CHAPTER - II

The Process of Freedom from Self-Preoccupation and Fantasy

Murdoch shared a certain attitude to literature which strongly characterizes her work. This attitude has been both serious and rebellious which reflects the character of an age in which she has lived and written. This age is known as the age of liberalism, the age of science and technology and most importantly for Murdoch, and the age in which the glorious idea of individual freedom has become human beings torment rather than emancipation. Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark both saw that fiction had lost its power to transform the lives of people. And they both firmly believed that fiction had to regain this power- the power to influence or to better the real lives of the real people through fictional narratives. They explicated their theories on life and fiction through writings. They have portrayed a battle between real people and images by providing their characters with allegorical aspects. Murdoch’s novels face the nature of narrative, and the representation of reality. As both novelist and philosopher, Murdoch is concerned with the human tendency to see the world through the distortion of fantasy. ‘We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey,’ she writes, “but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy” (Murdoch, “Against Dryness” 20). In the resulting false vision, things appear as the viewer wishes them to be, and other people become only means of fulfilling desires. A character or a person violates the real needs and rights of others, failing to understand the extremely difficult realization that
something other than oneself is real. The present chapter covers the same subject in following three novels: i) Under the Net, ii) The Bell, and iii) An Unofficial Rose. These three novels demonstrate the self-preoccupied characters and the role of fantasy in their life. Through the world of illusions and patterns the characters proceed to achieve the fantasy of freedom because they don’t recognize the separate state of others. Dorothy A.Winsor says….

“The confusion of fantasy with the exterior world may be compared to the way all people think when they are very young children. ... In the ethic Murdoch argues in her essays, the recognition of his separate state is a moral as well as a developmental task, for if he is separate, then so are others, and their separateness implies that his needs are not to be satisfied at their expense. Failure to achieve this recognition of separateness leads to the damaging actions of a character” (149).

Implicit in Murdoch’s novels is an ethical standard that contradicts the demand for separation she simultaneously makes. The novels often seem to treat the merged world of childhood as inescapable and operate entirely within its solipsism because one can not accept a world apart from oneself. In this childish world, self and world are perceived as one and maintained as such against all threats through fantasies of incorporation. In order to maintain the desired fusion, one incorporates others or is oneself incorporated. The ultimate moral division in Murdoch’s novels is between those who allow themselves to be absorbed and those who absorb others. Murdoch has implied the view through her novels that goodness comes through allowing or even promoting destruction of oneself in order to prevent oneself from destroying others.
The characters in Murdoch’s novels are driven by self-preoccupations and fantasies over which they have no or little control. The explanations given by the characters are always rendered suspect, not only in terms how their story is told but also in terms of their responses to contingent events. Her insistence on factors of contingency is important to her method of characterization, because these factors create characters and make them mysterious, it gives them structure. Murdoch’s realism doesn’t involve mimesis. Her realism involves not only what is in the text but what lies beyond it, what is ultimately Platonic reality. Her novels depict the dilemmas, spiritual ambiguities and moral paradoxes of the modern world. She tries to find through her work the dark points of human heart and mind. The characters in her novels invariably illustrate the strain and the central-disquietudes of present life and history. Her love lorn, power hungry characters willfully impose a pattern of reality on the chaos of life and try to console themselves with this false apprehension. The sinister power-games result in evil, exit from which is shown to be almost impossible. Murdoch tried to present the human being trapped by various myths and fantasies. By presenting the evil side of life she keeps her faith in the possibility of human goodness as the potentiality of human being.

The present chapter attempts to give justice to its title. In Under the Net Jake’s search for truth is uncommitted and self-contained but Murdoch is confirm to her view that the realization of truth requires some relationship with others. Jake has a fear of establishing relationships which has a self-protective cover, built around himself to avoid contingency. He lived in his shell of isolation. Another novel of Murdoch The Bell presents the idea that the movement away from theory and generality is the movement towards truth. Michael Meade
and his Lay Community present self-conceived form or role intruding upon the spiritual and religious world. The novel presents Dora’s moral development and struggle for freedom. Murdoch’s third novel in this chapter *An Unofficial Rose* also reveals the characters’ self-preoccupation and fantasy. Randall tries to win freedom but it turns out to be a mere illusion, for he has not perceived the reality of others. The characters think that they are free but in reality they are puppets controlled by others. The characters like Hugh Peronett, Randall, Emma and Miranda present enchantment, contingency and fantasy of freedom. Murdoch’s three novels *Under the Net, The Bell* and *An Unofficial Rose* strengthen the basic Murdochian theme – the fantasy of freedom. Because many characters live in illusions and fantasies. They don’t understand the individual personality of others because self-preoccupied mind doesn’t permit them to think about other people and compels them to live in fantasy.

Iris Murdoch was exceptionally creative and morally passionate thinker who witnessed some of the devastating horrors of the 20th century. Murdoch’s philosophy of good does not consoles us in our suffering, or save us from the pain of loss or shattered hope. Rather, it burns and singes with the knowledge that almost everything that console us is a fake – including sometimes, the idea of goodness itself. Murdoch believed that the idea of goodness must remain open even to the reality of its own absence in any particular human life.

Iris Murdoch herself poses the problem of the self in terms of freedom at crucial points in her philosophy. Freedom is important to notions of subjectivity because the way we conceive human freedom is directly connected to how we conceive various human capacities.
(such as reason, will or language) as well as the self’s relation to an ideas of moral value.

The extraordinary variety and abundance of her fictional art is the most obvious feature of Iris Murdoch’s work. In her early phase especially she seems deliberately to have composed each novel in a different idiom. Iris Murdoch’s novel Under the Net (1954) has some affinity with the picaresque. It is her first published novel which made her famous as a novelist of rare quality. The novel is a loosely episodic story of a free-wheeling, self-involved hero, Jake Donaghue. Jake is caught in a series of contingent events taking place in London and Paris, leading to the heightening of his vision of reality. Jake has not stable way of life nor fixed abode. He kidnaps a famous dog, he dodges the police in comic circumstances, he helps a patient to escape from a hospital; but what goads him on through his adventures is his quest for two people, a man and a woman, who appear but only to disappear again, as they were allowed to disappear from his life in the past. He renewed contact with them has the promise of meaning and human value, but all is episodic. Jake reveals facts about his own character:

“I hate solitude, but I am afraid of intimacy. The substance of my life is a private conservation with myself which to turn in to a dialogue would be equivalent to self-destruction” (Murdoch, Under the Net 34).

Jakes revealed fact about his character relate him to more modern types of anti-hero. Out of the wry and largely accidental convergence of events a new way of life suggests itself and is accepted at the end, so it is a moral novel and a little masterpiece too.
The novel _Under the Net_ traces the progress of Jake – the talented but lazy hack writer from being an ‘isolated free chooser’-holding a solipsistic view of freedom and reality – to the moment when he realizes that he is a ‘benighted’ creature who must take into account the world and people around him while exercising his liberty. As the story unfolds itself, there is a transformation in Jake’s romantic notions, resulting in his self-discovery, artistic freedom and awareness of others as ‘independent centres of significance’ and distinct from the fantasy – ridden images he had about them. This is true freedom in the Murdochian sense. _Under the Net_ gave Iris Murdoch entry into the literary arena. Jake lives in the world of convention and fantasy, deeply stressed as he is in the state of neurotic egotism and insanity. It is only in the end that Jake is freed of his illusions when he enters the world of love and freedom which beings him the state of true self realization. The novel charts out the various ups and downs in the life of Jake Donaghue, a writer in his thirties. The philosophical burden of the novel’s argument and its compressed aesthetic dimension has defined the contours of spiritual odyssey. For the epitaph of her novel Iris Murdoch chose a quotation from Dryden’s _The Secular Masque_ which aptly defines the parameters and framework within which the novel’s theme operates. Jake is always chasing someone or something, or some dream, idea or person. All the girls that come in his life are mere illusions and he realizes that if he has to realize his true being he has to come out of his world of make belief and see his true being. His idea of love shatters for he could not realize the otherness of his beloved; he was not prepared to acknowledge the existence of her perceptions and her space. The over possessiveness on Jake’s part cost him a relationship.
Both the themes of ‘love’ and ‘freedom’ are intermingling and go hand in hand in the Murdoch’s scheme of things.

Iris Murdoch’s first four published novels can be seen to constitute as distinct a phase as any to be found in her work. They all belong to the 1950s which was the time of her strongest interest in the implications of existentialism. Under the Net remains a formidable debut. Even though, in the manner of many established novelists, Murdoch considers it derivative. It is accomplished enough to be free of the almost inescapably solipsistic flavor and limited range of human experience usual in so many first novels. It is a genuinely European novel, with wide literary debts. It is also certainly a novel of its time, its central character an ‘outsider’ figure, its form a tale of picaresque adventure. A form itself raises questions about the way in which ‘necessary’ and ‘contingent’ elements go in to the making of novels. This theme may have encouraged its warm press, but also caused some misunderstanding of its emphasis; it certainly led her work to be associated with the group of new writers of fiction who emerged forcefully in Britain in the early 1950s and have exerted a powerful influence on the direction taken by British fiction since, from Angus Wilson to Kingsley Amis. These connections linked the book with the strong contemporary interest in a new social realism and with the problems of generational and existential self-definition in the post war Britain. Its impersonation of a male narrator also helped in the link, although that is probably best seen as an uncompromising exercise in the attainment of ‘otherness’.

Jake Donaghue, an impecunious and deracine hack translator of the best-selling French writer Jean – Pierre Breteuil, returns from Paris to London in time to learn that the relationship with the girl
whose flat he and his companion Finn have been using has come to an end. Jake faced with the immediate needs of shelter and survival and he contemplates the prospect of renewing an earlier friendship, with the singer and actress Anna Quentin. He is brought back into contact with other people from his past – notably Anna’s sister, Sadie, and Hugo Belfounder, a type who appears in several novels, and is Jake’s intellectual alter ego as well as an apparent sexual rival. Jake’s predicament is complicated by his felling that he had earlier betrayed Hugo by publishing a book called The Silencer, which adapts many of their former conversations on language and philosophical matters.

The novel’s title Under the Net is taken from one of these conversations. Iris Murdoch has described Hugo as a sort of non-philosophical metaphysician who is supposed to be paralyzed in a way by the problem about which the novel plays. As she told Frank Kermode in a “House of Fiction” interview,-

“the book plays with a philosophical idea. The problem which is mentioned in the title is the problem of how far conceptualizing and theorizing which from one point of view are absolutely essential, in fact divide you from the thing which is the object of theoretical attention”

(Kermode 115).

In company with Finn and Dave Gellman, Jake seeks intellectual fulfillment in the form of some obscurely planned reconciliation with Hugo in London. In solitude, he seeks erotic fulfillment through his search for Anna, who has, he discovers, left for Paris. The quests dovetail into each other. Jake goes to Paris but does not find Anna. He returns to London, but before he can follow a course of action that will eventually lead him to Hugo, he undergoes a spiritual crisis.
After some comic financial reverses involving his ex-girlfriend and her bookmaker consort, money becomes his chief need. So with characteristic lack of reflection he takes a job as a hospital cleaner. Hugo is brought in with a head-wound sustained at a political rally, and Jake, in an obsessive act of reparation, enters the hospital at night. His ensuing, conversation with Hugo surely recalls the nocturnal chess game, also rendered in provocative specificity, between Murphy and Mr. Endon in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat.

Jake learns that his misgivings about *The Silencer* are unfounded. He discovers that his unreflective vanity has produced a complete misunderstanding of the circle of unrequited erotic attention in which he and Hugo have been involved with the two Quentin sisters. His emotional world – picture is transformed as he realizes that it is Sadie, and not Anna, who has been in love with him. This affects his attitudes towards words and writing, producing a recovery of specificity and a new attitude towards creativity. The relationship between Hugo and Jake is in fact of a kind recurrent in Murdoch, displaying a conflict she has always seen between two types of writer or artist. Compared with Hugo, the type of artist represented by Jake is the facile maker of forms, the dealer in apprehensible shapes. Murdoch has recently phrased Hugo as a type of ‘the truthful, formless figure’ (Bellamy 135). Hugo is a person who is so haunted by the problems of artistic expression that he may in the end remain silent. And Murdoch’s very complex relationship with the intellectual awareness manifest in this contrast is a central theme in her work. As a work of art and as a psychologically realistic study of human specificity, which elicits behavior incompatible with the completeness which characterizes art, the play becomes her paradigm. What she has
emphasized here is the contrast between the man who is silent and the man who speaks; the man who’s unconsciously good and the man who’s consciously aesthetically, creating his life …..a kind of struggle between an angel and a mortal.

