Chapter Two
The Anti-Art Art of Demythologizing Realism and Modernism

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read, but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.

Francis Bacon: Of Studies

To evaluate Murdoch’s status as a novelist, it is essential to envisage it in light of the dominant literary movement of her era. Commencing her literary career with the publication of Under the Net in 1954, Murdoch is among those post-war writers who were anxious to amend the crisis in the novel evoked in the first half of the twentieth century as the result of the extreme innovations of high modernism. The linguistic and narrative experiments done in between the two world wars for the sake of aesthetic novelty were extinguishing the faith in literature as a redeeming device for mankind just as the faith in other cultural phenomena was collapsing. Optimistically accepting the possibility of recovery of aesthetic value through modification or transformation of narrative forms, post-war novelists start to write to accentuate the novel’s potentials and save its generic determinants from declining. After the metamorphosis has imposed on the subject matter and form of art especially the novel by questioning and repealing the tenets of realism, the new post-war literature shows a tendency to metamorphose again to inhibit the radical modernist techniques from pushing the novel toward silence and imminent death. Rubin Rabinovitz and Robert Scholes identify two distinct modes in this upward trend in the second half of the twentieth century. Rabinovitz argues that, after World War II, an anti-experimental strike against modernism led to a regressive attitude to restore the novel to its earlier modes of realism. The literary production of Angry Young Men is included among such regressive fiction which resorts to realistic techniques to reflect the most immediate problems and the particular issues of the time. Scholes recognizes totally another off-beat phenomenon emerging and developing itself into a full-blown trend especially in American fiction. He thinks that the practitioners of
the prevalent trend, among whom he places Murdoch, are more in favor of myth, allegory, romance, or fantasy instead of realism. For Scholes who traces back the origin of the novel to the epic and romance in his *Nature of Narrative*, the novels of 1950s onwards tend to revive the mythical, allegorical elements of narrative. He calls those novelists bent to the origin of the narrative fiction “fabulators.” The question that rises now is, in fact, a double query: a) Writing from 1954 to 1995, does Murdoch conform to the rising regressive attitude to fiction? b) If so, to which group does her fiction belong? Is it an instance of the restoration of the realistic novel or a token of the rebirth of what Scholes calls “fabulation,” a narrative form that later comes to be known as postmodern fiction?

To find a proper answer as clearly and convincingly as possible, the select novels are analyzed here in terms of narrative elements such as plot, setting, characterization, narrator and narration. This chapter is, therefore, divided into four sub-sections, under each of which Murdoch’s handling of the eponymous factor is compared to its realistic, modernist and postmodernist treatments. Under the close scrutiny in these sections, her novels are labeled postmodern because of the underlying ironic twist in all the studied narrative elements.

2.1 Plot

A narrative literature, whether fictional or non-fictional, requires a skeleton, something that generates its narrativity, that is the status of attracting narratees to itself by inducing in them mental or emotional equilibrium. That skeleton has been well recognized in the early days of literary theory. Analyzing mostly the tragic drama which differs from the narrative in many ways, Aristotle calls that framework the soul of mimetic literary works. He refers to it sometimes as “praxis” and sometimes as “mythos”: in his definition of tragedy, he describes it as a serious whole action: “an action that is complete in itself, as a whole of some magnitude, for a whole may be of no magnitude to speak of. Now a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and end” (*On the Art* 38).

A fundamental component of any temporal art, that skeleton is labeled variously as literary theory narrows down to the study of narrative texts and more particularly
literary narrative texts. To conceptualize it as textual feature that gives each narrative its idiosyncrasy, many literary critics have always distinguished it from the extra-textual element that makes any narrative allotropic. Russian formalists it *sjužet* and its counterpoint *fabula*; French formalists refer to them respectively as “*récit*” and “*histoire*.” Rimmon-Kenan reserves for them the more familiar terms “text” and “story.” “Text” is “a spoken or written discourse” which undertakes the telling of “story” while “story” designates “the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events” (3). In this chapter, however, the term “plot” is preferred over its counterparts for two reasons: first, its wide spread currency in literary analysis, second, its nonpossession of any narratological connotation which encourages an expectation of a semiotic dissection.

As a basic narrative element, plot has come to distinct itself from the notion that Forster has tied to it more than half a century ago; for him, in contrast to “story” that designates “a narrative of events arranged in time sequence,” plot is “a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality”(93). Its current academic usage denotes Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg’s conception of it as “the dynamic sequential element in narrative literature” (207). The inclusivity of this definition makes it more available for elucidating the mutations that narrative fiction has undergone in realism, modernism and postmodernism than Paul Ricoeur’s almost abstract interpretation as “the intelligible whole that governs the succession of events” (257). In their insightful study of narrative literature, Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg take “story” as “a general term for character and action in narrative form” and plot as a more specific term referring “to action alone, with minimum possible reference to character” (208). They argue that once the traditional epic form disintegrates into “its empirical and fictional elements” plot is the first narrative element that reformulates itself to match the separated elements and their double derivatives, namely, the historical and mimetic (the branches of empirical element) and the romantic and didactic (the ramifications of the fictional element). In correspondence to any new vigor to nullify the conventional narrative of the time which necessitates a recreation of the mythic story, various kinds of plot-pattern have emerged.
Like the birth of the epic, the rise of the novel is another turning point in the history of narrative. Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg believe that in a slow but definite process (starting at least as early as Boccaccio) the diverse narrative branches born after the disintegration of the epic gradually reunite into the fresh form of the novel. Another disintegrating phenomenon initiates again in the Europe of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and the novel finally faces the same fate that its great ancestor did. At the early part of the twentieth century the “great didactic” resurges and forces the novel to abandon the stage for new forms of narrative. In this regard, the posterior forms of narrative, although distinct enough to be called modernist and postmodernist, are the consequence of different permutations of the basic narrative modes which devise different kind of plotting. This cyclic model of synthesis and dialectics is doubly illuminating as it both accounts for the diversity of narratives and predicts optimistically still more future dynamism. Considering this Hegelian model of narrative evolution, the drastic change brought about by the unprecedented scientific achievements of modern age and World War I best explains any mutation, though small, that narrative fiction has undergone from the dawn of the twentieth century till the most recent time in the West.

As a temporal art, no narrative fiction even its most radical form of the postmodern experimentation can do without plot. That is, the innovation imposed on the sequential element can never exceed a certain point though theoretically it is desirable as the ideal to embody the modern conception of time. Burgass is absolutely right in her discernment that the theory of plot was interlinked to the theory of time from the moment of its first conception in Aristotle’s Poetics (179). Time, as Aristotle defines it in his Physics, is linear: “part of time has been and is not, while another is going to be and is not yet” (The Complete 371). What consists time, then, is the “now” that ironically links and limits the past and the future. This time is objectively measurable by considering the change an object goes through (375). In his definition of plot as a whole action that has “beginning, middle and end,” Aristotle, as he himself further explains, has a temporal-causal linkage between events in mind. Since the same classical notion of time is still dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the resultant novels which get the label of realism readily incorporate the legacy of Aristotelian plot by arranging the incidents of their narrative into a chronological order. As a locus for the second synthesis
of the empirical and fictional parameters, the realistic novel easily adopts the biographical (birth to death) and the romantic (desire to communication) plot patterns because of their apparent linear treatment of time that provides, according to Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg, the required “tension and resolution” that Aristotelian plot demands.

In realistic fiction plot is more or less chronological with a beginning that introduces a set of characters whose actions bring about stasis in their lives. So loyal are realist novelists to the classical time that almost all of them present the reader with a vision of what happens to everybody “afterwards.” Anachronies, Genette’s term for distortion of the actual succession of events, never occur extradiegetically in the realist narrative though they may naturally occur diegetically when character-focalizers remember their past or envision their future. The character-motivated anachronies never interrupt the chronological procession of plotting since as Rimmon-Kenan comments about Joyce’s “Eveline,” “[t]he act of remembering, fearing or hoping is a part of the linear unfolding of the first narrative” (53).

The scientific revolution at the early twentieth century along with the tragic outcome of World War I forces a massive change into the Western scheme of things. As a result of the shattering of socio-cultural frameworks, the traditional aesthetics is denounced as inadequate. Now that change and movement has substituted order and stability, the aesthetics feels the urgency to revamp in order to keep in line with “modernity.” A miscellany of alarming phenomena in many ways, modernity proves inspiring, a positive force sparking the proliferation of narrative fiction evident in the abundant unusual forms that prevail in the years to come.

As the devastating war destroys modern man’s solidarity, and Einstein’s definition of time as the fourth dimension in his space-time model of the universe challenges the classical belief in the objective representation of reality, narrative fiction

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3 Extradiegetic level is the highest level of narration in a narrative fiction in Genette’s classification; it is immediately superior to the story and concerned with its narration. See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. 2nd ed. (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005) 94.

4 “Diegetic” is Genette’s term for the actual level of events and may include speech-acts of narration—whether oral, or written. (See Rimmon-Kenan, 94).

5 In Genette’s terminology the ‘first narrative’ is ‘the temporal level of narrative with respect to which an anachrony is defined as such’. See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 48.
finds new themes impossible to be rendered in the same traditional medium. So the realist novel starts to break up to reconfigure into a more appropriate form to reflect reality that, in Matz’s words, became “the perplexed, individual experience of random, ordinary things” (43-44). To vocalize the personalized versions of reality, a new kind of fiction later referred to as the modern novel comes into being. The commitment to the orderly narration of significant events gives way to the haphazard account of the common experiences of very ordinary people. The shift of emphasis from the objective experience of time to the subjective one causes the modern novel to abandon the linear narration in favor of a more mimetic reproduction of the actual experience of time. As the rendering of time in a narrative according to Genette has three aspects, viz. order, duration, frequency, modern novelists set to inflict the Aristotelian plot with a staccato rhythm and let it go random to establish a new plot in which duration, frequency override order.

Instead of relating the story in a constant ratio allowing equal textual space for every experience, the modern narrator introduces some sorts of discrepancy between the story-time and the text-time to account for the subjective experience of time. The resultant plot still emerges as an amorphous temporal continuum which, despite the replacement of association for causality as the organizing principle of experiences, never loses its reliance on chronology. As Burgass affirms in her specification of the modern narration of events against the realistic and postmodern versions, whatever anachronies that may occur in such narration are naturalized in one way or the other, whether as the narrator’s experiences of equal emotional intense in the case of analepsis (Genette’s term for flashback) or as the narrator’s retrospections to give an account of what has happened before certain narrative point in the case of prolepsis (Genette’s term for foreshadowing). James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is just a sketch of a single day in the life of Harold Bloom. Its untraditional allotment of a disproportionate textual space to such a short period is owing to its project of yielding an exact portrayal of the impressions of various associative experiences on him.

Analyzing the modern novel from a posterior historical perspective, as Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg have done, leaves no doubt that its genesis depended essentially on the coalescence of only two of the distinct impulses that have given rise to the birth of the
realistic novel. The double objective that has been detected in the modern literary agenda is a convincing proof of the play of those impulses. The modern novel’s attempt to make fiction an art is indicative of the vitality of a romantic factor while its effort to adjust the art of fiction to a better and richer rendering of reality is insinuative of a mimetic motive. This alliance causes modern fiction to deviate from the realistic version. Instead of treating reality as a “given background to fiction,” the modern novelists, Matz states, consider it “the object of its speculations” (6). They set to invent the best narrative capable of revealing the unique, exclusive experiences of reality. Their eccentric productions defied any recourse to the common rules that govern our perception of the world. In her elaboration on “models of coherence,” Rimmon-Kenan talks of models driven from reality or literature. She enumerates “chronology and causality,” “contiguity in space” and “generalizations or stereotypes” as reality models. The intelligibility of modern fiction relies mostly on the second set of principles that work by “reference to specifically literary exigencies or institutions.” Designating them as “literature models,” Rimmon-Kenan assumes that they justify the employment of a particular element in a literary work by “its contribution to the action,” “its illustration of theme” or its compliance to the genre (128-29). Abandoning almost all of the reality models, modern fiction is yet comprehensible for only those competent readers who have gradually internalized the literature models through continual exposure to them. For any naïve reader, on the contrary, they are desperately incomprehensible and difficult.

The notorious difficulty at the heart of modern fiction is not random but a visible symptom of the integration of the urge for beauty into its very essence. It is the inevitable outcome of its commitment to aesthetic truth, an obligation that in the eyes of many critics characterizes all modern arts. The allegiance to beauty and truth rather than fact and goodness leaves modern fiction particularly anxious for an urgent development of a new literary style. Modern plot, unanimously specified as patchy, random, and incoherent in comparison to the realistic one, is, indeed, an attempt to offer a beautiful, unmediated rendering of truth. Modern fiction, then, easily does away with whatever impedes this: the intrusive explanatory telling, the didacticism that is the integral part of almost any eighteenth-century novel. Therefore, instead of turning more revelatory, it becomes more difficult and complex. Rimmon-Kenan identifies a natural disposition in any narrative
fiction to multiply difficulties and “slow down the process of comprehension” to ascertain “its own survival” (126). In the case of modern fiction, this tendency is accompanied by yearning to meet the requirements of both the mimetic and romantic building blocks, to achieve a self-contained form to imitate the truth of everyday life.

The modern plot gains the form it has when writers became obsessed with concept of time, especially Henri Bergson’s definition of time as personal “duration”: “the succession of our conscious states . . . which melt into each and permeate each other, without precise outlines” (100). Such idiosyncratic private time governs the modernist formulation of the plot. As a subjective experience, time stops, starts, leaps ahead and slow down hence the dissolution of regular linear time in modern fiction. It is better to say that, instead of objective time, impression and association, memory and desire are the organizing principles in the modern plot. A string of impressionistic or associative moments, the modern plot is still a dynamic sequential element. Its dynamicity lies at its particular rendering of moments, “at once ordinary and revelatory, at once a passing thing and a route to transcendence,” in Matz’s words (65). Although no final denouement is achieved through the perpetual flux of actions as in realistic novels, it is still built on an increasing momentum toward some significant moments in the life of the central character. Virginia Woolf calls them “moments of being” and James Joyce refers to them as “epiphanies,” when time stills and characters face its fullest significance. Thus, while the realistic plot establishes its dynamism in relation to external life, the modern plot, even more significantly, remains dynamic vis-à-vis inner life. It still deals with time since otherwise would be the end of the narrative fiction. In other words, an indispensable factor in both story and plot, chronology remains intact in modern fiction though no more it is in the foreground.

Along time, space requires a quite different treatment in modern fiction. No longer a backdrop to the succession of events, it acts as a potential site to frame or even induce various private moments. In this sense, it is part of the plot, a powerful device to contribute to its dynamism by reflecting the conditional and mental status of the characters. Stripped of its solid, independent existence, it does not require the introductory descriptions traditional plots invest in and becomes, instead, a flimsy,
insubstantial element. Matz interprets the ethereality of this space as the modern novel’s response to “the swift and continuous shift of urban stimuli” or even, its attempt to solace the modern reader through compensating “urban excess” with “emotional restoration” (68). These various functionalities ascribe to space a highly significant role in the new fiction. Faithful to the actual reality while compressing the novel to a considerable degree, space is actually at the command of both essential spirits of the modern novel; by enhancing both the mimetic and artistic aspects of the twentieth-century fiction, modern space still maintains its validity. It is not an abandoned, impractical device that Matz puts forward in highlighting modern fiction’s inconsideration of public places (71), but a helpful, potential element for rejuvenating the narrative fiction.

As plot changes from a sequence of actions to a sequence of impressions, its dependence on biographical or romantic models gives way to a reliance on relatively short, loose, uneventful patterns. As portrayal of “moments of being,” it no longer needs to be traditionally lengthy. A “slice of life” would suffice. So it emerges minimal and uneventful but never pointless and unrealistic as it may seem. In its strange minimalism, it succeeds to incorporate artistically the random openness of the human existence. A “slice of life” cannot contain an eventual resolution of a set of actions. However, it is an apt formula to keep readers interested in a group of seemingly loose experiences till the epiphanic moment. Once it is achieved, the novel ends abruptly without fulfilling the traditional expectation of the progression of actions. The inevitable outcome of the loose, fragmentary structure of the plot, that is, its abrupt ending defies the traditional closure and increases the textual survival as it prolongs the reader’s involvement with it. Faced with such unexpected ending, the reader can never be certain of a definite way to interpret the work.

This tendency of texts mainly modern to inhibit the formation of any “finalized hypothesis” is, relates Rimmon-Kenan, styled in deconstruction as “undecidability” or “unreadability” (125). Such resistance to any definite interpretations implies that modern texts are self-conscious since in poststructuralist perspective such phenomenon is an inherent feature of all literature. Having in mind the constituents of modern fiction, its “undecidability” is a predictable, immediate consequence, however. As Matz neatly puts,
modernists’ aim in inflict[ing] their plots with “randomness, inconsistency, deviation, omission” is “to reflect the incoherence and incongruity of real life, in which things seldom go at any regular pace or hang fully together” (39). In other words, it is to make art finer and reality richer that they determine to leave their novels open-ended with ironic or surprise closures. Negating the Aristotelian plot for its inappropriate conventions that falsify reality, the alternative new plot is ironically more artistic and truer to life. Its substitution of a set of new techniques for realistic conventions proves that plot is not dead in modern fiction but only transformed. Matz’s comment on the modern novel should be modified to be more appropriate: “modern novels decrease substantially the role played by [the traditional] plot in fiction’s designs” (39).

Having in mind the detailed outline of the modern plot not only helps see the features of the realistic plot more clearly but also provides a solid background to form a notion of the postmodern plot. Although modernists were convinced that their innovative, fragmentary, unresolved plots were the best way to mirror the actual reality with its plain incidents, and the most effective vehicle to criticize modern man and society, postmodernists see it a clumsy and insincere art, a highbrow project that cannot fulfill the primary goal of art, viz. to provide man with the entertaining vision of reality. Suspicious of language to reflect the external reality, they set against both realism and modernism in the most indirect way possible: exaggeration is for them the paradoxical stratagem to ridicule the traditional narrative techniques. Postmodernists revive realistic conventions while exploring powers of fiction to create truths of its own. They aspire to create a self-conscious art that is entertaining and didactic, factual and fictional at once. Unlike Faulkner, Joyce, Woolf who preserved fiction for an exact register of everyday life, Vonnegut, Pynchon and Carter (to name a few well-known representatives) incorporated fantasy, magic and supernatural in their literary productions. According to Matz, this new formula for fiction derives out of the postmodern interest in the capacity of storytelling and imagination and the belief that realism can never reckon with the sophisticated, multi-dimensional reality (143). A conspicuous feature of postmodern fiction, fantasization is a way to credit both factuality and fictionality.
Modernists’ ultimate ambition has been to attain a “balance between the flux of the world and the solace of forms,” the two artistic essentials Henry James names “notation” and “reference” and Frank Kermode calls “contingency” and “concordance” (Matz 176). The project is debunked in postmodern literature, highlighting modernists’ straightforward belief in the mimetic essence of fiction as extremely naïve. Emerged out of a strong disbelief in the linguistic ability to communicate the naked contingency of the world, the postmodern plot defies the possibility of such equilibrium since to contain contingency entails the dissolution of any unified whole —the death of form. However, since the wholeness and unity it is a basic element in narrative art, the postmodern plot cannot discard it totally. Aware of the indispensability of form to narrative art, postmodernists realize that to complete their mission they should resort to “irony,” a double-coding technique, irony helps them mark the impossibility of capturing the contingency within the consistency of form while bringing to the foreground the randomness and absurdity of life.

To be ironical, plot in postmodernism transforms once more. It draws on both its realistic and modernistic ancestors to present itself as the best container for contingency while projecting its inability to contain it. Simultaneously exaggerating the conventions of realism and modernism, it disperses the illusion of balance whenever it forms. Through a formless form mainly nourished by the employment of the existent contradictory narrative techniques and invention of new ones, it tries to depict the havocs of contingency on the form of fiction without losing its narrativity. No constant unified whole, no ultimate encompassing form is discernable in any postmodern plot. At least there are two forms interwoven in such a plot that defies both formlessness and the existence of a form concurrently. In comparison to the modern plot, the postmodern plot lives on fragmentation more fully and for quite other objective. Now fragmentation intensified by using the conventions from various genres indiscriminately and forged through pastiche gives plot a puzzle-like quality that in the most extreme cases evokes frustration in the reader as the number of possible permutations multiplies. Such plots though challenging the formation of a single unity never disappoint the reader of the pleasure of forming a transient one.
A temporal organization of a host of fragments, the postmodern plot is inherently ironic. It both conforms to chronology and resists it. As Burgass cogently argues, in their treatment of time, postmodernists differ from realists and modernists. To maintain their readability and narrative form, postmodern novels such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* and Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* keep the chronological narrative while the overall time is circular. Indeed they deconstruct the concept of classical time by making the past, present and future simultaneous. Burgass interprets this phenomenon the direct outcome of Einstein’s relativity theory. Contemporary with modernism, this theory, she insists, struck in modern fiction only the awareness and commitment to the subjective experience of time. The real impact of this radical theory is sensed in postmodern fiction where the distinction between the past, present and future is blurred and a perpetual now dominates the plot. As a perpetual now, the span covered in the postmodern plot is no more exclusively a chronological life time as in realism or an intermittent slice of life as in modernism. Interestingly enough, it is both: a slice of life and a history. The ironic essence of the postmodern plot is further evident in its treatment of setting: space here is both realistic, an external background, and modernistic, a device to shed light on the characters’ emotional-mental status as it is reduced to a set of impressions it evokes in them. Rendered as both real and unreal, this new space is fantastic, a unique phenomenon in the history of the novel. It is a device to express both the external and the internal world of characters. The integration of so much paradox in the structure of plot bestows an ironical tone to postmodern novels: they paradoxically accomplish what their texts reject as impossible, what modernists tried but could not achieve due to their comparatively simple techniques. While highlighting the limitation of forms for the accommodation of contingencies, postmodern novels bring off a fine though precarious balance between the two.

