CHAPTER - III
A State Of Form-Making Fantasy and an Individual’s Discovery of the Imaginative Recognition of Reality

The Murdochian characters live in the fantasy world with well-ordered, neat and explicable lives shielded from the pains and harshness of the contingent reality around them. The present chapter includes Murdoch’s three novels – i) The Unicorn; ii) A Severed Head; and iii) The Nice and the Good. The chapter attempts to study above selected novels which trace the progress of her characters from a state of form-making fantasy to the discovery of the recognition of reality. As the characters live in the illusions and fantasies, they do not perceive others as real human beings. They see them through their self-made forms and patterns. The characters fail to understand their life involved in fantasies and so remain away from the recognition of reality. Because of the burden of fantasies and the lack of reality they proceed to achieve the fantasy of freedom.

Murdoch points out through above novels that how evil is produced by obsessive faith or fantasies, lack of self-knowledge or misplaced good intentions. Her novels demonstrate how forms and myths created by fantasy can completely enslave and curtail liberty. She analyses our moral longing for the good through flawed characters. She depicts the people misusing or neglecting institutionalized religions, but longing for a more spiritual life. She analyses evil as intelligently as she does spirituality.

In The Unicorn the characters are controlled by the over-all design. ‘Hannah’ is invested with philosophical and religious
connotations, mythic and literary allusions that she never comes out of them as an actual living person and prefers to live in the fantasy world. *A Severed Head* offers the psychoanalytic version of her interest in the gulf between the contingent elements of reality and those networks like language, theory and art. In the novel the fantastic elements originate from the preoccupations of a particular character’s mind. Martin and other characters lived their life in fantasy. They go to achieve the fantasy of freedom. Martin always saw the individuality of other person through his own fantastic world, but the broken news of Martin-Georgie relationship leave him free to face others, to realize about the individuality of other person. In *The Nice and the Good* the character Ducane makes moral progress from a state of form making fantasy to the discovery of the recognition of reality. The excessive preoccupation with the past hinders the process of freedom. It captures human being mentally and prevents him/her to face the situation as well as outside world.

Murdoch presents dark surrealism in *A Severed Head* and a more domestic everyday world in *An Unofficial Rose* but in her seventh novel *The Unicorn*, she attempts one of her boldest experiments in the literature of suspense and terror. It is unique due to its theme as well as mode and the manner in which it is presented. It is a ‘closed’ novel in the Gothic tradition. The novel presents the tyranny of form over freedom and contingency. The novel tries to present this both structurally and thematically. In it fantasy reigns supreme, so the characters proceed to achieve only the fantasy of freedom. Therefore, the realism remains as the unconsidered and neglected.
The Unicorn covers the atmosphere of a desolate seascape and
dangerous bogs surrounding a mysterious castle with dark
passageways where obsessed people are imprisoned, whipped, and
murdered. The novel is also used for its allegorical implications.
Really, Murdoch’s most Gothic novel turns out to be her most
allegorical because many characters of the novel tend to represent
ideas. The central moral lesson which Murdoch wants to convey
involves the idea that we must not impose myths or theories and
forms upon other human beings. The human beings must be able to
preserve their unique qualities in a contingent world free of artificial
patterns. So, one character responses:

“No one should be a prisoner of other people’s
thought’s, no one’s destiny should be an object of
fascination to others” (Murdoch, The Unicorn 200).

The fantasy of freedom is taken up on a symbolic level in The
Unicorn. The novel presents the solipsistic and psychological
enslavement of Hannah and others as they have imposed the self-
created romantic conceptions on reality. Such characters reflect
symbolically the general human condition through fantasy, power,
redemptive suffering and love.

Hannah Crean-Smith is the central character of the novel who
is involved in an arbitrary network of images and patterns imposed on
her. Those who imposed forms on her are also not free than she is.
Both the enchanter and the enchanted are trapped by illusions and
fantasy which results into their unrealization of the fact. This is the
condition of most of Murdoch’s protagonists but each character works
progressively towards a recognition of their enslavement. Some
characters gain some insight into the meaning of freedom but many
proceeds to achieve the fantasy of freedom. Murdoch has created a myth or allegory about a number of people trapped to deliver her theme. In order to illustrate the evils of myth and fantasy Murdoch herself creates a fantastic myth. One does sense from time to time that in The Unicorn Murdoch plays with the Gothic form itself, defiantly exploiting obvious techniques, perhaps to emphasize the greater significance of the ideas. The novel can not be neglected by its allegorical element which plays an important role.

Hannah occupies the central place of the novel’s legend. She has been supposedly locked up in a remote English castle for seven years by her cruel and dissipated husband, Peter Crean-Smith. Peter seven years earlier found his wife in bed with a young neighbor Pip Lejour. Knowing this a violent argument took place between them in which Hannah pushed her husband over the steep coastal cliff on the castle grounds. Miraculously Peter survived by landing on a ledge but was reputedly maimed for life. A punishment given for Hannah’s transgressions seems minor compared to her husband’s lustful indulgences. She was restricted to the isolated estate guarded by Gerald Scottow, Peter’s friend and henchman, who took command while Peter enjoyed himself in New York. Violet Evercreech and her younger brother Jamesie soon arrived in the form of Peter’s poor relatives. They nominally assumed the positions of housekeeper and chauffeur. At the time of the fateful struggle a violent storm and flood had ravaged much of the landscape. Consequently, the superstitious town people in the nearby small fishing village linked the eerie events at the castle with the wild storm and created a legend around Hannah Crean-Smith. They believed that she would die if she ever left the
dreary estate. They also predicted that after seven years there would be another cataclysmic turn of events.

The Novel *The Unicorn* is filled with myth. Their are two main narrators of the book from the outside world. One is Marian Taylor, a children’s governess who discovers that at this unusual home there are no children. Another one is Effingham Cooper, a civil servant who sometimes visits Pip Lejour’s father, a philosopher who resides at Riders. The Riders is the only other estate within miles of the legendary homestead significantly called Gaze Castle. Murdoch’s novel examines a group of people who speculate upon the events at the castle and then construct rigid networks of interpretation. Ultimately they imprison them as they act their fantastic theories. Rubin Rabinovitz has written:

“To live according to a myth destroys contingency; if one is deluded by fantasies it is impossible to see, and to love, others” (35).

In the novel many of the individuals form relationships with each other but gradually it seems that one partner is possessed by the other. Iris Murdoch tries to deliver the message through her novels that a failure of vision creates the true evil and demonic power. If the people become fixed objects in a mythic system, it becomes hard to recognize the individual essence of a person. As in *The Unicorn* everyone gazes at Hannah, but they do not look objectively. They see her only as a character in their private dramas. They don’t see her as a real woman, a reality or the individual identity having her own existence.

“They gaze through the subjective filters of their fanciful minds and not with true awareness: they do not really
“see” or attend to her unique otherness. Besides symbolically naming her Gothic mansion Gaze Castle, Murdoch indicates the importance of “seeing” others clearly through several additional motifs. Physical vision itself often becomes difficult in this treacherous landscape where several people get lost in the murky bogs. When Marian Taylor first looks at Riders in the “sunny mist” it had “something of the air of a mirage” (Kane 46).

Miss Taylor’s new binoculars seem symbolic throughout the novel. She engages in a series of attempts to bring people and places into focus. When she first sees Jamesie Evercreech in the back of the dark car that picks her up at the railroad station, she initially perceives him as a big dog, then a shaggy fifteen-year-old boy, and finally, a young man of about nineteen. She has difficulty placing him either student or one of the servants when she gets a better look. Later in the novel when she wanders into Jamesie’s room, she has difficulty adjusting to the dim light before she finally focuses on what at first appears to be curious patterned wallpaper but in reality proves to be hundreds of photographs of Gerald Scottow, sometimes naked and in some very strange postures indeed.

A genuine but momentary glimpse of freedom is sighted by Effingham. Marian also understands the interpretation of freedom to some extent when she allows Hannah to escape from her prison. The Unicorn attempts to unfold the boundaries, swamps and abysses of freedom. It doesn't present what freedom is but it takes effort to reveal what it is not. In Murdoch’s novel she has created a closed atmosphere of fantasy and enchantment through her Gothic mode of
writing. This cramps moral advancement and keeps freedom at bay. She has not used this gothic form as a literary mode of presentation but she has used it as a weapon to present her religious, philosophical and moral ideas in a better way. She has borrowed this form from classic Gothic novels like Madame de la Fayette’s *Princesse de Cleves* and *Wuthering Heights*, composed by Emily Bronte. This is revealed through roles played by various characters, like Hannah’s self-imposed imprisonment, the mysterious atmosphere of the Gaze Castle, etc. Murdoch has used the applicable and suitable gothic elements in her novels by creating the scene of mystery, terror, supernatural elements etc. and tried to bring out the perilous contingency of human existence. She has deployed the scenes like an ancient ravaged land with few trees, deserted rivers, curious caves, megaliths and rocks with Carnivorous flowers, underground rivers, intractable, repellent and lethal sea etc. All these elements make the novel more Gothic.

In the novel an ancient ravaged land is dominated by two isolated country mansions – the Rides and the Gaze Castle. The Riders is the big handsome house where Max Lejour, the Platonist scholar lives as a recluse with his son, Pip Lejour and his daughter, Alice Lejour. The Gaze Castle is another big, grey forbidden and self-absorbed house in which Hannah has incarcerated herself to atone for her guilt. Though A.S. Byatt writes about this in her book *Degrees of Freedom*:

> “I have thought that the two houses in the narrative – Riders and Gaze Castle – are symbolically named and stand respectively for Platonic religion – Riders recalling the horses of the ‘Phaedrus’- and Christian contemplation – Gaze sufficiently suggesting this – which
is involved in the concepts of guilt, sin and redemption; the division between the houses is seen as something undesirable in the action, even in the flood, disastrous” (159).

The landscape presented in the novel possesses a frightening sublimity symbolic of the guilt–ridden mind of Hannah Crean–Smith and the sinful consciousness of mankind in general. It presents an image of the unconscious self and symbolizes the supersensible destiny. Hannah is the unicorn of the title that is in captivity at the end of the hunt. The mythical unicorn mentioned in the medieval bestiaries appears to have been a sad conundrum for hunters. Though a valuable piece of game, it could not easily be captured alive. The medieval legend portrayed it as a ferocious animal which valued purity and innocence. The legend embodies the idea of the incarnation and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. The traditional association of the unicorn is therefore with Christ, who came to the world to redeem sin but was imprisoned in the sinful human flesh thus inflicting great suffering on himself.

Hannah takes all the sins as he arises as an emblem of Christ. She suffers and expiates others through suffering thinking that those who gaze at her may be purified. Murdoch tried to present Hannah as a Christ figure through her novel. After one abortive attempt to escape, Hannah is resigned to her condition and accepts it as a kind of religious vocation in spiritual suffering, self-denial and purification.

“In her (Hannah) however, the passive suffering of Ann in ‘An Unofficial Rose’ becomes a kind of myth or a form woven by Hannah herself in conjunction with others. She becomes the spell-bound charismatic centre, a kind of
talisman or a magical symbol for all those who cluster around her. ... Hannah is seen variously as a ‘goddess’ an ‘angel’, an ‘enchanted princess’ and even as a ‘witch’, ‘sorceress’, ‘vampire’, ‘circe’ or a ‘scapegoat’. To Max, she is either an ordinary guilty person or a ‘spiritual penelope’ waiting faithfully for her husband’s return, like Ann in ‘An Unofficial Rose’” (Datta 35).

The Unicorn is build upon the different forms and meanings. These forms and meanings, philosophical ideas in the novel are originated from the prevalent self-based philosophies of existentialism and linguistic analysis, Feudal Christianity and Classical Platonism. The modern outer world of Gaze and the Riders is represented by Effingham and Marian Denis and Max Lejour. The events of Gaze are shown through the consciousness of Marian Taylor and Effingham as they are the secular envoys from the real, normal and ordinary world. These characters reveal the liberal, romantic outlook of the modern world with its moral and emotional inadequacies. They stress on the individual responsibility, and choice of human being rather than attention. They believe in easy-going utilitarian view of happiness. They try to make free Hannah from her suffering. Marian is considered a personality with progressive views and common sense who arrives at Gaze after disappointing love affair with Geoffrey to find distinction of life. Her stay at the Gaze Castle is partly her own education in the true nature of reality. She explains Hannah’s condition on purely psychological basis and later learns about spirituality:
“People have got to survive and they’ll always invent some way of surviving, of seeing their situation as tolerable ......she decided to become religious .....Hannah took to religion or the spiritual life ... like someone taking to a drug ... Now she’s simply spellbound. She’s psychologically paralyzed. She’s lost her sense of freedom” (Murdoch, The Unicorn 119).