*Under the Net* is something more complex than conventional realism. Readers have been impressed by the detailed accuracy of the descriptions of London and Paris during Jake’s adventures. *Under the Net*’s surreal dimension is most in evidence in the Paris scenes where Jake pursues Anna against the background of the Bastille Day Celebrations on 14 July. This quest is obsessively and erotically single–minded, unlike the London quest, where Jake reveals a disarmingly feckless ability to be distracted from the task in hand, the pursuit of Hugo. He likes to see this kind of characteristic not of himself but of Finn. Finn’s determined action at the end of story in returning to Dublin is thus a comic reversal that forces Jake at last to pay due attention to him as well. The problem, in its general nature a recurrent one in Murdoch, is that Jake’s actions seem to derive less from his character than from an authorial solicitation. The driving compulsiveness seems less Jake’s than Murdoch’s own. And this tugs against that urgency of ‘otherness’ which is perhaps the book’s basic premise, felt by Jake so sharply at the end:

“It seemed as if, for the first time, Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as part of myself. To experience this was extremely painful. Yet as I tried to keep my eyes fixed upon where she was I felt towards her a sense of initiative which was perhaps after all one of the guises of love. Anna was something which had to be learned afresh. When does one ever know a human
being? Perhaps only after one has realized the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it” (Murdoch, Under the Net 268).

In order to bring out her main philosophical ideas Murdoch has devised a plot consisting of a sequence of coincident but unpredictable events and odd improbable episodes. All incidents are strung together deliberately to throw Jake’s life into a turmoil to enable him to get rid of his false theories. The slender picaresque frame on which the philosophical weight of the novel rests, is quite suitable for the educative progress of Jake, the ‘Picaro’.

Iris Murdoch has acknowledged the literary indebtedness of Under the Net to Samuel Beckett and Raymond Queneau, both heirs to the existentialist school of the absurd. Jake’s ancestors are Beckett’s Murphy and Queneau’s Pierrot. When Jake finds that he must move out of Madge’s flat, the first two possessions he thinks of are the copies of Murphy and Pierrot Mon Ami. Huge Belfounder is one of the central characters in Under the Net. His views rest on the assumption that there is no master theory yet everything has a theory and so, attention has to be paid to particulars, because each thing is absolutely unique. These ideas represent nostalgia for the particular shared by Iris Murdoch too. In novel, the characters are drawn centrifugally as it belongs to the category of closed novels. She explained the philosophical centre of the novel in the following words in an interview with Frank Kermode:

“It plays with a philosophical idea. The problem which is mentioned in the title is the problem of how far conceptualizing and theorizing, which from one point of
view are absolutely essential, in fact divide you from the thing that is the object of theoretical attention” (115).

The concept of ‘net’ has another major influence on the novel. Wittgenstein first made use of image of the ‘net’ in ‘Tractatus Logico Philosophicus’ and Murdoch borrowed this image from Wittgenstein. The net demonstrates how concepts, ideas or connections of thought can be used to arrive at a unified description of the universe. The ‘net’ or ‘mesh’ is a picture of reality constructed in order to describe the world. Each system that describes the world can be represented by a particular pattern of net- a form that is purely arbitrary, for any other net can be used with equal success. The ‘net’ is a necessary tool for making sense of the world, but the danger arises when we confuse what it is, with what it describes, by considering the conceptual net and the reality as one and the same.

Annandine (Hugo), is a character in Jake’s The Silencer who first presented the image. He thinks that all attempts at theorizing or generalizing are a falsification of the particular or individualistic character of any decision. Theories, concepts, ideas and language form an impassable net barring us from understanding the essential reality of a particular situation. Since all theorizing is a flight, it is necessary for us to be ruled by the ‘Unutterably particular’ situation itself. According to Annandine that a ‘movement away from theory and generality is the movement towards truth’ (Murdoch, Under the Net 91). This goal can never be totally achieved however hard we may try to crawl under the net. The most common net is the language which is also a falsification of reality. A person tries to describe the moment of a particular situation but words come in between and will
not permit to state the reality. Hugo offered the only solution over it and that is Wittgenstenian in nature: if truth can be attained at all, it is only in silence.

The ‘net’ has a philosophical connotation as well as social dimension. The title Under the Net suggests and presents an image of the private will, of various private wills, at odds with the social spirit and the need of external co-operation. Society is seen as a net always trying to come down on man. Through its coarse and large meshes one may escape for a while only to be caught later by other finer meshes. G.S. Fraser pictures the net as a social trap. A similar net trope is used in Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Freedom for Stephen Dedalus is a ‘matter of flight, of escape, beyond the crippling power of nets’ (Kellman 49) flung by nationality, religion or language. However, Iris Murdoch does not conceive of any such liberation for her hero in her novel Under the Net. Rather, if a flight from anything is suggested, it is flight from a freedom of this kind, which in her opinion is a product of fantasy. She complains against such an existential concept of freedom with her opinion that it is the freedom of solitary individual living outside society with nothing to transcend him. Murdoch does not recommend an escape from the net of society but insists on crawling under it to reach the ‘unutterable particularity.’ She upholds a process of immersion and acceptance rather than withdrawal. On the social level, the net of society has to be entered, as freedom can be worked out only in interaction with others. On the philosophical level, freedom is crawling under the net of theories and concepts, imposing illusionary forms or artificial patterns on the intractable, contingent reality. Jake’s struggle against own fantasies and patterns, ultimately throws
light on both dimensions of freedom. In *Under the Net* the fantasy of freedom becomes the one theme of the novel.

*Under the Net* is written in the first person narrative with Jake as the deluded narrator. Jake performs as the central role not only as an observer of the happenings that take place but as the chief and sometimes the sole actor in them. In novel the incidents are shown through his limited and clouded vision. The reader is forced to accept Jake’s explanations and summing up of the incidents as correct. It is true that his vision later improves and earlier interpretations may be false to some extent. The narrator Jake’s interpretations of reality being real for him become real for the readers also. In the novel he is not the author’s ‘Persona’ but he is as much an objective fictional creation as any other character.

The exploration of the ideas and of the characters, the human behaviors work together in the novel. Hugo is a fascinating as a phenomenon and can be placed as the representative of certain intellectual attitudes to experience. Jake, in spite of the fantastic nature of the events through which he moves, is a real character. Jake is a standard fictional hero of our time to a great extent. He is an outsider, uncommitted politically or emotionally, opposed to formal work, socially classless. He constantly asks himself, for instance, if he ‘belongs to a social class which takes money in situations like this’. But Jake’s decisions are ultimately determined by considerations of morals rather than class. He has a kind of negative freedom. G.S. Fraser says of him that –

“*he does not have to make himself a bohemian, he is one, and the roots of his restlessness seem to lie more in an inquisitive desire to test out the range of his own*
adaptability than in any strong hatred of any particular atmosphere or milieu” (39).

At the beginning of the book Under the Net we are told that Jake has ‘shattered nerves.’ And it becomes clear from his relationships with the other characters that his detachment is nervous, a kind of instinctive protecting himself from life, rather than a purposive search for freedom: Jake has been living in the flat of and on the charity of Magdalen. She announces that she is getting married; Jake is at first surprised and becomes a little guilty that he has not noticed what was taking place. He feels for a moment a ‘need’ for her but –

“I took a deep breath and followed my rule of never speaking frankly to women in moments of emotion. No good ever comes of this. It is not in my nature to make myself responsible for other people. I find it hard enough to pick my own way along” (Murdoch, Under the Net 13)

Jakes early relationship with Anna Quentin also shows the same thing of shying away from relationship. He explains:

“I hate solitude but I am afraid of intimacy. The substance of my life is a private conversation with myself which to turn into a dialogue would be equivalent to self-destruction. The company which I need is the company which a pub or cafe will provide. I have never wanted a communion of souls. It’s already hard enough to tell the truth to oneself. But communion of souls was Anna’s special subject........ she took life intensely and very hard. Whereas I think it is foolish to take life so, as if you were to provoke a dangerous animal which will break your bones in the end in any case” (34).
In Under the Net Jakes search for truth is uncommitted and self-contained but Iris Murdoch is confirm to her term that it is not possible to find the truth without some relationship with other people. One comes to know Jakes relationships to his work at the beginning of the novel also through comments of Magdalen’s and through Jake’s relationship with Dave Gellman, the philosopher. His nature of shying away, a refusal to be committed, to grapple with art, as with relationships seems clear. Driven to some kind of action by being turned out by Madge, Jake goes to visit Dave who lives in what Jake calls ‘contingent London’. According to Jake everywhere West of Earls court is contingent except for a few places along the river. Dave hears Jake’s homelessness and raises the idea of jobs. Dave represents a spare utilitarian view of the world. He dislikes metaphysics or at least the metaphysics of his pupils to whom the world is a mystery. Dave’s relation with contingency is in one sense akin to Hugo’s in that he objects to metaphysics and to Jake’s artistic uses of language; but in another it is opposed. Dave’s prescriptions for Jake contain much of Murdoch’s own values:

“I looked at the wall of the hospital. ‘To save my soul’, I said. ‘Not therefore’, said Dave scornfully. Always you are thinking of your soul. Precisely it is not to think of your soul but to think of other people” (29).

Dave’s remark art not only utilitarian but those remarks are also directed at Jakes own unproductive situation.

“Society should take you by the neck and shake you and make you do a sensible job. Then in your evenings you would have the possibility to write a great book” (30).
We discover something further about Jake’s attitude to Murdoch’s truth in his relationship with Finn (Peter o’ Finney). According to Jake Finn is truthful like Hugo, like Dave. Jake sees him as ‘an inhabitant of my universe and cannot conceive that he has one containing me; and this arrangement seems restful for both of us’ (9). He ascribes this to Finn’s lack of an inner life, which he connects with his truthfulness. Finn is apt to make objective statements. Jake is a such type of personality who has a liking for ‘aspects’, a dislike for objective statements, a belief in his own inner life, and a lack of respect for Finn, who he automatically treats as an inhabitant of his own universe. At the end of the book it becomes clear that Finn inhabits his own universe; it is his return to Ireland that finishes Jake’s isolation. So, as in the case of Madge, he is seeing what he pleases, and as in the case of his views of Sadie’s and Anna’s real relationship with Hugo, he is distorting reality to fit his own needs. He says at the end:

“I felt ashamed, ashamed of being parted from Finn, of having known so little about Finn, of having conceived things as I pleased, and not as they were” (279).

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. 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. In *Under the Net* Jake is a free-wheeling, self-involved hero, who is caught in a series of contingent events taking a place in London and Paris, leading to the heightening of his vision of reality. From Jake’s own point of view he is afraid of relationships with people, afraid of, or anxious to avoid work, both useful and creative, and he has a strong tendency to deform the nature of reality by fantasy. In this context, he says significantly:

“I hate contingency. I want everything in my life to have a sufficient reason” (26).

The action of the story partly involves Jake’s quest for Hugo, his ‘destiny’, and partly his quest for Anna. It is complicated by the aesthetic, financial and political aspects of the situation in which he finds himself. His only final acquisition during the events related is the company of the dog Mars, whom he releases from a cage, and with whom he develops a relationship of some warmth. Mars is a symbol like the dogs in *The Sandcastle, The Bell, and The Unicorn*, for a kind of natural vital energy which Jake had lacked. Mars has in some ways much in common with Anna as Anna has a naturalness, heavy brown hair. Anna and Sadie are the first of a series of contrasts of ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ women, who seem to combine the human and aesthetic functions of the objects of desire for her male characters.

Jake’s relationship with Anna is one of ‘love’ although he has been reluctant to tie himself down because love would make too many demands on him. Anna is seen as pure art, divorced from social distortions, divorced as far as possible from the distorting effects of speech. Her theories of art resemble those of Hugo, although they are
not identical. Anna’s ‘general theory’, which Hugo does not understand, is her attempt to reproduce in her art his respect for the unutterably particular, the simply true, the fact or experience uncorrupted by ideas for personal feelings.

Jake’s self-involvement, his habit of self-scrutiny and pondering over differences between self-explanation and self-dramatization, his inability to accept contingency are traits he shares with the Sartrean heroes. Under the Net has been generally accepted as a comic parody of Sartre’s ‘Le Nausee’. He experiences Sartre’s impatience with the stuff of human life and like him has ‘a passionate desire to analyze, to build intellectually pleasing schemes and patterns’ (Murdoch, Sartre 75). Jake has a fear of establishing relationships which has a self-protective cover, built around himself to avoid contingency. He lived in his shell of isolation and freedom. He doesn’t try to communicate or understand the feelings of the person who helped him. He unscrupulously exploits Finn’s goodness. Jake behaves with Finn as his mirror and doesn’t permit him as an independent identity. ‘I count Finn as an inhabitant of my universe and cannot conceive that he has one containing me’ (Murdoch, Under the Net 9). Jake was unknown about Finn’s views and beliefs yet he discusses his own ideas on God, freedom and immortality with him. When Finn finally goes back to Dublin, Jake realizes that Finn had inhabited a different universe and was motivated by his individual needs and desires. Jake realizes that he had enveloped Finn in a form created by his own imagination and did not visualize his separate existence apart from it. He understands that he knows so little about Finn and things are not different as he considers. This is one of the
shocking experiences that ends Jake’s isolated freedom and forces him to take into account the existence and liberty of other people.