Such “formless form” is Murdoch’s ambition in her literary career. Starting from her first novel *Under the Net*, she interweaves a similar irony in all her plots. As an account of how a narrator-character finally comes to realize his true vocation as a novelist, *Under the Net* readily conforms to the chronological plot pattern of realism. But its plot has an ironic twist to it: it is the very novel the narrator aspires to write at the end of his narrative. In that sense, another temporal level is added to the plot. Time is no
longer linear but a continuum of individual moments in which the past, present, and future happen concurrently. Jake’s final determination to be a novelist, actually realized in the existence of *Under the Net* with so many hints to his authorship, proves the plot to be circular in addition to chronological: Jake finally has written what he thought he would write soon. In creating a narrator who finally writes his own narrative only after undergoing a set of adventures, Murdoch both acknowledges the reliability of Einstein’s theory of time and gives currency to its classic notion.

Ironically, the first artistic creation of an inexperienced author (both James Donaghue and Iris Murdoch) *Under the Net* is double in terms of the plot’s span of time. On the one hand, it is a representation of a slice of life of James (how bereft of a lodging, he is force to become more responsible for his own survival if nothing else). On the other hand, it is a portrayal of much longer period of his lifetime, roughly a span from his childhood to the point he succeed writing his long-desired novel. The narrative has so many digressions to the past naturalized as memory and is interspersed with so many of Jake’s authorial comments and anticipations of the future events that it exceeds to two hundred and eighty five pages and becomes an extended slice of life. The compartment of the plot into twenty chapters in each of which Jake’s acquaintance with the other members of the cast is rendered individually gives it an episodic look; however, the plot as a whole maintains its unity as everybody and everything is seen through Jake’s consciousness. This duality is repeated at the end of the novel; the multiple conflicts Jake was engaged in are finally resolved in the manner of realist novels. Four letters from other fellow characters that knot the colorful strands of the plot together reminds one of the familiar endings in realistic tradition; nevertheless, there remain so many other loose strands in the novel that the reader feels free to interpret the ending as a parody rather than a faithful imitation of the realistic plot. Formed as a result of deliberate gaps or the unconscious cracks which appear whenever there is contradiction in the narrative, the loose strands unravel the final braiding of certain strands into a definite end and introduce another resistance to the coherency of the plot.

*The Black Prince* evidently challenges the coherency of plot more vigorously. On the extradiegetic level, that is the level of the editor’s narration, the plot is both textually
and chronologically fragmented. It is sporadic as various people authorize its segments: successively Bradley the author, Bradley the intradiegetic narrator, Bradley the author, Christian, Francis, Rachel, Julian, the editor. Moreover, it features a dislocated chronology since the editor as an omniscient narrator annexes to the text of the events that happened years ago to his alleged friend the comments he extracted from the other participants in those events. The editor finally provides an ending to his indirect narration by telling what happened to Bradley and casting judgments on the others’ views in his postscript. In this way, the earlier events (those in Bradley’s story) are related much later in the editor’s narration.

On the hypodiegetic level, namely, “The Black Prince: A Celebration of Love,” the plot is more self-consciously incoherent. It acts as the mise en abyme for the encompassing plot of the editor. The obvious gaps and blank spaces among the segments of the editor’s text are echoed in deliberate pauses Bradley makes for characterization, setting, addressing his “dear friend,” predicting the reactions of his readers and even amending his descriptions. In introducing almost all the characters including himself, Bradley interrupts the plot to highlight his narrating role: “[p]erhaps I might pause here yet again for a moment to describe myself” (BP 3). Other examples are when he tries to give an image of Priscilla: “[a]t this point it is necessary for me to give some account of my sister, Priscilla, who is about to appear upon the scene,” or even her husband Roger: “I will not attempt a lengthy description of Roger. He too will appear in the story in due course” (43). Once he stops quoting a letter to Arnold to delineate a more detailed picture of his sitting-room: “I have not described this important room adequately yet” (35). Bradley’s anticipation of the further description of two of the objects in his room pauses the plot to add a comic tone to his setting, turning it into a parody of the realistic setting than its straight imitation: “upon the chimney piece. . . stood the little items, china cups and figures, snuff boxes . . . some of which I may describe later since two at least of these objects play a role in the story” (36).

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6 Hypodiegetic narrative level is a level at which a fictional character tells a story. It is a second degree narrative since it is below the diegetic level (See Rimmon-Kenan, 94).
The interruptions are multiplied when he pauses to speak to his narratee whom he refers to as “my dear friend”: “perhaps at this point in my story, my dear friend, I may be allowed to pause and speak to you directly” (54). Sometimes he sustains his account to debunk the reader’s inference: “The reader, especially if he has not had the experience I have been describing, may feel impatient with the foregoing lyricism. ‘Pshaw!’ he will say, ‘the fellow protests too much and intoxicates himself with words. He admits to being a thoroughly repressed man, no longer young. All he means is that he suddenly felt intense sexual desire for a girl of twenty. We all know about that.’ I will not pause to answer this reader back, but will go on as faithfully as I can to recount what happened next” (173). Or when he says, “what a common girl, the reader may say: naive, ignorant, thoughtless, not even particularly beautiful. Or else you have misdescribed her” (171).

Anxious to give a fair picture of Arnold, he deliberately engages himself on many occasions with retouching that image: “I pause here to say another word or two about my protégé Arnold Baffin. I am anxious (this is not just a phrase, I feel anxiety) about the clarity and justice of my presentation of Arnold, since this story is, from a salient point of view, the story of my relations with Arnold and the astounding climax to which these relations led” (8). The paradox is that despite all these distraction from the plot, he still believes that he is not delaying his narration: “The ‘story’ shall never be long kept in abeyance” (54).

In addition to the lack of the realistic coherency, the plot covers an ironical time span through interlocking the extradiegetic and hypodiegetic plots. Neither is it a short slice of life as in modernism nor of a biographic length as in realism. The hypodiegetic plot encompasses a period of nearly ten days in the life of Bradley when he felt he was struck by true love. In his foreword and postscript, this period expands to range from Bradley’s childhood till he gets incarcerated for murder. The extradiegetic plot extends the time span even further to Bradley’s death and even the time of the novel’s publication when his desire to publish an ingenious work of art was fulfilled posthumously. Presuming the editor to be the enlightened Bradley, who finally achieves the truthful form of art in the actual novel of *The Black Prince* than the self-portraying work of the selfish Bradley (see p. 181), the time span is just an extended slice in his life from his birth to this success. The plurality of views that Bradley the editor allows in his work
makes it an everlasting incarnation of unrepresentability of truth, a true art which according to him “is not cosy and it is not mocked. Art tells the only truth that ultimately matters. It is the light by which human things can be mended. And after art there is, let me assure you all, nothing” (364). In this sense, The Black Prince is the story of a would-be author who needs to undergo “unselfing” in order to be resurrected as a real author creating the ingenious art. The time span of the novel is, then, to use the metaphor Bradley used for his eternal love for Julian, an eternal “loop.”

Chronology is another convention that is parodied here. On the hypodiegetic level, Bradley is so deeply committed to chronology that he sometimes postpones the account of his reflections in the middle of an action: “[t]he telephone rang in the empty house. It was office hours, afternoon. I was looking at my well-shaven upper lip in the telephone box mirror, and thinking about Christian. What these thoughts were I will explain later. I could still hear that demonic laughter” (73). He even modifies the function of the foreword and uses it to supply the essential details about his childhood in order to minimize flashbacks. This regulation is, nevertheless, invalidated on many occasions when his sudden prolepses and analepses raise his status to that of an omniscient narrator as he can interfere in chronology by respectively bringing forward or postponing the narration of a story-event. Following Genette, Rimmon-Kenan defines “analepsis” as “a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told,” and “prolepsis” as “a narration of a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned” (48).

Two notable examples of unexpected prolepsis in The Black Prince are: at the outset of the story when Bradley anticipates the future incident of Arnold’s calling him for help saying, “It might be most dramatically effective to begin the tale at the moment when Arnold Baffin rang me up and said, ‘Bradley, could you come round here, please, I think that I have just killed my wife.’ A deeper pattern however suggests Francis Marloe as the first speaker . . . who, some half an hour before Arnold’s momentous telephone call, initiates the action” (BP 1). Or when he gives an outline of the future events then sets to narrate them, as it were, in detail, “I was at Christian’s house where they had taken Priscilla. Later I was with Rachel in a garden. This was no dream. And somebody was
flying a kite” (82); the narrative contains much more of these excursions into the future of the story. It also returns to a past point in the story frequently. To name a few, the analeptic events include: his reference to his marriage: “I shall not attempt here to describe my marriage. Some impression of it will doubtless emerge. For the present story, its general nature rather than its detail is important. It was not a success . . .” (4); his narration of the past events in his own life and his acquaintances’ including, Francis, Arnold, Rachel, Julian, Priscilla and Roger; or more dramatically his attempt to complete his report of the day of Priscilla’s first suicide before continuing his narration of the events of the next day:

It was the day after her exploit with the sleeping pills. The ambulance had taken her to the hospital from which she had been discharged on the same afternoon. She was brought back to my flat and went to bed. She was still in bed, in my bed, the time being about ten-thirty in the morning. The sun was shining. The Post Office Tower glittered with newly minted detail.

I had of course failed to find Arnold and Christian. . . . The familiar streets about my house, never fully to recover from this haunting, were filled with non-apparitions of the pair, fleeing, laughing, mocking, overwhelmingly real and yet invisible. Other pairs simulated them and made them vanish, the air was smoky with them. (57)

On the extradiegetic level, chronology, as it has been noted earlier, is subordinated to the format of the novel. The editor’s statements in his foreword and postscript subvert any sense of chronology Bradley built in his manuscript. Having Bradley’s narrative followed by the other characters’ postscripts and embraced by his own portions, he turns them all into interlaced “frame-stories” which are arranged based on the logic of story-telling than a linear temporal sequence.

The absence of chronology on these two levels of plot has textual manifestation; both Bradley’s manuscript and the editor’s text are fragmented. The former through the blank spaces saved between various portions of narration dividing Bradley’s story in three main parts, the latter through the various headings that compartmentalize the text into nine main sections (I regard contents page of the novel as part of the editor’s text). Such intermittence defies the formation of the traditional, continuous linear plot notwithstanding the fact that plot in linguistic art is always linear since words follow each other on the space of pages. Beside the enigmatic codes (BP-A, BP-A* . . . BP-M*)
appearing here and there at the page-bottoms, these textual fragmentations illuminate the fictionality of plot: the fact that there is an author, a craftsman behind the mechanism of the novel, who deploys certain established artistic conventions to make the commonplace more fascinating and worthy of attention.

Being a fragmented structure that flamboyantly draws on both realism and modernism for its coherency and chronology, *The Black Prince*’s plot is eye-catching on two other grounds: the beginning and the ending. Instead of the modernist technique of open-ending plots and the realistic method of linear succession of events from a set beginning to a definite ending, it chooses multiple beginning and ending. Playing with these two conventions as postmodern fiction does, it ends in a stunning flexible plot. In the hypodiegetic narrative, Bradley starts his narration with the metafictional question of the beginning: uncertain of how to start his tale, he comments: “there are indeed many places where I could start. I might start with Rachel’s tears, or Priscilla’s. . . . In a complex explanation any order may seem arbitrary. Where after all does anything begin? That three of the four starting points I have mentioned were casually independent of each other suggests speculations . . . upon the mystery of human fate” (1). The last part of this quotation is the metafictional evidence that the novel and indeed any postmodern fiction has still a claim to mimesis, that uncertain beginning and ending are the consequence of imitating the actual reality not the outcome of the radical adherence to the modernist ideal of “art for art’s sake.”

Bradley chooses to starts his story with an unexpected visit of Francis, his ex-wife’s brother with whom he claims to be out of touch while elsewhere calls him “the page or house-maid” (the first ambiguity in a narration that proves to be full of it). He has come to inform him of the return of Christian, Bradley’s ex-wife, from America as a rich widow. However, the unusual information he supplies in his foreword suggests that the beginning is actually much earlier when he and his sister spent their childhood in their parents’ shabby paper shop. This is supported by the clear evidence that his foreword has been written before the main text and has interdependent relationship with it: the foreword ends in his arrangements to depart to Patara, “my searching eye was caught by the advertisement: a seaside cottage at a modest rent. Its name was *Patara*. I had made
the necessary arrangements and was just about to depart . . .” (xviii). The subsequent reference to the place in the main text indicates that the foreword is part of the story, “as I have explained, I was about to leave London” (1). Yet another beginning offers itself since it is the editor’s foreword that launches the novel. Encountered by so many possible beginnings, the reader is jolted into its conventionality.

Similarly ending, is multiplied in an outstanding, conscious way. Bradley’s story ends in vagueness and his shock for being accused of the murder of Arnold to whose house he has rushed after Rachel’s call of distress. It is in his postscript that he explains in a nutshell what actually happened to him then and afterwards despite his stress that his story ended where it did: “[T]he first days were a maelstrom of confusion, misunderstandings, incredulity. Not only could I not believe what had happened, I could not conceptualize it. However I am not going to tell anything more of this as a story. The story is over” (329). Written basically as comments on Bradley’s story, the four postscripts open new dimensions in his supposedly finished story. They break the seal of ending on his story by acting as “afterwards,” revealing what happened to other characters in the meanwhile; Christian has married Heartbourne and gone into the cosmetic business owning a Salon. Rachel is living alone as Julian has got married to Oscar Belling, whose relationship to her appears to be broken off for good in Bradley’s story. Julian is now a poet who has her own aesthetic theory. Francis turns to be a successful psychological consultant who is going to write the results of his psychological study of Bradley’s case in a forthcoming book. Furthermore, the editor’s short account of Bradley’s last days in prison when he was diagnosed with ever-growing cancer still provides another ending to the novel.

Parodying the conventional ending in tragedies, the tragic death of Bradley, a common egoistic man, enables the plot to assimilate the biographical air of realistic plots. However, a glimpse of his life from childhood till death (a pathetic fate reported in another level of narrative), The Black Prince mocks the realistic necessity for closure. The burning issue of the identity of the editor along with his words about the eternity of art in the last page of the novel self-reflexively defies any literal sense of closure to the plot: “[a]nd Bradley Pearson's story, which I made him tell, remains too, a kind of thing
more durable than these.” (364). A linguistic piece of art, *The Black Prince* never ends.

On the contrary, its playful dealing with plot elements both thematically and structurally produces a formless form, a huge ironic construct typical of postmodernism that entertains its readers for generations to come.

Another such plot though less striking can be found in *A Word Child*. Here again the conventional beginning and ending are defied. The mechanical and cyclic turn of events foregrounds the indispensability of myth-making in daily life and its benefits for maintaining a sense of identity. Hilary Burde recounts two episodes of his life that have peculiarly the same pattern. In an interlude of twenty years, he undergoes almost similar misfortunes for which he is partly responsible. In the first sequence of events he is a twenty-three-year-old recently-appointed Oxford tutor who falls in love with the twenty-five-year-old Anne married to his friend and reference Gunnar of whom she has a four-year-old son named Tristram. They have got involved in a two-month affair before Gunnar comes to know and asks him in a note to leave his wife alone. In distress and anguish, one evening Anne rushes to Hilary saying “I simply had to run out of the house” (*WC* 123). Taking “this god-given chance to carry her right away while she was in a mood of absolute flight,” Hilary puts her in his car and drives to London. On the way, she insists him to take her back to her home as she is pregnant with Gunnar’s child. This remote but tenacious control of Gunnar over Anne’s life makes him desperately angry. He drives madly fast crosses the central reservation at about a hundred miles an hour and hits a Bentley driven by a stockbroker on the other side (125). Anne dies while he receives severe injuries. Years later another fatal course of events happens to him more accidentally. This time he is not so responsible for the death of Lady Kitty, Gunnar’s second wife, as he is for Anne’s. Nevertheless to alleviate his guilty conscience and preserve his self-identity he resorts to regulate his experiences in the form of *A Word Child*.

Hilary who has lived a miserable life since the death of Anne finds a way to his salvation in the similarity of the catastrophic events. The superimposition of these events in his mind soothes him as he replaces the more contingent event leading to Kitty’s death for the more intentional muddle in which he precipitated Anne’s death. A word child and
a buff at languages, he eventually sets to write to alleviate his suffering by highlighting the contingency of life. Justifying his secret visits of Kitty, he insists to Arthur that his life has been a muddle of chance and accident and he has had no control over his fateful existence:

Into a sort of stupid hope of somehow being rewarded at last for having been so unhappy, for having had one’s career ruined and one’s talents wasted — that’s what it came to, I suppose — no one could really help me except him, no one could really help him except me — and I somehow imagined that we could get together and say hey presto and the bad stuff would all fall away and be changed in the twinkling of an eye like in the Jesus Christ story, only life isn’t like that, it’s too deep, it’s too causal, we’re too old. Of course it seems ridiculous now, it seems stupid, to have suffered so much because of something so accidental and sort of frail which didn’t have to happen and so very nearly didn’t, and of course guilt is irrational, that was partly what made me think it would all vanish. But the irrationality is of the essence, it goes all the way through, it isn’t any sort of fulcrum or escape route, it’s the lot — I was destined to suffer stupidly, my mother suffered stupidly, my father suffered stupidly, my sister suffers stupidly, it’s what we were made for — Gunnar was just a mechanical part of my destiny just as I was a mechanical part of his — (291)

Paradoxically writing gives him a chance to secure his identity and withstand the fatal forces that restrain his authority. Orchestrating his experiences in the plot pattern he contrives for his narration, he takes advantage of the inherent myth-making of storytelling. It gives him the authority and self-satisfaction to accommodate the otherwise irrational muddle of his life in the comprehensible unifying form of a story. In Writing A Word Child, he obtains a kind of control over the desultory rambling of his life he could not have in the actual life.

The plot that effects such contradiction is beyond the realistic and modern scheme of things. Indeed, it cannot be solely a realistic biographical account or a slice-of-life portrayal. Actually, here it depends on both of these two methods of plot developing. On the formal structure, it is Hilary’s diary of five weeks in his life. However, since he follows a strict routine to have his life in command and visits people on a regular weekly basis, the diary is further an indirect report of the other personae’s life. Spotlighting certain characters almost regularly gives a controlled tempo to the process of
characterization. Although the cast is seen through the eyes of Hilary, the accuracy of the portrayal he depicts of them can be checked against their direct social communication through dialogues or letters. The meager snapshots that evolve out of the weekly encounters are mainly touched up by Hilary’s retrospections and daydreaming as well as the others’ sudden noncompliance to Hilary’s fixed schedule.

Both the characterization techniques of telling and showing pitch in to spread the plot rhizomically into the past even the future of the characters. Exposed to almost a month of the day-to-day life of Hilary, the reader gets familiar with the biographical vignettes of almost all the cast. In a hybrid plot pattern adopting its features from the conventional patterns of many genres particularly adventure story, memoir, autobiography, psychological novel, and romance, A Word Child exposes the mechanism of the plot through juxtaposing various patterns and mocking its conventional chronological basis. The division of the story into daily portions contradicts the achronological order in which the story is told. Hilary’s narrative is full of anachronism especially analepses. The fact that he tells the story of his debacle at Oxford much later when he has already narrated much of the events of the October of the year he is forty-one is the best evidence: “I will now tell the story which is at the centre of this story, and which it was necessary to delay until the moment when, in this story, I told it. I will tell it now, as far as it can be told by me, truthfully and as it was . . .” (111). The abundance of analepses deprives the plot of the chronological order that is usually kept in its realistic and modern kinds.