Marian learns from Denis about the superstition that she will die if she comes out of the garden. So, her desire to wake Hannah up from the psychological spell is increased by learning about the superstition. So, she tells Denis:

“It sounds to me as if she were really under a psychological spell, half believing by now that she’s somehow got to stay here. Oughtn’t she to be wakened up?” (65).

Marian knows about the apprehension that some sort of disaster would befall after the lapse of seven years of Hannah’s imprisonment; she attaches a great deal of significance to her own arrival at the Gaze. Marian complicates the existing mystery of reality by creating a myth and a role for herself. She gives a form to her presence at the Gaze. Scott addresses Marian as ‘maid’ Marian. She becomes the unicorn girl desiring to trap the unicorn. She plans to rescue Hannah from the satanic hold of Gerald Scottow with the help of Effingham. In the process, she becomes a part of the pattern herself. She inherits a sense of guilt by releasing Hannah from her room to her death. Marian attains her own selfhood and freedom by enabling Hannah to take this last independent decision. The old image of freedom gives way to the realization that liberty cannot be imposed upon others.
Marian recognizes the value of individuality of a person to some extent and admits that Hannah had the royal right to dispose herself as she would.

Marian adjoins the magic created by Hannah’s myth of spiritual life and returns to the comforting banalities of mundane everyday life. She leaves Gaze wondering ‘whether the world in which she had been living was a world of good or evil, a world of significant suffering or a devil’s shadow play, a mere nightmare of violence’ (263). Due to lack of moral maturity she does not get the answer. Effingham has an idealistic, romantic concept of Hannah. He is an outsider in the world of Gaze but a regular visitor to the Riders. He is a courtly lover who in his imagination suffers the pangs of unrequited love. He is himself enslaved and paralyzed by his inability to treat woman as anything other than mother-figures or inferiors. Effingham’s relationships with Hannah and Marian are an outcome of the same psychological problem. He does not love the real Hannah but a dream-figure, a myth or a form imposed upon her. She accepts Gerald Scottow as a lover which crumbles the entire structure of Effingham’s emotions for her and his fantastic world. Through this event he tries to find the real love and freedom. After his imprisonment he proceeds to gain an insight. Through one of the instances when everything stands stills, he is awakened to know his own existence and importance. He understands the necessity of knowing others:

“Since he was mortal he was nothing and since he was nothing all that was not himself was filled to the brim with being and it was from this that the light streamed. This then was love to look and look until one exists no
more; this was the love which was the same as death. He looked, and knew with clarity which was one with the increasing light, that with the death of the self the world becomes quite automatically the object of a perfect love” (167).

This event elaborates Murdoch’s stress on ‘unselfing’ and presents her opposition to the radical individualism of Sartre reflected in the idea of freedom as the exaltation of the alienated self. For her it seems a moment from humanistic feeling to a desire to act outside the self, beyond the self, to better the self. As Effingham moves out from the world of Gaze, it seems that he has still not learnt to perceive Hannah with less preconceptions or forms. A real understanding of her otherness is not unfolded through her analysis made towards the end of the novel:

“She had been their nun and she had broken her vows .... He had been glad to have her reserved, sequestered, caged.... They had all turned towards her to discover significance in their sufferings, to load their own evil on to her to be burnt up.....It had been a fantasy of the spiritual life, a story, a tragedy....... Hannah had been for them an image of God and if she was a false God they had certainly worked hard to make her so. He thought of her now as a doomed figure, a Lilith, a pale death dealing enchantress” (268).

Denis Nolan’s love for Hannah is based on a more sympathetic conception of personal sanctity. He works as the auditor of accounts in the Gaze Castle. He is considered as more clear-sighted and less deluded than the others. Nolan’s opening conversation with Gerald
Scottow clearly shows that he pays homage to other gods. Marian soon learns that Denis’s theory about Hannah depends upon the Christian myth of salvation through redemption. He tells Marian that-

“Hannah has found over these last years a great and deep peace of mind. As I think, she has made peace with her God... Her peace is her own and it is her best possession, whatever you believe” (229).

Denis also worships Hannah, besides the Christian God. In spite of his unusual devotion, he remains one of the few residents of Gaze Castle who is associated with nature and primitive vitality. The novelist Iris Murdoch sees the natural world as a positive, spontaneous force that has the potential to pull Denis away from deterministic theories of sin and guilt. He cares for the horses on the estate, frolics wildly with the dog, protects the goldfish from cranes, and brings Hannah wild pets. Even though he seems at home in its vitality, he tries to impose his Christian viewpoint upon the natural world. He comments that all God’s creatures must suffer. He sees Hannah as one of these creatures. He describes Hannah’s plight for Marian:

“The soul under the burden of sin cannot flee. What is enacted here with her is enacted with all of us in one way or another. You cannot come between her and her suffering, it is too complicated” (68).

Denis’s view of Peter Crean-Smith has created the complication in his theory about Hannah. His love for Hannah is stained by his intense hatred for Peter. He feels that Peter has made Hannah’s share of suffering greater than normal. Obsessed with his hatred of this man, Denis finally resolves to fight evil with evil. His evil is
realized in his responsibility for Peter’s drowning on his final return to Gaze Castle. When he learns that Hannah has taken her life while he was dealing with Peter, Denis realizes that his obsession with Peter probably led to Hannah’s death, for he feels that she would never have killed herself had he remained at her side. So he confesses to Marian:

“I did not only love, I also hated. And hatred can corrupt the love that makes it be. That was why I was not there when I should have been” (261).

Denis thinks that the Mythic cycle of sin and expiation will begin again. At last part of novel we see Denis as he tramps off into the hills carrying his pet goldfish and his new burden of guilt. Through these characters Murdoch tries to present her theme that fantasy can’t be based on reality but it always imposes various forms and patterns on others and never considers the existence of other human being. Here, Denis kills Peter to free Hannah who had already committed suicide and becomes an heir of her suffering. He also frees Marian, Jamesie and others from their bonds of guilt. Denis was less self-immersed and more sympathetic but like other people he never saw Hannah as a real individuality. He always saw through his fantastic image which never considered the importance of real freedom.

Max Lejour is the Platonist philosopher at the Riders who takes a theoretical interest in her condition without ever visiting or seeing her. Even though he had knowledge of Plato and Aeschylus, he, like the others, mistakes illusion for reality. He never uses his wisdom to the concrete situation. Max Lejour lectures about the dangers of transforming Hannah into a Christian Myth. He urges that she must
be seen as real, but yet he neglects her reality and turns her into an object of philosophical contemplation. Regularly, he equates her with Platonic Conceptions of beauty and goodness. He associates Hannah’s quite acknowledgement of unverified guilt with the Greek concept of Ate,

“Which is the name of the almost automatic transfer of suffering from one being to another? Power is the form of Ate……..But Good is non-powerful. And it is in the good that Ate is finally quenched, when it encounters a pure being who only suffers and does not attempt to pass the suffering on” (98-9).

But when Effingham asks if Hannah can be considered such a pure being, Max, keeping true to the speculative nature of philosophy, replies that he remains unsure. Max never acts upon his insights. He proves to be another one of Murdoch’s great theoreticians who pale at the thought of a practical application of their lofty ideals. According to Max, Hannah may either be a non-powerful pure being who only suffers and does not transfer it to an ordinary guilty person. Max professes ignorance about her reality yet Hannah was to some extent responsible for a crime. He thought that ‘she could be a sort of enchantress, a Circe, a spiritual Penelope keeping her suitors spellbound and enslaved’ (99). Max’s words of confession are following:

“Perhaps Hannah is my experiment! I’ve always had a great theoretical knowledge of morals, but practically speaking I’ve never done a hand’s turn. I don’t know the truth either. I just know about it” (101).
Iris Murdoch has presented Max Lejour to represent only a mouthpiece for her philosophical musings. He responded to the existential idea of freedom that it may be a value in politics but not in morals. Because ‘in moral we are all prisoners but the name of our cure is not freedom’ (97).

In The Unicorn Hannah is forced to take up a contemplative life like Catherine Fawley in The Bell. The Community sees Hannah through the image of a ‘pure centre’ or a Christ–like unicorn. She becomes a product of a human instinct to create an image of another instead of a separate, free, individual identity. The other people use Hannah to see her through their own forms and images which results into the lack of freedom for Hannah. So, she can not realize that how to live and how to respond in this world. She becomes unknown to the realities of the world. She looses her sense of freedom like Ann, in An Unofficial Rose, because of this she can not make the choice and fails to handle the situation properly. A.S. Byatt writes in Degrees of Freedom in which Hannah’s relationships are equated with others:

“But what Hannah’s story has in common with a case history of an obsessional neurosis is not, even in Freudian terms, the whole of the story; she does not act alone, but is also acted upon, and her relationships with the other characters recall those of the king in Freud’s description of the things which there are in common between primitive systems of taboo in kingship, and obsessional neurosis” (156).

It can not be denied that Hannah is a kind of a power–figure in the novel. She has awakened the veneration and fantasies of those who cluster around her, thus imposing restrictions hindering her
moral and psychological freedom. Like Ann in An Unofficial Rose, she accepts the passive suffering and waits for the return of her husband, but unlike Ann, her acceptance stems from a neurotic tendency rather than a submissive acceptance of the dictates of convention and duty. A.S. Byatt has analyzed the Hannah’s enslaved condition through the angle of Siegmund Freud:

“There are pointers enough in ‘The Unicorn’ for it to be certain that Hannah’s passive suffering, her religion of guilt and withdrawal, can be seen, not as a ‘real’ religious act, but as an obsessional neurotic fantasy. Although what Miss Murdoch is studying here is partly the ways in which the one might shade into, or partake of, the other, so that to know what is ‘real’ in this area at all becomes almost impossible. But neurosis, Miss Murdoch has reiterated often enough, is one of the ‘enemies of love’ and the terms in which Freud continues his compassion of obsessional neurosis and religion are close enough to Miss Murdoch’s own” (153).

Hannah’s neurosis, like all neuroses, is an escape from an unsatisfactory reality made up of the community of men into a world of fantasy. The prohibitions are self-created. Hannah’s gradual withdrawal presents her increasing self-involvement. Her behavior is revealed through her other neurotic characteristics. Her behavior shows her paralysis of will and inability to love other people:

“She loved what wasn’t there, what was absent. This can be dangerous. Only she did not dare to love what was present too. Perhaps it would have been better if she had, she could not really love the people she saw, she could
not afford to, and it would have made the limitations of her life too painful. She could not, for them, transform the idea of love into something manageable; it remained something destructive and fearful” (Murdoch, *The Unicorn* 254).

The novel presents the ambiguity involved in the understanding of human nature and human world through the story of Hannah. *The Unicorn* is a closed gothic novel. It is a novel of form and myth, structured on philosophical ideas. In an interview to the ‘Bookman’ in 1958, Murdoch distinguished between a ‘closed’ and an ‘open’ novel:

“The open novel contains a lot of characters who rush about independently, each one eccentric and self-centred; the plot to some extent situates them in a pattern but does not integrate them into a single system. The closed novel has fewer characters and tends to draw them, as it were, toward a single point....The advantage of the open novel is that it is bright and airy and the characters move about freely... A closed novel is most intensely integrated but may be more claustrophobic in atmosphere and the characters may loose their sense of freedom. Ideally ...one could, I think, combine both these things in a single work” (Conradi, 23-4).

*The Unicorn* represents a significant development in Murdoch's handling of the closed gothic novel – the novel of form myth, and socio-religious philosophy rather than that of character. Iris Murdoch's waifs, orphans, refugees, demons and saints, all share a common isolation, a loss of community and the absence of close relationship. As a philosopher, Murdoch connects this loss of
community to the inadequacies of existentialist and empirical thought that rely on self-centered standards of individual consciousness and sincerity rather than on other-centered values of virtue, love and imagination. As a novelist, Murdoch dramatizes her ethical concerns by increasingly demonizing the existentialist, solipsistic hero who rejects the messy reality of involvement with others in order to pursue what he perversely sees as freedom, abstraction and romance.