Jake distorts reality to fit his own preconceptions of it in the case of Hugo. He extols Hugo as ‘his destiny’ and is enchanted by the concept he has formed of him. Hugo takes the shape of destiny for Jake and works like an enchanter on his mind. But he is an enchanter who is unaware of his influence and is not impelled by the desire for power, like the other enchanter figures in Murdoch’s novels. As the artist Jake shapes, forms, orders and articulates Hugo’s views in *The Silencer*. Hugo sees not himself but Jake as a philosopher. He in his saintly unconscious goodness frees Jake of the prolonged pattern of guilt that had haunted him. The forms were purely mental constructs Jake had patterned around the relationships between Hugo, Anna, Sadie and himself. Jake loved Anna. His love for her is a romantic illusion and craving of a mentally inquisitive male character. She is for him a mysterious and an unfathomable creature. Anna is a good singer. The Mime Theatre she sets up is for her a symbol of pure and honest art. Jake misinterprets the Mime Theatre as a proof of Hugo’s love for Anna. His understanding of the natures of Anna and Hugo is not sufficient enough to enable him to imagine the truth which is later revealed to him.

Hugo explains the whole situation in the big recognition scene in the hospital which forces Jake to discover his wrong suppositions. Jake is forced to know the difference between reality and illusions, to know the fantasy of freedom. Jake had imagined a particular thing as a true through his own suppositions but the fact was different. He was self-concentrated and so was blind. Because of that he was unable to understand the reality told by people. The real events and the
relationships between the characters are very plain and clear. Jake believed that Sadie loved Hugo, that Hugo loved Anna. But the reality was different that Sadie loved Jake, not Hugo. Sadie is disgusted and afraid of Hugo. Jake imagines that Hugo loved Anna but the reality is this that Hugo loved Sadie. Hugo repeatedly makes efforts to win Sadie’s attention.

All these disclosures affect the mind of Jake. So he says,-

“A pattern in my mind was suddenly scattered and the pieces of it went flying about me like birds” (254).

Jake comes to realization that he had been busy constructing a plot in order to evade reality. Because of this he realizes the essence, individuality of other people and to conceive things as they are. Jake had imposed the image upon Anna. But now he releases her from his hold and grants her the freedom to be the ‘other’. Jake admits her as a separate identity, a real person who exists who has her own opinions, and views.

“....for the first time, Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as a part of myself..... I felt towards her a sense of initiative which was perhaps after all one of the guises of love. Anna was something which had to be learnt afresh. When does one ever know a human being? Perhaps only after one has realized the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it and finally ceased to feel even the need of it. But then what one achieves is no longer knowledge; it is simply a kind of coexistence” (268).

Jake achieves this coexistence which includes a way of living in which one’s freedom is not absolute, but it is defined by the
concrete presence of the other person who inhabits his or her own universe. Murdoch’s concept of freedom is ‘to know, to understand the other’. Jake lived in the world of fantasy but later he realized the place of ‘social will’ rather than one’s ‘private will’. Jake’s vision becomes clear in the case of Hugo also. Hugo’s revelations give Jake the right perspective on human relationships. He moves out of his fantasy world (spell and enchantment) and earns his moral and psychological freedom by giving up the false forms he had imposed upon others and himself also.

Jake also achieves the artistic freedom by developing a destiny of his own as a writer. He realizes that he is a writer and writer must write. So, he decides to not to remain as a translator by getting some shocks and he asks himself,-

“Why should I waste time transcribing his (Jean Pierre Breteuil) writings instead of producing my own?” (192).

He discovers the sense of personal freedom through which he understands his life of dependence on someone like Jean Breteuil or Madge. Through this process of realization Jake achieves artistic freedom. This artistic freedom is accompanied by his need for taking up a job and to do something for society. In the beginning, he refused to work which is a symptom of shying away from commitment and social involvement. In the conversation with Lefty Todd, the socialist leader, Jake expresses his pessimism regarding socialism and points at the ‘deadliness’ of work. But eventually he takes decision to take up job as a hospital orderly. This must have been inspired by the series of events, which open his eyes to the advice of Dave and the socialism of Lefty. Jake was always on the side of individualism and he disagrees with Lefty but yet at the end of the novel we come to
know him in touch with Sadie, an actress and Lefty. These both are the representatives of social spirit. Jake’s changed personality one understands from his change of jobs from a hack writer to hospital orderly and finally to a creative artist. This is a process of his mind which goes towards selflessness and exorcism from fantasy and delusion. It is the process of freedom from self-preoccupation and fantasy.

Murdoch always believed that the change in human being is not achieved by will but it is achieved by a deep process of unselfing, a process of knowing and understanding the people.

“Simone Weil says that will does not lead us to moral improvement, but should be connected only with the idea of strict obligations. Moral change comes from an attention to the world whose natural result is a decrease in egoism through an increased sense of the reality of, primarily of course other people, but also other things” (Murdoch, *Metaphysics* 52).

The unselfing process requires a liberating force to remove the illusions of one’s mundane egoism. This human being can be seen as selfless and enlightened individual, purged of all selfish desires. Viewed in this context Murdoch’s *Under the Net* attempts to reveal the same. She puts all the facts of life in a very convincing manner in *Under the Net*. G.S. Fraser writes:

“‘Under the Net’ presents an image of the private will, at odd with the “social spirit” and the “needs of external co-operation.” Society is seen as precisely the net, which is always coming down to catch us through, if only later to be caught in other finer meshes” (78).
The atmosphere of novel is full of various pressures, social and sexual, which have made human relationships very complex. Self-indulgence has brought muddle and confusion in every relation where everybody thinks about his own happiness. Murdoch says that a human being should as a social being try to understand the otherness and opacity of the others. An exploration of the problematic business of interpretation is at the heart of *Under the Net*. The novel deals most profoundly and directly with the relationship between writing and artistic truth in the Murdoch canon, has been acknowledged, as has their value in understanding a novelist so concerned with the state of the contemporary novel. The treatment of writing is intimately bound up with a deep concern with reading. The concern with interpretation which recurs throughout Murdoch’s fiction becomes in these texts more literal - it relates to the process of reading fiction as much as to reading a situation or other people.

*Under the Net* is narrated to tell or see the truth. Jake has always been in pursuit of grand philosophical truth. The complex plot of the novel revolves around Jake’s subsequent effort’s to find Hugo and explain the reasons for this betrayal. He goes about this task with such energy; however, that it appears Hugo himself has come to represent the kind of truth Jake is longing for. At the end of the novel Jake realizes that he has been guilty of constructing a myth around Hugo: he is not truth – he is a far more humble and bewildered creature than Jake remembers. This realization ushers in the more concrete, more valuable truths that are necessary for Jake’s enlightenment, which Byatt categorizes as –

“‘Under the Net’ is about the search for truth, social, moral and aesthetic’” (193).
and Bran Nicol writes:

“Under the Net portrays a search for truth which embodies the key principles of the moral philosophy its author was developing at the time while also conforming to the 1950’s preference for social realism. But in the light of the concern with reading I have been focusing on so far, I think it is worth describing Jake’s search for truth in another way. He is constantly in pursuit of an altogether more mundane kind of truth, but one which is hugely important to the epistemophiliac: knowledge of what is going on around him’’(93).

Most of Jake’s epistemophilic energy is centred on a tangled love-plot being played out around him, even though the situation is quite straightforward. Jake is unable to understand who is in love with whom because he has failed to read the other characters with enough care despite all the clues in front of his eyes.

Murdoch’s characters are moral beings with intellectual passion; confused and perplexed by concepts and ideas. In Under the Net she has depicted this idea that creative thoughts can bring about moral consciousness. Similarly Jake’s new thoughts, his success to respond to the heterogeneity of experience and attention to the objects and people around him helps in having a broader moral vision, which further helps in perceiving the reality. He comes to realize that constant presence of self-abnegation; renunciation and withdrawal describe the route to barbarous knowledge of reality. Murdoch is opposed to egocentricity, which is the cause of the multiform muddles and human failures.
Iris Murdoch’s concept of freedom focuses not on the individuality but gives respect for the others. Jake in *Under the Net* makes journey from his false suppositions, false concept of freedom and consolatory forms of fantasy to real freedom. Real freedom is to know others, to respect others, to understand others and to gain a humanistic approach about life. Through the process of recognition Jake renews his contact with other people, he recognizes the real meaning of love and creativity and its importance in life. He becomes free and reconciled to the contingency of creation. The ending of novel shows the new beginning in his life.

“It was the first day of the world. I was full of that strength which is better than happiness; better than the weak wish for happiness which women are awaken in a man to rot his fibers. It was the morning of the first day”

(Murdoch, *Under the Net* 283).

Jake learns to see other people as they have their separate existence but it may not be a guarantee to say that it is a permanent or total change. In the Murdochian view Jake learnt to see a little of the reality and not the complete freedom. It may be said for that as a partial freedom or fantasy of freedom.

Iris Murdoch skillfully portrayed the fantasy of freedom through her characters in *Under the Net*. Her central figure in the novel makes flight against fantasy and proceeds towards freedom. The characters play their role with the concern of theme of the novel. The novel is a crowded story cluttered with details. Murdoch has endeavored to display the contingency of reality through some improbable and comic situations. Through Jake’s eyes readers see events. The novel becomes successful as a novel of ideas than of
character. Jake precedes his process of freedom from the forms he imposes on others, and from self-preoccupation and fantasy.

Murdoch’s novel *The Bell* was her fourth to be published, and is set in Imber Court, a lay religious community situated next to an enclosed order of Benedictine nuns in Gloucestershire. The setting of novel is the remote enclosure of romance; its rituals are those of a lay community enclosing the Benedictine but Anglican Abbey. *The Bell* is careful about verisimilitude, and has been claimed for realism. The novel has the solid life that Murdoch praises in the great 19th century novels. The characters are not tied up neatly at the end of the book; they have a life of their own which exists beyond it. The story of the novel *The Bell* is seen through the eyes of Michael Meade, leader of the community, and owner of the house. The events of the story are arranged loosely around the bell itself. At the beginning of the story one – learn that a new bell is to be hung in the Abbey tower, and will enter the gate like a postulant – here resembling Catherine Fawley, a member of the community who intends to enter the Abbey as a nun. Paul tells Dora the legend of the old bell, which flew out of the tower into the lake – this because the Bishop cursed the Abbey on an occasion when one of the nuns took a lover and would not confess; the guilty nun drowned herself in the lake when the bell was lost.

Within a naturalistic and flexible framework there is a deepening of characterization in the novel which aims at a happy union of formal qualities and moral vision. The right balance of philosophical thought, symbolism and realistic characterization is seen in *The Bell*. It is worked out around the symbolism of the bell. This does not hamper the free growth of the main characters. The concrete life of the characters and the abstract implications governing
the novel are blended into one another in an organically inevitable relationship.

“The successful symbolist novel will combine the concrete and the abstract in an organically inevitable relationship. They will be as inseparable and yet as distinguishable as the flower and its scent or the memento and its associations” (Byatt 187).

The religious attitude to the philosophical Hegelian totality is the major preoccupation of the novel- The Bell. Hegel has decided the place of man in a social whole, and in this social whole everything and everyone is determined by the overall system. Hegel assumes that reality is a ‘given totality’. The two major characters of the novel Michael Meade and James Tayper Pace have reflected the aspiration for Hegelian totality through their attitudes. Michael, who is the founder of the lay religious community at Imber Court longs for a distinctly defined religious role. He establishes an artificial social order like the Imber Community which has no place for deviants and expression of love. James believes in conforming to the given rules of Anglican religion. The novel The Bell focuses on artificial orders or intellectual theories formed without thinking about individuals and contingent factors of reality. The novel tries to find the realities about the place of rules, experience and the criteria to know and understand the human world.