The frequency of analepses and Hilary’s tendency to withhold information are the outstanding features of the novel to challenge the traditional notions of beginning and ending retrospectively. The textual outset does not include the beginning of the story which is revealed in the later portion of the narrative. The tactic of narration within the narration justifies the late beginning. Like Hilary’s retrospection and memories which smoothly bring forth the past, it helps sustain a unified form for the narrative by maintaining the unity of action. However, it exposes the compliance to the classic convention of beginning, set in the Aristotelian definition of plot, as an unnatural narrative requirement that disregards the perpetual causal sequence of events in real life.
Upsetting the element of ending drives *A Word Child* further forward in its defiance of the convention of chronological plot development. What looms large in the plot here is not so much Hilary’s daily experiences than the fatalistic loop of experiences he periodically undergoes. The plot is actually a depiction of the emergence of the second catastrophic, peculiarly alike cycle in Hilary’s unhappy, uncreative life. There is no conclusive ending in the narrative as it is not obvious whether he will eventually marry Tommy; even Gunnar’s reaction to Hilary’s second muddling with his married life remains in a mist of uncertainty. This vague ending has no anterior in both realism and modernism since it neither settles the characters in their life nor is an abrupt stop to narration but stimulates in the reader an expectancy of another cyclic recurrence of analogous events in Hilary’s future.

Considering the foregoing, what differentiates the plot of *A Word Child* from its realistic and modern counterpoints is its dependence on conventions to invalidate them. It is, in short, an ironical plot that takes advantage of the very narrative traditions to expose their inefficacy in yielding a truthful representation of reality. Integrating irony in its whole structure, it succeeds to capture the contingency and muddle of life in its scope. The development of the plot in a diary form enables it to be panoramic and episodic, tragic and comic. Besides a general view of the life of the cast, such plot gives piecemeal information about their daily occupations. Parallel to reflecting the stagnation of the life of such people, their suffering and the tragic fate many of them undergo, it adumbrates the comic aspect of life, the way man is impotent in face of the uncontrollable formidable forces of the universe; Clifford’s observation to Hilary best encapsulates this inherent comic aspect of the tragic life of man, “[a]s flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. Even Wittgenstein did not think that we would ever reach the moon. So am I a happy fly, if I live or if I die, only dying is very much to be preferred” (80).

Encompassing so many incompatible conventions to portray the random, arbitrary pattern of life that gains its momentum from the sum total of various effects, *A Word Child* develops a formless form that denounces the formation of any form as the falsifying subjective regulation of life. In this sense, it flaunts the potential of the novel to be the highest morally accredited genre in narrative art. To further engross the reader to
its mechanism, the plot blocks any interpretative attempt. The anticipation of any possible interpretations and foregrounding them in the text itself (for example indirectly through the characters’ few discussions of the possible meanings of Peter Pan that acts as a remote mise en abyme in the novel keeps readers alert to the sequence of events rather than letting them satisfy their fervent desire to dissect the text for an underlying unifying ideology nourishing the theme. It further enriches the novel metafictionally since it makes *A Word Child* a fiction containing its own criticism.

The formless form is indeed Murdoch’s aesthetic solution for the survival of narrative fiction in the age of incredulities. Her oeuvre consists of sophisticated novels to this end. They are bold experiments with the form traditionally prized in fiction, hence in line with the postmodern zeitgeist of her age that she characterizes by the “‘demythologization’ of history, art, science” (*MGM* 2). *The Philosopher’s Pupil*, is actually one of her subtlest parodies of the myth of form. Conspicuously written in imitation of realist novels with its panoramic plot that progresses to the winding up of its various narrative stands, it succeeds to feign a form for its narrative. Tracing all the consequences of George’s weird relationship with his philosopher tutor on his own life and that of others, the novel gains its sense of wholeness and unity when the textual structure ceases with a report of “What Happened Afterwards” to the active cast. Despite such an apparent completeness, the plot never surrenders completely to the requirement of unity meet in the literature of realism and even modernism.

Positing “unity” as the underlying principle of human perception in her “Conceptions of Unity. Art,” Murdoch considers art along with “history,” “religion,” “science” as the major one-making human activities (*MGM* 2). For her, “[t]he calming whole-making tendencies of human thought” are the major barriers in observing the multifaceted aspects of reality and the perception of truth. Great art is then what allows the “violence of shock and paradox” to be embedded in its inevitable form (7). Through certain techniques, the plot here acquires the essential fluidity to spill over the edges of the form that confines it. It gains a hermeneutic diversity, a kind of aporia that flouts any resolution. *The philosopher’s Pupil* is not an account of a straightforward story since it has some kind of a convoluted plot; the affixation of two sections respectively entitled
“Our Town,” and “What Happened Afterwards” are enough to shake the unified whole that it shams in ostensibly duplicating a realistic air. As Bradbury truly discerns, except the prelude, the plot is rendered in “the style of panoramic nineteenth-century fictional realism” and “in classic social-realist fashion” (xv).

“Our Town” section is the set piece, designed to prevent the novel from being pigeonholed as realistic fiction. Obvious in its title, the section is to set the scene; nonetheless, it might as well be considered the narrator piece. Here the narrator attracts attention to himself by openly talking of his role: “I am the narrator: a discreet and self-effacing narrator. This book is not about me. I knew, though not in most cases at all well, a number of the dramatis personae and I lived (and live) in the town where the events hereafter recounted took place.” A self-conscious narrator, he continues, “[f]or purposes of convenience, for instance so that my ‘characters’ may be able (very occasionally) to refer to me or address me, I shall call myself ‘N’. But as far as this drama is concerned I am a shadow, Nemo, not the masked presence or secret voice of one of the main characters. I am an observer, a student of human nature, a moralist, a man; and will allow myself here and there the discrete luxury of moralizing” (PP 23). This bold declaration in the light of omniscient narration that frames it serves to highlight the transparency of any omniscient-narrator mask. The self-effacement is exactly what the narrator cannot achieve in his story. His footprints are discernable all over his narration. By the end of the narrative, he turns to be not just “an observer”, but a participant in the plot as significant as the other characters. He is, as Bradbury points to, doing “everything”: “[h]e watches through his windows, consults, interferes when necessary (for example, when Stella has, in her own way, to go underground, or when Tom needs his cloths back), and he gives us stories” (xix-xx). The cunning concealment of his name and features under ‘N’ along with his recurrent appearances in the narrative makes the question of his identity one of the major concerns for the reader. As a mysterious character, he therefore contributes to the overall scheme of the novel that flaunts itself in many ways as a detective narrative.

The integration of “Our Town” chapter where it stands (i.e. immediately after the account of George and Stella’s quarrel in car on a late rainy evening that ends in the mysterious fall of the car with Stella in a canal and her being laid up in hospital) not only
is a hard evidence of the failure of the narrator to keep himself self-effacing but dislodges the narrative from many frames that it might have snugly occupied without it. One such frame is the time frame. Rendering this section mostly in the present tense, to set the scene and introduce the McCaffreys that are part of the cast, in the midst of a dominantly past narrative has a connotation that squares with the postmodern concept of time. It insinuates that the past and present are not mutually exclusive: the past is an extension of the present. On the empirical narrative communication level—which in Genette’s view is when the “text” connects the author to the reader with the help of larger socio-culturally communicative patterns—the inclusion of the present in the texture of the past signifies that the past and present tense are just conventions as the story always takes place concurrent with the present moment of reading. Furthermore, on the level of implied narrative communication, in which the implied author is linked to the implied reader through the literary work or what Genette calls “structure,” this juxtaposition of the past and present tense disrupts the chronological order that dominates the framing past narrative of the events. Its intrusion alerts us that the plot is not as temporally linear as it appears at first hand.

The many examples of anachronies, both analepses and prolepses, in the plot of The philosopher’s Pupil contribute to the alinearity that lies at the heart of its apparent linearity. Two examples of analepsis are: (1) when the narration of what George does after noticing Rozanov at the Baths is postponed until he is been ringing actually the bell of his house: “George McCaffrey had, like his mother, meditated carefully upon exactly how soon and how he was to present himself to John Robert Rozanov. He had fled promptly from his teacher’s apparition at the Institute: a meeting then would have been a miserable botched affair” (137). (2) when the detailed narration of Tom’s escape from the sweaty underworld below the Baths, a place only open to “authorized personnel” into which he has sneaked out of curiosity, is postponed to much later when out of there he has taken Hattie away from Rozanov.

They passed Greg and Ju’s house. The curtains were drawn. All was silent, no one was about in Ennistone. Tom’s feet were aching, his knees were hurting. He had kicked off his shoes and removed his socks somewhere in the course of the night’s adventure, which now seemed long ago.
When the lights had gone out Tom had decided in a second to execute his plan nevertheless. His body, trained by his careful looking, remembered what to do. (529)

Two of the proleptic instances include: (1) when Tom’s recital of his complete song precedes the report of what actually led to it: “Tom was pleased with his pop song which had developed so quickly out of Adam’s germinal idea about the two snails. Later in the evening, after the conversion recorded above, he and Emma had got rather drunk together, and Tom had then retired to his bedroom to polish up his ode. Now it was after midnight. . .” (213); (2) when a glimpse of the family interrogation of George is offered before a detailed account of how the story reached there: the McCaffreys go to the Baths after the funeral of William, then witnessing the second jet of hot water in the history of Lud’s Rill, they all return to Belmont for a drink where Tom learns that Hattie is still in London. Disconcerted with an urge to do something, Tom inadvertently brings about the predicted scene:

What Brian McCaffrey later called ‘the family court-material of George’s came about by accident.

The funeral of William Eastcote took place late on Saturday afternoon. . .

When they reached the Institute they found the place in a turmoil . . .

Tom, kneeling, sat back on his heels. He began saying out aloud, ‘Wednesday, Thursday, Friday . . .’ if Hattie was still here…what did it mean? . . .

‘All right, let’s play it differently,’ said Brian. ‘I think we’ve got a right to ask George some questions.’(472- 481)

In addition to the present tense and anachronies, what subtly push the plot to achronology are the recurrent similar incidents. They bring about a cyclic frame that defies the linear sequence of the events. For instance, the opening incident of George’s murderous-or-accidental drowning of Stella in the canal is repeated in another version near the end of the plot when George attempts to drown his past philosopher tutor, John Robert Rozanov, in Bath Institute. Tom’s miraculous escape from the contraption of the steam room with the help of the dramatic convention of deus ex machina reminds us of the similar lucky deliverance of Stella from the sinking car in the initial scene. Even the scene of a young man in girls’ garments recurs twice; once at nearly the beginning of the
story when settling at Greg’s house Tom puts on Judy’s négligé and runs to Emma to show himself (115). The next time is when Emma puts on Judy’s dress and long-haired wig and to share the joke sets off in search of Tom to the disgraceful unplanned party at the Slipper House.

The illusion that a unified form materializes out of the ostensible conformation to the established conventions of the novel is once again dispersed by the double beginning and ending. The very existence of the narrator piece sandwiched in the tale makes the certainty about beginning waver. Although this consciously-woven background to the story’s incidents does not start the novel textually, it suggests itself as a substitution for the in-medias-res opening which sets the plot. Describing the setting and the biographical background of the McCaffreys at the time of story, it just projects metafictionally that all the beginnings are rhetorical and predetermined, part of the mechanism through which any artist or narrator winds up its material into a comprehensible form. In this way, it parodies realism and modernism for their adherence to the convention of beginning.

Similarly, the ending in The Philosopher’s Pupil avoids the existent correspondingly formula in realism and modernism. It is neither exactly an eventual finality as in classic novels nor an undecided, sudden cessation as in modern fiction. In a sense, it is both simultaneously. The denouement of initial action narrated in “i An Accident” settles at the end of “The Events in Our Town” when George finally, undergoing a series of escapades and exorcism, returns back to Stella in a peculiar state of blindness with the help of Father Bernard Jacoby. This ending is not final since the continuation of the narrative in “What Happened Afterwards” suggests another ending in the style of happy-ever-afters of realism. There are certain twists in this final part of the narrative that expose the conventionality of the ending. The rendering of the status of Tom and Hattie’s married life in the future tense gives it the look of a fortuitous prophecy by the narrator, “I share the general view that the marriage will be a happy one. I see Hattie as the leader” (558). Highlighting the effect of Rozanov’s willpower in pairing Tom and Hattie, ‘N’ moreover mocks the way endings are usually mechanical: “it is certainly fascinating to consider how successfully (and indeed how literally), in the end, the philosopher carried out his plan thrusting her into Tom McCaffrey’s arms” (558).
This arbitrariness of ending is what he openly imitates and challenges in the last paragraph of his narrative: “the end of any tale is arbitrarily determined. As I now end this one, somebody may say: but how on earth do you know all these things about all these people? Well, where does one person end and another person begin? It is my role in life to listen to stories” (558).

With such metafictional comments on the nature of endings, and his claim that “Tom and Hattie intend to have a lot of children, so there will be plenty more McCaffreys available in the future for the inhabitants of Ennistone to gossip about” (558), ‘N’ not only degrades his own narration to gossip, but procures a postmodern ending for his narration. Eventually unmasked as a fabricated story despite all its strive to feign being derived out of first-hand knowledge, The Philosopher’s Pupil does not simply end in “idyllic couples, reconciliation, renunciations, come-uppances and destinies” as Bradbury believes it does (xx). It ontologically ties the nature of the ending to the beginning casting any ending as the nascent stages of any possible beginning. As a result of this playful rendering of multiple endings, the plot diverges from the fixity of realist endings as well as the open-endedness of modern fiction and approaches a more truthful presentation of reality.

The assumed unity of the plot is once again dismantled when the plot’s set piece disjoins the structure of narrative levels. Here, the narrator ironically forms the extradietgeic level of his narrative inside his actual narration on the diegetic level. Openly announcing his narrating role, he occupies an exterior position to the narrative that at the same time embraces him at its heart as a character-narrator. The blur of the boundaries between these two narrative levels leads to the coexistence of two discursive frames. The unsuccessful disguise of the homodiegetic narrator in the course of the narration along his deliberate self-exposure mingles both first-person and third-person narration together: an odd juxtaposition that modifies the features of each mode to the effect that the omniscient narrator loses as much reliability as the first person loses authority.

These challenges to the unity of the form of the novel are further augmented via considerable gaps and mysteries that remain unresolved by the closure of the story. The major contribution of loose strands to the plot is a sort of tentativeness, leaving it
incapable of yielding any plausible, coherent interpretation. The question of George’s
double remains a riddle. The moment you feel sure to define him a schizophrenic who
personifies his vices and sins as a separate identical evil personage, Adam’s confiding in
William Eastcote that while “on top of a bus” he once saw “uncle George being in two
different places at the same time” (290) shatters your image. By the end of the narration,
the real causes of the car accident and Rozanov’s death remain obscure. It never becomes
obvious what caused George’s temporal blindness and what those murders Farther
Bernard Jacoby talks of in his letter to ‘N’ really are — “I have witnessed three murders,
two by George and one by that philosopher...” (553). Is it Stella’s long letter that
convinced Diane to abandon George and leave London or her own disappointment in
him? And finally who is the narrator? so much contradictory evidence in the narration
easily allows him to hide behind the mask of either George, Father Jacoby, or Ivor
Sefton, a famous psychiatrist native to Ennistone whose apparition is everywhere in the
story.

To sum up, N’s integration of letters into his narration along with his mainly
incessant delving into the consciousness of the characters leaves no chance to the
enigmatic plot of The Philosopher’s Pupil to be anything but a hybrid form benefiting
from both the traditions of historical plots and associative patterns. Accepting the
aesthetic impossibility of employing purely exclusive ways to convey meaning in
narratives, Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg nonetheless recognize two major patterns:
“representational” and “illustrative.” In his view, the former is “mimetic,” that is, it
aspires to reproduce “a replica of actuality” hence ties to “means” while the latter is
symbolic, that is, it sticks to “an aspect of reality” hence ties to “ends” (84). To connect
their worlds to the external world, realistic novels and modern fiction idiosyncratically
rely on these patterns respectively. Preferring no one to the other, the plot of The
Philosopher’s Pupil, however, symphonizes these two patterns so ingeniously into its
own structure that it flashes as a new species. The fact that such a complicated plot is
constructed on the symbolism of water is beyond doubt. A detailed elaboration on the
illustrative aspect of the novel can be found in the first section of chapter four.
A more structural coalition of “representational” and “illustrative” can be attributed to *The Bell*, Murdoch’s fourth novel, the unique charm in her literary oeuvre. Here the illustrative level through the symbolism of the bell (elaborated on in chapter four) lays the ground for the metafictional overtones of the narrative. In addition to *The Sandcastle*, *The Bell* is Murdoch’s second novel titled after an object rather than people or concepts. It is, in fact, her only work in which an object is pivotal in both theme and plot. The versatile imagery of the bell is what makes *The Bell* so multifaceted. It is, thus, what imparts to it its postmodern undertone. Since the postmodern quality of the novel is subject to scrutiny in the next chapters, the space here is spared to just the plot.

The plot of *The Bell* like all those of her other novels is a parody of the traditional and modern plot. It is, in a sense, both a chronological panorama and an episodic vignette of the consciousness of three characters: Dora, Toby and Michael. Such juxtaposition of the realistic and modern conventions transforms the plot to be neither of these established plot patterns. What enables it to deploy these apparently contradictory techniques and distinguish itself as different is its postmodern trust in irony. Despite the seemingly biographical chronology suggested by the precise delineation of the past of the three characters, the plot is a patchy report of their consciousness as they contact many people and undergo significant experiences during their stay at Imber Court (two weeks for Toby and four weeks for Dora and Michael). The major challenges to the chronological scheme of *The Bell* are, however, the legend of a medieval bell, a story that acts as a mise en abyme in the novel, and the symbolic incidents; by foreshadowing the way the state of affairs actually turns out as the plot unfolds that they expose the repetitive nature of life.

To study old manuscripts in Imber Abbey, Paul Greenfield, an art historian, is living with a lay community gathered at Imber Court adjacent to Imber Abbey when his strayed wife, Dora Greenfield, joins him there at the beginning of the story. Among those manuscripts, he comes across a legend he tells Dora about. According to the legend, one of the nuns there had a lover who breaks his neck when climbing the high wall that has enclosed the Abbey. The abbess of the time wants the guilty nun to confess. But as nobody confesses even when demanded by the bishop, he puts a curse on the Abbey. Consequently, “as the chronicler puts it, the great bell ‘flew like a bird out of the tower
and fell into the lake’.” Overwhelmed by this event, “the nun forthwith ran out of the Abbey gates and drowned herself in the lake” (*TB 39*). Paul tells Dora that the bell’s name was Gabriel and there is a story that its booming portends a death. In a strikingly imitative way, the plot of *The Bell* develops according to this story. Not an exact replica of the legend, *The Bell* is a modern rendering of the same deep structure. Here attributing the structural functions to more characters from various social and psychological backgrounds, the plot offers a more complex story.

A namesake of the drowned bell is due to be installed in the Abbey in a fortnight. Though Dora inspires in Toby the will to pull out the bell he discovered in his swimming excursions down in the deep part of the lake, they fail to carry out Dora’s witch-like plan to replace this old bell with the new one the night before the ceremony of its entering the Abbey. Before being installed securely in the Norman tower, the new bell like the medieval one ends in the lake. On its way to the Abbey on a trolley, the bell drowns in the water as the wooden supports of the middle of the causeway slowly sags, the wooden surface slopes, the trolley inclines, and the bell, poised for a moment at an almost impossible angle, plunges sideways into the lake, taking the trolley with it (281).

Moments after this incident (which later turns to be a sabotage), Catherine Fawley, a postulant living in the community before entering the Abbey to be a nun, rushes past Dora to that part of the lake from which the medieval bell has been pulled out. Frightened by the deranged look of Catherine, Dora follows her and is shocked to see her deliberate attempt to drown herself there. Although her struggle to pull her out of water risks her own life as she does not know swimming, her shrieks and calls attract help to the spot. Both are rescued by the skillful swimming of one of the nuns, Mother Clare. The suicide element of the legend is, however, fulfilled by Catherine’s twin brother, Nick Fawley, who ends his life the next afternoon. In fact, the character of the guilty nun is reconstructed in the characters of these twin siblings. The character of the lover of the legend is multiplied in the characters of Noel, Paul, Michael and Toby who embody different versions of selfish love. Noel, Dora’s lover, is, as Levenson affirms, a hedonist liberalist who has an affair with Dora only because of his existentialist belief in absolute freedom of man (573). Paul, Dora’s husband, has a possessive love for Dora. He loves to
control her and keep her a conventional docile woman devoid of any aspiration of her own. Michael is a selfish homosexual lover who loves the young of his own sex disregarding of their sexual propensity. His selfishness is obvious in the damage the feckless exposure of his love inflicts on Nick and Toby’s innocence. Finally, it is Toby who acts similarly to the legendary lover; he actually climbs up the wall of the Abbey and rambles inside in a willful act to prove his heterosexuality before being led out of the place by a nun whom he runs into when opening a door that turns to be the Abbey’s cemetery.