Murdoch's benighted protagonist is compelled to rely exclusively on personal values by failing to see reality as worthy of loving exploration. The resulting psychological distortion to which such solipsism is liable cuts a man off completely from others and from society. She contends that the modern psyche is debilitated by such ailments of romanticism as neurosis, solipsism and obsession with power, a fear of history, and a fear of the real existing messy modern world. Such a sickness can be cured only by a therapeutic perception, by an act of imagination which Murdoch identifies with love. The characters of Murdoch's novel can not see because they are enclosed in a fantasy world of their own into which we try to draw things from the outside, not grasping their reality and independence. Her protagonist’s can redeem themselves only by discovering new ways of seeing reality and by resisting the false consolations of form and of fantasy which Murdoch defines as the enemy of that true imagination.

Although Murdochian characters long to be part of a familial, social or national group, they are at the same time solipsists who rely chiefly on will, ego and power in order to manipulate the behavior of others according to their own systems and beliefs. Where there is
power, there can be no community. Murdoch demands contact with
the chaos, contingency and elasticity of an unpatterned life that finds
its richness in multiplicity and its meaning in communication. She
agrees with Karl Jasper’s theory of community. This theory insists
that the individual can understand himself only in communication
with other persons:

“The thesis of my philosophizing is: the individual can
not become human by himself. Self being is only real in
communication with another self-being. Alone, I sink into
gloomy isolation- only in communication with others can
be revealed in the act of mutual discovery” (Wolfe, 37).

Like The Severed Head and The Time of the Angels or Under
the Net, the significant way to The Unicorn is ideological. The
narration if divorced from the complex ideas would reduce the novel
to a string of accidents, coincidences and arbitrary reversals. As a
philosophical novelist Murdoch's novels are filled with various ideas
and philosophies. Important to her characters’ inability to understand
their true motivations is Murdoch's use of the ideas of Freud.
Murdoch's understanding of passion marks Murdoch's realism as
dramatically different from that of the nineteenth-century writers
whom she admires. Murdoch's view of the human subject as a system
of energy aligns her with Freud’s determinist views regarding human
consciousness. Murdoch's knowledge of Freud can be seen in her
work and she has spoken of him as a great and wonderful discoverer.
Some of the ideas taken from him surface in her satiric treatment of
psychoanalysis in A Severed Head, The Unicorn and The Black
Prince. Murdoch gives more importance to Freud’s ideas concerning
ego and id. Yet, she rejects being a Freudian and questions any
scientific view about the structure of the soul, nor does she accept Freud’s foregrounding of the ego.

In Murdochian novels the myth has sucked in the characters and they are never freed from their being in a fantasy world. But whereas in novels like The Bell or Bruno’s Dream there is a brilliant fusion of myth and reality. In The Unicorn myth works abstractly and symbolically without being built into the substance of the theme. The symbolism is not of the natural kind. Hannah’s character does not come up to the highly religious symbolic significance of the unicorn. The characters of The Unicorn are controlled by the over-all design. Private personality is sacrificed to patterned, predictable and predetermined types who fall into two categories, namely the enchanter and the enchanted. Hannah is the enchanter who is invested with philosophical and religious connotations, mythic and literary allusions that she never comes out of them as an actual living person and prefers to live in the fantasy world. To some degree, the limits of the individual’s attention are the limits on his freedom. Choices are restricted by what can be seen, and what can be seen depends upon the individual moral imagination and effort. The individual has only slight control over the direction and focus of his vision. While the idea of freedom is essential to Murdoch's analysis of moral progress or perfection, the concept of necessity enters with more emphasis and conviction. Freedom is a kind of necessity if it is attended properly there will not be choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at.

The character ‘Hannah’ occupied an important role in the novel The Unicorn. Murdoch and critics both tried to interpret her but yet she remains as indefinable. Hannah’s indefinable character represents the wider unknowability of human and spiritual reality. She may be a
symbol of the human soul, who does a great work to gain the divine knowledge because she lives in the moral and spiritual prison, attempts and fails to be a Christ–like Unicorn, aspires for the divine. The novel partly reveals the falsity of construing virtue to be a stripping the personality for a leap, unaccompanied by a change of vision and an effacement of the self. It seems that Hannah has made suffering consolatory idea and an end in itself. This suffering leads to excessive self-involvement and finally to violence instead of purification, so it doesn’t become true unselfing but it becomes purgatory. At the end of the novel, the following words indicate her ‘waking’ up to some extent in which she admits:

“......I needed my audience; I lived in your gaze like a false God. But it is the punishment of a false God to become unreal. I have become unreal. You have made me unreal by thinking about me so much. You made me into an object of contemplation” (Murdoch, The Unicorn 219).

Hannah realizes about her enslavement but knowing only one’s identity is not freedom. She cannot improve her perception of others, which is the real interpretation of freedom. The above got temporary insight can’t give the real freedom to Hannah because it is soon veiled by the murder of Scottow and her own death. The Catastrophe leads to the dissolution of the community at the Gaze Castle. All her worshippers are released, Denis, Marian, and Effingham leave the place; Scottow, Pip and Peter are dead. Only Max Lejour remains to inherit her death as Denis inherits her guilt. The novel forcefully stresses the theme the fantasy of freedom because in it one can see the fantasy of freedom of all the characters – Hannah inside the prison
and the rest outside it. The characters haven’t paid attention on reality. Instead of that, they lived in illusions, in a fantasy world by imposing forms and patterns on themselves. They tried to gain freedom by imposing various forms and patterns according to their own needs, expectations and emotions. No one character is able to understand, to know the other persons individuality, his or her separate identity. No one realizes the place of truth in the life of human being. Failing to see the truth, they are not able to love others, to know the importance of love. To some extent, Hannah is herself responsible for having been denied love by allowing herself to selfishly occupy the role of the absent God for others. She allows them to make her a mental object. Hannah’s this behavior becomes hindrance in her process of freedom. Hannah and other characters live in their ungrounded selfish illusions, in a fantasy, in which they forget that “the way to freedom lies in relinquishing these illusions or forms and entering sympathetically into life” (Wolfe 196).

*A Severed Head* (1961) marked some sort of change in which Iris Murdoch seemed to have shifted her ground to look at the moral compulsions which loving entails. The present novel with *An unofficial Rose* (1962), *The Unicorn* (1963), *The Italian Girl* (1964) and *The Red and the Green* (1965) represents a romantic phase concerned not only with the philosophic concepts of truth and love but also with the responsibilities, impositions and ties of marriage or of religious vocation (*The Red and the Green*). The novelist seems to exercise at this slightly later stage is the terrible strength of inward conditioning, even of secret guilt, arising perhaps from, education, from early moral or spiritual guidance or simply from one’s own deepest thoughts and reflections. The novel *A Severed Head* is
narrated by the Urbane, Anglo-Irish Martin Lynch-Gibbon. His complacently successful marriage and concealed adulterous relationship are threatened and destroyed by the narrated events. In no other work by Iris Murdoch does the demonic seem more didactic than in *A Severed Head*. The novel traces the education of a protagonist by a forceful teacher whose eerie influence upon her student disturbs him profoundly. Murdoch’s decision to allow Martin Lynch-Gibbon to tell his own story seems especially appropriate for a novel that criticizes self-absorption and the consequent failure to see the uniqueness of other individuals.

Martin Lynch-Gibbon cannot feel he is free, after his wife has left but he sees himself as in bondage:

“A bond of this kind (i.e. marriage) is deeper and stronger than wanting or not wanting. Wherever I am in the world and whenever I am I shall always be Antonia”

(Murdoch, *A Severed Head* 70).

Marriage is the dark bond in *An Unofficial Rose*, *The Unicorn*, *The Italian Girl*, and *A Severed Head*. These novels present through it about the good and evil, about guilt, about sin and redemption, and finally and above all about truth, about understanding the sin in order to achieve the redemption. *A Severed Head* and *The Italian Girl* employ a first person narrator and illustrate Murdoch’s interest in the idea that a person speaks for himself alone. In the novel the first-person narrator Martin Lynch-Gibbon gives us an entirely solipsistic view of events which precludes the reader from being able at first in any way to assess a wider truth. The narrator finally likes Jake Forced to understand that they are not at the centre of their world and that
what they had seen as the solidity of their world is built upon the quicksand of their own self-deception.

*A Severed Head* is not set in an isolated spot away from society but it is set in the heart of London. The characters of novel suffer from acutely claustrophobic surroundings. The plot moves from one closed room to another. There are only two outside scenes. In neither of these scenes is the full light of day allowed to illuminate events. On one level the novel delineates martinis attempt to break out of his own solipsistic point of view. He is a wine merchant and amateur historian who took the best first of his year in History at Oxford and always regretted in a way that he had not become a don. As the novel opens he has a beautiful and civilized wife, Antonia. She is some years older than himself, and a young mistress, Georgie Hands, a lecturer at the L.S.E. Murdoch has made the division of her characters into the enchanters and the enchanted. Martin comes as one of the enchanted victims. Murdoch has created the complexity of characterization in her novel. Although Martin seems more like a victim in various other relationships in the book, with Georgie he rules like a tyrant.

Iris Murdoch stressed on the wrong conceptions of freedom due to imposed forms and patterns in *A Severed Head* like her other novels. She always strengthened the virtues, truths, morality etc. through her novels and tried to reveal the place of illusions and fantasies in human life.

“*Since morality is compulsory (we cannot avoid moral choices) some from of moral cognition is compulsory and we have to set up at least the forms of distinction between what is real and what is not. Bad conduct has cognate*
illusions and fantasies. ‘Our world’ is at best likely to contain large fantasy areas. The idea of truth, not always easily evaded is active in the training of desire and tends to deepen and strengthen our conception of virtue; whereas would-be neutral descriptions in terms of feelings or moods are themselves morally persuasive and suggestive of a picture” (Murdoch, Metaphysics 385).

Murdoch always believed that the novel should be used to create a realistic world, because it can express our lives. It can make our relations with others and present the human struggle to create the meaningful relations in love and freedom with others. She strengthens on the significance of vision for the development of moral growth of human being. She advises through her novels that the human being should correct the distortion that the frantic, self-seeking will imposes on the real. She appeals that one should make a difference between self-awareness and self-obsession without becoming its prey.

Murdoch seems the human being as a mysterious. Most of the protagonists of her novels, especially first-person narrators are set out on an emotional odyssey to comprehend the otherness of other people but generally their quest remains unanswerable. These protagonists at the end of the novel understand, to some extent, the falsifying images of the situation. So, they try to become free from such type of fantasies, fantasy of freedom because without knowing fantasy of freedom one can not understand the real essence of freedom and reality. In Under the Net the character Jake understands the meaning of impersonal love by giving up the false beliefs he had of Hugo and Anna. In The Bell Michael Meade understands the artificial world at Imber Court as well as the emptiness and hollowness of religious
destiny he had assigned for himself. In An Unofficial Rose Hugh realizes the reality by discarding the romantic patterns he had imposed on himself. Iris Murdoch in her later novels, for ex. Bruno’s Dream, The Sea, The Sea, The Nice and the Good, stresses on the obsessions of the past. These obsessions of the past prevent the characters from living freely in the present. Through this the characters become the slaves of fantasy. They live in fantasy and proceed to achieve the fantasy of freedom.

Her present novel A Severed Head cannot remain apart from the above views. The protagonist of the novel Martin becomes realistic due to knowing the other persons individuality. He achieves the sense of virtue and freedom after his moral maturity. The novel presents Martin’s difficult lesson in coming to accept and to love the otherness of other people. Elizabeth Dipple has written in her book Work for the Spirit:

“It presents a stunning attack on the egocentricity and folly of psychoanalysis and that characters gable about freedom and mythology and art are tossed about with abandon. Symbolic interiors are dismantled, tousled, redesigned and relationships permute and recombine so that every character falls in love with every other possible and impossible character” (148).

A Severed Head is a novel of moral amelioration which similiarizes the characteristics of a restoration comedy filled with love intrigues, adulterous affairs etc. Such characters give importance to adultery and incest. Murdoch has not only revealed this problem and behavior of human being in A Severed Head but also she has depicted in her other novels. She writes:
“Men in other ages and societies had been able to have two or many more women, whom they kept incarcerated in separate places and visited when they felt in mood. An elderly less-loved wife could be related as an amiable companion or simply out of pity, and should feel no resentment at that. A man, any man, surely needed various women; there were so many possibilities and styles of love and affection and habits. Why should some of them automatically exclude the others? He led a double life” (Murdoch, The Sacred 80).