The Bell presents the subject for novel that the movement away from theory and generality is the movement towards truth. According to Murdoch a human being can face the reality by only moving away from illusions, forms and patterns designed by fantasy or rules formed by convention. Freedom over fantasy can be achieved by this
way. Because imaginary forms and illusions can overshadow the world of human relationships and the real world. In The Bell Michael Meade and his lay community presents self-conceived form or role intruding upon the spiritual and religious world. The relationships between religious aspirations and sexual drives in a detached but sympathetic manner are explored in The Bell. In the novel the symbol of the Bell provides a unifying structure.

“The entire range of characters is held in a bond by means of the complex net of references to it. It is a narrative device around which the book is organized. Iris Murdoch has, however, refrained from giving the bell any specific meaning. She does not regard it as the repository of the novel’s message. ... The characters find symbolic values in it according to their varying points of view. It is a kind of floating symbol to which different meanings are given” (Datta 70-71).

The bell is a baffling symbol which appears to be more of an adornment, appended to the novel rather than a natural symbol worked into it. It is the central point around which the crucial events of the novel are arranged and so its presence cannot be ignored.

The Bell presents the disintegration of the Lay Community which was founded by Michael Meade. The idea of establishing the Imber Court as the home of a permanent Lay Community—a kind of a ‘buffer state’ or an ‘intermediary’ between the Abbey and the world—comes from the Abbess. The purpose is to help those ‘sick’ and unhappy persons ‘whose desire for God makes them unsatisfactory citizens of an ordinary life, but whose strength or temperament fails them to surrender to the world completely; and to whom the present-
day society, with its hurried pace and its mechanical and technical structure, offers no home; (Murdoch, *The Bell* 80). Imber Court is meant to provide the unhappy with a half-contemplative life and a work made simple and significant by its dedicated setting. Michael is appealed by this idea and so he considers himself as one of those ‘sick’ persons who could live neither in the world nor out of it. He is attracted to become a priest when he was young but he failed to do so and then turned towards school teaching. While the days of his teaching career the never forgotten his sight of the religious vocation. A scandal concerning his unconsummated love for his student, Nick Fawley ended his teaching career. It is Michael’s long cherished ambition to set up the semi-religious Lay Community. He always imagined himself as a person with a definite destiny waiting for a call; the proposal appeared to him as an emergence of the pattern. Michael exercises an existential form of freedom by ignoring the past and imposing a rational order or form on the world when he establishes the Lay Community:

“The Community is akin to the Kantian concept of a simple society living strictly by extremely general rules....With no place for the morally complicated or eccentric. The ideals of the Community can also be considered as a parody of the High Church culture concepts of T.S. Eliot. Eliot talks of a Christian society inspired by Christian elite, and reminded by the Church of Standards which lies beyond the individual. Michael, like Eliot, dislikes ‘untidy lives’ and desires his Community to achieve the clarity and cleanliness of the medieval world” (Datta 72-73).
Michael desires to withdraw from society. Apart from him, this utopian society is made of several other self-deluding persons desiring to withdraw from society, from their past and imposing a rational order or form on the world. This society wants to escape from the complexities and randomness of the world. They fear to face the realities of the existence. They prefer to live in the fantasies and wrongly consider the concept of freedom. James Tayper Pace is a martinet with a strong and simple Anglican faith and a rigid moral outlook. Then there are Margaret and Mark Strafford, whose marriage is on the verge of breaking up, and who wants to join the Community in order to escape from the reality. Catherine Fawley, the sister of Nick Fawley, a prospective postulant to the abbey is frustrated by an unrequited love for Michael. Peter Topglass, a naturalist suffers from no religious illusions. He takes an objective interest in doing his share of work in the market garden. He is a morally uncomplicated Character in touch with the real world.

Iris Murdoch’s novels continuously trace the theme fantasy and freedom. Like other novels The Bell also interrelates the concept of love with the ideas of virtue and freedom. Murdoch’s concept of freedom is different than that of commonly understood meaning. According to her the idea of freedom is …

“Knowing and understanding and respecting persons and things other than ourselves. Virtue in this sense is to be construed as knowledge that connects us with reality”

(Murdoch, The Sublime and The Beautiful 270).

In the process of freedom Murdoch seems love as the powerful medium which links us with reality. She views ‘the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real (Murdoch, The
Sublime and The Good 51). The bell symbolizes the ethics of love. But the members of the Community fail to listen to this voice of love for; most of them are afflicted by its two enemies; i.e. ‘convention’ and ‘neurosis’. Convention gives undue weight to external reality and neurosis lays more stress on primitive internal reality. These are two structured ways of conceiving reality which imposes forms on what is formless. Mrs. Strafford’s insistence on rules, propriety and correctness illustrate the shallowness of her self-imposed religiousness which is a far cry from true religion residing on compassion and charity. Her argument with Dora over a minor issue of flower arrangement shows this:

“I hope you don’t mind my saying so.... But we never have flowers in the house... we keep everything here as plain as possible. It’s a little austerity we practice... We try to imitate the monastic life in certain ways as closely as we can. We believe in sound discipline to give up that particular sort of self-expression” (Murdoch, The Bell 58).

Mrs. Strafford’s forbidding demeanor which shuns the past and insists on strict adherence to the general rules framed by the Community is totally unconcerned with individual difference. James Tayper Pace who is one of the mentors of the Community is better representative of ‘convention’. He insists on living by plain outward rules without any image of oneself. His sermon is a plea for working from outside inwards. Living conventionally by outward rules is not a difficult task for him. His religion is a force outside himself and is not based on individual reaction or speculation. So he talks in style:
“Truthfulness is enjoyed, the relief of suffering is enjoined, adultery is forbidden, sodomy is forbidden... truth is not glorious, it is just enjoined; sodomy is not disgusting, it is just forbidden. These are rules by which we should freely judge ourselves and others too” (134).

In Murdochian novels it is seen that the characters are not ready to accept the identity of other person as a separate. James’ religious preconceptions are different. His faith in God’s word makes him ignore the needs and individual reality of others. He is unknown with man’s hidden and inner qualities. Nick and Dora are judged by him according to the rules of the formal Anglican religion. He doesn’t understand Nick’s complex background, his history or his individual needs and existence. James and Community do not understand the separate and individual identity of Nick. They fail to see him as a real and individual personality. Such type of attitude of James and Community is also remained with Dora through whom she becomes rebellious. To present her own individual identity she decides to play a witch by raising the old bell out of the lake and substituting it for the new one. By considering Catherine as a symbol of innocence, James and Imber society are equally responsible for imposing a false image on her. They force a fantasy of innocence on her and refuse to see her as her separate and own identity.

“James’ insistence on rigid moral rules is a kind of psychological disgust of the contingent and a deep-seated longing for form and total order. ... Michael Meade is a typical introspective man without faith criticized by James in his sermon. He is a case of ‘neurosis’, the Sartrean ‘totalitarian’ man, completely enclosed in his
fantasy world. Without trying to grasp the reality and independence of other persons or things, he transforms them into his private dream object” (Datta 76).

Michael’s concept of good life is based on a reasonable understanding of one’s capacities aided by the knowledge how best to use the strength one has. He favors salvation through self-knowledge. Like James the bell for Michael is not an image of truthfulness, simplicity or innocence but he sees it as an invitation for self-analysis. According to Michael one should find his hiding places of strength to understand the mechanism of his spiritual energy. Michael’s concept of self-knowledge involves respect for the individual as a separate identity, individual personality. But his moral thinking centers only on himself. His concept respect the individual only centers the individual who is himself and not the other needy people who are needed to be respected, loved. So, such type of concept in his mind takes him away from the world of reality and it only leaves him in the fantastic world.

Michael’s longing for an absolute aspiration and a strong sense of destiny inspires him a desire for patterns and signs in life. A significant pattern or form in his life appears in the shape of a religious vocation of priesthood. His romantic imagination gives him the illusioned consolation that he is a favorite of God and has a definite destiny of his own. His image of himself is as one of God’s chosen, shapes his moral life and relationships with people. At times, it leads to a kind of spiritual pride and facile optimism about the consequences of his actions. He seeks the help of religion to escape from the desire to exercise power over others. He meditates upon the desirability of self-abnegation, yet he is found exercising wanton
power over his fellow men in the Community. As a leader of group he forces his decisions upon them and exhibits his dominating self-assertiveness. He gets protective joy in converting Nick and Toby into disciples. This is his egoistic feeling of freedom. Michael is not in touch with external reality. One possibility was that he could have loved and saved Nick. But he refuses to do so because the pattern of a spiritual destiny and a sense of sin associated with Nick overpower him. He considers himself as superior to Nick, as a savior, as a guardian. He feels the protective love for Nick and Toby which does not accord equal status to others. Such love doesn’t think the essence of loved one. Michael was involved in his own false image through which he doesn’t hear the voice of love when he was repeatedly reminded of his duty through the various appeals made by Nick and the suggestions given by the Abbess. The following conversation between the two reveals the evasive attitude of Michael and the tormented mind of the boy:

“All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of bloody things shall be well’ said Nick... Michael realized that he was a bit drunk. He turned to go. ‘Wait a minute’, said Nick, ‘you’re always ‘off’; confound you, like the bloody milk by the time it reaches me at the Lodge. If you want all manner of things to be well there’s a little service you could perform for me. Will you? ‘Certainly’ said Michael. ‘What is it? ‘Just get into the lorry and put the gear lever in neutral and release the hand brake” (Murdoch, The Bell 214).
Michael’s concern with keeping his hands clean and his future secure had deterred him from opening his heart to Nick. He realizes too late the reality of situation.

“Nick had needed love, and he ought to have given him what he had to offer, without fears about its imperfection... So great a love must have contained some grain of good, something at least which might have attached Nick to this world, given him some glimpse of hope” (319).

After Nick’s death Michael realizes about his egoistic concepts, his decided things which he desired to achieve through religion. He becomes free from his false form or pattern of religious vocation. His illusions come to an end. Michael becomes that one character of Iris Murdoch which has come from its pattern of fantasy and then faces the real concept of freedom by knowing that he had been living in a mechanical and artificial world which was constructed by his imagination.

“The pattern which he had seen in his life had existed only in his romantic imagination. At the human level there was no pattern” (321).

The process of knowing the reality and thinking about the others took Michael towards spiritual struggle. He lived in his romantic imagination and accepted self-dramatizing religiousness. But later he recognizes the individuality and essence of others and himself. He gets a kind of tragic freedom which allows him to accept the identity of others and differences among individuals. He took the responsibility of Nick’s sister Catherine. He decides to quit from Imber Court and look for a job like school teacher. Because he
wanted to rejoin the practical life instead of life of illusions and fantasy. Michael had also neglected Dora. But after his recognition about the realities he started to see the moral growth of Dora. He accepted her own individual identity and so he does not impose his opinions on Dora and leaves her free to do her work.

In the novel Dora and Michael’s exploration of consciousness, their limitations, their reality and their attempts to live in their own way can be seen clearly. The novel presents Dora’s moral development and struggle for freedom. She is unreflective personality locks self-knowledge. She is not over brilliant and religious. She is an example of goodness and helpful personality. She tried to know and respect the other people and used to forget herself for the sake of other peoples individuality. She is the central consciousness of the novel through whose eyes the readers are first introduced to the inhabitants of the Imber Community. Iris Murdoch presented her as an example of real goodness and virtue. We see her keen interest in renewing contacts with reality, with people. She had shown her devotion in life and the people of Imber Court. She had shown her love for Catherine. She makes considerable inquiry about Mrs. Strafford’s past although she is rebuked by her. Dora always saw her interest in others but it was disappointed by the accusing attitude of the Community which considered her as an ‘erring wife’. She was also frustrated by her dominating husband Paul, who fails to respect her as an individual identity with her own history; presence and values. So, Dora’s marriage eventually turns out to be a trap due to Paul’s dominating behavior. Paul treats Dora as another item in his unique collection. Once Paul tells Dora that he is in love with her but doesn’t respect her. Murdoochian concept of love doesn’t accept this
presentation of love delivered by Paul. It is based on knowing, understanding, respecting and accepting the separate identity of others. Paul at every step tries to burden Dora’s identity and comes in the progress of Dora as a disturbance. He always tries to impose his own will upon Dora and through that Dora becomes as a salve. Its effect comes out that Dora loses her sense of freedom and sense of own’s life. She forgets her own identity, her own existence because of her dominating husband. The other people see and decide their image about Dora as an object in the world.

“This breeds a type of ‘Parasitical’ solipsism dependent upon the image planted by other people on one’s mind” (Kaehele 561).