Integrating such parallelism in the plot of *The Bell* imposes an ineluctable cyclic pattern on the novel that seems otherwise straight chronological. The plot development on this mise-en-abyme structure makes *The Bell* a novel that in an iconoclast, postmodern fashion highlights the interrelationship of fact and fiction. The reiteration of the incidents recorded in the medieval manuscript in the life of a lay community in the twentieth century suggests that fiction is truthful only if it is conscious of the vast effects of fiction on reality, a tradition practiced in postmodern literary projects to express that reality is a replica of fiction. The irony here is that all that appears as reality is actually part of the fictitious world of the novel. In foregrounding the fictitious double of its account of reality, *The Bell* metafictionally celebrates the cause of fiction. It delineates that people’s actions are always the result of the fictions they create for themselves. They are not the consequence of their deep apprehension of reality but derive out of the fantastic unified image people hold to comprehend the fragmentary reality.

Another eye-catching feature of the plot that resists its linearity is the reiterative cycle in the individual life of some characters. At the start of the novel, Dora is returning to Paul after abandoning him for six months to live a bohemian life with his journalist friend, Noel Spens. She did not think that she would ever return to him but “Dora suffered from guilt, and with guilt came fear. She decided at last that the persecution of his presence was to be preferred to the persecution of his absence” (1). She spends totally around two weeks with him at Imber Court, but again she cannot tolerate the persecution of his presence feeling her self being crushed under his willpower. On the second Friday of her stay at Imber Court, She leaves for London but returns the same night after being
disillusioned about her own sense of identity while at the national gallery and gazing at “Gainsborough’s picture of his two daughters” (196). The picture reminds her of the existence of something real and perfect; she experiences the moral encounter with the “sublime” what in Kant’s view evokes the paradoxical feeling of awe and pleasure in the observer: “here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour, and by making it part of her fantasy make it worthless” (196). Out of the gallery, she is sure of her return. Once at Imber, the turn of events takes her to the legendary bell Paul has told her about as Toby driven by his own conflicts and motives discloses its place to her. Determined to make her own “work of art” to surprise others and flatter herself, she coaxes Toby to contrive a detailed plan to drag it out of the lake and substitute it for the new bell. The failure to fulfill the plan and Paul’s late constant harassment of her are enough to keep her back from joining him the day after his departure as he has planned for her. Instead, she plans to join her friend Sally in Bath to achieve the happiness she felt so deprived of in her life with Paul. What happens next remains uncertain. These reunion cycles, however, leave a good chance for a future one not covered in the story.

Cycles exist in the life of other characters. One is Michael Meade, the elected leader of the community, a self-restrained homosexual who finally tends to pursue his religious vocation after the Abbess has inspired him to turn his family mansion into “the home of a permanent lay community attached to the Abbey, a ‘buffer state’, as she put it, between the Abbey and the world, a reflection, a benevolent and useful parasite, an intermediary form of life” (80). He ruined his career as a teacher fifteen years ago when he became involved into a homosexual attraction to Nick Fawley, his fourteen-year-old student. Influenced by the sermons of an evangelic priest at the school, Nick betrayed him to the head of the school, hence not only forced him to resign but also destroyed his hope of ordination as the headmaster informed the bishop in a carefully worded letter. Now years later in Imber Court Nick is resorted to him by chance to be a barrier to his spiritual growth. Once again Nick causes the betrayal of his homosexual tendency, this time to his moral counterpoint, James Tayper Pace, and shatters Michael’s delusion of “a new life and of the deep and destined pattern emerging at last” (109). Nick is witness to the late night scene of Michael’s kissing Toby, as he is leaning his head toward Michael through the window of the car in which they have carried a newly purchased cultivator.
form Swindon; he moreover has seen the rolling together of Toby and Dora after their success in securing the old bell in the derelict barn. Therefore, he forces Toby, at the night he is to help Dora to replace the new bell with the medieval one, to go and confess to James about his relationship with Michael and his adulterous relationship with Dora. This confession along with the consequent suicide of Nick not only ruins Michael’s new life but leads to the dissolution of the community as a whole. Four weeks later, when arranging for the Court to be leased indefinitely to the Abbey, Michael heads toward London, the possibility of the cyclic resurgence of his homosexual desire that ends his career remains of high likelihood though the narrative ends silent about his future.

The other characters whose lives have repetitive pattern are Paul and Nick. Of course, it is in their relationships with Dora and Michael respectively that their lives become cyclic, yet they are as responsible for the reiteration as them. Paul’s sadistic love for Dora makes him enjoy her intermittent refuge to him. If he had another personality, Dora would not be repelled and attracted to him as she does frequently. Definitely learning from Catherine that Michael Meade is the leader at the Court, Nick joins the community. If he were a different person, he would not intrigue another destructive cycle in Michael’s life. However, being the same vain person, he once again repeats a cycle of events that he has started fifteen years ago. The future possibility of such cycles for Nick is ruled out as he terminates his life a day after ruining Michael’s career for the second time.

The simulation of the plot of the hypodiegetic level (the romantic legend about the medieval bell of the Abbey Paul relates to Dora) for the extradiegetic level affects the beginning and ending of The Bell. The cyclic pattern that it imposes on the narrative contradicts the Aristotelian sense of the beginning and ending which traditional novelists took as poles apart. Instead, it redefines any beginning as an ending in its own right and vice versa and creates an expectancy of another cycle. Moreover, since the extradiegetic plot is developed through the three centers of consciousness of Dora, Toby and Michael, the traditional convention of one beginning and ending (whether fixed or open) is replaced by multiple ones. The Bell is not the story of one single persona, but a narrative formed out of the entanglement of three basic strands of the lives of Dora, Toby and
Michael each with their own uncertain beginnings and endings. The analepses in each strand of narrative, in addition to disrupting the strict chronological order of events, help destabilize the textual beginning as the beginning of the plot. Moreover, the silence about the future of the characters challenges the sense of ending. The unresolved destinies, primarily justifiable on the grounds of Murdoch’s belief in the necessity of acknowledging the contingency of life in good art, encourage the reader to consider a future for those characters. This demand to, as Levenson puts it, “imagine a life beyond the given” (575), involves the reader in the moral activity Murdoch considers as the distinguishing feature of any truthful art.

Strewn with reiterative cycles, analepses and multiple beginnings and endings, the plot of The Bell gains its postmodern attribute while the shadow of the traditional plots is still there competing for dominance. Arranged in twenty-six chapters in the style of realistic novels, the overall plot, with its “anticlimactic” closure in Wagner-Lawlor’s words (11) and its almost comprehensive record of Dora, Toby and Michael’s lives and the flow of their consciousness at the time of the story, manages to occupy a middle ground between the modern and realistic styles of plot development. It is both episodic and biographical, both a recount of some slices of life of the three focalizers and a coherent account of a series of events that owe their happening to both the past of the characters, and their present states of consciousness. All these dualities and challenging uncertainties in the structure of the plot set it apart from the traditional plot patterns that have given rise to it and qualify it as a postmodern plot. As soon as the plot ends, the story transfers into the mode that seemingly conventional technique of story-telling hides from the reader’s consciousness. It retains only a vague semblance to reality for it hurries to replace the hypodiegetic legend of the bell. Building its diegetic on the hypodiegetic backbone rather than the solid factual world, The Bell enters the beautiful, ethereal world of imagination the moment it ends.

Almost to the contrary, The Unicorn belongs to the uncanny yet beautiful world of imagination in its very conception and through the whole process of its formation. The seventh novel of Murdoch, it is really “the unicorn” of her literary career. Its weird story totally sustains the imagination with its engaging plot, setting, characterization and
narration. Depicting a self-contained world driven by its own logic, *The Unicorn* resists the encroachment of the factual rules for its interpretation. Via all its extraordinary complexities, it figuratively displays the distinction between fiction and fact: how the former is actually an autonomous world most of the time logically incomprehensible to the dwellers of the factual world. Chaos, in the form of death and the disintegration of the two households, ensues in this world as Marian and Effingham, the two representatives from the factual world, change the course of events by awaking Hannah to her deplorable condition and forcing the seeds of freedom in her head.

The plot in *The Unicorn* plays a uniquely significant role; it influences the characterization and setting even narration technique so much so that the novel acquires a multi-level text and becomes a palimpsest. The plot here is a fusion of many established styles, a gestalt that is, overall, the parody of the individual styles that have given rise to it. Besides the familiar styles of realism and modernism, *The Unicorn* draws heavily on the romance plot pattern popular in fairy-tales. This overlapping of plot patterns enables the novel to build up representational, symbolic, allegorical, ethical and aesthetical levels. Owing to such multifarious structure, the novel is, moreover, thematically rich and always conducive to new interpretations.

In the vein of realist plots, it inclusively portrays the characters’ past and present and is almost suggestive of their future. Providing the past of nearly all the characters whether analeptically (as the consequence of Marian and Effingham’s curiosity) or retrospectively (through the consciousness of the focalizers), in a narration that tries to keep its resemblance to the omniscient narration of realistic novels, *The Unicorn* fabricates the illusion of securing a realistic plot. Mrs Hannah Crean-Smith is confined in her own property, in a deserted place on the west of Ireland, for seven years by her husband Peter Crean-Smith because of her adultery and her pushing him over the steep black cliffs out of which he miraculously survived. The small group of people around her appointed by Peter to be her guardians or incarcerators respect her surrender to the confinement until Marian is employed as her governess. Nearly the same age as Hannah, Marian, who succeeds to extract enough information to build her own version of story of Hannah’s confinement, cannot digest her submission as normal and self-willed.
Interpreting what others call Hannah’s “peace of mind” as her expedient strategy to tolerate her misery, she determines to awaken her to the possible freedom and happiness. Her plan to bring back Hannah to reality sets loose a concatenation of events that ends in the disintegration of the secluded community brought about by the close-following deaths of the Crean-Smiths and Gerald Scottow.

The stability of such nearly biographical scheme is shaken by the assimilations the plot makes of its modern variety. Impressed by modern plots, the plot diverges from a seemingly seamless linear chronology to an anachronic staccato that relies heavily on analepses and a fragmented structure allotted almost symmetrically to the two focalizers, Marian and Effingham. The temporal lapses in between the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next amplified by the alternative shift of narrative perspective are enough to disrupt the chronology that issues from the realistic drive of the plot. The interesting point about the fragmentary appearance of the plot into thirty-five chapters subsumed under six parts is the underlying irony. The adaptation of such a formula is to espouse the cause of realism and modernism without recommending one over the other. It promulgates that reality includes both the social interactions and psychological complexity. Sticking to the consciousness of Marian and Effingham, it exposes both the consciousness mechanism and how it triggers the plot. *The Unicorn* is the epitome of the novels that foreground characters over plot as its inscribers. The sequence of relationships here leads to the specific sequence of events. The plot consists of a series of relationships driven out of the personae’s desire for dominance over others; in this sense, it is a credit to the thematic concern of the novel that people are propelled by their selfish drives.

Although a particular plot dealing with the experiences of a group of people at a short period, *The Unicorn* draws noticeably on the traditional plot patterns of fairy tales and detective stories. This modeling transfigures the plot from a particular mode into the universal one characteristic of modern plots. Besides securing the novel some symbolic patterns, it cunningly increases its aesthetic appeal. In “The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited,” published three years before *The Unicorn*, Murdoch proclaims that “to combine form with a respect for reality with all its odd contingent ways is the highest art
of prose” (271). Following the effortless success in *The Bell*, a set of more innovative experiments bring about *The Unicorn*. Here the narrative is more self-conscious of its goal. Both the form and the contingencies are more colorful. In contrast to Conradi’s presumption that in Murdoch’s novels fairy tales only “contribute to . . . atmosphere” and “are sometimes played with and made to help yield decoration for the plot” (13), they bestow *The Unicorn* the sought-for form essential to make the otherwise arbitrary incomprehensible flow of life beautiful and morally valuable.

The plots of fairy tales and the detective stories have the strictest forms; in the former the hero and heroine are united with each other or their families after undergoing a rite of passage, that is, after some ordeals and defeating the villain(s). In the latter, a mystery is solved after many clues are decoded in a meaningful account. Parodying these two literary genres, *The Unicorn* gives currency to both form and contingency and demonstrates that contingency can be accounted for without demolishing the form altogether. This dependence on the established plot patterns while resisting their finality makes its plot postmodern. What equips the plot for such postmodern aspiration are the freedom-conscious characters who know that they are part of a fairy-tale story. In fact, inhabited by some characters anxious to break their predefined typical profiles, the plot transforms from a stable, predictable scheme to a fertile ground for the action of such characters when the scheme of detective novels overlaps the basic fairy-tale plot.

The introduction of Marian to the plot though still in accordance with the fairy-tale plot—Denis deems Marian is to chaperone Hannah against Effingham (*TU* 155)—sets the mechanism of detective plot in motion. A curious girl, she starts to make sense of the mystery of Gaze Castle, and her unexpected probe into the matter compels other personae to shun complying with the fairy-tale character stereotypes. Perplexed by the odd inhabitants of the castle, she coaxes Jamesie to shed light on the mysterious situation. Jamesie’s clues trigger her curiosity so much that she cannot help extracting the whole story directly from Denis and Effingham. Forming an outline of the story, she seeks the help of Effingham, Hannah’s courtly lover, to restore Hannah back to free normal life. Their failure in kidnapping her in the temporal absence of Gerald and Jamesie alerts all the personae to their own freedom. None of them acts any more their specified roles in
the fairy-tale plot. Gerald is no more a jailor but a seducer, Violet not the deceiving witch but one after Hannah’s wealth, Jamesie not Gerald’s gay page but a Peter Pan enjoying the turn of events, Effingham not Hannah’s courtly lover but Alice’s desperate lover, Mariam not Hannah’s guardian angel but a young woman after her own love affairs, and Hannah not a docile heroine but a free agent fighting for her own freedom.

In this way, the plot does not resolve in a traditional fairy-tale denouement; instead of a usual happy ending, the reader faces a paradoxical open closing triggered by an extremely macabre denouement. Hannah kills Gerald, and then in anticipation of Peter’s arrival, she kills herself over the cliffs when Marian leaves the door of her room unlocked on the rainy dawn before Peter’s arrival. In the meanwhile, Denis that has gone to fetch Peter from the airport drowns him on the way home by driving the car into flood tide. Such a peripeteia, accentuated by Max’s inheritance of Hannah’s properties and Philip’s accidental death while cleaning his rifle days later, proves the plot a new species highlighting the conventionality of the past patterns and how they can still be employed for articulating the postmodern concern over the plurality of perspectives and the chaotic nature of life.

In line with postmodern novels, The Unicorn discards the traditional concepts of beginning and ending. Since it does not contain just a single line of story but various strands, it has multiple beginning and ending: each strand, a slice of life of one of the character, with a pair of its own. Owing to the fact that Marian is the major focalizer, the novel starts textually with her strand of narrative. However, as the plot unfolds the beginning appears to belong to at least nine years ago when Hannah and Peter got married, a time when all the stage characters entered the plot. The beginning multiplies since each introduction of a new character is not stimulated by a cause. It is not obvious why Gerald, the Evercreechs, Denis, Effingham and Marian were brought in Hannah’s household. As soon as they are added, they affect their own exit from the plot. Gerald becomes Hannah’s seducer and is killed by her. Violet and Jamesie leave the house when learning that Max is the inheritor of Hannah’s wealth. Denis replaces his innocence with a guilty conscience by killing Peter, and Marian loses her selfish grab on life and accepts the absurdities of life.
The novel closes, attracting attention to its cyclic pattern on two levels. Marian’s reflection on Denis’s revelation of his regret of leaving Hannah alone to vent his hatred in killing Peter projects, on a larger scale, the commencement of another cycle of the story:

All her life she would, with differences, be re-enacting that story. And with Denis’s words she had an eerie sense of it all beginning again, the whole tangled business: the violence, the prison house, the guilt. It all still existed. Yet Denis was taking it away with him. He had wound it all inside himself and was taking it away. Perhaps he was bringing it, for her, for the others, to an end. (550)

It, moreover, points to the cyclic mini-structures inherent in the plot. When *The Unicorn* reaches its major denouement, we are struck by the repetitive structure of the plot. The information that Marian gathered about the past events happened before her arrival foreshadow the events that are going to happen while she stays there. Years ago there was a huge flood in the region in which, as Jamesie relates to Marian, houses were perished and a car was taken into the sea and sank. As she learns from Denis, five years back Jamesie tried to kidnap Hannah but failed as he was caught by Gerald packing a bag for her. There has been much false news of Peter’s return like the two while Mary is there. Hannah’s eventual fall from the cliff is a duplication of Peter’s fall with the difference that she does not survive. Marian’s anticipation of a similar future, consequently, turns *The Unicorn*, on the particular level of its fictional world reflexive of its cyclic mechanism; and on the symbolic level, reminiscent of the universal fate of man: despite the apparent differences, people’s lives are basically following the same repetitive pattern.

These cyclic schemes enhance the ironic potential of the novel and make it more capable of presenting the complexity of truth. Symbolizing in Denis—who, as Marian puts it, is “becoming Hannah, now” (558), the one, as he himself stresses, to whom the guilt passes—*The Unicorn* displays that people are both responsible and victim of the repetitive patterns of their lives since they fail to enhance the quality of their consciousness. Like Denis, instead of deciding morally at the critical moments, we let our selfish desires control our actions. That is why we are bound in cycles of moral experiences and cannot reach the ideal moral status that requires the acknowledgement of
others though selflessness. This Murdochian ideal, very similar to Buddhist concept of nirvana, is very difficult to attain, as it requires conscious self-effacement.

The irony that such structures built in the plot is, in sum, more structural. On the one hand, it enhances the representationality of the plot, and on the other hand, adds metafictional overtone to it. As explained above, the cyclic schemes enable Murdoch to create a semblance of real people what she refers to as “free characters.” Moreover, they attract attention to how the plot and characterization are interlocked and mutually dependent. Metafictionally, they connote that characters are both inscribers of the plot and controlled by it. The characters’ sudden mutiny against their prescribed fairy-tale roles when they hear of Peter’s return, although a telling sign of their influence over the plot, is counterpointed by the cyclic patterns. The repetitive incidents ensure that another pattern is still manipulating the characters hence indicating that plot is the controlling form and an indispensable element in any narrative fiction.

Ironically creating free characters in the restricting plot form of The Unicorn, Murdoch satisfactorily meets both the moral and aesthetical requirements of the truthful art she emphasizes on in her poetics. The Unicorn appears as another of her fiction evidently incongruous with the poetics of realism and modernism. An epitome of Murdoch’s ethical aesthetics, it, however, takes advantages of both realist and modern plot techniques to extend its own ironical overtone to the formal level. In fact, it proves that the best way to articulate the postmodern concern about the paradoxical function of narrativity in the revelation of truth is an ironical fiction that besides telling a story attracts attention to its inevitable form. Since Murdoch stresses on the moral significance of any art form, the plot is rendered both in panoramic and episodic formats. The result is a new plot format that utilizes, on the one hand, the realistic panorama to meet the aesthetic goal of imposing a form over the disparate segments of experience, and on the other hand, the episodic format that lends much to its moral end by paving the way for the plot development through two focalizations. This dependence on traditional plots sets The Unicorn against the radical experimental trend derived out of the modernist tradition. Thorough its own employment of the plot conventions, the novel certifies them still feasible for the contemporary issues. In what Jack Stewart names its “stylized use of
Gothic narrative and settings” (77), the plot vocalizes Murdoch’s view that “myth-making,” the term she adopts for the process of fitting our life incidents into a unifying pattern, is the indispensable feature of man’s psyche and literary production. The myth-making that she has been involved with in *The Unicorn*, however, is a critical demythologization of realism and modernism.

2.2 Setting

It is clearly understood in literary circles that the disintegration of a narrative to its various elements such as plot, setting, characterization, narration, etc. is for a focused analysis and in effect they are inextricable. The duality of ending, both a realistic closure and a modern open-endedness, is reverberated in Murdoch’s settings. Setting in almost all her novels directly contributes to the ironic nature of her narrative. It is neither exclusively a social-historical landscape nor a sole landscape of the characters’ minds. In the detailed realistic description of various spaces, Murdoch incorporates the characters’ perceptions of them; even in her third-person narratives, the setting is described through the focalizer’s point of view. Such treatment of setting goes very well with the common thematic concern of her fiction: man is a prisoner to the cave of fantasy so the perception of external world is always contaminated with prejudgments and personal evaluations. As juxtapositions of external and internal backgrounds, her settings are indeed fantastic, both real and unreal.