Murdoch’s main focus in her novels has remained on morality and freedom. She believed in the human values like mercy, pity, peace and love. She advocates that as a human being he should follow the principles of humanity. Through her novels she criticizes the wrong notions, misdeeds, illusions of human being. She seems the present human society as false and lie, having proud of their own self. Through such notions and thoughts they behave wrongly. In the name of love and freedom accept sexuality and adultery without knowing the other people. A Severed Head reveals all these things.

“A Severed Head’ is recognizably Iris Murdoch’s novel. Almost without exception the characters are amoral. They too are hurt creatures, while pretending not to be. They inhabit the middle class intellectual world - have attended or teach at a university. One merchandizes excellent wines, all accept psychiatry as a fact of life, some sculpt or paint, one lives on her inheritances, all drink a great deal and all accept divorces with ease and grace of buying a sleek new car” (O’Connor 74).
Murdoch portrays the character of a military historian Martin Lynch Gibbon. His moral maturity from the state of passive acceptance to the active reception marks his freedom. This character proceeds to know the reality of other people. This process becomes his journey from fantasy to reality, from fantasy to freedom. At the beginning of the novel we see that Martin lives in the fantasy world and avoids facing reality. He feels awkward to maintain his relationships with dissimilar beings. He had his pre-occupied notions about his own self and also about others. So, he used to see the other people through his own conceptions those may be false. He is captured by the dilemma. This dilemma doesn’t permit him to achieve moral maturity and freedom. As he is married to Antonia for “good business prospects” and thinks that his marriage bonds are sacred. Martin and Antonia fail to have natural relations of husband and wife because they always search the personal inadequacies of married life. Antonia maintains her relations with Martin as a mother and she accepts that she has kept him from growing up. Palmer also referred him as a child. Through these notions, Martin also suffers a mother-son relationship and he feels protected by his wife Antonia. Antonia tells to martin about their marriage relationship:

“It is partly my being so much older and being a sort of mother to you” (Murdoch, A Severed Head 26).

Because of imposed pattern of mother on Martin, he is not able to grow up and achieve maturity. Antonia becomes the hindrance in his growth. Martin becomes dependent, as he admits,

“I could no longer separate my being from that she had been my mother” (6).
Such type of love cannot be included in Murdochian definition of love because according to her real love requires the individuality of the other person. This individuality of other person can lead to free love. Antonia-Martin’s love is not like this. Here, Martin seems himself as dependent, inferior to Antonia. Martin lives in forms and patterns imposed by Antonia. He lives in illusions, fantasy and loses freedom by accepting forms given by mother surrogate, Antonia and Palmer.

Martin lives in his own world without any control over his emotions. He completely becomes dependent on Antonia and cannot imagine his life without her. They both live such life but without inner strength and self-reliance. Inner strength and self-reliance requires freedom and independence but there was a lack of them. Through such type of relations between them they forget the bond of marriage and pursuit the extra marital sexual relations. Martin is shocked knowing that Antonia has fallen in love with Palmer. But he was helpless because he was unable to live without her. So he begs her not to leave him. Through such type of helplessness he allows to Antonia any kind of relations with Palmer. His words interpret his helplessness:

“Well, well if you are so much in love with the analyst perhaps you’d better go to bed with him. Only don’t talk to me about divorce, for I simply won’t bear it” (24).

As Martin was unable to live without Antonia, he connects her action with honest lust. He accepts this new kind of relationship and even Antonia’s confession:

“A marriage is an adventure in development and ours is simply at a standstill. I was conscious of that even before
I fell in love with Anderson. It’s partly my being so much older and being a sort of mother to you. I have kept you from growing up. All this has got to be faced sooner or later” (25-6).

A husband’s confession and permission for her wife’s adultery or wife’s permission for her husband’s adultery is not only point of discussion in only A Severed Head but it is also discussed by Murdoch in her other works such as, Henry and Cato, Sacred Profane Love Machine etc. Iris Murdoch has always criticized such type of affairs like adultery, incest, suicide etc. She looks towards this as false rational focused things. Martin gives permission for Antonia to have physical relations with Palmer. He has also his own homosexual attraction towards Anderson. Martin fails to understand the demand of his own self. He becomes unsuccessful to evaluate his own self. He forgets his own individual existence, own identity. He lives in illusions, forms and patterns imposed by Antonia and Palmer. He feels separated without his wife because she has made him incapable of having any existence of his own. He accepts any forms imposed by his wife without knowing, understanding his own self. He lives in fantasy of freedom and so does not realize the complexities of human relationships. He even neglects the realities of existence, the realities of world. As a power figure Palmer prevents Martin from achieving self-discovery.

Martin later understands that he lived in illusions; he suffered due to Antonia and Palmer. His sense of realization is expressed:

“But I do wish everyone would stop scheming for my welfare. I’m perfectly well able to look after myself” (49).
Though Martin understands his suffering due to Palmer and Antonia, he easily comes in the flattering of Palmer and then accepts the dissolution of their marriage. Through this he accepts the new relationships of Antonia with Palmer.

Iris Murdoch’s presentation of such affairs, mentality of characters reveals their own identity, their ability to earn freedom. She strengthens the point through such relations that to achieve freedom a human being should develop his sense of reason and capacity of love. He must come out of illusions and artificial world of fantasy. To know oneself as well as others, to respect oneself as well as others, is the real meaning of freedom but the Murdochian characters live in fantasy world and prefer to achieve fantasy of freedom. The failure of mature hetro-sexual relations with Antonia leads Martin to Georgie, a Junior Lecturer in London school of Economics. He is caught between the dilemma of marital fidelity and extra-marital affair with Georgie. He appeals to Georgie to help him to gain some sense and vigour. He begs love from Georgie but even Georgie does not provide him some sense and vigour. He tries to fulfill his emotional needs from Georgie which he could not fulfill from his wife. He explains his feelings about Georgie:

“I did not fall desperately in love with Georgie. I considered myself by then, too old for the desperation and extremity, which attends a useful love. But I loved her with a sort of gaiety and insouciance, which was more spring-like than the real spring, a miraculous April with its pangs of transformation and birth. I loved her with a wild undignified joy, and also with certain cheerful brutality, both of which are absent from my
always more decorous, my essentially sweeter relationship with Antonia” (19-20).

Martin is not sure in his relations with Georgie that whether he really wanted to marry Georgie even if Antonia’s going away leaves him free to do so. He possesses Georgie but evades responsibility. He avoids any kind of responsibility in his relation to Georgie. This rejection of any responsibility shows Martin’s failure of perfect human being. He visits his brother, Alexander but yet he has not learned to face the complex relationships with dissimilar beings. He is troubled to see his brother “head hunter”, working on a sculptured head and so speaks:

“You have a technique for discovering more about what is real. “So have you”, answers Alexander” It is called morality” (43).

In the novel the severed head becomes a symbol of Martin’s moral incompleteness. He becomes indifferent to Georgie’s existence especially when she became pregnant. His attitude can be seen:

“Last spring my beloved had become pregnant. There was nothing to be done but to get to rid of the child. Georgie had gone through with the hideous business in the manner that I would have expected of her, calm, laconic, matter-of-fact, even cheering me along with her surly wit.... For myself, I got off with extra-ordinary ease” (13).

Since Georgie serves as Martin’s toy, the novel perhaps appropriately begins during the Christmas season, but this celebration of a famous birth assumes grimly ironic overtones when we learn that Georgie has had an abortion. Although responsible for the
pregnancy, Martin has been left off easily by his secret mistress. The messy contingency of an unwanted child is dealt with as Georgie remains true to the crystalline form of the relationship. Martin has achieved a formal status in his two relationships - Antonia and Georgie. Both relationships prove false. Martin has failed to attend to the real otherness of each woman. He has imposed his own fantastic shapes upon them and has turned them into so many ornaments on a Christmas tree.

George does not bother about Martin’s affairs with others. George easily shifts her affection from Martin to Alexander and from him to Palmer. These Georgie’s changing relations are not important for her as she thinks but through this Martin realizes the opacity of other characters. Martin had the illusions about Antonia and Georgie but these illusions are cracked when he knows their real existence. Alexander informs Martin about his intended marriage to Georgie. Knowing this Martin feels that there was nothing left for Georgie except a bad conscience. He takes a lesson of realism from Honor Klien, through which he makes his journey from illusion to reality.

“Honor is the object of Martin’s quest. She is taboo object, sister in the royal incestuous brother-sister pair, severed head, Medusa as site of the original castration trauma (“the female genitals feared not desired”) (44).

Martin is able to evaluate himself and is able to understand about own self because of only Honor. She explains him about the reprehensible softness with which he has treated Antonia and Palmer. She tells Martin that you are responsible for your deeds and so you have to find the way from the situation. The gentleness is a weakness and with it only you can prolong the enchantment of untruth. Honor
tells Martin that if he wants his wife back, he has to fight for her. She also tells that Martin was letting Antonia and Palmer off and it is not going to bring good to anyone. She warns him that he should come out of the compromise which he has made with them:

“You cannot cheat the dark gods, Mr. Lynch Gibbon. Perhaps it is no business of mine, if you choose to be powerless and abandon your life. I believe that you love my brother. But you do him no good by letting him off. He wants, he needs, your harshness” (64).

Martin was unable to understand the realities about relationships. He had been living his life in the narrow part, in the protected world. Honor helped Martin to understand the relationships, to grow up. She awakened him to accept the bitter realities of human life. She becomes able to make him realize the opacity of others, if she arouses fear and repulsion in him. His first meeting with Honor makes him realize:

“This was the first judgment. I had received from an outsider since; I had officially taken up my position as a cuckold” (56).

All the explanations and lectures given by Honor create some place in the mind of Martin. Through this he feels attracted towards her. Because her expressions are energetic which refresh his mind and creates a feeling of realization in him. This helps him to go near to reality because before that Martin was living in illusions. He thinks that he is proceeding to achieve freedom but it is the fantasy of freedom. Honor’s statements helped him to realize his positions in illusions and fantasy. She creates a feeling of consciousness, a feeling of revolt in him through which he understands that his position is like
a victim in the hands of Antonia and Palmer. The process of self-
realization starts in his mind through which he proceeds ahead to
achieve his own position. He becomes violent to see Georgie with
Alexander and hits Georgie. This example presents Martin’s
movement from passive acceptance to active opposition in the novel.
Antonia and Palmer feel threatened to know Martin’s affair with
Georgie. Martin replies Antonia that there is no any right of her to
know his relationships and he want to be left alone by both of them.
He realizes that they are not his parents. Through all this process of
realization Martin feels renewed and stronger than before. He feels
free from the power cage of Antonia and Palmer.

The severed head shown to Martin by Alexander stand as
objective co-relative in Honor and he finds its arrival in Honor who
finally comes to the rescue of Martin. The moral awareness in Martin
was initiated by Alexander and it is carried forward by Honor. He
slowly comes to the moral awareness. Awareness requires a one
process, which is dependent upon knowing oneself. Iris Murdoch
presents Martin as an example of human personality in the novel.
Martin represents general human tendency. Because a human being
always tries to see the other world through his own glass, not
considering the existence of other human being. In this process he
forgets himself also and thinks that all the considerations are correct
according to him. But his own preoccupations, and prejudices about
himself and about others can’t be always right. It should be evaluated
properly by asking questions to himself, it should be realized through
the angel of another person. This is the real meaning of freedom,
according to Iris Murdoch. But in Murdoch’s novels this doesn’t
seem primarily. Because the characters live in their own world (i.e.
world of illusions and fantasy) supposing it as a freedom. In A Severed Head Honor shocks Martin and others with reality of relationship. Honor delivers the news of Martin-Georgie relationship to others, when Martin responds:

"Why the discovery of the fact should make me feel guilt, which the fact itself had not made me, feel. I experienced too an obscure dismay at the extent to which, in a moment these two seem to have established over me a moral dictatorship even more complete than that which they had enjoyed before" (81).

Martin always seen the individuality of other person through his own fantastic world, but the broken news of Martin-Georgie relationship leave him free to face others, to understand other person’s existence. Fantasy always kills the freedom. Murdoch’s stress has been always remained on this point that freedom is the most fundamental and essential part in the end of “right living”, is liberating oneself, from the prison of egoism, narcissism, selfish urges and desires. In this process man has to face a painful condition for a time but ultimately he will realize self-awakening. He will participate in the entire business of loving giving, receiving, sharing and enjoying.