The Community and Paul, Dora’s husband imposed on her the distorted images. Through all this dominance Dora feels her life as an empty and eventless which brings the feeling of nervousness and frustration for Dora. She was trapped in a fantasy through which she tried to escape to exercise her freedom or to assert her individuality. Dora runs away from Paul but the magnetic grip of Paul forces her to return repeatedly to his tyranny. At National Gallery, she feels satisfaction that comes from attending to something external to oneself. She deeply touched by looking at Gainsborough’s painting, a beautiful art. Those pictures enabled her to think out of his own self:

“It occurred to her that here at last was something real and something perfect.... Here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour, and by making it parts of her fantasy make it worthless. Even Paul, she thought, only existed now as someone she dreamt about; or else as a vague external menace never
really encountered and understood. But the pictures were something real outside herself, which spoke to her kindly and yet in sovereign tones, something superior and good whose presence destroyed the dreary trance-like solipsism” (Murdoch, The Bell 196).

Dora conspires with Toby to play the ‘Witch’ by dredging out the old bell from the lake and then substituting it for the new one about to be installed in the belfry. She sees the raising of the bell as a ‘kind of rite of power and liberation.’ But at a later stage, when their plot is discovered and she is apprised of the harm it may do to the Lay Community, she rings the old bell in a bid to tell the truth and disclose the reality. It showed her moral courage. At the last part of the novel when all the members had left and the Imber Community was in disgrace, only Dora and Michael stay back. This period becomes the period of some gains for Dora because this time she achieves moral and psychological freedom by rejecting all the imposed images upon herself by others. Here, she finds her real self by knowing and understanding the realities. She brings herself out of illusions, fantasy etc. and takes towards the process of freedom. She proves herself as a natural, buoyant and fearless swimmer as being able to swim is considered by Murdoch as a sign of moral competence. She shows her enthusiasm and interest for classical music, which is disliked to her before this. Dora discovers and learns the meaning of true love and develops an accurate, dispassionate vision about the reality of her marriage. Dora experiences the kind of love for Michael that Jake feels for Anna at the end of Under the Net. Dora knows Michael’s commitment to Catherine and accepts the viability of the situation and loves him with a quiet, undemanding
hopelessness. She doesn’t become jealous of the Catherine but loves Michael impersonally without any selfish and egoistic feelings. She understands the individual existence and identity of a person and so respects it.

Dora’s refined, impersonal, undemanding real love explores her ideas about her married life through which she learns the lesson to accept the failure and her limitations. She realized the secret of happy married life that it is based on the mutual understanding between husband and wife in which both should be treated equally and everybody has their individuality. She felt to become an independent grown up person instead of returning to Paul. She decides to return to her first creative job of painting in Bath.

In this way finally Dora realizes her own identity with respecting others. She comes out of imposed patterns of fantasy and proceeds towards freedom. She wins her freedom by successfully weathering the dangers of both ‘convention’ and ‘neurosis’. Her journey from fantasy towards freedom depends on various things like her contact with the bell, with Michael, the stay at Imber Court in the last autumnal period of its breakdown.

In Imber Community for those who are living there is no escape from life and the effort to do so by creating an artificial social order is an expression of an illusionary desire to assert one’s freedom. The failure of such a Community can be attributed to the absence of respect for the individuality of others and lack of love. Such retreat from the world is corrupting as it offers an illusion of innocence in place of true vocation enjoyed by the Abbess. It is the convent across the lake which is in touch with reality and rests on feelings of charity, compassion and love. A greater degree of moral freedom is achieved
by nuns. Their love for God is a reality and not a falsified idea. They are more realistic, selfless, virtuous and practical than the laymen.

*The Bell* is less melodramatic and less willing to deploy the devices of the romance than other novels. The novel shows how naturally a preoccupation with the past functions as the motor in Murdoch’s fiction. The novel also touches the subject of religion, subjectivity and the nature of love. What is especially powerful about *The Bell* is the way that the insistence of the past actions upon the reader, who is made subtly to feel the power of the past through the symbolic texture of the fiction, rather than being confronted with it directly through dialogue or stream of consciousness. *The Bell* is the first of Murdoch’s novels to make use of the audacious grand flourish of plotting, where a shocking event that happened in the past comes to happen again, as if predetermined.

The novel presents us with a society who is attempting to address the problem practically rather than philosophically. The original conception of the community came after the Abess spoke to him of the need for a “buffer state”, between the Abbey and the world.

“The idea comes from the conviction that the modern world is full of people who can live neither in the world nor out of it. They suffer from a kind of sickness, yearning for the value that God can bestow on their lives, but lacking the strength or character to give up their everyday existence. The Abess does not criticize such people for being weak. Rather their predicament is an inevitable response to the realities of a modern society dominated by the work ethic” (Nicol 52).
Michael, like most Christians had associated his interpretations of life with the idea of a necessary pattern, visible and comprehensive providential order whose design is automatically consoling and meaningful. This longing for order is a built-in component in western culture to which existential thought as well as conventional Christianity is devoted. Sartre subscribed to this longing and recognized its power. The horror of Michael’s experience denies such coherence and comfort. Michael’s necessary lesson stresses the unknowability of God and bitterly asserts that the ways of God are higher and wholly other than that which human faith and desire for knowledge can fruitfully deal with. Michael’s attempt to suit his life to a pattern has been wrong, pointless, and destructive - and when he says ‘there is a God, but I do not believe in him,’ he is saying that his need to live a coherent life is eternally separated from the immense human need for large and mighty symbols. This particular alienation can be seen as Murdoch’s definition of the ravages of Romanticism. Michael’s above statement is basically a statement of utter and irremediable separation of the divine from the mortal.

“Cato (‘Henry and Cato’) and Michael Meade are far distant from Brendan and very much alike: both are caught in the conflict between messy and personal desires and the unrewarding, even impossible demands of a strongly alien transcendence. The birds evoked in both books establish a connection both literal and symbolic between the natural world and the spiritual, and the hovering kestrel high above the wasteland of the grim present effectively illustrates the distance and separation so strongly felt by the spirituality restless characters”(136).
Imber might be regarded as a fictional realization of the vision of an ideal community in which work would once again be creative and meaningful and human brotherhood is restored. But rather than see Imber as a didactic illustration of the author’s view on how religion might be made to work in a godless world, it is better to regard it as a microcosmic portrait of late twentieth century society. Positional between the ascetic world of the Abbey and the numinous real world Imber is not quite a version of purgatory but it is certainly poised between two extremes: the spiritual world of the Abbey and the secular outside world. Michel Meade, who readily acknowledges that he suffers from the sickness the Abbes, refers to.

*The Bell* has a dialogical balance typical of Murdoch’s writing. The sociological/philosophical subtext is conveyed via two sermons given in turn by James and then Michael. Each opens with the expectation of the good life, each considers the question of innocence and each uses the image of a bell to reinforce what they have to say. For James, goodness is a matter of adhering to rules. For him, adhering to the law of God means preoccupying ourselves not with what delights us or what disgusts us, but what is enjoined and what is forbidden. Simply obeying the laws of God unquestioningly means that innocence can be preserved and the reward will be knowledge.

The plot of the novel revolves around repetition. So the symbolic and philosophical texture of the novel works according to the logic of repetition.

“The repeated sermon episodes signify the repetitive rhythms of a community sustained by a rational, traditional ideology in which the personal past is renounced for a collective past. But these are paralleled
by the disorienting effect of Michael’s repeated wakening to the booming of a distant bell, the first a dream that seems like reality, the second reality that seems like a dream. These replayed episodes remind us of the irrational, insistent power of the past—another symbol for which is the lake itself, the dark dangerous hole at the centre of the community” (57).

The reader of Murdoch’s novel is confronted with the philosophical conundrum which is never far from Murdoch’s writing. Life is a random chaotic flux but human beings are predisposed to regard it as patterned. Literary devices such as repetition and symbolism employed in The Bell in relation to the old bell or the lake seduce us to interpret, to make links between different aspects of the text. This process is integral by which author puts together a patchwork of events and signifiers and the reader organizes these into a meaningful sequence. Like most of the fictions this general law is applied to The Bell. The Bell indicates its value in making sense of the past. Because narrative tells a different kind of truth about the happened events. The imposed narrative conventions such as the religious ones so central to The Bell, or psychoanalytic or historiographic ones – carry with them the danger of falsifying the reality of events. These narrative conventions offer a consoling myth to the storyteller composed with sufficient detachment, can tell a kind of truth.

In The Bell, at the end, the major characters proceed to achieve self-knowledge, respect for others and freedom from imposed forms, patterns and illusions. They realize the realities of the existence and strengthen their sight with more clarity about other individuals. They
understand that in order to achieve freedom one has to come out from
the illusions and unrealized things. Michael discards his self-created
image. Dora learnt to shed those imposed on her by others. The
characters try to make their journey from fantasy to freedom.

The Bell may be seen as a perfect fusion of the real and the
symbolic. The skillfully patterned symbolic framework is used to
reflect on the lives of the characters. A.S. Byatt comments on ‘the
solid life’ of this novel and compares it favorably with The Flight
From the Enchanter:

“The characters are not tied up neatly at the end of the
book; they have a life of their own which exists beyond it.
What will happen to Michael Meade, or to Dora, is a
matter for real concern and speculation, as what will
happen to Rosa is not....” (73).

At the end of the novel the neat tying-up of characters is often
a problem for Murdoch – not that she cannot do it but that she does it
too glibly. Murdoch has begun her lifelong search for truth through
this novel. For her, the novel is concerned not with introspection but
with interrelationships, person with person. It is partly for this reason
that her novels have a tendency towards the dramatic. She constantly
describes scenes in which the characters are of necessity responding
to each other’s actions. She concludes in her essay “Against
Dryness”:

“We need to return from the self-centred concept of
sincerity to the other-centred concept of truth. 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 16).
In *The Bell* Murdoch has made an elaborate endeavor at reflecting effects, failures and partial failures to understand, apprehend and comprehend the distinct being of “others”. She has also projected the relationship between freedom and virtue and also between beauty and truth. In this novel Murdoch gives the impact of different concepts of morality on human relationships. All the characters are faced with the urgency to probe the limits of personal morality to ponder over the means of ordering their lives. No member of the Lay Community is free from the contradiction between the desire to seek self-transcendence and emphasize on the “self” as a means of seeking the ideals. Murdoch’s concept of morality depends on the love for goodness, truthfulness, justice, kindness and courage. She feels that one must learn to know and accept the importance of the world outside them and one mustn’t concentrated in his own self. To knowing and respecting others can be done only by extricating oneself from the egoistic, distorted narrow vision of self-interest, which prevents human being from perceiving what is real:

“To exist is to be conscious. Awareness means both choice and objective understanding of the conflict between one’s needs and the impediments one puts in one’s way. Once we acknowledge the non-deducible character of the world, we must return to personal consciousness as an un-derived and a causal phenomenon if we want to explain meaning” (Wolfe 92).

The connection between one’s sense of being and relation of human freedom to reality and tendency of mind to deform it with fantasy is vividly brought out in the actions and experiences of Dora in *The Bell*. Like Sartre, freedom to choose and the theme of
realization of the self and urge for its development and fulfillment are fundamental to Murdoch’s novels. Dora symbolizes the freedom of the youth. She makes an attempt to assert herself. In order to discover herself, she is not able to free herself from the bond of marriage. She lacks the knowledge of the self. The love for her husband has a kind of “violent, restrictive and impinging power”. As a result she is not able to grow and the reality of the “others” makes her aware that she existed. Iris Murdoch believes that fiction should always aim for the creation of the “unique, particularized individual” and this individual can achieve happiness only when he sees his own importance in the perspective of the needs and rights of those around him. Dora realizes that art (a painting by Gainsborough) can rescue her from her solipsistic fantasies.

Iris Murdoch’s consistent moral philosophy in The Bell highlights the importance of love and freedom to realize the otherness of other people and also for becoming morally conscious. She highlights the unspeakable particularity of human experience and of individual human beings and desires that the novelist should respect contingency which destroys fantasy. Many of her characters translate reality into a series of subjective magical devices and obliterate the distinction between fantasy and reality. By the end of the novel, the characters realize the falsity of their situations and earn moral freedom and consciousness and give up the subjective vision. For Murdoch, accurate seeing without fantasy, provided by falsifying mind, is freedom. Freedom is a state of mind, not freedom from something. To gain freedom, the mind has to think of people, relationships and life and it should break out of the patterns of fantasy.
The philosophical richness of Iris Murdoch’s mind can be seen throughout her novels. Like Plato Murdoch’s intellectual thrust is on constant search for moral regeneration and consciousness, and also in knowing the world devoid of fantasies. Her concern for morality and views on morality are reflected in her serious effort to portray the inner psyche of her characters. In a complex amalgam of love, power and freedom, her contingent characters find a certain self-definition. Her work is characterized by her endeavor to present reality. She is basically concerned with the philosophical realms where reality can be freed from learnt meanings and dreary systems. For Iris Murdoch art has much to do with the clarification of illusion and movement towards reality. According to her man is the most precious entity. He uses his mind for truth seeking, imagining and questioning to find the realities. But at the same time his egoistic consciousness, self-aggrandizing fantasy, self-indulgence and self-delusion makes him distort reality. She thinks that it is the duty of artist to find out the reality and respect contingency. She expects about a novel in the following words:

“A novel is a drama about people who are in some kind of confusion or illusion but are seeking enlightenment, freedom seeking happiness of course, which we all seek and the novel describes a drama which ends in catastrophe, falling back into illusion, or acquiring greater illusion or becoming more sensible, more enlightened or more free or something of this kind. I think that there is a struggle between good and evil which exists in the traditional novel and that is fundamentally what it is about; but then this is just to say that the novel is a general picture of human life” (Sagare 13).