In *Under the Net*, the setting is London and Paris. All the places in these cities that Jake, the narrator-character, visits in his picaresque quest for a secure future is easily traceable on the actual maps of London and Paris. That is, the external world of the fiction has an actual correspondence to the real world. In contrast to their direct correspondence to the factual world, these two cities are contraposed as antithetic. Except for the rivers (the Thames and the Seine) running through them, they are incomparable in any other respect in Jake’s eyes. As he confesses at the beginning of the novel, he does not like the return to London after sojourning for a while in Paris, “I hate the journey back to England anyway: and until I have been able to bury my head so deep in dear London that I can forget that I have ever been away I am inconsolable” (*UTN 7*). Later on, in the course of his narration, it becomes obvious that London, for Jake, contrary to
all facts, is a dull and dumb place, where people forgetting vivacity and liveliness have turned into automatons bereft of any emotions and life. He sees Londoners, as his impressions of his friends show, to be avaricious unsympathetic people incapable of love and sincere emotions. Paris, on the contrary, is the site of energy, abundance, love and happiness. Jake earns his living by going to Paris frequently to translate one of the works of a French novelist by the name of Jean Pierre Breteuil. The coincidence of the festival of 14th July with the time he goes to Paris in search of Anna further associates Paris with the positive source of life. Huge amount of people, almost the whole city, are celebrating that day near the Seine with firework. Paris is alive and alight in contrast to London that harbors torpidity and silence.

Rendered in detailed realism, the portrait of setting is not solely objective, yet. Spear underlines its symbolic dimension when pointing to an underlying “sense of confinement” that she identifies dominating all the four novels Murdoch wrote in the 1950s. Identifying “a slightly claustrophobic atmosphere in which their characters are isolated as on a stage,” she emphasizes that such shared “restrictive setting” is to facilitate the search for truth (20-21). In addition to this symbolic connotation that Murdoch attaches to it, it is tainted with the phantoms of the narrator’s consciousness. Jake is so engaged in weaving fantasies that the setting acquires a surrealistic veneer especially on the moments he is fantasizing the most both as a character and as a narrator; the image of Mrs. Tinckham’s shop, Anna’s mime theatre, the Thames in which he, Finn and Lefty swim at a still, hot night, the deserted look of Hugo’s flat above Hoborn Viaduct, the grove in front of Place de la Concorde towards which he heads following a woman he mistakes for Anna, all appear to some extent phantasmagoric. They seem to change appearance into two different images: Mrs. Tinckham’s newspaper shop appears as Circe’s Cave in Odyssey: “an enamel basin at her feet is filled, usually to overflowing, with cigarette ends; and beside her on the counter is a little wireless which is always on, very softly and inaudibly, so that a sort of murmurous music accompanies Mrs Tinckham as she sits, wreathed in cigarette smoke, among the cats” (UTN18). The mime theatre is a strange, dark place where no sound can abide and the velvet of silence wraps the whole building insulated from the outside world: “I did not look for a bell, but tried the handle at once. The door opened quietly and stepped on tiptoe into the hall. An oppressive
silence surged out of the place like a cloud. I closed the door and shut out all the little noises of the river front. Now there was nothing but the silence” (39). The Thames at night is both a common river and a weird unknown force with apparent unnatural properties: “The sky opened out above me like an unfurled banner, cascading with stars and blanched by the moon. The black hulls of barges darkened the water behind me and murky towers and pinnacles rose indistinctly on the other bank. I swam well out into the river. It seemed enormously wide. . . . The whole expanse of water was running with light. It was like swimming in quicksilver” (118-119). Hugo’s flat is a man-bird dwelling: “as I entered Hugo’s sitting-room there was a sudden wild flurry. The room was whirring and disintegrating into a number of black pieces. I grasped the door in a fright. Then I saw. The place was full of birds. . . . Hugo’s flat seemed already more like an aviary than the abode of a human being” (269-270). The grove in Paris, Jake goes into in track of Anna, is, moreover, an enclosed place that first entices one into its depth but then suddenly fills him with panic as it transforms into an alien, fearful space: “As I vaulted over she was thirty paces ahead of me, walking between flower beds. . . . I saw her outlined against the forest like a lonely girl in a story. Then she stopped walking. I stopped too. I wanted to prolong the enchantment of these moments” (217). He then continues:

I ran along calling Anna’s name. But now suddenly the wood seemed to be full of statues and lovers. Every tree had blossomed with a murmuring pair and every vista mocked me with a stone figure. Slim forms were flitting along the avenues and pallid oblique faces caught the small light which penetrated through the forest. (219)

In The Black Prince, setting is again mainly London but expands to include Ealing (the Baffin’s), Bristol (the Priscilla’s), Croydon (Bradley’s parents’ shop) and finally an unidentified beachside village in which Patara is located. In comparison to Under the Net, setting here is rendered in fewer details and from less focused zoom. Although we always come across a still realistic adumbration of the setting throughout Bradley’s narration, the setting is not so precise. In fact, it is precise only the moments one expects the least precision. Such uncommon treatment of setting surely is not arbitrary. An ironical story illuminating the blinding nature of love while celebrating its redemptive power as we will see in the following chapters, The Black Prince requires
such paradoxical treatment of setting to project the duality of love. More effective than any direct statements, the setting reflects the change of vision Bradley undergoes when experiencing a selfless love for others. As he drives Julian to their haven, Patara, he sees the “very blue twilight between fat flowery chestnut trees” and “the full moon like a dish of Jersey cream above a barley field which was still catching the light of the sun” (BP 260). Such precise vision of nature despite his nagging anxiety about the future is justifiable only in light of the illuminating effect of his love.

Generally speaking, the picture he portrays of his surroundings despite its adherence to Murdochian trend of huge details is almost always too ethereal to be realistic. Two reasons seem to be involved: firstly, to intensify the symbolic significance of the setting and make the story myth-like; Murdoch just identifies those features of the neighborhoods which attribute certain connotation to the story. Bradley describes his dwelling as:

… a ground-floor flat in a small shabby pretty court of terrace houses in North Soho, not far from the Post Office Tower, an area of perpetual seedy brouhaha. . . . My “rooms” were all at the back. My bedroom looked onto dustbins and a fire escape. My sitting-room onto a plain brick wall caked with muck. . . . A sunless and cozy womb my flat was, with a highly wrought interior and no outside. Only from the front door of the house, which was not my front door, could one squint up at sky over tall buildings and see above the serene austere erection of the Post Office Tower. (2)

The strong resonance of the Post Office Tower to the theme becomes striking when the frequent reference to it is dovetailed with dominant image of womb in the rest of the narrative. As he divulges to Francis, Bradley frequently dreams of his parents’ paper shop in his childhood; he even dreams of it as he fell asleep on a quay in Bristol leaning his head on a ship’s hull. The hollowness of the ship evokes the image of the shop, a woman, and dead animals in cages to his mind. Both in the story and later in his own postscript, Francis interprets these as the symbols of womb and symptoms of Bradley’s Oedipus complex. Emphasizing on Bradley’s perverted sexuality, Francis even interprets Bradley’s obsession with the Post Office Tower as his homosexuality believing that he was in love with Arnold, “When I say that Bradley Pearson was in love with Arnold Baffin I would not be understood to be making any crude statement. We are
dealing with the psychology of a complicated and refined person” (346). Francis even claims that Bradley was in love with him, “I would not, and indeed need not, use his ill-concealed love for me as evidence of his perverted tendencies” (348).

Since the love that Bradley feels for Rachel and later for Julian is most of the time a self-conceited love that doubles his ego, he sees the natural surroundings in presence of them as paradise. His description of Baffin’s garden on the day he kisses Rachel twice reminds one of the Garden of Eden.

The Baffins’ garden was not big, but in the flush of early summer it seemed endless. A dotting of fruit trees and ferny bushes amid longish red-tufted grass obscured the nearby houses, obscured even the creosoted fence. Only a hint of pink rambler roses between the trunks suggested an enclosure. The garden was a curved space, a warm green shell smelling of earth and leaves. (87)

This description goes well with the vignette he depicts of the natural surroundings of Patara, the secluded, beachside cottage he takes Julian to after their elopement:

Julian . . . set off across the sort of huge courtyard of flat seaworn stones which divided us from the house. Here mauve sea cabbage and blue vetch and cushiony pink thrift was growing in profusion and wild yellow tree lupins sprawled their starry leaves and pallid cones of blossom about upon the stripey concentric stones of the natural pavement. . . . The exact whereabouts of the paradise I shall for many reasons conceal, but amateurs of the British coastline may hazard their guess. (emphasis mine 267-68)

The setting develops an ethereal air, secondly, to deprive the reader of the self-satisfying joy of cracking its descriptive codes. Murdoch does not want her readers to be interpreters. She wants them to be just an observer of the complexity of human psyche and the novel’s innate capacity for truth. That is why she lets the significance of the story multiple in the postscripts in which the characters’ various interpretations block any further possibility of reading. Familiar but unidentifiable places make the setting dual; pointing to the simultaneous presence of the realistic and modernist trends, they turn the setting to an ironic postmodern device apt for a self-reflexive work which tends to put the world of fiction on par with that of reality.
As a postmodern device, setting here contributes to the metafictional quality of the narrative as well. By producing \textit{déjà vu} effect, it makes readers more conscious of the act of reading and attracts their attention to the artistic, rhetorical aspect of the novel. On the occasion Rachel takes Bradley to her house for lunch, Bradley feels so close to her that he kisses her. As he leaves the house the setting, viz. the garden and the house, is blurry and dark framing a person looking out of a window of the house: “[a] figure was sitting in an upstairs window, sitting up half reclined upon a window seat, or even it seemed upon the window sill itself. Without seeing the face except as a blur I recognized Julian, and felt an immediate pang of guilt at having kissed the mother when the child was actually in the house” (92). Later a rather matching scene is portrayed when Bradley distressed by the urgency to see Julian rushes to Ealing and prowling in front of the Baffin’s feels: “[a]s I stood there in that thick oppressive urban dusk breathing the breath of fear, smelling the dunes of dust, I became aware of being looked at by a figure standing in the long unlighted landing window of the house I was studying. I could see the figure framed in the window and the pallor of the face regarding me. It was Rachel” (242). Their similarity is, indeed, the novel’s way to upset the established convention of love triangle in classical fiction by entangling one lover with two spiteful beloveds.

On the surface, the setting of \textit{A Word Child} is a common background to the story with symbolic overtone for some places like Leningrad and Kensington gardens with the statue of Peter Pan. The great number of place and district names (i.e. Bayswater, Hampstead, Hyde Park, North End Road, Blythe Road, Hammersmith Road, Trafalgar Square, King’s Lynn, Fulham and Chelsea, Parson’s Green, Lexham Gardens, St James’s Park, Great George Street, Cheyne Walk, through Headington, Gloucester Road, Westminster Bridge, the King’s Arms Blackfriars Bridge) corresponds the setting to actual London city; Hilary’s consciousness of the social code of these places in stratifying the society completes the Marxist insinuation of the story resonant in the Marxist reading of \textit{Peter Pan}, many references to the economic problems and the “proles,” Hilary’s obsession with his low social class and his desire for an upper-social-class living. Misjudging Christopher’s drugging Laura and Hilary, Freddie considers Hilary as Laura’s lover and decrees an end to his Thursday’s customary visits to them. Hilary’s class-consciousness is obvious in his and Freddie’s altercation:
‘You’re a rotter, a complete cad. I can’t think why I didn’t realize it before. I might have expected this — ’
‘From someone who came out of the gutter.’
‘That has nothing to do with it.’
‘Of course proles who haven’t been to public schools don’t know how to behave themselves.’
‘I suppose I can excuse you for falling in love with my wife — ’ (317)

On a more careful inspection, it appears to be beyond an indifferent, realistic spatial-and-chronological context or a symbolic illumination of the characters and theme. Hilary tells the story of his past in the sequence we read to bring it under his own control by subjecting it to a pattern. In fact, since, as it will be discussed in the elaboration of the narration technique of the novel, he narrates to exorcise the cursed memories and extricate himself from the loop of his afflicting miseries, he has no other choice but to develop a precise, clear setting through an exact identification of the time and place of the events. Consequently with the progress of the plot, there is a continual shift of time and place. This extraordinary awareness of the time-space dimension of the events for a fantasy-ridden character like Hilary jolts the reader into an awareness of the inextricable role of the narrator in the organization of narration.

“A word child” is a key term in the three identifiable major patterns in Murdoch’s *A Word Child*. It is an epithet Hilary chooses for himself: “I learnt from Mr Osmand how to write the best language in the world accurately and clearly and, ultimately, with a hard careful elegance. I discovered words and words were my salvation. I was not, except in some very broken-down sense of that ambiguous term, a love child. I was a word child” (21). It conceptualizes the common, unsatisfied desire of all the women in the novel for a child. Anne is pregnant when she dies in the car accident caused by Hilary’s mad reckless driving. Laura wants him to trust her and divulge his mystery to her assuring him of Freddie’s and her parental love for him: “Hilary, let me help you. I love you, my dear, let me help. Don’t just throw yourself away. I know you need a home, and you’ll need it all the more if Crystal marries. Lean on me, use me. You know you have a home with us at Queen’s Gate Terrace. It could be much more to you if only you’d open yourself a little. We are childless. Freddie’s very fond of you —” (344). Tommy and Crystal are desperate to marry and have children. Gunnar and Lady Kitty are childless, and they
cannot have one as after a surgery that deprives Gunnar of his ability to have one. Since Gunnar is ignorant of his inability, and Hilary is in love with her, Lady Kitty suggests Hilary to enter an affair with her just to procure Gunnar a child he cannot have: “We both desperately want children. And Gunnar doesn’t want to adopt, he wants my child. And I am over thirty. . . . Hilary, I want you to give me a child” (345).

These personal and interpersonal demands are artistically paralleled with a spiritual plane which revolves around the Nativity and Christ Child. To interlace such triple levels in the plot, the setting has to be what it is. It has to be near the Christmas time and the personae should reside where they live for the plot to build up its irresistible momentum toward its predetermined closing. In this regard the setting is both in the service of the plot and contributes to the metafictional dimension of the novel. It not only sheds light on the social status of the characters but also self-reflexively flaunts through its very detailed and exact descriptions of time and place the way that setting can be a rhetorical device for bringing home the polemical intentions of the extradiegetic narrator and by extension the real author. It is not a chance that the plot occurs in the weeks prior to Christmas and has its climaxes near Peter Pan statue and at the jetty in Cheyne Walk. Such time-place concurrence reminds us of the presence of the great plotter Iris Murdoch who has skilfully contrived the past and present of all who are populating A Word Child.

The collaboration of time and space in A Word Child metafictionally implies that setting gains its symbolic import whenever it is associated with the turning events. In other words, it can act as an illuminating background to the characters and events or gain some extra significance through being associated with those people and events. The space around Peter Pan in wintery Kensington garden, for instance, both sheds light on the childish, carefree happiness that Hilary, Biscuit and Lady Kitty feel there and comes to signify man’s selfishness as it swarms in those characters. Both affecting and being affected by the other narrative elements, the setting here is beyond its realistic and modern kinds; it is a new species that due to its hybrid features of its ancestors can best be described as postmodern.

In The Philosopher’s Pupil, setting is such a phenomenon that it imparts a unique quality to the novel. It is the element that makes The Philosopher’s Pupil memorable
since in none of Murdoch’s novels, setting is as invaluably vital to the plot as here. It attributes to the novel much of its utopian quality and causes it to have “a far more fantastic play and less solemnity,” to use Bradbury’s term, than almost all her other works (xx). It is indeed what prevents the novel from being a strict conte philosophique, and makes it instead a playful, quizzical, witty tale. In contrast to the settings of the aforementioned novels, it does not draw on the actual geographical places though aware of the verisimilitude they can impart to the story it never dismisses them entirely. Most of the plot happens in a quaint little town in the south of London. The narrator prefers to call it after himself as “N’s Town” or “Ennistone” (that is wittingly a homophone of the former) and describes it fully in “Our Town” section of the prelude. The vignette orients us around the city and in addition to offering pictures of most of its public places and their location makes us familiar with its history.

Ennistone turns out to be an ancient city because of its unique geographical features. It is “situated upon an attractive river” the narrator calls “the Enn.” Moreover, it is mostly famous for its “copious hot spring with alleged medical properties” (PP 25). Being an attractive site to people for this excellent spring, it develops a history that goes back to the Romans even pre-Romans: “there is a Roman bridge over the Enn” and “[s]hadowy historical evidence suggests that the worship of a pre-Roman goddess (perhaps Freya) was associated with the spring” (25). The existence of the remains of nine megaliths upon the Common known as “the Ennistone Ring” even attests earlier inhabitants. As a spa, there have always been some public buildings around the spring; subject to vicissitude, cultural and political powers, they have developed, refurbished, closed, reopened, and damaged by the World War. At the time of the story, there is a collection of public building around the spring: “the Bath Institute,” and all the contiguous places, “Ennistone Hall,” “Diana Garden,” “Ennistone Rooms” which play a central role in the life of Ennistonians.

“The Bath Institute” commonly known as “the Institute” or “the Baths” and the adjacent “Rooms” means a lot to Ennistonians. “Its role has been compared to that of the agora in Athens” (30). For their recreational, medical, social and even spiritual and inspirational needs, people frequent there all year round (31). Going there is more like a
ritual than an optional activity: “It is like what going to church used to be, only it happens every day” (30). From infantry all Ennistonians swim there: “[e]verybody swims. Babies learn at the age of six weeks in the Infants’ Pool, where mothers with amazed joy watch the tiny creatures taking boldly to the water, striking out with puny arms, and floating fearlessly with noses just above the surface. The aged swim, unashamed of their bodies, pot-bellied men and ancient wrinkled women in bikinis. Decency is maintained, however” (30-31). The baths are, in Bradbury’s words, “an erotic (phallic, venereal), a philosophical and, indeed, an operatic location. They attract around themselves issues of art, architecture, landscape, nature, community, venery and virtue. They are also a theatre of exotic and magical machinery” (xv). Even its water is assumed Aphrodisiac.

Characterized by so much oddity, the baths seem too ethereal to be factual.

The weirdness of the baths along with other exceptional sceneries and historic landmarks of the town, its concealed name, its unidentified river, its weird prig people (who have banned TV but are at home with gossiping and passivity), and the eccentric social life they follow, on the one hand exposes this setting as imaginary. On the other hand, the particularity with which it is delineated beside its live connection to other actual places like London, Brussels, Paris, American cities and Greece never allows it to be pinned down as such. “A fairly frequent train service increasingly takes ‘commuters’ daily to their work” in London; most of the youths of the town are students in London universities; Emmanuel’s mother is living in Brussels, Professor Rozanov has been living in London and some American cites. Hattie is a resident of California before being brought to Ennistone by Rozanov’s injunction. Projecting the town’s identity under an assumed name while marking its open access to the rest of the actual world, the narrator preserves a sense of reality for Ennistone.

To increase its verisimilitude, he, simultaneous with the town’s spatial dimension, builds its factuality in time. In his conscious, detailed setting of the scene in “Our Town” section, ‘N’ mostly uses the present tense whose application along with the hint to his current dwelling in Ennistone not only implies that the town is still there at the time of narration but also synchronizes it and its inhabitants with the reader’s time. So palpably
real and stunningly unreal, Enniston blurs the distinction between factual and fictional setting; it is a postmodern setting putting the world of fiction on par with that of reality.

The postmodernity of the setting of *The Philosopher’s Pupil* is noticeable when another dual pattern strikes us. On the one hand, we are offered so many details about Enniston, that we can imagine it clearly in our mind. Enniston is a unique, particular city with unparalleled landscapes, objectified buildings and deeply particularized individuals. On the other hand, the centrality of the baths in the plot, the entanglement of all the characters with this place and the recurrent image of water (the canal, the river, the rain) elevate it to a symbolic level. As all the people regardless of their age and status make “the fullest possible use of this natural bounty” (30), and whenever there is a crisis in the life of some of the characters they visit the place out of which they emerge free, clear minded, more confident, “the Institute” can be interpreted as a symbol of mind.

The multibuilding structure of “the Institute” duplicates mind’s machinery. Fed by a perpetual hot spring, the pools and the baths of the Rooms are always abundant with water. “The only ‘natural’ manifestation of the great spring which is visible to the public,” is in Diana Garden: “a steamy stone basin . . . where scalding water spits up at intervals to a height of three or four feet” (26). It is called “Lud’s Rill” or more popularly the “Little Teaser” (27). These places with their ever-flowing water stand for consciousness. The association of the “Lud’s Rill” with the myth portrayed in Shakespeare’s sonnet 153 highlights it as the sexual-fantasy center in the consciousness. In line with this symbolism, the locked engine room inside part of “the Institute” called “the Baptistery,” which serves as a storeroom closed off to all except “authorized personnel,” stands for the sub-consciousness. Tom’s adventure in this room in hope of getting a glance at the natural source itself reveals it a steamy strange place crammed with suspended stairways and complicated huge mass of pipes which go on “down and down for a long way without any floor or bottom being visible” (504). The fact that his risky, bold descend does not take him to the fountainhead he fantasized to be between the rocks, but “a wide level space where immerse silver golden pipes like pillars entered smoothly, sleekly, into the perfectly fitting concrete” (506) turns the place into a perfect symbol of sub-consciousness and the hidden world beyond the concrete floor to which
Tom has no access a symbol of unconsciousness. The symbolic dimension of the baths that are so central in the social life of Ennistonians transforms Ennistone to a universal city that can be anytime and anywhere.