"As you are no longer looking to anybody or anything for help, you are already free to discover and when there is freedom, there is energy; and when there is freedom it can never do anything wrong. Freedom is entirely different from revolt. There is no such thing as doing right or wrong when there is freedom. You are free and from that centre you act and hence there is no fear and a
mind that has fear is capable of great love. And when there is love it can do what it will” (Krishnamurti 19).

Honor tried to force Martin to accept the reality and otherness of other people. All the messages of understanding discover a love for Honor in the heart of Martin. Murdoch tried to present this message that human existence is a task to grow in love. Murdoch talked about different kinds of freedom and also about the connection between love and freedom:

“Freedom and love are concepts, which interconnect. What one means by ‘physical freedom’ is another thing. ‘I mean, one may be free in one’s soul’ as it were but may be imprisoned by circumstances, or literally imprisoned, unable to leave one’s country or whatever, but that is another sense of freedom. Spiritual freedom is connected with the idea of love. To love is to respect and to attend and be unselfish, to withdraw yourself and let other things exist, and this is also a state of freedom” (Sagare 13).

Murdoch says that freedom is to be free from bad habits, bad desires and can be brought about in all sorts of ways by impulses of love, rational reflection, new scenery, conscious and deliberate formation of new attachments. She tells that loving recognizes and cherishes the anatomy of the other as one cherishes his or her own. Love helps the individual to breathe and act independently. Martin’s love for Honor changes his relationships with Antonia. Before that he was dependent upon Antonia but later realizes his personality and own individuality. He compares his love for Honor with his feeling for Antonia and Georgie and understands an inferiority of the
relationships of Antonia and Georgie. He seems his love for Honor as a light which symbolizes the consciousness. He replied that he knew to perfection his condition. Martin gets an awareness of himself and Honor. The fantasy kills the freedom but the consciousness kills the fantasy. Martin achieves this consciousness and proceeds from fantasy to freedom.

Thus, Martin discovers his love for Honor but it doesn’t remain for a long time because Martin sees Honor and Palmer in bed and realizes the reality of human relationships. He realizes that in this world other people are other and so one cannot assure about other person’s personality. This incident becomes an important point in the recognition process of Martin. He had faith and love in Honor but Honor’s such conduct breaks his all illusions. Through this incident he understands that human relations are mere illusions, those are fantastic. These relations are away from reality. Martin always saw Honor as a representation of complete reality but then he understands that this is not reality but it is fantasy. Whatever Martin has thought about other characters turns out to be a myth. It is only when these myths are shattered that Martin is able to see the reality. He realizes that other people are always other and so Honor does not exist in relation to his dreams. Series of changing bed makes him realization and opacity of others, which was difficult for him to understand earlier. Through this realization he warns Antonia and Palmer to not to interfere in his affairs. He becomes violent towards Palmer and strikes him when he comes to take Antonia with him and says “from this moment I end my friendship with you” (Murdoch, A Severed Head 133). Martin feels in him a beginning of sanity, a beginning of recreation. He separates himself from all others and grows to the
point of Honor’s equal. He faces Honor with dignity. He learnt to see other people as other, free, a separate personality. Murdoch’s definition of freedom, ingredients of morality depends upon this:

“Martin Lynch Gibbon is shown as progressing through his love for Antonia (as a mother-figure), for Georgie (as a daughter-figure), and as arriving ‘finally’, at his love for Honor (an erotic challenge, we feel, which will take place in a more equally-matched level, despite the aim of foreboding about the novels closing words) Honor herself progresses through incestuous love for Martin” (Hague 51).

A Severed Head belongs in the category of closed-up, rather obsessional novels as Murdoch has referred it. In The Italian Girl, The Unicorn and The Time of the Angels, an entire community of characters seems to be living out a collective fantasy, and the solipsism of the cast is paralleled by the melodrama of the plot and the claustrophobia of the setting. The obsession novels often draw on the Gothic tradition and, in their compulsive patterning are close to Murdoch’s conception of the crystalline novel. In her obsession novels, the Platonic ideal of ascesis is conspicuous only in isolated glimpses. The characters remain locked into a way of behaving that resembles Freud’s baser version of the soul. A Severed Head and A Word Child are typical of the ‘Murdochian Gothic’ in their brooding wintry settings enclosed locations and cast of characters small enough for each to be a play. But there is something deeper and more complex about the portrayal of the obsessional side of life in these works than most of the other closed-up novels. Each is narrated in the first person; we are given a particularly powerful insight into how the
obsessional mind works. Both novels are more than any other illuminated by the Orpheus Myth. The experiences both of their heroes undergo involve a descent into the particular kind of underworld Murdoch excels at portraying: the destructive mechanism of the unconscious.

_A Severed Head_ offers the psychoanalytic version of Murdoch’s interest in the gulf between the contingent elements of reality and those networks like language, theory and art. The novel is concerned with the overturning of imposed rational order by the irrational force of desire. _A Severed Head_ is on one level a very English ‘drawing-room’ comedy where the hero remains resolutely ‘stiff-upper-lipped’ in the face of outrageous partner-swapping and taboo-breaking. Desire also erupts in the form of the aggressive impulses of naturally violent protagonist-Martin Lynch-Gibbon. The naked desire erupts to much more devastating effect. The psychoanalytic understanding of Eros performs a function in _A Severed Head_ where desire also emerges as a force which cannot easily be incorporated into the symbolic. Psychoanalysis is relevant in exploring the novel. The certain aspects of Murdoch’s thoughts, specially her conception of human nature, run along similar lines to Freud. But in the case of _A Severed Head_ Freudian allusions are placed there to establish a specific context to help the reader to interpret the events in the novel. A.S. Byatt has said that _A Severed Head_ wears its Freudianism ‘sceptically’ (Byatt, “The Omnipotence of Thought” 33).

“In ‘A Severed Head’ the invitation to interpret psychoanalytically functions less ironically; it is not limited to the predilections of one character but carries
the endorsement, as it were, of the author. This is most easily demonstrable by considering the knowing way in which it sets up a psychoanalytic framework. The twin themes of the castration-complex and mother-fixation (which I shall say more about in due course) are made central in the novel by a layering of suggestive references” (Nicol 110).

At the time of *A Severed Head* Murdoch is still struggling between her instinct for didactic patterning and her desire for a looser, more character- centred version of form. The reference of Freud has been carefully built into *A Severed Head*. The effect of this novel also depends upon the strongly psychoanalytic framework. As well as a general concern with the relationship between real and symbolic, the novel explores an obsessive concern with the past in a way which resembles the psychoanalytic approach to repetition. Repetition indicates one of the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. It is the title of one of the most significant of Lacan’s series of seminars. There is a affinity between the Freudian and Murdochian understanding of the soul, a link embodied in Palmer Anderson, the charlatan psychoanalyst in *A Severed Head*, who could almost be speaking for his author when he remarks:

“The psyche is a strange thing [....] and it has its own mysterious methods of restoring a balance. It automatically seeks its advantage, its consolation. It is almost entirely a matter of mechanics, and mechanical models are the best to understand it with” (31).

It is the repetitive patterning of this machine working within them which strikes Murdoch’s characters when they become
possessed by their own myth. There is something powerful and otherworldly about this. In the protagonists of *A Severed Head* the experience of falling in love induces this distinctive inertia. The characters feel that the epiphanic realization promises escape from their normal selfish state of being, when in fact it is just an intensification of it. The experience of love in Murdoch is based on enchantment and self-dramatization rather than selfless attention. The repetitive patterning is a dominant feature in Murdoch’s fiction as a whole, both in terms of plot and character. It is particularly important to *A Severed Head*. It provides us with a powerful insight. Repetition of a more disguised but no less resonant kind features strongly in *A Severed Head*.

“Whatever our response to ‘A Severed Head’—amusement, infuriation, pleasure—it is likely to come from its use of repetition. Antonia’s announcement at the beginning of the novel that she is leaving Martin for Palmer sets in motion a bizarre catalogue of couplings among the cast of characters, where, as has frequently been acknowledged, almost every permutation is tried out” (Nicol 113).

Murdoch’s use of fantasy could be categorized as uncanny. The fantastic elements originate from the preoccupations of a particular characters mind. *A Severed Head* contains a concentration of uncanny episodes and images that it seems certain it is designed to explore the uncanny directly. But the uncanny is woven into the fabric of the text in more subtly suggestive ways. The title itself is included by Freud in a list of things which ‘have something peculiarly uncanny about them’: dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off by the wrist
[...], *feet which dance by themselves*’ (Freud 366). The novel continually evokes the image of the severed head-playfully but in ways which are faithful to Freud’s definition. Alexander has produced a version of Antonia’s head which ominously suggests to Martin how she would appear to another man in love with her. Georgie, feeling rejected by Martin, sends him a box full of her hair, which she has cut off in despair before taking an overdose. As he opens the package and sees the hair, Martin and the reader both are shocked, believing her severed head lies underneath.

The fear of castration is of key importance in *A Severed Head*, and not only because this is what the severed head ultimately signifies in Freudian theory. A close look at Martin’s character reveals that he is driven by an intense desire to control his world and the people around him. In this respect, *A Severed Head* tells of how this power is systematically stripped away from him. When we first encounter him, professionally and privately Martin enjoys a role as lord over all he surveys. Slowly but surely he is made to realize that he is merely on the periphery of a larger world outside his own ego. His metaphorical importance soon becomes physical and he realizes that even his business can function without him. Martin in forced, like Freud’s ego, to accept that he is no longer master in his own house. Martin lived in the fantasy world but freedom resides away from the illusions and fantasies. Proceeding to achieve freedom without destroying fantasies becomes ‘The Fantasy of Freedom’. In Murdochian novels many characters live in the fantasy of freedom considering it the real freedom. Through the characters of her novels Murdoch tried to deliver the real picture of freedom. In the 1950’s and 1960’s Murdoch attacked both the romantic promethean freedom in Sartre’s fiction,
drama and philosophy and the careful rational analysis of freedom in Stallurt Hampshire’s *Freedom of the Individual*. There was the false picture of freedom in Kantian and Hegelian analyses, according to Murdoch and so she tried to correct the false picture of freedom through her writings.

“By the 1970’s, Murdoch’s growing skepticism had developed, into a belief in the severe limitation of human freedom. In her fiction, Christian, Celtic and Classical myths play an important role in her fictional interpretations of freedom. ... Freedom appears as a suspect mode of that existence that, like human life itself, is so complex as to defy a total rational analysis; myths provide fictional frameworks to support her notion of the incomprehensibility and impenetrability of human action and motivations” (Nicol 19).

Instead of respecting the contingent, Martin turns to an artistic process which promises to allow him to control the contingent factors which have left him impotent. He has already expressed his envy for the technique for discovering more about what is real. In *A Severed Head* mythology becomes an important as it is a symbol in itself to inform the reader that Martin is tracing out, replaying, his own kind of psychic myth. He takes to reading mythology in order to satisfy his need for information on incest. He is discovering associations between his own story and Greek Mythology which will allow him to present his own myth more persuasively. For this reason there are a bewildering number of allusions to Greek Mythology in *A Severed Head.*
A Severed Head presents Martin’s gradual change from fantasy towards freedom. Martin and other characters lived their life in fantasy and goes to achieve the fantasy of freedom. The process towards freedom goes through reality. Many characters in the novel prefer to live in their own world and they watched other peoples through their own mirror of sight. They tried to make the relationships with other people according to their own conduct and understanding. They do everything according to their own imposed illusions. They remain away from recognition and awareness. Iris Murdoch tried to deliver the point through this novel that if a human being wants to recognize his real self, he should open the doors of self-knowledge, self-extension and self-transformation. He must realize his real personality, individuality in relation to the others. The character in the novel Martin develops himself from passive acquiescence to active opposition, due to Honor’s influence. He lives in the fantasy of freedom but later rejects the illusions, fantasies and proceeds towards freedom.

Iris Murdoch’s novel The Nice and the Good (1968) in atmosphere, treatment and subject matter marks something of a break with its predecessors. Right from the urbane poise of the opening sentence the reader may sense a new, authoritative stylistic confidence. The novel marks a new direction in Murdoch’s career as a novelist. The novel delivers mature philosophical viewpoint. It is an open novel without any mythical centre. Murdoch no longer appears to be interested in building a symbolic system or a myth. Her new method is a loose form of allegory. In the novel the philosophical ideas and moral principles are worked out at the experimental level.
The characters indirectly present the larger philosophical issues in the novel.