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Iris Murdoch’s works are moral works and they quietly call to an “unselfing process” which comes with a right perspective to the world with a decreased sense of egoism and an increased sense of reality of the other. According to her the change of the being is not the result of the will but a deep process of unselfing and the process of unselfing can be done by only knowing and respecting others. In An Unofficial Rose (1962) the same effort is done by the writer. Randall in An Unofficial Rose tries to win economic freedom, but it turns out to be a mere illusion, for he has not perceived the reality of others. In An Unofficial Rose Murdoch has created free and individual characters who think that they are free but in reality they are puppets controlled by others. The theme of the fantasy of freedom, enchantment and contingency is depicted through the characters like Hugh Peronnet, Randall, Emma and Miranda. Murdoch highlights Randall’s egotism and his quest for freedom to be a mere illusion. On the other hand, the virtuous Ann’s self-denying submission to the contingencies of life symbolizes her defeated struggles to assert a will, which she does not possess. Ann’s character seems to suggest that goodness, forgiveness and generosity can lead to ideal human relationship.

The title of An Unofficial Rose is taken from Rupert Brooke’s poem, “The Old Vicarage, Grantchester”. The novel presents the author’s technical interest in 19th Century realism. Her novels achieved realism due to the influence of writers like Henry James, Tolstoy, George Eliot and Jane Austen. Her present novel tries to present the human life through her characters and settings by exploring the major concerns of usual philosophical dimensions like freedom, form, choice-making contingency and goodness. The title
page of the novel carries an epigraph with a line from Rupert Brooke’s poem, “The Old Vicarage, Grantchester”. In this poem the natural freedom of England is favorably set against the disciplined and regimented life in Germany in about 1912.

“The poem hinges on the conceit that nature in Germany is formally ordered, while in England it is gloriously free” (Conradi 259).

Rupert Brook sees the English unofficial rose as the ultimate reality but attacks the ordered life of Grantchester. In the same way Grayhallock and Seton Blaise in An Unofficial Rose and the Imber Community in The Bell are examples of such places susceptible to the pressures of contingent reality. At the last part of the novel most of the characters move away from Dungeness through which Murdoch tries to reveal the reality that patterned and imposed life by rules and illusions is merely a non-existent artificial world constructed by man’s own imagination. So, it is far away from the concept of freedom which respects other person’s individuality.

In An unofficial Rose, the ‘rose’ is the central symbol of the novel. It is associated with Randall Peronett and his youthful project devoted to the creation of new ‘floribundas’ and ‘hybrid teas’. These official roses are grown, cultivated and exhibited annually at Grayhallock. These are contrasted with the ‘unofficial’ dog rose. The unofficial rose presents a natural beauty and the miracles of nature in a natural form. This rose grows freely in wild and free atmosphere away from any imposed forms on it. Whereas official roses are cultivated and presents symbolically determinism, human desire to impose forms and patterns on nature. The official roses involves –
“The endless tormenting of nature to produce new forms and colours far inferior to the old” (Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose 183).

Randall had engrafted the shapes on the roses. Through imposing shapes on the roses he himself excessively searches for forms and patterns in life. Iris Murdoch tries to deliver the artificiality and superficiality of forms and patterns symbolized by the official roses. She tries to strengthen the importance of natural realistic life through an Unofficial Rose.

In the novel, an unofficial rose is one of the two central symbols. Another one is the artistic perfection of the Tintoretto painting. Hugh’s wife bequeathed him the golden, serene and authoritative painting of Susannah bathing. This painting represents beauty of art and perfection based on realistic sense of beauty. So, both symbols in the novel, an unofficial rose and Tintoretto painting is a source of realistic vision which gives birth to freedom. The story of the novel is presented around these two symbols. The attitudes of Hugh, Randall and Ann towards these symbols illuminate and expand their characters. The characters think that their choices are their own and ultimately they can make their own decisions according to their own desires and wills. But in reality they are not free and they are controlled and manipulated by others. Randall’s quest for freedom is a mere illusion. On the other hand Ann’s character presents the role of goodness, forgiveness and generosity for strengthening ideal human relationships. According to Elizabeth Dipple:

“The real world is one that most characters in Murdoch’s fiction would dodge, but the ineluctable working out of cause an effect in their personalities as
well as their past and present actions keep them on a firm track towards the conclusions that only chance, the uncontrollable, frightening, indifferent element that governs much of human destiny can change” (Dipple 350).

The novel An Unofficial Rose is a liberal kind of novel about human relations. The story of a novel matures in two country estates near London with long established traditions of gentility. The spacious Grayhallock stands on one estate, where three generations of the Peronett family are living: Hugh Peronett is a retired civil servant at the age of sixty-seven. He lived his life as a highly conventional and dull with a proper marriage and a proper career. He had an extra marital affair while his wife was living. He was in search of freedom but due to lack of freedom in marriage he does not get it. As he was a traditionalist, he is not able to desert his wife in the past:

“Surely, it was not for Fanny’s sake or for the sake of children he had not gone away...but he had not let things rip. Was it pure convention that he had sacrificed that marvel? Perhaps ... or was it for some demon of morality which he knew would have given him, later no peace? Yet morality as it subsequently seemed, was neither here nor there... He had passed years in resentment against his wife, which had gradually deadened his tenderness into pity and pity into a dull resigned companionship. Their marriage had become a hollow frame” (Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose 15).

The novel opens with a rainswept vista of Hugh’s wife Fanny’s funeral. All the relatives and friends attended this funeral. Randall
Peronett is Hugh’s son, a horticulturist, who has succeeded in setting up a large and flourishing rose nursery. Miranda is an adolescent daughter of Hugh and nephew Penn Graham who has come from Australia and is in love with Miranda. Grayhallock and Seton Blaise are the two neighboring estates having mutual friendship. Saton Blaise estate lives the Finch family. Humphrey Finch is an old friend of Hugh’s. He is now in love with Penn Graham. His wife Mildred had for many years’ cherished romantic feelings for Hugh and always thought that she would ‘inherit’ him on his wife’s death. Hugh’s wife Fanny died with an illusion of a very happy and successful marriage. She couldn’t realize the realities of Hugh even after forty years of marriage. Hugh had Kissed Mildred, Humphrey’s wife twenty-five years before near a river when they were both middle aged and married. He also had another affair with Emma Sands and after the cremation of his wife he feels that he should re-establish his relationship with Emma:

“There was such a lot still to be done there. So many tasks, so much sheer tidying up now that poor Fanny was gone. Well, it should all be done and then he would be free. He would be free” (14).

Mildred’s younger brother, Colonel Felix Meecham is inarticulately in love with Ann and looks forward to marrying her after Randall’s Withdrawal from Grayhallock with Lindsay Rimmer. But he is unaware of young Miranda’s feelings for him. Emma and Lindsay Rimmer are two Londoners closely related to the Peronett family. Emma is a writer of mystery fiction. Lindsay Rimmer, Emma’s adventurous secretary and companion, is being courted by Randall who wants to marry her to escape from his dull, loveless life
with Ann. Murdoch presents the theme of freedom, power and enchantment through the novel. Hugh is bound by convention to come out of his relationship with Fanny, but now his freedom awaited him. He loved Emma for a long period of time through which it becomes alive. After Fanny’s death Hugh’s love for Emma is aroused once again. Iris Murdoch expressed her feelings about human beings through her novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*:

“Human beings are finders of substitutes…driven by their own private needs they latch blindly into each other” (237).

Hugh is not able to get marry with Emma due to cowardice or convention but after Fanny’s death his love for Emma gets freshness. Emma declined the offer of Hugh and shows her love for Hugh in her own special way by adopting his grandson as her heir. She proposed Hugh to keep on loving and dreaming about her where Hugh responses:

“I don’t understand. Do you want me to remain as I –am –in –love”? “Yes, if you can. I’d adore it… Let it be some innocent dream love, a courtly love, something never realized, all dreams. And Penn shall be our symbolic child and you can telephone me and send me flowers. It will be quite like seventeen again” (Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose* 270).

Hugh understands that he may love Emma only in the imagination because she will not redeem the past. In the past, he has been offered his moment of freedom, to break loose from his normal marriage and to choose a compelling love in the past. But like Ann he rejects his freedom and regrets his past choices.
“No great store of spiritual energy had been liberated by his sacrifice; and his action, too high doubtless for any context, which he could sustain for it, appeared to have had merely a destructive effect. He had passed years in resentment against his wife, which had gradually deadened his tenderness into pity and his pity into a dull resigned companionship... He had given up the peril of great love” (15).

Hugh does not succeed to remake the past. At last he is freed from the fantasy of his expectations from Emma and turns to Mildred and goes to India with her. In this sense he is freed. Mildred finely understands the mentality of Hugh and so patiently she forces him to sell Tintorettos, the expensive painting thus facilitating his son Randall’s elopement with Lindsay. Hugh discards the romantic pattern he had designed for himself and recognizes reality. This reality is achieved by him with improvement of vision. Randall, Hugh, Penn- each of these characters is a dreamer and prefers to live in the illusions and fantastic world. Everyone is became a slave and enchanted personality by the one he loves. The novelist comments deliberately the ideas, expressions of the characters and shows their misconceptions, unrealistic expectations and dreams. She depicts the realities about fantasy and freedom through this novel. The human relationship based on one person’s power and modification of another doesn’t pay attention to the individuality and reality of others. The human beings engaged completely in creating their own forms and patterns think that they are free to know and understand the world. Jake Donaghue in the novel Under the Net and Michael Meade in The
Bell impose the forms, and their own patterns of fantasy on other characters. In An Unofficial Rose Randall’s concern is same.

In the novel the characters’ emotions and ideas are presented through the point-of-view technique which falls into Murdoch’s classification of the ‘Totalitarian’ and the ‘Ordinary Language Man’. The novel attempts to find out the relationship between freedom and good. A.S. Byatt writes:

“The other, more serious, criticism I would make of the whole work is that, in so far as it consists of two opposed groups of characters- Let us call them, for the moment, the ‘rapacious’ or ‘violent’ characters, and the ‘conventional’ or ‘good’ or more neutrally ‘normal’ characters- ... she asks, not ‘what is it to be free? But ‘what is it to be good?’ and in so far as she is breaking new ground and her imagination is involved, the book has an exciting life” (124 - 25).

Randall Peronett, being as a horticultural student studied rose culture. He has developed new varieties of roses. He worshipped the chaste and perfect form of the roses. He imposed his false patterns and forms on those roses. The concern of roses with Randall is described as follows:

“He loved nothing in the world so much as he loved these roses; and that he loved them with a love of such transcendent purity that they made him, for the moment like to themselves. He could have knelt before these flowers, wept before them, knowing them to be not only the most beautiful things in existence but the most beautiful things conceivable. God in his dreams did not
see anything lovelier. Indeed the roses were God, and Randall worshipped” (Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose* 183-84).

Randall tries to find the beauty and excellence of roses in his real life and his marriage. He compares the perfection of roses with his wife Ann and finds forms in her. His expressions are:

‘I need a different world, a formal world. I need form...something to encounter, something to make me be. Form, as this rose has it. That’s what Ann hasn’t got. She’s as messy and flabby and open as a bloody dog rose. That’s what gets me down. That’s what destroys all my imagination, all the bloody footholds” (322).

Randall sees Ann as an imperfect being without any positive spirit. He can’t find the designed pattern of the roses in her. He doesn’t understand the difference between imposed forms in art and in human beings. Randall’s attitude towards Ann is through his own fantasy imposed on her without knowing the importance of love and mutual understanding in human life. Through his false understanding about his wife he seems his marriage as a trap from which he wants to quit. He finds freedom from this married life because he sees it as a dull and lifeless. He searches for a different and formal world through which he makes his relationships with Lindsay Rimmer and Emma. Lindsay-Randall relationship is symbolic of one more attempt by the characters to be free. Randall is a self-centred person for whom the other people are organized menacing extensions of the consciousness of the subject. He abhors the real world, its incompleteness and lack of form. Iris Murdoch through Randall’s changing pattern of relationships stresses on the fact that human beings should face reality
and they should know their own identity as well as the identity, individuality of others. In the mean time Randall developed an extra-marital relationship with Lindsay thinking that he is ruined and destroyed by his wife.