The peculiar eye-catching cityscape of Ennistone proves to have metafictional significance once we reach the end of the narrative. The buildings in Ennistone manifest diversity in architectural designs; from the time of the Romans till around 1960s, the representatives of various architectural styles are there. The Roman Bridge along with the foundations and a piece of wall of the bathing establishment are the historical remains from the Roman time. The “Ennistone Hall” is actually the Pump Room remained from the Bath House of the eighteenth-century. The whole “Bath Institute” is in Victorian and Gothic style. Adjacent to this is the “Ennistone Rooms,” a model of modern architecture constructed in 1920s in the Bauhaus style. The rooms adorned in *art déco* style include only one item reminiscent of the traditional taste: “the big goldenly Edwardian brass taps” (29). This juxtaposition of styles in one building even the whole cityscape (the houses we enter in as the plot unravels are in different designs) mirrors the complex compositional form of the novel. The narrative of *The Philosopher’s Pupil* benefits from a collection of conventions from many genres: romance, drama, adventure stories, detective novels, epistolary novels, fairy tales, gothic novels, psychological novels, picaresque novels, *conte philosophique*, novels of ideas, and many more. In a broader sense, the town with its ancient history and the trace of vicissitude all over its buildings is a symbol of narrative and its constant transformation though time.

The setting in *The Bell*, though not so complex, is still metafictionally telling. Notwithstanding London and Swindon, the settings for few of the events, the majority of the plot occurs at Imber Court, a Palladian mansion located in Gloucestershire in the west of England. People gathered there are from different parts of England and disperse to its more various parts after the dissolution of the community. However, the self-contained seclusion of the place with its rich greenery is too idyllic to be real. It strikes the mind as a fairytale setting and reminds one of an ideal utopian world. This double-codedness is the literal embodiment of the function the Abbess assigns to the place. Imber Court is to be a “buffer state,” as the Abbess puts it, “between the Abbey and the world, a reflection,
a benevolent and useful parasite, an intermediary form of life.” It becomes home for a lay community “who can live neither in the world nor out of it,” those who do not belong to the everyday world and cannot join the spiritual world entirely either (TB 80). In the parallel way, since the building is physically located contiguous to the Abbey, it serves as a middle ground between the ordinary life and the spiritual world.

On the metaphoric level, the function and location of Imber Court has metafictional implication. It sheds light on the status of The Bell in particular and the arts in general. A house of fiction, The Bell (and any art object) is also a “buffer state.” It is neither a mimetic duplication of reality (what history claims to do) nor a verbal incarnation of truth. Instead, it builds its own fictitious world distinct from the two worlds while imbibing some shades of reality and truth. Enforcing certain narratological rules on familiar people and events, the novel is a self-contained world which has its own way of attaining truth. Having its principal setting governed by its self-imposed rules, it attracts attention to how fiction or any truthful art constructs its familiar yet revealing world by the effect of defamiliarization. In this sense, besides a medley of other themes, The Bell is an ontological reflection on the nature of fiction. With the help of Gainsborough’s painting and the medieval bell, it stresses that, to be truthful, art ought to highlight its incomplete projection of the truth. This inherent irony resembles The Bell to postmodern metafiction. Imber Court where real people live a different contrived routine is a conceit for metafiction, which relies on blurring the distinction between fact and fiction for its being.

The “buffer state” locality of Imber Court lends color to the thematic level of The Bell as well. As it has been discussed, the characters are the symbols of various views of personality in different moral traditions. The unsatisfactory dispositions of the cast, exposed in their interactive life at Imber Court, reflects, to use the attributes Murdoch ascribed to the “liberal concept of personality,” the “shallowness,” “extreme simplicity and poverty” of these traditions (“Sublime” 266). The “faint appearance of two parties” (86) one accepting the authority of Michael and the other that of James is suggestive of the conflict between two major moral views, romantic ethics and rule-governed ethics. The final disintegration of the community metonymically reveals that the community was
ignorant of a “buffer state” in ethics, a perspective sustained in Murdoch’s philosophical investigation and vocalized by the Abbess: “[o]ften we do not achieve for others the good that we intend; but we achieve something, something that goes on from our effort. Good is an overflow. . . . and we can only learn to love by loving. Remember that all our failures are ultimately failures in love. Imperfect love must not be condemned and rejected, but made perfect. The way is always forward, never back” (243). The unresolvable conflict between James and Michael’s moral standpoints signifies that neither following rules nor tending the self grants man any moral grace. It is achieved, however, in an attempt to see the reality of the other. A hard and humiliating experience, “attention” can redirect people to the path of the truth only and if only they approach others as an end in themselves. Symbolically, Toby’s deliberate climb over the high wall of the Abbey is an act of attention that yields him a moral grace only when he encounters two of the nuns tending the graves in his furtive excursion in the vicinity of the enclosing wall. Thus, the enclave of Abbey connotes something more than mysticism and spiritual devotion. Although in reality an excrescence to the everyday life of British society, to Imber community it is the only source of value and aspiration, the sole incentive for moral growth, in short, a symbol of the other.

In The Unicorn, the setting is noticeably more contributive to its thematic level. Its gothic features and weird place names that engross the reader in their possible connotations are more flaring and eye-catching signals to its symbolic signification. In his introduction to the novel, Stephen Medcalf traces the actual referents of the stage setting to “two famous landmarks on the west coast of Ireland, the cliffs of Moher and the limestone country of the Burren.” the actual place names never find their way into the novel; only “the Burren” is recognizable in “the Scarren” (17). The consequence of dispensing with the real names of the geographical places in the setting is the evolution of a symbolic level that grants the novel its autonomy, its freedom to subsist as a distinct realm separate from the factual world. A deserted place enclosed by the sea, the bog and the barren land of the Scarren, so separate from the hurly-burly of everyday life, the setting symbolizes fiction. Being within the vicinity of an airport and a train station but lacking any direct connections to the outside world, the place portrays the ironical
relationship of fiction to fact. Although fiction and especially *The Unicorn* requires the factual world for its conception and perception, it remains surprisingly self-contained.

Such a symbolic setting, besides the traditional development of characterization through the metonymic association, intensifies the Murdochian respect for the opacity of others, a thematic concern interwoven in all her oeuvre. Unable to feel at home in Gaze, Marian observes, “[t]he place, somehow, resembled her strangely, it was *nervous too*” (*TU* 85), and “There were many matters for puzzlement in the big *self-absorbed* house” (emphasis mine 86). Such a symbolic impression of the house is metafictionally significant. Having a persona conscious of the echo of her emotions and the others’ moods in the mirror of setting is a metafictional exposition of the conventional dependence of characterization on setting. It, further, signifies the Murdochian concept of consciousness.

An unsympathetic location portrayed in black, grey, and brownish yellow tones evident in the monumental unique black cliffs, the barren yellowish land of the Scarren, the blackish sea, the dominantly greyish overcast sky, and the dour exterior and interior of the houses, the place, actually, stands for the vague look of one consciousness to other consciousness. An “appalling” realm that defies even its dwellers’ reason, it strikes pleasure and awe in the observer; therefore, as Gerald Scottow admits to Marian while driving her from the station to the castle after her arrival, the place has the Kantian characteristic of “the sublime.” It cannot be devoured and reduced within the consciousness, consequently a symbol of the Murdochian notion of the other who has an incomprehensible existence.

On a narrower scale, Gaze particularly is the symbol of the other. For Marian, Gaze pulsates with the probing consciousness of the strange people inside. That is why when Scottow and Jamesie carry her bags in Gaze, she follows them up, “[n]ot looking up at the *staring windows*” (emphasis mine 63). Such metonymic eyes along with Marian’s and Philip’s implementation of the binoculars underline the significance of the name of the house. Gaze the place Hannah lives in is not only an object of gaze (under the scrutiny of the inhabitants of Riders) but is also home to gazing subjects. In this sense, the location of the two houses separated by a valley allegorizes the Murdochian
significance of gazing. For Murdoch, gazing, a deliberate act of focusing on the other, is a requisite for moral perception. Being surrounded by a desolated, dreary setting which, in Medcalf’s words, features “the land of unselfing,” the surmountable chasm of the two houses embodies the possibility of self-restraining attention.

To be the symbol of “the other,” the setting must shun being pinned down. Thus, instead of adherence to certain conventions, it takes advantage of a miscellany of traditions. It depends on both realism and modernism for its identity. Unlike modernistic models, setting here is not solely a side element whose meager, limited role just lends to the portrayal of the subjectivity of the focalizers. It is not, furthermore, exclusively an external factor like its realistic version. Indeed, in line with other eclectic narrative techniques of the novel, the setting of *The Unicorn* incorporates these features of both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary styles, a fact further reflected in the physical structure of “Riders” and “Gaze.” These huge buildings are postmodern in architecture as they integrate modern architectural materials and style into their eighteenth - and nineteenth-century styled mansions. As compared with Riders, a “long grey three-storey eighteenth-century house” (53), Gaze belongs to, Gerald informs Marian, the “nineteenth century, of course. There was an older house here, but it got burnt down like most of them. The eighteenth-century terrace remains and the stables” (59). Interestingly enough, Gaze has “swinging glass doors” (63).

This hybrid setting enables Murdoch to relate the Kantian notions of the “beautiful” and “sublime.” Referring to Murdoch’s “The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited,” Medcalf remarks that Murdoch’s ambition has always been to modify the sublime to include human life along nature and to “relate the two terms ‘sublime’ and ‘beautiful’ . . . to contingency and form respectively” (15). He argues that by constructing *The Unicorn* into two deliberately contrast parts she attains her two goals. The first part with its beautiful setting and slow-paced incidents displays the beauty of form while the latter part starting with Hannah’s killing Gerald followed by a quick succession of unexpected events is an “overdone” rendering of the sublimity of the contingent human life. The role of the setting in bringing about such formless form is beyond doubt. Depicting a small barren, hostile, grey atmosphere, *The Unicorn* not only creates a gothic
form but also symbolically points to the unimaginable deep stagnation of modern man’s morality.

While attributing a gothic form to the plot, the setting of *The Unicorn* attracts attention to itself since it conforms too conspicuously to the requirements of such a plot. It is rainy at the multiple climaxes. To make the quick turns of events convincible, it features as a mysterious prison devoid of modern facilities in the vicinity of modern life. Modern technology in the form of train, airplane and steamer and various makes of cars engulfs the region that is bereft of other signs of modernity such as electricity and the newspaper. This sets the place as a mediatory state between the ancient past (represented in the ancient dolmens strewn in the region) and the technical modern world. Such intermediary realm is best at the service of the plot that, for the flow of its scenes in the specific direction they head, needs an access to the modern world while remaining mainly out of it. To sum up, it is to intensify the theme and support the plot that the setting of *The Unicorn* takes an ironical structure.

This special treatment of setting differentiates Murdoch from a group of English interwar women novelists, who developed an innovative way of dealing with setting. Tracing the fountainhead of the “micro novel” in the particular localism and limited scope of the writings of Winifred Holtby, Rosamond Lehmann, Nancy Mitford, Elizabeth Taylor and Sylvia Townsend Warner, David James argues how such writers came up with a sub-genre of modern fiction by employing setting for reflecting the subjectivity and improving on high-modernists’ inconvincible personae. These novelists turned to provincial fiction just in response to “late modernism’s cultural/nativist turn” (48). Not against the experimentation of the 1920s, they were dissatisfied with the way the external world has been wiped out of the novels in favor of the innovation in form. In early modernism, fiction has become only an aesthetic vessel with no serious commitment to social criticism. To compensate for that, these writers decide to dissolve the “high modernist paradox” that, according to Esty, involves “localism yielded by imperial projections of universality” (qtd. in James 47).

In the fiction of the women writers of 1930s and 40s, setting is restricted to local environment to project not only the problems of that particular area but, as James
stresses, to help improve modern characterization. Through the impressions the characters have of their local environments, their fiction displays the individual’s “perceptual dynamism,” the fact that perception is affected by impression thus can oscillate between “immediate sense and removed abstraction” (Matz, “Cultures,” 319, 302). Far from naturalism and adherence to facts, continues James, the investment in “local scenes to explore new fields of perception,” makes their novels an interface of the regionalism of Victorian realism and the interiority practiced by metropolitan novelists (50, 61). Their style, as Bowen characterizes, is “a state of open susceptibility,” suspicious of the efficacy of both high modernism and literary realism (“Roving” 63). It juxtaposes both, however, as a more promising method to bring fiction to life by bracing its characterology and social commitment. James believes that to actualize Virginia Woolf’s demand “to bring back the character from the shapelessness into which it has lapsed,” the interwar women novelists set to examine “the bonds between place and personhood” like what Henry James and Lawrence did (50-51). Instead of following Storm Jameson’s advice to restrict the narration to the facts, they staged a scene as “a luminous essence” formed out of the subjective perspective than in material terms (James 54). In this way, they advanced the modern novel to a new level at the mid-century. Instead of introducing new topics and fresh techniques, this modernist fiction produces believable characters in a provincial atmosphere without invalidating the modernist devotion to form (50). Both art and instrument, these novels are solid evidence of their success in adjusting “the will-to-experiment to the demands of social critique” (51). They owe this double-coding to the complex reality of modernity that requires new innovative techniques for its representation.

This late modernist sensibility to setting is identifiable in Murdoch’s novels although she favors it on other grounds. She similarly takes advantage of the geographical concerns for characterological and moral ends. Her stylist approach to setting is an outcome of the coalition of the realist and subjective modes, not of their synthesis that happens in the regional novels of 1930s and 40s. It is something between mere description of landscapes and atmospheres and a subjective perception of them and aims to show the difficulty even impossibility of pure perception rather than mind’s incapability to have a full immediate perception of physical reality which Ford Madox
Ford regards as the promising resource for modern novelists. Annoyed, even more than Woolf, by the modern ignorance of characterization as in Joyce’s works, Murdoch allots a great deal of space for scene and environmental atmosphere representing both the external and internal world. This resembles her novels to “fat Victorian volumes” in size but not in handling of setting.

Her setting boosts her recurring themes and lends to her style. To adumbrate man’s fantasy-driven consciousness, Murdoch makes use of the interwar regional writers’ approach to setting. Although, following the Victorian tradition, there are a huge amount of scenic details and material particulars in her fiction, her scenery is selectively chosen. She believes in the heritage of Conrad, Ford, and Henry James captured in Bowen’s comment that scenery “is justified in the novel where it can be shown, or at least felt, to act upon action or character. In fact where it has dramatic use” (“Notes” 40). Thus, like them she delineates very unique scenes where something happens which in her case are better to be called “scenes of revelation” rather than what Bowen calls, in her “Out of a Book,” “scenes of acute sensation” (51).

Although Murdoch is not a regional writer due to her subordination of social criticism to her other concerns, her fiction gives a topographical representation of certain places in Ireland and most frequently in London of her time. In this regard, her settings share a common ground with both British fiction which as James quotes “has always been provisional—with odd glance at London” (56), and more generally with provincial writings whose indispensable feature, defines Morgan, is “that of absorption in a particular locality: absorption and not merely interest” (84). That is why her scenes are so photographically realistic. Their location has concrete correspondence to the actual world. In a similar devotion to a “firm contact with the real” and a “firm rejection of the vague” that Bentley attributes to the regional writers according to James, Murdoch focuses on “a clearly defined spot on earth” (56). In contrast to the women writers James sets to defend as late modernist who contributed to the spirit of experiment of modernism by refashioning the Victorian convention of setting (56), Murdoch lets the techniques of modernist subjectivism coalesce with the regional realism to enunciate her serious concern over modern moral decadence; this enables her to portray the mechanism of
man’s egoism and its net-like structure from which it is practically impossible to disentangle.

While for those regional writers, in James’ view, setting acts as a mirror of the interiority, a psychophysical element that relates the individual alienations to their social matrix, (57-58), for Murdoch it never fully succumbs to the service of the inwardness; instead it acts as a topographical epithet and a window to the characters’ inner world. She is then more successful than the interwar regional writers as her fiction renders “the highest kind of justice to the visible universe,” that Conrad demands of fiction, “by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect” (xlvii). It, moreover, manifests a certain reality that have been untouched in realistic and modernist literature: the fictional treatment of an actual setting is more truthful since it highlights the difficulty of facing the quiddity of the familiar surroundings without their being contaminated by the personality vibrating within the perception. In the light of the foregoing elaboration, her setting can be characterized as the only element that makes the reader understand and believe in her stories that are abundant with weird characters and kinky events. Despite the particular characters and events it accommodates, her setting is a collection of vivid sensory images that invoke a sense of solidarity to all humans in the reader. Opening our eyes to reality in the midst of unreality and vice versa, it is a postmodern phenomenon that revives the realistic portrayal of the outside world only to emphasize its insufficiency.

2.3 Characterization

Part of the outside world is the people who provide the basis for the creation of figures that populate fictional worlds. Characterization, the technique to establish the distinctive characters of the persons in a narrative in Abrams’s definition, or the textual representation of the character component in the story in Rimmon-Kenan’s words, has undergone constant changes throughout the history of narrative. The degree of similitude of characters to actual people varies as characterization slides between mythic and mimetic impulses present in the evolution of the narrative according to Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg. With the rise of the novel and its development into the realistic novels of the eighteenth century, characterization relies exclusively on its mimetic axis. Beginning
with the nineteenth-century realism and flourished in the twentieth-century, it changes its focus as mimesis acquired different connotation.

In the early days of the narrative fiction, mimesis ended in a replica of the visible world as there believed to be an objective reality available similarly to all. So characters were almost unexceptionally flat, static, limited to their physical features and one distinct behavioral characteristic. Notwithstanding Samuel Richardson’s skillful psychological rendering of Pamela and Clarissa, it is with the development of psychology in the nineteenth-century that the concept of mimesis expands to include the representation of the inner life of people. The realistic masterpieces of the period, therefore, allowed some psychological exploration of the characters along their physical depiction. This new interest of novelists in the invisible aspect of man’s existence reaches its radical status in the diverse fiction of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. In the early twentieth century, the scientific revolution invalidated all the traditional scientific, social and religious frameworks that have backed up reality as objective hence knowable. As reality lost its validity, it became impossible to depict a comprehensible human experience using the realistic characterization.

The suspicion about the objective reality aroused such awareness of the subjectivity of perception in modernist novelists that they felt the need for a different characterization that would take into account the ignored realities of human existence. This transformed the novel from a familiar form of entertainment founded on the “suspension of disbelief” to a new form more capable of revealing the complexity of human experience. Instead of providing a detailed description of the visible features of characters like realistic novels, modern fiction offers “material details for impressions, essences, things in flux,” as Matz points out (70). To expand characterization beyond the world of objects, modernists dispense with physical details almost totally, a measure that evoked serious criticism against them; James Joyce has been condemned for his shapeless characters. Even Virginia Woolf who has animadverted Joyce for such characterization, was attacked by Arnold Bennett for her characters’ lack of reality. In defense of her characterization, she wrote of the questionability of reality: “[h]e says that it is only if the characters are real that the novel has any chance of surviving. Otherwise, die it must. But,
I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality?” Consequently, instead of “telling” about her characters as realists primarily have done, she turned to, as Matz notes, “catch the phantom” of modern personality (emphasis mine 5). Her alternative technique employed by other modernists as well was “showing.” It was the first time in the history of the novel that novelists showed the ongoing in the heads of their characters so much that Matz regards Henry James the one who enriched the “consciousness” of the novel (16).

This interest in the consciousness transformed the novel to a great extent. As a result of modernity, the self was no longer stable but, as Judith Ryan says in The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism, “a bundle of sensory impressions precariously grouped together and constantly threatened with possible dissolution” (4). Famously stressed by Virginia Woolf, doing justice to the flux of consciousness in fiction became the major concern of the modern novel:

The mind, exposed to the ordinary course of life, receives upon its surface myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms, composing in their sum what we might venture to call life itself. . . . Is it not perhaps the chief task of the novelist to convey this incessantly varying spirit? (33)

In the same way, Ford practiced “the record of the impression of a moment” than a “corrected chronicle” in his fiction, the rendering of momentary feelings than objective realities. His narratives dealt with “the looping and jagged paths of memory and desire” (Matz 26). To sum up, this denunciation of the “the archaic myth of depth,” along with the replacement of individuality with “anonymous,” “pre-human” stratum and “persistence of traits” with “allotropic states” associates modernism, according to Rimmon-Kenan, with “the death of character,” a phenomenon that is interpreted by Barthes as the modern inability to write “Proper Names” (31-32).