In *The Nice and The Good* plot develops directly out of the actions of Murdoch’s characters. The narrator links the plot by shifting perspectives and viewpoints. The novel gets the suitable structure which is beneficial for Murdoch to present her ideas. She succeeds to give her characters natural primacy and free atmosphere. The complications, revelations, tricks etc. are so solidly introduced in the novel. Murdoch explores the universal ambiguity of living creatures in relation to each other, of good behavior and bad, of pleasure and pain, of responsibility, obligation, influence, meddling and neglect; or of *The Nice and The Good*.

The human being is his own centre and possesses the truth in himself. So, everyone should enquire within himself. For this enquiry, will of mind is necessary. The person who seeks moral and spiritual amelioration amidst the details of time and space-ridden universe must make his own effort to seek ‘Good’. Murdoch’s view of the function of art and the role of artist displays Platonic severity. Similarly in life and morality also, Murdoch’s thought reveals Platonic injunctions. Murdoch writes in her book *The Sovereignty of Good*:

“Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of virtuous consciousness...‘Good is a transcendent reality’ means that virtue is the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is. It is an empirical fact about human nature that this attempt cannot be entirely successful” (93).
The statement shows Murdoch’s concern for moral progress. Her novels examine the nature of goodness and its various forms. Good is subjected to a detailed analysis. The characters in the novel are granted individuation in accordance with their capacity to respond to the moral needs with a positive and open mind. In her novels, there are characters who are full of positive energy and in their encounter with the people and reality; these characters acquire a renewed sense of affirmation. They suspend their egoistical desires and strive to traverse the stringent path to goodness. They possess a capacity to identify the devils of their self and overcome complete submission, to the irrational forces. John Duncane in *The Nice and The Good*, in his confrontation with the realities of life overcome his illusions, fantasies and make a headway toward a morality better state like Jake Donaghue in *Under The Net*, Dora Greenfield and Michael Meade in *The Bell*.

The moral progress of human being acquiring capacity of goodness, acquiring freedom is only possible by overcoming illusions and fantasies. The realization of reality can proceed human being towards moral achievement. The search for God is not a grand metaphysical search but it is an action-oriented programme. Any search for good is in fact a search for the scattered intimations of good. A fuller understanding of the complex moral texture of her novels is possible by keeping in mind the distinctions between the nice and the comfortable and the good. The title of the novel *The Nice and The Good* affords a meaning into how Murdoch makes distinctions among these categories. The, nice and the good are usually equated. There is a general tendency among the people to apply the two terms indiscriminately and interchangeably. But
Murdoch points out that the real good lies beyond the realm of mediocre minds, and the nice are not necessarily the good.

Many characters of the novel *The Nice and the Good* are nice. They conform to the ‘ordinary morality’, are kind, cheerful, happy and unaware that beyond their niceness is an ethical level more nearly perfect but painfully difficult to achieve. At the end of the novel Murdoch makes statement about Theo Gray:

> “Theo had begun to glimpse the distance which separates the nice from the good and the vision of this gap had terrified his soul. He had seen, far off, what is perhaps the most dreadful thing in the world, the other face of love, its blank face. Everything that he was, even the best that he was, was connected with possessive self-filling human love. That blank demand implied the death of his whole being” (348).

Earlier Ducane has a similar vision when faced with death:

> “He saw himself now as a little rat, a busy little scurrying rat seeking out its own little advantages and comforts. To live easily, to have cosy familiar pleasures, to be well thought of .... To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Love is the only justice. Forgiveness, reconciliation, not law” (304-5).

Good implies the death of being to kill the ‘scurrying rat’, to live life without acquisitive and possessive pleasure. Both Ducane’s near death vision and Theo’s reflection point towards one stringent ideal and no body in the novel achieves that height. The novel tries to examine the good and its connection with love- a gate way to
goodness. There is a large inter-related cast of characters, all more or less struggling to distinguish the nice from the good. John Ducane’s efforts at moral analysis and a just vision; Mary Clothier attempts to conquer her past guilt; Theo’s struggle to master the burden lying heavily on his heart are all psychologically realistic and indirectly present the philosophical ideas of Iris Murdoch.

The idyllic Trescombe country house in Dorset is at the centre of the novel. It is a home of Octavian and his wife, Kate which is sanctuary for the less fortunate members of the community. Amongst them are Mary Clothier, a widow with an adolescent son; Paula, a college friend of Kate’s and a divorcée with twins; Willy Kost, a melancholic German refugee Scholar; and Octavian’s brother, Theo, an engineer who has returned home from India in disgrace. All these characters are more or less unconnected like the members of the Imber community. The come together by chance.

The form of the novel is the official-intrigue-cum-spy story. The plot centres on the mysterious suicide of Radeechy, a senior bureaucrat in the Whitehall. John Ducane, the legal advisor, is in charge of the investigation. The solution of the mysterious suicide of Radeechy is linked to more serious concerns. Ducane is taken to another enquiry in investigation. This investigation is highly moral in nature which extends the limited mystery form of the novel and brings into it Murdochian philosophical issues of fantasy, freedom, goodness, power and love.

Murdoch has stressed on the problem of freedom as an existentialist but as a Platonist, she focused on love. She has interrelated the concept of love with the concept of freedom. Romantic love creates fantastic illusion, whereas real love proceeds
towards reality and the real sense of freedom. She always strengthened on her concept of freedom based on vision, self-knowledge, virtue and reality. Many characters of her novels fight against fantasy to get freedom. In this process, love plays an important role. She considers love as a perception of individuals and the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Both freedom and love involve the imaginative recognition and respect for this otherness.

In the novel The Nice and The Good Ducane makes moral progress from fantasy to discovery of reality. In this process he learns the real meaning of goodness. Ducane, like many other Murdochian characters learns to face the truth by discarding the imposed forms and patterns for himself and others. He is a Scottish Puritan whose chief ambition is to lead a ‘clean, simple life and to be a good man’ (32). This aim of Ducane is like a rationalist’s egocentric dream of freedom expressive of the fear of contingency and messy human relationships. To become a good man he plays the priestly role of a ‘father confessor’, or an advisor to the crowd of characters at Trescombe. All the disturbed characters attribute to him powers as a dispenser of advice and consolation. Mary Clothier relates to him the intolerable memory of her husband’s ghastly accident. Mary requests Ducane to intervene when Paula is disturbed over some secret trouble.

“I do wish you’d have a serious talk with Paula too. She’s awfully upset about something, and she won’t tell me what though I’ve positively asked her. She’d tell you. She’s terribly fond of you and you’ve got authority with her too, well you have with all of us” (266).
Because of the influence of Ducane Paula unfolds her anxiety about the anticipated arrival of her formal lover. Paula’s husband Richard Biranne also reveals to Ducane what could have damaged his job and reputation. He becomes a favorable personality to all of them. He spreads his charm like an enchanter or a God. The characters attribute to him powers and qualities that grow out of their own fantasy and a desire for consolation. Ducane’s egoism and his distorted concept of freedom become more apparent. He decides to end his relationship with Jessica as it becomes hindrance in his private goal. He wants to become free. His passions for orderliness, propriety and form are stronger than his love for Jessica. Ducane is a disciplined and virtuous scholar who is anxious to be good is assigned to investigate the suicide of the satanic Redeechy. By virtue of this investigation, Ducane is given power over others. He reveals enough elements of sex-scandal, deviant behavior and black-mail. He investigates himself to ascertain how worthy he is to make judgement on others. The revelations he gets about the human heart force him to confront his own self. His self-exploration takes him away from the Plateau of conventional niceness to a point from where he can hope to survive towards the higher plane of goodness.

John Ducane liked his life to be simple. He did not care for concealments and feelings of guilt. He had no religious belief. He just wanted to live a clean and simple life by being a good man. He guiltily muddles into ambiguous flirtations with Jessica Bird as well as with Kate Gray. He knows that for Kate there was nothing but joy in the prospect of so caging him. He also knows that in order to love Kate in innocence he should be free and truthful and for that he must end completely the muddled compromise with Jessica. The muddle
makes him insensitive and indifferent to others. He is only interested in himself. This guilty aspect keeps him away from seeing himself accurately. His quest for goodness is impeded by this demon of guilt. A sense of the impurity of his motives weakens him. He has an image of his own self as a pure and innocent good man. He wants to present himself in this image to Kate Gray also. In the course of his investigation and through his relationship with Jessica and Kate, Ducane is gradually forced to recognize himself as a hypocrite. He reflects:

“I am the perfect white sepulcher. I’ve fiddled and compromised with two women and been a failure with one and a catastrophe to the other. I am the cause that evil is in a man like McGrath. I cannot pity the wretched or bring hope or comfort to the damned. I cannot feel compassion for those over whom I imagine myself to be set as a judge. I cannot even take this girl in my arms” (251).

Ducane is destined never to see or comprehend the real darkness of evil but he suspects that the most monstrous inhumanity stems from selfishness. Ducane’s attempts at moral self-control and self-analysis, the degree to which he is confused by his own sexual mechanism, and the degree to which he can control it, make him real as a moral consciousness. His dilemma is the dilemma of a moral being. He expends his considerable powers of rumination on examining his own moral potentialities. Ducane may not be the achiever of the good, but he is certainly on the path to goodness. He learns an important thing about evil that evil lies within human heart. He releases himself from Jessica’s possessiveness and Kate’s playful Kitten love and decides to marry Mary Clothier.
“He had begun to need marry when he had begun to need a better image of himself. She was the consoling counterpart of his self-abasement” (334).

The marriage changes Ducane’s status from god-like to human being in the eyes of the rest of the characters, but at the same time this union presents the contrast between the human love and selfless transcendent spiritual love. Ducane’s love for Mary Clothier moves away from the selfish, self-absorbed love, he earlier feels for Kate or for Jessica. Ducane realizes:

“Her mode of being gave him a moral, even a metaphysical confidence in the world, in the reality of goodness. No love is entirely without worth, even when the frivolous calls to the frivolous and base to the base. But it is in the nature of love to discern good, and the best love is in some part at any rate a love of what is good. Ducane was very conscious and had always been conscious that he and Mary communicated by means of what was good in them” (192).

Mary–Ducane relationship presents the union of two souls especially when it is contrasted with Kate-Octavian relationship, which is based on sensual pleasures, Paula-Brianne relationship which is a union of mind and body. In the beginning it becomes clear that in spite of all his obvious intent to be good, Ducane’s goodness is only proceeds towards the direction of niceness. To be ‘nice’ is easier and different than to be ‘good’. It implies conformity to conventional ordinary morality of the contemporary philosophers with the stress on overt acts of goodness. Iris Murdoch has tried to present the new meaning of the ‘nice’ and the ‘good’. The contrast between the ‘nice’
and the ‘good’ is between easy sincerity and the desire for hard truth which is difficult to discern. Iris Murdoch’s Novel’s- *The Nice and The Good, Bruno’s Dream, A Fairly Honourable Defeat, and An Accidental Man* – these are deeply concerned with the problems of Good and Evil. At times they are infused with a palpable, almost demonic evil, coupled with a negation of the existence of God. Murdoch was of the view that if one does not believe in a personal God there is no problem of evil, but there is the almost insuperable difficulty of looking properly at evil and human suffering. In contradistinction to William Golding’s view of evil as indigenous to man, Iris Murdoch appears to view evil as stemming from catalytic figures who destroy the peace and tranquility of the world around them. She sees existential man as descending from Kantian man: She explains:

“*Kant abolished God and made man God in his stead ... this man is with us still, free, independent, lovely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave... his proper name is Lucifer*” (*The Sovereignty of Good* 79-80).

It is just such a man who is placed at the centre of several of the novels of this period. The hero who seeks to undermine the simpler characters by testing the quality of their ‘goodness’, whose sense of power is manifested by his own self-regard and his apparent indifference to those around him.

Murdoch sees the novel in general as ‘a comic form’. She considers that her own books are filled with full of happiness but yet she is also aware of the magnetism of evil:

“One tends to be impressed by the people who are demonic ...I think one identifies with the demonic
characters in books, since it’s a deep notion of feel that the devil tempts you and gives you power in return for giving up goodness, which is after all often dull” (Haffenden 204).