“She just ruins me. She just destroys my footholds. Ann is awfully bad for me... For someone else she may be a bloody little angel but for me she’s the destroyer, and the destroyer is the devil. She’s got a kind of openness, which makes whatever I do meaningless” (16).

Randall has not granted will for Ann. Her renunciation and negatives mix curiously with her frequent muddy attempts at comprehension of others. She is defeated in her struggle to achieve her will. Randall meets Lindsay at Emma’s residence, when he had gone to see his father’s mistress just out of curiosity and he falls in love with her.

“Randall’s love for Lindsay had come violently and suddenly, the entire transformation of the world in a second, a wild cry after long silence, the plunge of a still stream into deep ravine. The falling in love was, he felt, the best thing he has ever done. It had that absolute authority which seems to put an act beyond the range of right and wrong. It had splendor. Before it, Randall had passed years of restlessness, weary of Ann, weary of the nursery, weary of himself, and yet not able to conceive of any other life” (60).

Randall allows dominating him for Lindsay. Through Randall’s relations with Lindsay and Emma Sands Ann’s life becomes as a slave. He evaluates a particular work according to her imagination
and then gives form to it. Emma and Lindsay together gave the feeling of form to Randall. He had a feeling of the “negative force” about Ann and so he elopes with Lindsay. Emma Controls Randall-Lindsay affair and joined with Randall in flattering Lindsay and with Lindsay in teasing Randall. Randall says to Lindsay about his connection in a marriage with Ann that he was hideously connected with her. His attitude about others was one-sided which doesn’t allow him to think about his wife. His marriage connection with Ann was the reality but it was unacceptable for Randall. He starts the feeling of emancipation after his involvement with Lindsay:

“But somehow the power is broken...Ann’s tyranny was broken, her dead hand had gone. Why had he fretted so in the old days when freedom was after all, so easy? Perhaps this and this only was what Lindsay was for, to free him from Ann. Whereas, Emma’s awareness of him still seemed to hover over him like clouds. Ann’s awareness of him had vanished, it was nothing...” (263).

In this way Randall wants to free from Ann’s identity which he seems as negative, dead and absent. He believes that his life is belonged and trapped by his wife so he couldn’t experience the real experience of his life without any burden.

Randall loves Lindsay but Lindsay loves a life of adventure. She has come to London for increasing her finance and so she is so pragmatic in her approach towards Randall. She has no moral scruples regarding her alleged infidelity and says that ‘morality is depressing’ (102). She was a practical woman who always thought about money, freedom and adventure in her life. A.S. Byatt writes in his book Degrees of Freedom:
“The central symbol in ‘An Unofficial Rose’ is analogous. They are first, the Tintoretto, portrait of Susannah, golden, serene, authoritative, a source of power and value, both moral, aesthetic and social (it is sold for a large sum to purchase a fantasy of freedom for Randall, a freedom in itself and enslavement to a fictitious beauty. And second the Rose itself likes the birdsong, a natural beauty, with a natural form, also on a rose farm, a source of value, vision, or even money” (22).

Randall’s freedom for a short while symbolizes the Tintoretto. But this freedom becomes an illusion and fantasy. Randall proceeds to gain only a fantasy of freedom but he can not realize it. His illusions about freedom shatter when his love for Lindsay is distracted and realizes that his life means not only a woman-Lindsay. He knows that Lindsay has not covered all things but besides her there are many others. He realizes that survival of human being should not be so depending on a particular thing or person because at any time it can be like hallucination. The concept freedom is dependent on the mind of a person, will of the person and the person can use it according to his own will. But when the hindrance of illusion comes in the way of it, then it becomes difficult to achieve it. In the novel Randall’s illusion, fantasy comes in the way of his freedom. Murdoch tries to pour these philosophical and realistic ideas in her characters. She is known to the fact that man is born free but he is trapped by limitations. After knowing freedom man acquires the reality in his life. Randall forfeits self-knowledge and creative understanding of reality by resigning his will to Lindsay. So, he cannot make his either
positive or negative relationship with Lindsay. Eventually, he knows the fantasy of Lindsay’s love and recognizes reality:

“In any case, there was still Ann and perhaps, there would always be Ann. Pity for unloved Ann haunted Randall like a demon, preventing him from rising, preventing him from being free” (Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose 63).

Randall neglected the aridity of the marriage which resulted into a change in life. He becomes able to decipher the individuality of other people in relation with Lindsay. He agrees with the statement that it was not that Lindsay possessed. He feels that Lindsay and he is not an equal match as it was presumed earlier by him. He admits that Lindsay was the stronger and she was the boss. After knowing about Lindsay, Randall decides to come out of the bounds of Lindsay. Lindsay and Emma both sap his energy. Randall understands that they both turned his love relation into play relation. Emma and Lindsay control him through their power and illusions knowing his desires of patterns and forms. Randall wanted to get a form in his life but he can not get it from both Ann and Lindsay. Randall thinks that Ann has a kind of openness and because of that it becomes everything meaningless done by him. He feels that Ann destroys all his imaginations and expectations as she had negative spirit:

“He could never have treated Ann rationally. He could never have explained to her what his grievances were. She would not have understood. She would have stood there, strong in her kind of honesty, that honest simplicity which destroyed the foothold of his imagination.... As he pictured her thus he saw her indeed as the incarnate sprit
of the Negative. The fact that she was his destroyer and some ultimate instinct of self-preservation initiated and justified his proceedings against her” (64).

The contingent particular and messy individual is the concern in Iris Murdoch’s novels. Randall had a fear to face the reality of the existence. He had also lack of tolerance and love through which a feeling of hate is created in his mind about Ann. Emma Sand is a profaner of all relationships who passes on her suffering to others. She operates on complex human relationships. She is the power personality in the novel on whom the imagination of most of the characters played. She is a successful mystery writer. Her mysteries partake more on the ordinary world than those of Mischa Fox in Flight from the Enchanter or Honor Klien in A Served Head. In the novel Ann becomes a sacrificial victim of her husband and daughter, Miranda because she can’t express her will of freedom. She loves hopelessly & struggles but her struggles are defeated while asserting her will. Murdoch believed that virtue for total man is sincerity, courage, will and the unillusioned exercise of freedom. Ann does not exercise her will and work for the freedom. She handles the whole situation very negatively. She laments:

“If she had not for that instant tried him with words of denial everything might have been different. Yet, had she not merely and exactly done as she had decided before hand she would do? And had he not acted, as she must have known he would act? It was scarcely a matter of ‘motives’. She has had no motives. Her whole life has compelled her... she had let go” (274).
Ann is more concerned about her self sacrificing spirit and the sacrament of the marriage because she sets Randall free but never thought about her own freedom. She followed virtues and goodness. She never gives importance to her individuality and always keeps her relations of mutual understanding with others. She believes that only knowing the needs, identities of others one can become happy, satisfied and self-realized. Randall’s elopement with Lindsay gave Felix some hope of getting Ann and he decides to fill the vacuum created by Randall in her life but Ann is not capable of defying her conscience. Ann dismisses her freedom due to her indecisiveness and Christian piety. She is Murdoch’s symbol of goodness in which she explores the nature of moral life. She is truthful and non-fantasizing. The quality of goodness in her can be compared to that of Adam Vermer and Maggie in Henry James’ The Golden Bowl. Like Maggie, Ann rejects her ‘immediate impulses and the desire for knowledge, and finds in the refuge of convention and deliberate ‘ignorance’ salvation both for herself and for others’ (Bayley 239).

Murdoch thinks that only the humble man can see the other man’s individuality. Ann proves this. She suffered due to imposed designs and egoistic forms and patterns imposed by Randall. Ann’s life allows her freedom, in Sartrean’s sense and she feels ‘value’ in setting Randall free from her negative powers. In the end Ann comes to a state of consciousness which was rational and beautiful and free and a state to which her whole life had compelled her. Elizabeth Dipple writes in her book Work For the Spirit:

“Ann Peronett is no doubt the unkempt... English unofficial rose of the title. She is one of Murdoch’s characters of good. Her renunciation and negatives mix
curiously with her frequent muddy attempts at comprehension and her defeated struggles to assert her will she does not fully possess. After Randall’s final defection, marriage of Felix Meecham would mean an access to life, but Ann’s negative handling of the critical scenes cuts her off from it” (57).

Ann is a representation of good human personality as she perceives and accepts the muddle of life spontaneously. She has no will of her own and has no self-supported structure.

“Ann had never really had the conception of doing what she wanted. The idea of doing what she ought, early and deeply implanted in her soul, and sedulously ever since cultivated, had by now almost removed from her the possibility, even as something ‘prima facie’ of a pure self regarding movement of will. She felt, at the moment, the lack of this strong uncomplicated machinery” (Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose 240).

Ann represents a reality and the goodness which Randall thinks to be opposite to highly structured fantasy with Lindsay and Emma. Randall is not free. To acquire the freedom one requires the ability to transcend one’s self awareness to a degree that permits penetration into the reality of others. It also involves breaking through the patterns and forms created by one’s fantasy. Randall is not shown as having freed himself in this manner. The theme of freedom and enslavement is also seen in a minor sub-plot ranging around the adolescents, Penn and Miranda. Penn imagines himself free from parental authority on his visit to England. But later he becomes slave of his cousin Miranda due to his romantic delusions. He pictures
himself as a disciple of courtly love and a slave of this moon goddess, for whom he could do any service. This abject love is an illusory idealization. He had yet to learn the meaning of real impersonal love.

In An Unofficial Rose, a shifting to and from various centres of consciousness imparts an effect of authorial omniscience of which full and ironic use is made. From the point of view of narrative technique, it marks something of a return to the mode of The Flight From the Enchanter. The novel is a formally very beautiful work with a number of contingent graces which tend to mask the form, so that the readers overall response is one of subdued, aesthetic pleasure at the blend. The chain of unrequited affections seems here almost willfully self-parodic. The symbolic potential of events and objects is now so strong as to make it hard for a reader to accept unreservedly the notion that such potential is bestowed by the characters alone. The features of the novel are best seen in terms of an experimental holding in balance of necessity and contingency.

An Unofficial Rose makes use of a more mannered form of the drama of a repeated action than we have yet seen, though the general pattern is familiar from The Bell and A Severed Head. Here the action is repeated not by the same character so much as representatively or vicariously in successive generations. This allows Murdoch to place great emphasis on the family; the ‘court’-like element in noticeable both here and in The Nice and The Good, a novel which has certain features in common with An Unofficial Rose. Actions and events are initiated and pushed around both by Mildred Finch from Seton Blaise and by Emma Sands from London. Both these characters visit the main court, Grayhallock, although Emma does so only once. Power so wielded is still completely a feature of the wealth of these
characters. In *The Nice and the Good* John Duane’s exercise of power is seen to be less dilettante and more closely related to obligations to society. Richard Todd writes about the novel:

> “Human freedom is seen here in terms of the freedom to explore possibilities, although the way in which we actually react in the face of a feeling vista may be disappointingly cautious. The formal beauties of this novel suggest, as do others where the pattern is used, that the overall pattern of action is not apprehensible in equal measure to all the characters. Here, perhaps, the character with the greatest overall vision is Emma, the writer of detective stories” (53).