The priority of the reflection of consciousness over external actions brings a different set of characters on the stage. Heroism is seen in ordinary thoughts and inactions, in the way that ordinary people mentally struggle to keep their subjectivity in the face of the challenges to its coherency. Therefore, modern writers choose to focus on
“the passivity, weakness, and failure” of common individuals while delving into the depth of their minds and feelings (Matz 46). Characters are involved in a quest for self-identity but modern bildungsroman ends no more in a social conformity. Indeed, it necessitates an “intense and often destructive rejections” of society for having autonomous identity, Matz stresses (48). Restricted to their characters’ consciousness and their callous or hostile relationship with society, modern novels bring the subjective truths forward over the received wisdom. Exploring the memories and hopes of various characters as they surge into their consciousness provides a sense of immediacy that modern fiction longs for in the name of perfect mimesis. Its preference for immediacy in the hope to “make you see,” in Joseph Conrad’s terms, is satisfied by relying on the established techniques of showing such as “dialogues” and “interior monologue” and inventing that of “stream of consciousness.”

In contrast to interior monologue that has an ancient history, stream of consciousness is a very young technique in literary narratives. Interior monologue, as Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg elaborate, denotes an “unspoken soliloquy,” a dramatic element exclusive to the narrative literature revealing the characters’ motivations and feeling using proper linguistic structures without the intervention of the narrator. Originally a psychological term, stream of consciousness, however, refers to a mode of mental process prior to any logical linguistic articulation. In literary criticism it then is used to indicate “any presentations in literature of the illogical, ungrammatical, mainly associative patterns of human thought” which may be “spoken or unspoken” (177). Virginia Woolf and James Joyce are its most famous practitioners who trusted it as the best possible means to render man’s inner experiences.

Although its employment leads to the emergence of different characters, themes and forms in modern novels, stream of consciousness paradoxically points to the unbroken link between modernism and realism of the previous centuries. The same faith in the representational quality of language underlying the mimesis principle of realism forms the essence of modern stream of consciousness. In fact, stream of consciousness is the advanced mimetic technique. Modernists believe that language is capable of reflecting the illogical, associative pattern of psyche hence stream of consciousness
technique which in its most radical form dispense with correct complete grammatical sentences, punctuation and chronology all together. It is this faith in the reflective nature of language that inspired modernist to intensify the immediacy of their descriptions and make it more lifelike.

Modernists’ belief in the linguistic representation of reality and their humanistic approach to life are not duplicated in postmodern literature. That is why again a new order of characters, themes and forms emerge. Language that has formerly been taken for granted as the solution for the insufficiency of realism turns to be the major issue in the new fiction that renounces modern fiction for the same fault. The postmodernist doubts that reality can ever be offered to the reader immediately since language itself is always the mediation. Such doubt revitalized the narrative fiction as the ontology of language became the major concern of the novel. The novel tends to highlight the discrepancy between fact and fiction hence the narrative becomes metanarrative. As language becomes the source of reality not the means to reflect it, extraordinary, unrealistic characters crowd postmodern novels, characters with unnatural physical or psychological characteristics. To create such individuals, postmodern writers do not end in the solipsistic depiction of their consciousness or even the objective portrayal of their physical appearance and social status but try to highlight the conventionality of characterization, the fact that language by nature is not referential but a set of rules agreed upon by consensus. Postmodern characterization, thus, depends on parody, an imitation of the established characterizations just to magnify their conventionality and mechanism.

A convention of characterization parodied in postmodern fiction is the coherency of character. Established in realism, this convention requires a novelist to create coherent characters that always follow a certain set of codes of behavior. For example, bad-tempered people always lose their temper easily. This principle is the basis of what Barthes in his S/Z calls the “process of nomination,” the reconstruction of characters from the text in the act of reading (92). Merging Barthes’ notion of reading as a struggle to name and the psychological theory of personality, Chatman stresses that to name a character includes identifying his/her “personality traits” by which he means “relatively
stable or abiding personal quality” (127). Rimmon-Kenan believes that it is this notion of character as a “paradigm of traits” that leads Garvey to define characters as textual element abstracted in “attributive propositions,” that is “a character’s name, (or its equivalent), a predicate (e.g. ‘insane’) and a ‘modalizer’, indicating degrees and qualifications (e.g. ‘questionable’, ‘to some extent’).” Reading any traditional novels, such attributive propositions can easily be extracted from their texts though it is often accompanied “with various degrees of generalization” (39).

The naming of modern characters is possible in a more demanding manner. Modern characterization focuses on the inner life of individuals and their search for self-identity; nevertheless, it never challenges the convention of coherence. Modern characters are still coherent constructions but each with fractured identity. In postmodern fiction, characterization yields weird, kinky characters as it does away with coherency principle. No longer is it likely to find a pattern in the traits of postmodern figures. The incoherent characters are suggestive of both the incoherency of actual people and discrepancy between fiction and fact (the fact that, in contrast to reality, form and coherency are indispensable in fiction).

Iris Murdoch’s characterization has more in common with the postmodern practice. For her, the modern total trust in the representationality of language and in the inner life as the actual reality of man’s life ends in a meager image of personality that makes the novel more unrealistic than ever. To make integral human characters, she felt the necessity to disregard the convention of coherence and lay bare the linguistic autonomy and its detachment from reality. Her characters are more linguistic constructs that replicas of any sort of man in reality. They are ragbags of various, even contradictory traits than units of predictable characteristics. Instead of “self-indulgent exploration of inner lives,” as modernists would do according to Matz (104), she lets characters emerge out of their internal and external engagements with other people. The cast of her novels are not modern solipsistic figures or even cardboard dummies of the early realistic novels. On the contrary, they are three-dimensional constructs that remind one of the opaque, elusive realities of our fellowmen if nothing else.
Murdoch’s different mode of characterization is derived out of her deep dissatisfaction with modern theory of personality. In her essay “Against Dryness,” she laments the image of man that is bereft of any transcendental values in modern fiction. Such a portrait popularizes “too shallow and flimsy an idea of human reality” says Matz (117), thus needs to be replaced with a truer one which, in her view, should portray the characters both in mind and action vis-à-vis others. The failure of modern characterization is highlighted thematically in *The Sea, the Sea*. Charles Arrowby, the narrator-character, is a self-obsessed man like any modern figure. The novel reveals, writes Matz, the impossibility of living an isolated life detached from others; it is an account of his failure to be the master of a self-contained world he sets to create for himself striped of others and away from his profession as a stage-director, (117). His characterization contradicts the modern idea that people can best be depicted in their pure, perfect worlds.

As her characterization relies on the interrelation between personae, it never stops at a certain point in her novels, but incessantly acuminates our vision into a better simulation of reality. No one of her characters can be defined in any fixed and distinct terms since in every instances of the encounter with others one aspect of their myriad dimensions shapes. In this sense, their resemblance to reality increases although a holistic view of them is shockingly unrealistic. Such an ever-growing characterization enables Murdoch to propose a substitute for the invalidated frameworks in modernity. Through it she demonstrates that “real people are destructive of myth” and “contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination.” Therefore, her fiction resonates with “a new vocabulary of experience, and a truer picture of freedom,” as Matz concludes (118).

Framing such a demythologizing picture in a narrative that revolves essentially around the idea of unity, she implies that reality is always seen through fictional frameworks. As Matz elaborates “there is always some metaphor, some style of plotting, some style of description and characterization, at work in any view we take of the world” (136). Highlighting the way that her characters attempt to cultivate a unified world of their own, and interlacing it with the efforts of some artist-characters to yield an art-
object, what she creates is actually metafiction: fiction about fiction prioritizing fiction as the basis of our realities. Like all other metafiction, her novels are more the representative of “literature of replenishment” than “literature of exhaustion,” in John Barth’s terminology: they are both playing games (fictional, entertaining puzzles) and truth-revealing projects.

To be both, besides plot, Murdoch invests a great deal on characterization. Any one reading her fiction is amazed by the complexity and weirdness of the characters she brings into life. So dexterously she interlocks characterization and plot that their separate analysis can ignore certain quality of her fiction. Walter Allen praises her for creating engaging characters with “autonomous life” while being puppets dancing to a plot “almost in a mindless trance.” What makes characterization her greatest gift is her effort to substantiate her belief in the centrality of characters in narrative fiction: “literature must always represent a battle between real people and images; and what it requires now is a much stronger and more complex concept of the former” (“Against Dryness” xvi). Thus, the discrepancy that is obvious between her characters’ behaviors and the common conducts is more accountable in the light of such literature than Bellamy’s emphasis on her interest in the Lawrenean exploration of “the allotropic aspect of the human personality” (137).

Her aim in bringing real people and images together is to strike an effect of defamiliarization. She is not depicting what people might do in specific situations but what they actually are doing so confidently and repeatedly that thought and resistance is never provoked in society. Her characters are the common people in common situations. Their oddness is part of their reality since in her eyes actual human beings are odd and various: she says to Bellamy, “I think real people are far more eccentric than anybody portrayed in novels. Real people are terribly odd, but of course they keep this secret. They conceal their fantasies” (137). Her attempt to bring individuals’ oddness and their secret fantasies into the foreground gives her fiction an enticing quality. One is encouraged to read all her novels because her personae attract and dispel one simultaneously. They “engage sympathy . . . more as another closely related species than as conceivable neighbors,” Albert B. Stewart comments, “[t]hey live too self-consciously,
wrestle too intensely with right and wrong and other fundamental issues to be truly believable” (398).

To achieve such absolute realism, Murdoch acknowledges the novel as the most appropriate genre. Its wide scope allows for detailed and unique portraits of individuals. That is why she is fascinated by the great novels of the nineteenth-century. Their characters are the sole determiner of their structure. In fact, they are the realms in which free characters grow. In “The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited,” she notes that “the individuals portrayed in the [great] novels are free, independent of their author, not merely puppets” (257); there she comments the only possible though difficult way to increase the mimetic aspect of the novel and prevent its form to slide into a unified rigid structure is through duplicating lifelike characters, people who escape to be taped. Emulating the great nineteenth-century novelists, she wants to build “a house fit for free characters to live in” (271); however, living in the twentieth-century, it is almost impossible for her, since as she herself confesses to Bellamy her “plot and the kind of central magic are so strong that they tend to draw the characters too much towards the center “ (139). In contrast to her own self-criticism, “I am not yet good at it,” it is not a failure, but, in effect, the outcome of her postmodern distrust in the representationality of a linguistic construct and her certainty about the inevitability of unity in the narrative fiction. As fiction cannot dispense with the role of plot, to increase its truthfulness it might as well spotlight its restrictive mechanism. The result is the ironic mode of Murdoch’s novels.

The novels of Graham Greene, Murdoch’s contemporary, Whitehouse asserts, “deal with individuals in their own specific personal situation, upon which important institutions and large scale events impinge to varying degrees, but always peripherally,” (54). Murdoch depicts her characters with similar qualities of dignity and freedom in similar situations; however, they hardly grow in “human stature” as do Greene’s mediocre characters who, according to Whitehouse, acquire a deeper knowledge of themselves as they learn to see the humanity of others (61). Murdoch’s aim is to show what she, in “Against Dryness,” calls “the opacity of persons.” In this regard, she is in sync with George Meredith in whose novels, Stewart quoting J. Hillis Miller observes,
“[w]e can never encounter another person face-to-face in that person’s otherness or enter into a direct relation with that otherness” (79).

Integrating opacity at the heart of her characterization, Murdoch ends up in more real characters than those of Greene. As Whitehouse analyzes, Greene’s personae are at various with us since “they live their lives more consciously and fully, they have a dimension of rightness, fittingness, and integrity often lacking in our own mediocre everyday existence” (72). Defining saints as people with higher quality of being, who far from “behaviorist paradigms or God’s puppets” can choose free from the external conditions, Whitehouse concludes that Green’s characters are attractive because of their saint-like traits (72): their fuller freedom, their desire to penetrate to the quiddity of things and their success to practice what Murdoch necessitates for moral growth in *The Sovereignty of Good*: “the checking of the selfishness in the interest of seeing the real” (65). The saints, however, are a rarity in Murdoch’s novels as it is in the actual life.

Almost all her characters are involved in their own self-interest. Although enlightened temporarily with the help of art, there are no conscious serious attempts to see the reality outside the self. Except a few instances, they collectively have a false notion of their freedom. Assuming themselves absolutely free, they embark to manipulate the world ignorant of the others. Majority of times, their failure is just enlightening for the reader; in a dramatic irony it becomes obvious that beliefs, illusions and fantasies are what keep human beings from sainthood by marring their vision and restricting their freedom.

As a whole, her cast includes various people caught under the net of the impediments to sainthood. *An Unofficial Rose* is the epitome in this case. More evidently, it houses people cocooned in the gossamer of their self-serving consciousness. As the slight response of the complex world surrounding them shows, none of them “is strong enough to achieve consistent freedom in the metaphysical sense of the word” (Pondrom 412). Yet, they remain partially free. It is the exertion of their wills that propels the plot to the course it takes. It is true of all her novels in which the plot is the outcome of all the characters’ actions not a ritual rut to which they dance in trance. The fact that no character in her novels controls or directs the action does not substantiate Felheim’s
conclusion that Murdochian characters are puppets to illustrate and serve “the imagery” and “the theme” (189). Instead of their instrumentality, it indicates the co-ownership of the events. Characters play a central role in her fiction rather than being the most neglected element of her art. Her practice of restricting the reader’s vision to her characters’ inner life far from being a sign of what Felheim calls her “indifference” to them (189), is owing to her wish to the duplicate opacity of actual people.

In the huge volumes of her novels we are told about her characters, see them in their actions and their dialogues and encounter their consciousness mostly in the moments of moral dilemmas. They take a great deal of Murdoch’s creative energy undoubtedly. Men, women, teenagers (of various personalities) and a few children occupy the world of her fiction. The striking point about them is their bizarre traits and actions that liken them to each other despite their distinct individual destinies. Strangely similar, they depend on each other for their individuality. Almost always Murdoch creates counterpoints to intensify her indirect characterization. Among female characters are the sisters Anna and Sadie Quentin in *Under the Net*, Annette Cockayne and her “guardian” Rose Keepe in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Rain Carter and Nan Mor in *The Sandcastle*, Dora Greenfield and Catherine Fawley in *The Bell*, Crystal Burde and Lady Kitty Jopling in *A Word Child*. The Parallel pairs of male figures in the same novels respectively are: Hugo Belfounder and James Donaghue, Mischa Fox and John Rainborough, Bill Mor and Tim Burke, James Tayper Pace and Michael Meade, Hillary Burde and Gunnar Jopling. Of the two groups of male and female pairs, the females are prioritized since they carry the burden of her theses; according to Felheim, it is through them that Murdoch interweaves her philosophical concerns in her fiction (189). At least one in each female pairs gains a vision of her potentiality and the nature of the world, what never happens to the negligent male counterparts. As the novels close, the females emerge mature and initiated into their vocations through suffering; their dedication to activities such as Anna’s singing, Rain’s and Dora’s painting, as well as Anna’s Gardening, are signs of their moral redemption. This growth is indicated stylistically in their soliloquy; Nakanishi asserts that “A character’s ability to ‘overhear’ his own thoughts allows him to disentangle himself from their self-obsessed nature” so that he
realizes the reality of other people and the partiality of his own view of life (“Shakespeare”).

A combination of strangeness and reality like the rest of her cast, a certain group of her personae are better be called eccentric. Some such figures are engaged in some kind of magic rituals: Miranda in *An Unofficial Rose*, Jesse Baltram in *The Good Apprentice*, Radeechy in *The Nice and the Good*, and James Arrowby in *The Sea, the Sea*. Others appear as enchanters to a group of enchanted individuals. These include Mischa to Annette, Rosa and Nina in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Emma Sands to Hugh and Randall Peronett as well as Lindsay Rimmer in *An Unofficial Rose*, Julius King to Morgan Browne, Rupert, Simon and Hilda Foster in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.

Such a diverse set of weird and eccentric people diverges her from the great nineteenth-century novelists whose deftness in autonomous characterization amazed her. Placing them in what Nakanishi describes as “a fixed social world, a hierarchical cosmopolitan society in which nobody seems to work or, if they do, their schedules are extremely flexible but the pecuniary awards often considerable,” Murdoch seems quite right in confessing her failure to emulate the great realist characterization which yields fully-rounded people whose personalities rather than being the product of any sort of authorial determination is the author of their lives (“Money”). Following this self-criticism, many critics like Nakanishi and Levine denounce her characters as unbelievable and unrealistic. Analyzing her novels from a bird’s-eye-view, her own statement, quoted by Levine, that “in the end . . . something about the structure of the work itself, the myth as it were of the work, has drawn all these people into a sort of spiral, or into a kind of form which ultimately is the form of one’s own mind” (457), does not seem to be wholly negative and without merit. Surely, she does not create character independent from herself as George Eliot did. Yet, she succeeds in bringing into life a new species of characters who contribute to the postmodern cause far more than she could have imagined. In a way, her people do not sustain the myth of her plots; they are the agents to propel the plot not its helpless victims.

A new kind of autonomy flourishes in her characters. That is perhaps the reason behind Nakagami’s conviction that the realness of characters in *Under the Net* are
different from that of Eliot’s cast (13). Instead of being the determiners of their own lives, they depend on her to evolve into a parallel yet autonomous existence to real people. In this sense, they are copies of Don Quixote, realistic figures out of linguistic structures. Their life is meaningful in their own fictional worlds which are interconnected through her virtuosity. Always in her subsequent characters, Murdoch allows a trace of the traits and features of the previous characters to reappear. This not only turns her whole fictional world into an autonomous universe but helps her simulate the process of perception. As in our actual encounters with others in which we are never free of prejudgments that form whenever there is a point of similarity with the pervious experiences, one’s vision of her characters is always marred by the memory of the previous personae who have somehow similar features. For instance, Dora Greenfield is an assemblage of some stock characteristics; according to Felheim, she inherits “her love of nature and her instinctive sympathy” from Mischa Fox, her “youth, beauty and zest” from Rain Carter, and her being enchanted to an intellectual cruel male from Annette (195). Even Catherine Fawley, he adds (196), reminds one of Rosa Keepe in her beauty, paleness and copious hair; similar to Rosa’s always loosening “mane,” she has “a weight of dark hair which she wore in a drooping bun” (TB 27).

Murdoch could not have followed George Eliot’s characterization because she was interested in the partiality of freedom. Through depicting naked, autonomous individuals whose life is “stripped down to a sequence of actions and choices,” in Levenson’s words, Murdoch reveals that events are the sum total of various wills and contingencies and cannot occur to the full satisfaction of anybody (565). Therefore, her characters are never seen caught in the “tragic inevitability” which is integrated in the fate of George Eliot’s people, especially those in Middlemarch who are suffering from, Nakanishi implies, the consequences of their free wills (“Characters”). Murdoch’s people suffer, but that is caused by the effect of a number of forces rather than the sole exertion of the will. Even her heavy reliance on conversation does not put her people on par with Eliot’s. Occupying a great deal of her volumes, dialogues are never illustrative and communicative in the sense they are in Eliot’s novels. Nakanishi is right in her assertion that conversations in Murdoch’s fiction are “curiously counter-productive”: deflective of true communication and “conducted . . . as self-absorbed monologues rather than as
dialogues” (“Characters”); however, she is wrong to deny her greatness in characterization. Murdoch actually advances the realistic novel, as Harold Bloom avers, since she succeeds to imitate the weird, unexpected traits and turn of events. It does not mean, however, that she rates plot over characterization. The range of her people proves that her idea of the realistic character is different from what Arnold Bennett accentuates for the survival of the true novel: the novel “cannot seem true if the characters do not seem to be real. Style counts; plot counts; invention counts; originality of outlook counts; wide information counts; wide sympathy counts; but none of these counts anything like so much as the convincingness of the characters” (191).

To lead the realist novel to a higher level of mimesis, she feels the need to tread a new path. It is only in the importance she reserves for characterization that she is an Eliot’s descendent. In other respects there is no common ground. Harold Bloom’s observation that like Eliot she possesses “an untallied directness as a moralist that frees her from any excessive self-consciousness that would inhibit her willingness to judge her own characters, implicitly or explicitly” is unjustifiable (qtd. in Nakanishi “Characters”). Rather than employing direct moral pronouncements, Murdoch injects moral overtone to her characters’ dialogues and monologues.