The Nice and the Good as begins with the suicide of Radecchy, the perpetrator of necromantic rites, but the investigation into his death exposes the evil of McGrath and gives full rein to Ducane’s sensitive and rather esoteric goodness. This goodness embraces Mary, returns Kate to Octavian and it seems that it is able to bring about the redemption of McGrath. Unlike The Time of the Angels, this novel has a happy ending with Ducane restoring order to chaos, with wives and husbands being reunited, with children finding their fathers again, with those yearning for love finding partners. During the gestation of this novel Murdoch was concerned with the presentation of the philosophic concept of Good and with the problem of a morality of Good that can exist without belief in a God. Some of the results of these deliberations were published in The Sovereignty of Good and all the novels of this period reflect to some extent the philosophical ideas which were simultaneously under Murdoch’s consideration. Whilst The Time of the Angels is most involved with the essay ‘on “God” and “Good””, however, Bruno’s Dream, published the year before The Sovereignty of Good can be seen to mirror many of the ideas to be found in the last of the essays. Iris Murdoch’s The Nice and the Good show a considerable advance in her thought. If not philosophic novel, it is certainly novel that embody some of the basic philosophic concepts of our time. After reading it a reader can understand her thoughts about God, about Good and Evil, about the quality of love, about the fantastic world and about the reality. Both the characters
and the movement of the plots voice arguments for readers that are closely related to arguments in Murdoch’s philosophic books.

In the novel *The Nice and the Good* the well-to-do couple, Octavian and Kate Gray are ‘nice’ and are aware of doing good to others. They have collected a few unhappy souls with the desire to do them good. They represent the ‘nice’, while being convinced that they are ‘good’. They preserve a form of self-love. The ‘Nice’ People like Kate think life as easy because of not knowing the higher ethical values. Their concept of goodness concentrates on self-love like the pleasures of the Freudian man feeding on the ‘fat relentless ego.’ They remain away from the recognition of the concept of goodness which requires a kind of objective, unselfish love unnatural to human beings. They live in their safe made world of fantasy which doesn’t permit them to recognize freedom. Ducane tries to get such type of objectivity during the course of the investigation. He faces conflicts while thinking about his private notions and the public decisions.

> “Not content with combining thriller and serious fiction, Miss Murdoch invites us to see her characters as participants in an ancient drama, as incarnations of eternal, recurring figures. The Lawyer, Ducane, who is in change of the investigation, is himself and also Faust, but behind both identities he is the seeker who must descend to the underground in search of truth and battle, there with supernatural forces” (Janeway 2).

From the point of his enquiry, Ducane is placed in a position of considerable power. The enquiry rakes up black magic, sex scandals and blackmail. Ducane discovers that Radeechy had conducted black magic in the vaults under the Whitehall offices. McGrath, an
employee of the same department plays role in such type of activities with his wife Judy, who is known as the Helen of Troy. She is a woman of easy virtue who tries to entice men. She even tries to work her sensual magic on Ducane. Richard Biranne is also participated in the scandal who is the morally capable accessory to Radeechy’s suicide and the murder of his wife. Richard had suppressed the suicide note left by Radeechy revealing the facts of his wife’s adultery and blaming Richard for his death.

Iris Murdoch covered in her novels the concerns of human behavior such as suicide, murder, blackmailing adultery etc. Through such type of human tendencies she makes her search for human goodness. She always forced to present her real theme through her novels; i.e. Freedom. She tries to deliver so many human tendencies dependent upon wrong conceptions, illusions, and fantasies. The human being lives in his own world and defines the world according to his own way. He defines every physical thing through his own eyes and considers it absolutely perfect. In this process he forgets to consider the outside world based on reality. The characters from Murdoch’s novels ultimately face this reality. The happenings with Ducane in *The Nice and the Good* impel him to revise his ideas about justice and goodness. Early in his life, Ducane had given up a career in the courts as he considered judging morally wrong. He had considered that no any person is liable for a judge.

“In theory, the judge represents simply the majesty and impartiality of law whose instrument he is. In practice, because of the imprecision of law and the imperfection of man the judge enjoys a considerable area of quite
personal power which he may or may not exercise wisely” (Murdoch, The Nice and the Good 74).

Rationally, Ducane understood the importance of law and courts and pictured himself as being the only person humble enough to be a just man and a just judge. This is his illusion. It is his fantasy which doesn’t permit him to see the freedom. He lives in the fantasy of freedom in which he considers that he alone is capable to be a just man and a just judge. This is a dangerous desire and misconception which wants to shape and command the world. Ducane had largely influenced on other characters but had not been much concerned with the power he had over them. Ducane has known that Biranne is a witness to the suicide and was also present when Radeechy had killed his wife, he becomes aware of the mastery he has over him. Ducane’s rational concept of goodness doesn’t permit him to hide a murder. Mary refers to his morally wrong method of coming to a decision in this jumbled and messy case. Her advice points out the need of keeping the attention fixed upon the real situation and to prevent it from returning to the self. But this message is revealed to him after the terrifying encounter with death. The anticipation of an unavoidable death unfolds the real meaning of justice, goodness and freedom to him. Knowing the reality about the situation destroys the blinded, self-created illusions. The recognition of reality creates vision:

“I wonder if this is the end, thought Ducane, and if so what it will all have amounted to. How tawdry and small it has all been. He saw himself now as a little rat, a busy little scurrying rat seeking out its own little advantages and comforts. To live easily, to have cosy familiar
pleasures, to be well thought of ... To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Love is the only justice” (304-5).

The egocentric fantasy is the real hindrance in achieving freedom. The human beings egocentric views don’t allow thinking separately about other people. It only strengthens self-centred thoughts. Iris Murdoch tries to reveal the same fact through her writing by using different characters, different situations. Ducane realizes the importance of love and forgiveness in human life. In the Murdochian novel The Unicorn the character Effingham achieves such type of clarity of vision. A human being can love the world; the world can become an object of love but for that one should destroy the egocentric fantasies of his own self. Death is the destroyer of all images which dispels all the roles and forms. Before the almost certainty of death Ducane loses the obscuring sense of a self-designed role of a good man and a just judge. Murdoch uses death as powerful force for the destruction of the dreaming, self-aggrandizing ego that hinders moral growth and freedom. The idea of death creates awareness in human being. This idea draws attention of a personal on the good, moral and releases the hold of the normal working of the egocentric self. The idea of death clarifies the vision which enables to proceed towards love, virtue and freedom. The person forgets his pre-occupations, illusions and fantasies. The idea of death proceeds to end human beings the fantasy of freedom and takes towards the recognition of reality. Both Iris Murdoch and Sartre try to give a realistic context to Plato’s image of life outside the cave by considering death as a crucifixion of personal desires. Ducane’s moment of epiphany and insight into the meaning of reality and life
emerges out of his close brush with death. The references to death as
a clarifying and unselfing agent had been taken up in the Murdochian
novels.

As a character immersed in a moral struggle, Ducane had
begun by believing in his superiority over others and in his separation
from evil and guilt. He now sees himself as a fake. He realizes that he
had deceived Jessica and Kate by keeping them in the dark about each
other. He learns to strengthen himself morally through all these
process. He discovers that there may be demons and powers outside,
such as the ones Radeechy had played with, but the real demon
resides in the mind of the man. The conflict in his mind about
dispensation of justice in the Radeechy case is resolved. He decides
on a private from of justice, instead of the harsh legal. Once he is
assured of Biranne’s remorse and that he still loves Paula, his ex-wife,
he decides to conceal his disclosures. Instead, he stipulates a
reconciliation of the two as a kind of moral punishment. He finally
works out the compassionate form of justice through the insight he
has gained. Ducane has learnt something about the reality of evil and
about the egocentric fantasy. This realization leads human being
towards the real concept of freedom. Goodness, love, reality takes us
towards freedom which is an energy system:

“Love, a form of freedom open to the artist, is a
reorientation of the selfish egocentric mechanism toward
something other; and goodness liberating because it
frees us from our narrow personal fantasies, is attained
by this redirection of attention. Good, not mediocre art
reveals an ardent love for reality and liberates one from
the mechanisms of fantasies. ... Murdoch stresses love
and art because they are energy systems addressed to the outside, the other objects” (Tucker 22).

The incident took place in the Grotto convinced Ducane that forgiveness, reconciliation and compassion are the important human necessities to proceed towards the fulfillment of life. This understanding enabled Ducane towards uniting various other couples apart from Paula and Biranne. He enables Judy McGrath to be consorted with Fivey. He restores Kate to Octavian and brings Pierce closer to Barbara. He had earlier failed to apprehend Mary as a separate individual but now he learns for her to feel the impersonal, transcendent love that is of the highest order. It was different from the self-seeking love of Jessica felt for him. Jessica’s love was also the possessive love which had been hindrance in the process of freedom. Ducane had earlier used to see Mary through her mirror of illusions and fantasies. These fantasies come from the flight from freedom because fantasy is a false sense of freedom but slowly Ducane creates an understanding and feeling of respect for Mary. He tries to understand her separate identity. He comforts her for her husband’s death by convincing her that accident and contingent happenings are not controlled by the human being. It is only in the hand of human being to accept the happenings of fate by understanding the realities of the world.

Murdoch’s emphasis through her novels has been remained on reality. Ignorance and negligence of reality can be expensive for human being. Because freedom is such thing which can be gained by knowing reality and understanding, respecting others.

“Murdoch attempts to get a firmer grip on the vague term ‘reality’, which is at the heart of her aesthetics and
concept of freedom. It is not a photographic realism that Murdoch means to be the real subject of great art, but rather, “pity and justice”. ... Murdoch’s reality is a vision which defines and redirects the energies and passions of the often misdirected psychic mechanisms. Seeking and finding reality are thus liberating experiences” (23).

The excessive preoccupation with the past is an important obstacle in achieving freedom. This preoccupation with the past makes man mentally slave and prevents him to face the present situation as well as to face the other people. The situation becomes poorer if the obsession is accompanied by guilt. Paula comments about this in the novel:

“Is it fruitless to think about the past and build up coherent pictures of what went wrong? I have never believed in remorse and repentance. But one must do something about the past...It goes on existing and affecting the present” (Murdoch, The Nice and the Good 120).

Making sense of the past is a common concern among post-war novelists, especially English ones. As a result of the uncertainties brought about by recent history, contemporary fiction was poised somewhere between nostalgia and nightmare alternatively or simultaneously imagining a brutal apocalyptic future and a vanished era. Rather than marking a new departure in Murdoch’s fiction, ‘The Past’ simply makes more explicit the device upon which a great number of her stories in fact rest: a significant event occurs in the past with which the characters must somehow come to terms. The Nice and the Good begins with the discovery of a body. The instances of
the past are suggestive of the Buddhist notion of ‘Karma’, the belief that we inevitably pay for our past actions, an idea which is clearly attractive to Murdoch as part of her continued interest in theology. But a more pertinent comparison than ‘Karma’ for the symbolic returns in Murdoch’s fiction is psychoanalysis, the fundamental law of which is that past trauma will always find a way of returning. These symbolic returns illustrate that the past functions in Murdoch’s work as ‘insistence’. One way or another, the past cannot be ignored; it insists on being taken into account, on being interpreted, and signified.

The novel *The Nice and the Good* moves towards the exorcism of the obsessive demons tormenting Mary Clothier, Paula, Theo and Willy. It is true that man can not break his present from the past but too much absorption in the past guilt is a kind of vanity and self-esteem that creates an obstacle in clarity of vision. So, the man should evaluate the past on realistic level. It can be neglected wherever possible but in the situation of chance, accident or death, one has to accept it to progress towards freedom. Ducane speaks:

“*Chance is really harder to bear than mortality...It’s not easy to do, but one must accept it as one accepts one’s losses and one’s past*” (206).

In the novel Mary Clothier seems a personality considering other people. But if there is any self-esteem in her it is of a feeling of guilt and self-accusation. She saw her husband Alistair’s death as an accident. So, this feeling of guilt she cannot forget with passing time. This feeling of guilt hovers over her until these are expelled by a new incident of death and loss. The incident takes place in the grotto named Gunnar’s Cave where the rising tide imprisons Ducane with
Pierce. This incident persuades her to rethink on her previous way of looking at the past:

“All human life is compact of accident and chance. If one loves what is so frail and mortal, if one loves and holds on, like a terrier holding on, must not one’s love become changed? There is only one absolute imperative, the imperative to love; ... a love so impersonal and so cold it can scarcely be recognized, a love devoid of beauty, of which one knows no more than the name, so little it is like an experience. This love Mary felt now for her dead husband and for the faceless wraith of her perhaps drowned son” (307-8).