Both the interest and the dissent of good and evil seem to be some of the more significant driving forces of Murdoch's fiction. She has a very clear sense of restraint about the relationship between politically committed and creative fictional writing. In her presentation we may sense a Sartrean existentialist concern for advocating freedom of human action, a freedom which is located firmly in the context of those complexities that inevitably arise when the individual’s predicament within society is concerned. Murdoch’s understanding of social realism requires that in fiction an individual be presented with the almost specificity against the background of a real and dynamic picture of human society. She thinks that the novel must create essential images of humanity and must be a fit house for free characters to live in. This involves an essential celebration of the creative imagination, as a moral, ethical and apprehensive power, responding to contradiction otherness.
In *An Unofficial Rose* the characters are involved in the struggle between good and evil. The novel is concerned with the relationship between freedom and virtue. The theme of freedom, enchantment and contingency is explored from the point of view of number of characters – namely Hugh Peronett, Randall Peronett, Emma Sands, Lindsay Rimmer and Miranda. In the light of Murdoch's own definition of freedom, many quests for freedom in *An Unofficial Rose* fail. She dramatizes in the novel the fantasies and duplicacies. The novel takes pains to highlight Randall’s egotism and Ann’s self-denying submission of contingencies. Hugo’s injunctions emphasize man’s vital need to understand himself - the supremacy of his self. One must accept the world and know oneself in the true context of that world as it naturally exists. Hugo’s departing words have a salutary affect on Jake. Hugo’s as well as Brendan’s withdrawal from the terrestrial field bring to light the power of renunciation, and self-abnegation as a gateway to knowledge. Murdoch's own pronouncements emphasize that the truths of spirit can be apprehended only by those who prepare themselves for their reception by rigorous discipline. A human being must cleanse the mind of all distraction and purge the heart from all corruption to acquire spiritual wisdom. Kum Kum Bajaj writes about the true renunciation and victory over self:

“to be free from desire and from the illusion of personal interest is the true renunciation. The true renouncer may not have any personal necessity for works but he works as God works, without any binding necessity or compelling ignorance, and even in performing work, he is not involved. ..... Hugo by moving out of the mundane
and terrestrial realm, emerges a man who has learnt his 
first lesson, in educating his desires. His mode of 
detachment reveals the power of “being” as opposed to 
the power of becoming” (94-5).

In An Unofficial Rose outwardly it seems that the characters are 
free but really they are not free. The unifying presence of a delighted 
imagination is displayed in the novel. The novel lacks a complex 
emotional depth that could have only been achieved through the 
medium of well-imagined free characterization. Iris Murdoch 
emphasizes the need of unselfing for the Good. The good people must 
see and respond to the real world in the light of their virtuous 
consciousness. The highly conscious good characters in Murdoch’s 
fiction have no illusions at all about truth. The good man is liberated 
from selfish fantasy. He is free from his geocentrism. Such man can 
see himself as others see him; imagine the need of others, love 
unselfishly without thinking about any reward, desire etc. Murdoch 
writes:

“Good is also something clearly seen and indubitably 
discovered in our ordinary unmysterious experience of 
transcendence, the progressive illuminating and 
inspiring discovery of others. The positive experience of 
truth which comes to us all the time in a weak form and 
comes to most of us sometimes in a strong form (in art or 
love or work or looking at nature) and which remains 
with us as a standard or vision, an ‘orientation, a proof 
of what is possible and vista of what might be’” 
(Metaphysics 508).
Murdoch’s characters mistake the nature of the world in which they live. They don’t understand their own nature as well as the nature of others around them. They live in a fantasy and proceeds to the fantasy of freedom but don’t understand that freedom is the true seeing. So, Murdoch warns against a false “seeing”. Through the characters in the novel Murdoch tries to deliver the reality that man is essentially unfree and he can get the freedom by knowing, understanding and respecting others. Otherwise it would be the fantasy of freedom. Her novel An Unofficial Rose is an attempt to present “goodness”, “freedom” as opposed to “illusions” and fantasy. In the novel she has created free and individual characters, who think that they are free but in reality they are puppets controlled by others. Hugh Peronett, Randall, Emma and Miranda, these characters present the above concern. Murdoch believed that reality is too complex for human beings to control. This belief is expressed in the frustrated attempt of her fictional characters to find consistent patterns or casual relationships in the world around them. The different characters of the novel make constant and reasonable efforts to understand each other, to be free but ultimately they fall into one another continuously. The characters fail to recognize that they are going to achieve only a fantasy of freedom.

Thus, Iris Murdoch's above discussed three novels- Under the Net, The Bell, and An Unofficial Rose reveals the reality that the preoccupation and fantasy hinders the process of freedom. In these three novels style and matter may be vary but there is a constant unity of theme underlying the ideas. In Under the Net there is a stylistic attempt to move from fantasy–myth to depiction of character and a break in subject-matter. It has a social dimension. It emphasizes on
the possibilities of man’s freedom in society. How work limits freedom recurs in the organization of the community in The Bell. And the problem which Jake Donaghue encounters from time to time in Under the Net, the problem of economic freedom, of whether he can accept large sums of dishonorably earned money in order to live free of economic necessity, also, in a different form, besets Randall in An Unofficial Rose, who buys a kind of freedom with the money obtained from the sale of his father’s Tintoretto.

In Murdoch’s above novels the freedom of characters is incomplete and unresolved. The characters constantly attempts to interact or order their experience with the transcendent reality. This process constantly degenerates into deforming reality by fantasy. This reality is seen in part as that fundamental, indefinable stuff of existence. In her book on Sartre, Murdoch writes:

“What does exist is brute and nameless, it escapes from the scheme of relations in which we imagine it to be rigidly enclosed, it escapes from language and science, it is more and other than our descriptions of it” (13).

But Murdoch's concept of incomprehensible reality does not exactly coincide with Sartre’s ‘contingent over-abundance of the world’. It contains an element which Sartre would ignore, dividing, as Murdoch says he does, the world between the ‘swooning abundance of existence’ and the reason and will of the isolated human individual. This element can be located in her criticism of Sartre as a novelist. She writes:

“Sartre has an impatience, which is fatal to a novelist proper, with the stuff of human life. He has, on the one hand, a lively interest, often slightly morbid, in the
details of contemporary living, and on the other a passionate desire to analyze, to build intellectually pleasing schemes and patterns. But the feature which might enable these two talents to fuse into the work of a great novelist is absent, namely an apprehension of the absurd irreducible uniqueness of people and of their relations with each other” (75).

Murdoch believes in a respect for people as they are and not as she says of Sartre’s man in another context, ‘stripped and made anonymous by extremity; which leads her to set a higher value upon those social and moral ideas and habits which do in fact exist and affect people’. In an article, “Against Dryness” Murdoch wrote:

“We need to be enabled to think in terms of degrees of freedom, and to picture, in a non-metaphysical, non-totalitarian, and non-religious sense, the transcendence of reality” (16).

Murdoch describes a dry view of the human personality. She considers that the human beings are occupied by various things like myths, forms, and patterns, and fantasies. Her characters through Under the Net, The Bell and An Unofficial Rose present the feature of lonely, self-contained individual. Murdoch is of the view that human being is totally free and is responsible for all his actions. Murdoch has thoroughly presented the human tendencies through her work. She tried to depict every thing by rationality. She opposed the human beings in this modern world completely buried in their self-satisfaction. She tried to reveal every aspect of human being through her novels. She writes about the human being:
“He is rational and totally free except in so far as in the most ordinary law-court and commonsensical sense his degree of awareness may vary. He is morally speaking monarch of all he surveys and totally responsible for all his actions. Nothing transcends him .....His inner life is resolved into his acts and choices and his beliefs, which are also acts, since a belief can only be identified through its expression. His moral arguments are references to empirical facts backed up by decisions” (17).

Murdoch lays most emphasis upon the aspect of the transcendent reality. The pursuit of sincerity as opposed to truth leads to fantasy and it opposes to imagination. This process leads to myth-making, to a dry and facile ordering of experience into false and easily comprehended wholes. She says that we need a respect for the contingent. In Under the Net Jake lives in the world of convention and fantasy, deeply stressed as he is in the state of neurotic egotism and insanity. In The Bell Michael Meade and his Lay community presents self-conceived form or role intruding upon the spiritual and religious world. Keeping the same concern of Under the Net and The Bell, Murdoch's another novel An Unofficial Rose focuses on the Murdochian theme of freedom. In it Randall’s tries to win economic freedom turns out to be a mere illusion and the supposed free characters become puppets by the others. Hugh Peronett, Randall, Emma and Miranda reveal the Murdochian theme of enchantment, contingency and freedom.

Iris Murdoch has skillfully handled the both themes of love and freedom in Under the Net. She stresses love and art because they are
energy systems addressed to the outside, the other object. She explains:

“It is in the capacity to love that is to see, that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists. The freedom which is a proper human goal is the freedom from fantasy that is the realism of compassion. What I have called fantasy, the proliferation of blinding self-centred aims and images, is itself a powerful system of energy, and most of what is often called ‘will’ or ‘willing’ belongs to this system. ... Freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision” (Slaymaker 22).

The novel charts out the various ups and downs in the life of Jake Donaghue. His idea of love shatters because he couldn’t understand the individuality of his beloved. He is haunted by the problems of artistic expression. Murdoch in the novel does not recommend an escape from the net of society but insists on crawling under it to reach the ‘unutterable particularity’. If the concept of net is taken to understand, on the social level, the net of society has to be entered, as freedom can be worked out only in communication with other people. On the philosophical level, freedom is crawling under the net of theories and concepts, imposing various forms and patterns on the contingent reality. In the level, Jake has a fear of establishing relationships with others which has a self-protective cover, built around himself to avoid contingency. He distorts reality to fit his own preconceptions of it in the case of Hugo. He extols Hugo as his destiny and is enchanted by the concept he has formed of him. Jake lived in the fantastic world but later he realizes the place of social will
rather than one’s private will. He comes close to the Murdochian concept of freedom through various forms and patterns imposed by fantasy. Murdoch strengthened the point that in art and also in morals, it is so necessary to overcome the fantasy and ego-centredness:

“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 .....The artist’s worst enemy is his eternal companion, the cosy dreaming ego” (The Fire and The Sun 79).

The story of Murdoch's another novel The Bell is seen through the eyes of Michael Meade, leader of the community. As we have seen the self-preoccupied characters in Under the Net, Murdoch’s The Bell also can’t remain away from this. Here, Michael Meade establishes an artificial social order like the Imber Community which has no place for deviants and expression of love. Like Jake in Under the Net, Michael Meade and his Lay Community presents self-conceived form imposed upon the spiritual and religious world. Michael exercises an existential form of freedom by ignoring the past and imposing a rational order or form on the world when he establishes the Lay Community. He seeks the help of religion to escape from the desire to exercise power over others. He meditates upon the desirability of self-abnegation, yet he is found exercising wanton power over his fellow men in the community. He forces his decisions upon them, and shows his dominating self-assertiveness. He could have loved and saved Nick but he refuses to do so because the
pattern of a spiritual destiny and a sense of sin associated with Nick overpower him. After Nick’s death he realizes about his egoistic concepts. This realization through fantasy is like the Jake in Under the Net. Murdoch strongly presents such characters through her novels to reveal the role of preoccupations and fantasies in our life. She thinks that such preoccupations and fantasies of the characters create obstacles in their process of freedom. She reveals her concept of freedom, which has a wider and deeper meaning:

“Freedom is, I think, a mixed concept. The true half of it is simply a name of an aspect of virtue concerned especially with the clarification of vision and the domination of selfish impulse. The false and more popular half is a name for the self-assertive movements of deluded selfish will which because of our ignorance we take to be something autonomous” (The Sovereignty of Good 100).

The major characters in Under the Net and The Bell live in various forms and patterns, not knowing the realities of world. The characters due to the egoistic consciousness, self-aggrandizing fantasy, self-indulgence and self-delusion neglect the process of freedom. Like Jake in Under the Net and Michael Meade in The Bell, Randall in An Unofficial Rose lives in illusions. Here, an unofficial rose grows freely away from any imposed forms on it. But the official roses are cultivated and present symbolically determinism, human desire to impose forms and patterns on nature. Randall excessively searches for forms and patterns in his life through imposing various shapes on the roses. Murdoch reveals the artificiality and superficiality of forms and patterns symbolized by the official roses.
The characters Randall, Hugh, Penn, all are dreamers and so prefers to live in the illusions. Everyone became a slave and enchanted personality by the one he loves.

Freedom, goodness, love etc. are Murdoch's basic moral concepts. She has thoroughly revealed these concepts through her novels. Her concept of freedom has been different from commonly understanding of it. She always opposed the forms, illusions as the obstacles in the process of freedom. Above discussed three novels – *Under the Net, The Bell and An Unofficial Rose* strongly expresses the Murdochian views about freedom. As these three novels may be different in its style and matter but its theme is unique. The major characters from these novels prefer to live in fantasies. The major characters, Jake in *Under the Net*, Michael Meade and his Lay Community in *The Bell*, Randall, Hugh, Penn in *An Unofficial Rose* live in the self-centredness. They devise roles for themselves and others and are entrapped in the artificial network. Most of the major characters by the end of their respective novels come to understand the falsity of their situations and try to understand others. Murdoch has skillfully revealed her ideas and philosophy of freedom through her characters. Her characters represent her ideas. Through these three novels she has delivered a message that freedom is such concept which is based on knowing and understanding others and self-preoccupation and fantasy hinders the freedom. By overcoming the preoccupations and fantasies one can precede towards freedom otherwise it will become the process to achieve the fantasy of freedom which is presented by Murdoch’s characters.
References


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