The obsession of the past didn’t permit Mary Clothier to understand the reality but the death incident released her from the feeling of guilt of past. It created in her an impersonal love for her husband which poured energy in her life to live in present. Richard Biranne and Paula are reconciled to their obsessions. These lived in their fantasy world not knowing to each other. They misunderstood the concept of freedom and took the meaning of it according to their own illusions. Paula, a divorcee is caught up in a traumatic experience. Paula’s husband, Richard, out of jealousy upsets a billiard table on Eric, Paula’s lover. It resulted into the amputation of Eric’s foot, his departure to Australia and a divorce between Paula and Biranne. This memory hovers over Paula. Ducane’s terms of private justice and his insistence on reconciliation with her former husband released her from the memory of the past which became an obstacle in her process of freedom. Paula decides to go back and live with her husband. Both, Paula and Richard try to understand the individuality
of the other in the National Gallery. They both try to understand each other. Richard assures that he would keep his lies to a minimum whereas Paula agrees to redeem the past for the sake of love. They both release themselves from the bondage of the traumatic past. In the National Gallery Paula has learnt by looking at the painting more objectively. This change in Paula as well as Richard’s life can be the feature of their release from preoccupations and fantasies. This is an individual’s discovery of the imaginative recognition of reality.

Theo was also entrapped by a tainted memory. He forgets to take into account the contingent factors of his personality. An incident made him feel that he is still the same and his relentless egotism had not diminished. In a weak moment he repeated an action from his past. He tried to seduce a novice in the monastery. The boy committed suicide and Theo Fled from a broken image of himself. He keeps on holding to the feeling of guilt and the romantic illusion for a long time after this incident. Knowing that it was too late he decides to go back to the monastery. This choice is significant as it implies the acceptance of reality and one’s limitations without any help from the ameliorating fantasy. Theo understands the meaning of goodness. He muses over the idea of returning to the monastery:

“Why should he stay here and rot? Perhaps the great mountain of himself would never grow less. But he could keep company with the enlightenment of others, and might regain at least the untempered innocence of a well-guarded child. And although he might never draw a single step closer to that great blankness he would know of its reality and feel purely in the simplicity of his life the distant plucking of its magnetic power” (349).
In *The Bell* Michael tried to come out of his self. Theo in *The Nice and the Good* also tried to come out of his self. He wanted to break his personality. Earlier he tried to escape from his self by withdrawing into a religious and monastic form of life. Later, he understands that a disciplined process of unselting requires the acceptance of opacity, contingency and randomness of reality, not an escape from it. Theo gains something which helps him to know his situation in the fantasy. The selfish ego brings obstacles in the process of achieving freedom. Theo redeems his past by returning to the monastery with no hope of any personal gain but only to see the progress of the community people. Such understanding features the rejection of fantasy and illusions imposed by the past or the concerned contemporary situation. Willy cost, a German refugee was also obsessed with his past. He remains immersed in his prison of guilt. He is released from it by an erotic encounter with Jessica Bird. He guides her which proves fruitful in feeling her from the jealous possessiveness she felt for Ducane.

“...faults in the past have their endlessly spreading network of results... *We are not good people, and the best we can hope for is to be gentle, to forgive each other and to forgive the past, to be forgiven ourselves and to accept this forgiveness*” (191).

The final vision of Theo is presented as the vision of good. He hopes to submerge the mountain of his egotism back into the Buddhist monastery. Ducane sincerely chooses to pursue the path which can take him to the realm of good. In *The Nice and the Good* most of the characters try to free themselves from enslaving memories of past. These memories entrapped the characters. The
characters created their own images about the other peoples and they made their relationships with others through their personal outlook. They live in the fantasy world and proceed to gain freedom but it is proceeding towards achieving the fantasy of freedom. They try to come out of the fantasy of freedom by forgiving themselves, others and their pasts. Through this conflict of mind they learn some important things to achieve freedom. Like other Murdochian novel *The Nice and the Good* suggests that one should accept the world in all its random details and messiness and try to know oneself in the true context of that world. Theo’s renunciation is the quest for the stringent ideal and Ducane’s March is significant because of his commitment of everyday reality and life.

Thus, Iris Murdoch’s above discussed three novels-*The Unicorn, A Severed Head,* and *The Nice and the Good* presents various forms and myths created by fantasy can completely enslave and curtail liberty. The characters succeed in arriving at the imaginative recognition of the reality of others and themselves by giving up the various forms created by obsessions, self-conceived dramatic roles or the images imposed on those with whom they come in contact. The novels are also concerned with the basic human aspects of love, power, justice, death, truth and goodness.

In view of Murdoch the human being should always see things, objects, people, moral situations, truly as they are, uncoloured by our personal fantasies or needs for consolation. She considers morality and goodness only as forms of realism. She does not accept the idea of real man living in a private dream world.

“Of course a good man may be infinitely eccentric, but he must know certain things about his surroundings, most
obviously the existence of people and their claims. The chief enemy of excellent in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one... one might say here that art is an excellent analogy of morals, or indeed that it is in this respect a case of morals” (Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good 59).

Murdoch in The Nice and the Good reveals the interpretation of good. Murdoch says that, a good man must be aware of his surroundings and the existence of other people and their claims. Because most people only are good in their own fantasies. Morality is a way of human life. It exists in the actions of men and not in their fantasies. Murdoch thinks that those people who are busy in collecting wealth live in their own fantasies. So, they cannot do real deeds of goodness. Like the real good people, higher art also aims at presenting the reality without intrusion of personal fantasy. It also helps us seeking and recognizing things outside ourselves. Murdoch believes that for being good, one requires the intellectual ability to understand the truth and the suppression of the self:

“'I would suggest that the authority of the Good seems to us something necessary because the realism (ability to perceive reality) required for goodness is a kind of intellectual ability to perceive what is true, which is automatically at the same time a suppression of self. The necessity of the good is then an aspect of the kind of necessity involved in any technique for exhibiting fact’” (66).
Murdoch’s novel *The Unicorn* shares a gothic environment and certain other local characteristics, many of them rather negatively viewed even by Murdoch’s sympathetic critics. Her novels—*The Unicorn, The Italian Girl, The Red and the Green* and *The Time of the Angles* deal with peculiarly self-destructive families, and incest comes to be seen almost as a way of conveying internecine destructiveness and the raw nerve endings of suffering. *The Unicorn* for Murdoch comprises a successful case of a character who eluded the pattern laid down by her creator becoming involved in falsehood and guilt herself. The mode of narration of the novel is quite different from that of *The Bell* even though both are narrated in the third person. In *The Unicorn* these are only two consciousnesses, which are similar to each other and unlike any other character since they belong to the only ‘outsiders’ in the book, Marian and Effingham Cooper. They have their own reasons, not consciously realized by themselves, for wishing to make the imaginative inferences which they do from the events they perceive. Their inability to be objective about what they are witnessing is rendered in various ways. It is clear that, at least of Murdoch’s career psychological plausibility which constitutes the form of realism. The Gothic background may be seen in terms of that transcendent reality of which she speaks in “Against Dryness.” The unlikelihood or bizarreness of many of the novel’s episodes is subordinate to this transcendence, which places in perspective much of Effingham’s egoistical reflection, including his pseudo-metaphysical insight when almost drowned in the bog.

Murdoch’s novels concentrate on freedom, goodness and love. She believed that in this modern world human being is captured by various wills, desires, egos, illusions, forms, myths and fantasies. And
he resides away from the recognition of realities. So, this behaviour of a human being keeps him away from the real concept of freedom. In this illusioned world he does not understand the individuality of other person nor gives respect for the other persons’ personality. Murdoch’s force has been remained on this point through above discussed three novels- *The Unicorn, A Severed Head* and *The Nice and the Good*. Her novels reveal the necessity of understanding human personality which can not be easily understood.

“Murdoch argues for the necessity of understanding the human subject against both a contingent world and a world of essences. Unhappily, however, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Liberal tradition have all combined to leave us with “Far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality”. This liberal-democratic theory of personality, as she calls it to which we in the twentieth century are heirs, is responsible for what Murdoch perceives to be wrong with ourselves and our literature” (Tucker 2).

Murdoch’s *The Unicorn* is her most Gothic novel turns out to be her most allegorical because many characters of the novel tend to represent ideas. In no other work by Iris Murdoch do the demonic seem more didactic than in *A Severed Head*. Murdoch’s decision to allow Martin Lynch-Gibbon to tell his own story seems especially appropriate for a novel that criticizes self-absorption and the consequent failure to see the uniqueness of other individuals. *The Nice and the Good* points a new direction in Murdoch’s career as a novelist. It is an open novel without any mythical centre. Her new method is a loose form of allegory. She succeeds to give her
characters natural primacy and free atmosphere. She demonstrates the universal ambiguity of living creatures in relation to each other. Murdoch uses different characters through different novels but her strengthening point is common in all the novels. She tries to present through characters that man’s egocentric fantasy doesn’t permit him to see others separately but it creates self-centredness. It captures man in its various forms. In The Unicorn Hannah is involved in an arbitrary network of images and patterns imposed on her. The Nice and the Good stresses on the obsessions of the past. The obsessions of the past prevent the characters from living freely in the present through which they become the slaves of fantasy. Martin Lynch Gibbon felt awkward to maintain his relationships with dissimilar beings in A Severed Head. He is pre-occupied by various conceptions about himself and others. Martin and Antonia fail to have natural relations of husband and wife because they always search the personal inadequacies of married life.

“One may fail to see the individual...because we are ourselves sunk in a social whole which we allow uncritically to determine our reactions, or because we see each other exclusively as so determined, or we may fail to see the individual because we are completely enclosed in a fantasy world of our own into which we try to draw things from outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream objects of our own” (Murdoch, The Sublime and the Good 52).

Convention is the dominant landscape of what Murdoch calls the ‘ordinary language man’. He is shaped by convention but is too arrogant to be overpowered by any structure larger than himself. He
has a tendency toward abstraction and oversimplification, and although he exists in a network of difference, he still manages to operate self-sufficiently. The second condition, neurosis, is the most telling mark of the existential man; whom Murdoch calls the ‘totalitarian man’ because of his supreme isolation. ‘Ordinary language man’ is at least surrounded by something which is not of his own creation. But totalitarian man is entirely alone. He lives through a process of self-mythologizing, which casts the world and people in it as extensions of his own consciousness.

Murdoch is of the view that the human personality is opaque and it can not be understood properly. It seems the same through her novels. Her characters represent the confused situation of human being in which they can’t define the life properly. They behave in such a way through which they try to create their own way of livelihood, but forgets to compare those ways with realities of the outer world. Murdoch seems skeptical about the human subject’s ability to be either wise or good. In *The Sovereignty of Good*, she more fully outlines her questions about the human psyche. She argues that human beings are “naturally selfish” (78), that they are egocentric, machine-like energy systems driven by forces incomprehensible to them. This egocentric consciousness is inclined, even doomed, to falsify harsh realities through the generation of a variety of obsessional fantasies which she defines as a proliferation of blinding self-centered aims and images. She also argues that the human beings are transient mortal creatures subject to necessity and chance. Murdoch expresses her views about the world in which human beings live:

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“Murdoch has, of course, a lot to say about the world this human creature inhabits. It is rich, complicated, external, and –above all-contingent. Indeed, it is its contingent nature, its complexity, particularity, and messi-ness that the fantasy-ridden egotists fear and attempt to control by imposing from and pattern upon it. In part Murdoch’s view of the world is shaped by Kant’s idea of the sublime, although in the end she qualifies certain aspects of his theory…” (Tucker 4).

Murdoch’s novels enable the characters to clarify their perception to interact with others. This other-centredness requires unselfing and living in the present. It also involves the acceptance of contingency and the real world instead of creating our own imagined world of fantasies. Most of the characters from The Unicorn, A Severed Head and The Nice and the Good translate reality into a series of subjective magical devices or forms. They conveniently confer it on others obliterating the distinction between fantasy and reality. They devise roles of themselves and others and are entrapped in the artificial network. In The Unicorn the theme of enchantment and enslavement has been worked out successfully. Murdoch’s characters gradually try to understand their structured fantasies and reality. They fight against the form-making fantasy and try to discover the recognition of reality.
References


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