Having in mind E. M. Forster’s theoretical distinction between flat and round characters (the former having small fixed traits and the latter the complexity of real people) and the more recent one between static and dynamic people (the former remains the same in the course of the story while the latter changes), there is no doubt that Murdoch has a predilection for certain characters. Eliot populates her novels with round, mostly dynamic people, while Murdoch crowds hers with complex symbols, the epitome of which can be Mark Wilsden in *The Good Apprentice*, who resembles in the drug-entranced state before his accidental death to “an Egyptian king, a god, a divine being, a sleeping knight, and the dead Christ” (Nakanishi “Characters”). The other is Hannah in *The Unicorn* who embodies The Sleeping Beauty, Christ, and Medusa. To intensify their symbolic aspect, she even like Dickens attributes names to them which highlight their unique significance. Anna Keepe, Dora Greenfield, Mischa Fox, Hilary Burde, Hugo Belfounder, Sammy Starfield are a few examples.
This has led people including Nakanishi, Hampl (658), Baroness Warnock (a friend of Murdoch) to ignore their growing complexity and label her characters the flat ones who stand for different ideas to dramatize her philosophical opinions. For Nakanishi, there are only a few characters in Murdoch’s fiction that are dynamic. The rest have just one or two defining characteristics. For example, in *The Good Apprentice* “Edward is guilty and feels anxious; Stuart is earnest and longs for goodness; Harry is sensual and relaxed; Midge is attractive and vivacious; Thomas is gloomy and thoughtful” (“Characters”). As Brown explains, Warnock dislikes her novels believing that her characters are just animated arguments rather than convincible people one can sympathize with. Murdoch’s world even accommodates a group of mysterious individuals that due to their unusual powers go beyond the ordinary and mundane and can sometimes dominate others. These include, for example, Jesse Baltram, his wife and two daughters with their amazing talents. Such few enigmatic people to whose thoughts and feelings we are not privy seem to support the general consensus that her characters are almost totally flat. However, considering the role they play in the life of others, it is not their flatness but their excessive complexity that makes them enigmatic. Their multidimensionality cannot be pinned down hence their mysteriousness.

Other sets of inconvincible characters have their own raisons d’etre. The group whose strangeness is highlighted in their very names (e.g. Harry Cuno’s parents, Casimir and Romula, Meredith McCaskerville, and Kiki St. Loy) are there to parody the unjustifiability of flat characters in the novel. Unsatisfied with such figures she makes them strange to deflate them. The other batch is the homosexuals whose illustrated life as in *The Philosopher’s Pupil* and *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is far from the actual practice of homosexuality. Quoting Halperin’s observation that her version of homosexuality is “nonsensical,” Hampl concludes that her novels lack homophobia since homosexuality actually “fails to exist” there (662,663). On the whole, like realists, Murdoch strips her novels from passionate sex scenes that abounds D. H. Lawrence’s writing owing to her assumption that by augmenting readers’ fantasies they prevent them from perceiving the individuality of characters. Murdoch restricts her characterization to physical details and the individual’s responses to others to adumbrate how people’s solipsistic fantasies eclipse their perception of even their nearest and dearest.
Although Murdoch crams her fiction with lots of details, her characters are still rendered in sketchy presentations. Gordon identifies her tendency to push image toward imageless and story to storylessness in her handling of spiritually gifted characters (118). Not only Nigel (in Bruno's Dream) casts no shadow and Craddock (in Henry and Cato) describes his saintly mother as ‘almost invisible’ (HC 394), Bradley (in The Black Prince) remarks that saints have no dramatic sense of themselves, and James Arrowby (in The Sea, The Sea) observes that “the good are unimaginable” (SS 445). The same tendency justifies her wide yet incoherent characterization. Aware of destructive effect of portraying fully good characters, who share unassertive saintliness, in the novel which is the art of image-making, she restricts their appearance to a few instances. The only one who, contrary to the rest, is interesting and enacts a significant role in the story is, as Gordon quoting John Haffenden insists, Tallis in A Fairly Honourable Defeat (119). Unexpectedly, he is strong both physically and spiritually and carries the burden of his defeat decently.

Instead of saints, more imaginable figures occupy her world. They are not villains but caricatures of those who are too confident of their freedom. Murdoch is not harsh towards them not because of Gordon’s appraisal that “they pass such decisive judgment upon themselves, being at bottom wrestlers with God” (125), but since they prove interesting enough to hold the readers’ attention and improve them morally. Those include a group of scheming adolescents like Miranda (An Unofficial Rose), Kiki St. Loy (The Sacred Profane Love Machine), Peter Foster (A Fairly Honourable Defeat), Marian (The Unicorn), Julian (The Black Prince), and Annette (The Flight from the Enchanter). Among the adults are Michael (The Bell), Monty (The Sacred and Profane Love Machine), Ducane (The Nice and the Good), Simon (A Fairly Honourable Defeat), and Henry (Henry and Cato). Other groups are the intellectuals and the artists. The former who, according to Gordon, “spout a moral philosophy patently resembling her own” (125) are definitely not her favorites since all their intellectual endeavors are doomed to failure. Marcus in The Time of the Angels aims to write a philosophical treatise along Murdochian lines but fails as he proves a timid moralist. While writing a book about the substitution of the Good for God, Rupert Foster in A Fairly Honourable Defeat is destroyed due to his extreme self-satisfaction. Having written a book entitled as
Murdoch’s essay “Nostalgia for the Particular,” even Rozanov in The Philosopher’s Pupil cannot ascertain himself of the ability of philosophy to capture the truth hence his eventual suicide. Toward her fascinating group of artist-characters Murdoch is ambivalent. A complex range of artist-characters from the early Mischa Fox and Honor Klein down through Jesse Baltram, David Crimond, and Marcus Vallar are born out of her ambivalent attitude toward art. They are mostly treated negatively as demons or magicians to emphasize that, instead of being redemptive and truthful, art is most of the time the outcome of fantasy hence blinding.

As the concluding remark it should be emphasized that despite the integration of chance and accidents in her stories, Murdoch is not yet satisfied with her characters. In an interview with Rose she insists that “what I feel my work needs, what makes it less good is that I'm not able to present characters with enough depth and ordinariness, and accidentalness. This has always been a problem for me—my characters get cramped by my story” (11). Elsewhere she clarifies “I do regard myself as a realistic novelist . . . trying . . . to create characters who are like real people . . . sometimes plots get in the way” (Rencontres 74). What seems obscure to those who take her observation for granted is the fact that accident to one is to some extent the exertion of the will of the other; Chance may be still the continuation of free, autonomous characters. Too sensitive to chance and contingency, she is actually more realist than the realistic novelist of the past. Allowing chance to overlap with free characters promotes the novel to be the truer presentation of reality. That is why her plot and characterization get more interdependent.

In opposition to modern writers, whom she attacks in “Against Dryness” for their misrepresenting man as “rational and totally free” in their concern for “the human condition,” she starts to revive the nineteenth-century characters that she, using a Marxist notion, accredits to be partially free: a merging of type and individual (17,18). In her emulation, however, she exceeds her realist peers; her people, as in real life, are pinioned by more factors than just the social codes of the nineteenth-century society. Her central characters are neither “the existential hero” nor “the mystical one,” the appellations she keeps respectively for a “powerful, self-assertive” individual and “an anxious man trying to discipline or purge or diminish himself” in “Existentialists and Mystics.” Unlike such
heroes who are involved in “egoism” and “masochism,” her personae are anti-heroes, the common individuals who timidly try to keep their fantasy worlds intact. They are dragons as in *The Green Knight* who can transform to princesses if open to the redemptive power of art.

Displaying in her wide range of characters the difficulty of loosening the grip of fantasy, Murdoch is a Platonist showing that individuals can have only intimations of truth. Correlating her characters’ knowledge of truth to their spiritual status, as Bove underlines, she follows Plato suggesting that moral improvement is the prerequisite for increased knowledge of the world. Such characterization, however, differentiates her from Sartre whose similar concern to rework the connection of art with morality makes their works the apt candidates for an interesting future research project. Her characterization leaves no doubt that, in contrast to Sartre for whom “transmitting the ideological commitment is necessarily a moral act,” for Murdoch “a just portrayal of reality is a virtuous act” (Bove 22). Revolving around “people” rather than “issues,” her fiction never leaves us with “a sense of emptiness” she criticizes Sartre’s novel for (*SRR* 146, 147).

James Donaghue (Jake) in *Under the Net* is a prototype of Murdochian anti-hero. As both character and narrator-author, he is totally fantasy-ridden. It is obvious in his account of the past events as well as his present-tensed comments. In the story he recounts of what has befallen him that showed him his vocation, he is depicted as a self-obsessed individual who has perceived his surroundings from behind the haze of his falsifying dreams. Going through some adventures, he comes to see those he is acquainted with in another light. Everyone whom he has pigeonholed proves different and opaque. In his longed-for though unexpected, humorous encounter with Hugo in the same hospital he works as an orderly, he sees what his fantasies have blinded him to; that it is Anna who is in love with Hugo who is infatuated with Sadie that actually loves him not Hugo. Obvious in his tendency for generalization, as a narrator he is still blind to reality: “[t]here are some parts of London which are necessary and others which are contingent. Everywhere west of Earls Court is contingent, except for a few places along
the river. I hate contingency. I want everything in my life to have a sufficient reason” (*UTN* 26).

A story of a reckless, penurious would-be artist, *Under the Net* has a picaresque plot, indeed. Entangled in what is truly termed by Kiernan Ryan as “a bizarre erotic comedy of errors,” Jake acts like a buffoon. An easy-go-lucky person, he cannot possess anything in life. He even does not try since he thinks that they are always ready for him by some means. He is an irresponsible, extravagant, lazy person, who scrapes up his living out of the compassion of others such as Anna and Madge. He never engages himself with the women who he claims love him. A person with so little funds at his disposal, he spends too much on drinks and hiring taxis. He is ready to join a cold-cure experiment camp, where he meets Hugo as his companion, just to secure some lodging for a while. He is timid and restores to tricks in his difficult times: e.g. he pretends he is dumb when eavesdropping Sadie’s conversation with Sammy at her kitchen door he finds her back neighbors suspicious of his malice. He manages Mars to sham injury so that he can escape the police cordon who are to control the socialist and anti-socialist melée in Hugo’s studio.

Jake is a complex character who, in contrast to Kiernan Ryan’s view, is never “much the wiser for his adventures” (x). He cannot capture the truth in the *Under the Net* he writes because the ephemeral nature of the significance of his experience has not fundamentally changed him. He is still an egoist while narrating. So he is not a dynamic character. His statement that ends the novel—“it’s just one of the wonders of the world”—is not indicating the transformation of his views on life. More than being a response to Mrs. Tinckham’s wonder of why, out of four kittens of her cat, just two of them are fully Siamese, it conveys his huge excitement at his decision to be a novelist. The decision to pen his own novel is actually an extension of his fantasy-driven existence since the gaps in line of events and their arrangement signal his way of covering the reality to aggrandize his self.

Despite their complexity, each of the other characters appears to be more an avatar of one of Jake’s traits than a distinct individual. Each of them is featured with one of his characteristics that he never declares as his own: e.g. the application of
firework as a simile in his comments on the young fans of the British film —“time and again some youngster would receive the routine press fanfare and then pass away in the course of one picture with the noise and the brevity of a firework” (UTN 32)—proves that it is he not Hugo who is obsessed with pyrotechnics. Encountering him for the first time in Madge’s flat, Sammy, her suitor, addresses Jake: “[d]on’t be in such a hurry. I want to look at you. It’s not every day I meet a writer chap who talks on the radio” (80).

Concealing this aspect of his life throughout the novel, he integrates it in Anna’s characterization; she sings on radio. He accuses Sadie of lying easily and frequently, what in the course of events appears to be his own tendency: “I don't like being asked direct questions, and on such occasions I usually lie” (108). He describes Mrs. Tinckham as a chain-smoker. But the number of time he is seen smoking points to his own chain-smoking habit: “Hugo appeared punctually and waited. I sat on a seat and smoked two cigarettes. Hugo walked up and down. After a while longer I saw him cross the bridge to the south bank and I knew he was going to my lodgings. I lighted another cigarette” (75). He even introduces Peter O’Finney, his companion while living with Madge, as an alcoholic. But his own addiction to alcohol is more noticeable in his frequent resort to it during the course of events. The following textual excerpts are evident enough: “[f]or a long time I have kept a stock of whisky with Mrs. Tinckham in case I ever need a medicinal drink, in quiet surroundings, in central London, out of hours” (18); “I had enough alcohol inside me to feel despair at the prospect of having to stop drinking” (113). Such attribution of his own features to his characters leaves no doubt that fantasy rather than imagination governs his account.

Jake describes himself as “a short man, but slight and neatly built would describe me better,” having “fair hair and sharp elfish features” (UTN 23) and tells about his thoughts and feeling at the time of the story. However, the contradictions that emerges between his account and his narrating comments that he expresses in a frequent imaginary dialogue with the reader reveals that he is an indiscrete narrator; for instance, he introduces Dave as a penniless philosopher, “of course he has no money” (24). Later on, his description of the neighborhood of Dave’s dwelling exposes him as a rich person, “[h]e lived off the Goldhawk Road, in one of those reddish black buildings which for some reason are called mansions” (26). Even his emphasis on “the loose ends that most
of us have to play with” does not go with “I hate contingency. I want everything in my life to have a sufficient reason” (26). Such substantial discrepancies in Jake’s Under the Net that make us suspect him of unreliability lay an ironic foundation for his characterization at the higher level, namely, in Murdoch’s Under the Net. Jake is at once lying and truthful—a liar in depicting his own life yet truthful in reflecting the incoherent, unsystematic human world. He is both particular and universal; he is to tell his own life but gets intertwined with humanity as his association with Ulysses suggests. His foolishness, for example, in kidnapping Mister Mars, the film star dog, to force Sammy to return him the typescript of his translation of Le Rossignol de Bois is contradicted with his cleverness in escaping the police cordon by playing on the sympathy of the crowd outside Hugo’s studio for a hurt dog; a naïve-mature person, he is moreover both parasitic and self-esteemed; short of money and not making a living, he is ready to sponge off his friends and rely on them for lodging yet easily refuses Madge’s suggestion to do sinecure “as a script-writer” for a Anglo-French film company at the pretext of conscience. Having so many contradictory traits, Jake is an indefinable character, the one very different from those whom he brings to life in his narrative. As a novelist, Murdoch is then more successful than Jake, her counterpart novelist in her novel. Questioning the fundamental principle of generalization while highlighting its indispensable role in narrative fiction, it is actually the text of Under the Net that is “one of the wonders of universe”: full of gaps and contradictions, it is amazingly both a unifying pattern and a rhizomic structure in which every strand is as significant as others as in the actual life.

Other characters in Under the Net like the cast of her other novels are colorful individuals who have their own ego-stricken world. After Madge has turned him out of her flat, Anna Quentin sends him to her sister Sadie Quentin not willing to help him out of his destitute but to get rid of him and to give Sadie an opportunity to win his heart so

7 Jake is a modern Ulysses. His quest for love, living and identity is a parody of odyssey. His Similarity to Ulysses is striking in his resort to the cat-filled corner shop of the mysterious, smoking Mrs. Tineham whose likeness to “an earth goddess surrounded by incense” brings to mind Circe in her cave. After leaving there, he undergoes a series of humorous adventures that catapults him around London, back to Paris, from whence he returned at the outset of the novel, before restoring to her shop still under the spell of his egoism. What he obtains is not the reunification with his seemingly stuck-away love, Anna, but a way to self-love through writing his own novels.
that she herself can win Hugo who is courting Sadie unrequitedly. Hugo Belfounder shuns Jake not because he is offended by Jake’s publication of his ideas in *The Silencer* as his own but because he sees Jake as his rival, the real love of Sadie. Finn, Jake’s remote cousin is not so much his devoted companion as he describes him but leaves him for Ireland as soon as he gets his hands on some money. Madge does not invite Jake to Paris to procure him a sinecure job but because she wants him near herself.

*The Black Prince*, another of her first-person narratives, is populated with such indefinable characters. As Jake’s counterpart, Bradley Pearson is another anti-hero that shares this status more conspicuously with almost all his fellow characters. In contrast to the cast of *Under the Net* whose complexity of consciousness oozes through the gaps and contradictions in the netlike narrative of Jake, here characters are given a chance to come into the center in the space of their postscripts to Bradley’s story and challenge the authenticity of the central consciousness by divulging their own consciousness. Even in the course of the plot of Bradley’s story, all characters have the same centrality: every one, form Francis Marloe, Christian, Priscilla, to Arnold, Rachel and Julian as well as Bradley himself, is a key figure in developing the plot in its course. The discrepancy between the main plot and the other characters’ comments on it illuminates the psychological complexity of all the active characters.

Bradley is truly one of the most complex characters portrayed in English literature. Fairly at the beginning of his narration he pauses to describe himself: “I am thin and tall, just over six feet, fairish and not yet bald, with light fine silky rather faded straight hair. I have a bland diffident nervous sensitive face and thin lips and blue eyes. I do not wear glasses. I look considerably younger than my age” (*BP* 3). Throughout the rest of the narration, this description sounds really shaky. He is “a trifle deaf” as he cannot hear what Francis is saying at his doorstep (3). His poor eyesight is obvious in his frantic attempt to take Priscilla to hospital when she reveals she has taken the content of a bottle of sleeping pills (“I can't read the blasted telephone number. Can you read the number?” ‘I always said you needed glasses’”). These symptoms of old age, which he identifies before the narration in his foreword as fifty-eight, along with his undue stress on keeping his youth even transforming much younger under the spell of his love for
Julian signifies a lot about his character. Bradley’s final success in writing his longed-for book is more due to his selfish desire to escape death and be eternal rather than fulfilling his pronounced poetics that has kept him from being a prolific writer as Arnold. As the author of “The Black Prince: A Celebration of Love,” he is an egoist who through love and art tries to preserve his self.

What he eventually produces is far from an account of truth as the following postscripts indicate. It is an attempt to aggrandize his humiliated self. A lonely desperate middle-aged perfectionist writer, he fails to publish any piece of work. Over the span of forty years, he publishes just three short books, making him a butt of Arnold’s jokes. He has waited for a long time to be inspired by his muse to flesh out the truth in the medium of his art. He believes that at the time of the story he was possessed by a huge black power that would certainly reward him with the art he hadaguishly waited for. He is certain that “The Black Prince: A Celebration of Love” despite whatever fault that it may still have is that reward. However, the discrepancies and gaps in his own account along with the different lights that four of the characters shed on it prove his failure to meet his aesthetic principles: to provide an objective replica of truth. To combat his old age and his passion for fame, he fumbles in meddles of love easily justifying it essential for the visitation of his muse. The fifty-eight Bradley tries to convince his reader that, the Black Eros, the demon of love is his demon of art as well.

Like his young counterpart, Jake in *Under the Net*, Bradley is a self-conscious narrator-author. He believes he is writing to tell the truth of love stories, what he believes almost all previous stories fell short to demonstrate. Adapting a quite realistic chronological plot, he pauses his narration in a noticeable way to describes himself and his characters. For instance, he portrays Francis Marloe, his ex-wife’s brother, to be “stout (the raincoat failed to button) and not tall, with copious greyish longish frizzy hair and a round face and a slightly hooked nose and big very red lips and eyes set very close together. He looked, I later thought, rather like a caricature of a bear. Real bears, I believe, have eyes rather wide apart, but caricatured bears usually have close eyes, possibly to indicate bad temper or cunning” (emphasis mine 3). Such interruptions in the flow of narrative which are at times more caricature-like and funny are the way
Murdoch’s way to parody both the realist conventions of a linear plot and the technique of direct characterization.

Employing direct presentation, Murdoch highlights how pointless it is. Paradoxically, no images of appearance remain the same throughout Bradley’s story just like what usually happens in everyday life when people undergoing emotional turmoil look different or see others differently; Arnold’s complexion is of different shades in different situations: “[t]here was a general lack of colour. Something of an albino?” Later on it is described as “pale brown” next as being “with any emotion . . . uniformly pink, as if a pink light had been switched onto it” (61). Francis and Christian look different when Francis reveals their Jewish identity of which Bradley was ignorant: “I stared at Francis. When you find out that somebody is Jewish they look different. I had only after many years of knowing him discovered that Hartbourne was a Jew. He immediately began to look much cleverer” (118). About Jewish Christian he comments, “[o]f course I could see now that she was Jewish: that curvy clever mouth, that wily rounded-off nose, those veiled snaky eyes. She was as handsome as her dress, a queen in Israel” (134). Julian changes so much in different scenes that she crosses the gender border and appears as both a boy and a girl. When she is introduced first in the story, she looks like a young man. In fact, Bradley takes her as one: “I noticed with only a little surprise and interest the figure upon the other side of the road of a young man who was behaving rather oddly. He was standing upon the kerb and strewing flowers upon the roadway, as if casting them into a river” (30). Even when closer Bradley realizes that the boy is Julian, her features expose themselves on him as boyish: “[e]ven at close quarters she still slightly resembled a boy, tallish, dour, who had just cut himself in a premature attempt to shave his first whisker” (32). It is this boyish, Hamlet-like look that finally prevails on Bradley to make love to her: “[s]he was dressed in black tights, black shoes, she wore a black velvet jerkin and a white shirt and a gold chain with a cross about her neck. She had posed herself in the doorway of the kitchen, holding the sheep’s skull up in one hand” (280). To suggest the conventionality of characterization, Murdoch even lets the characterization of some of the personae superimpose occasionally. In this way, she indicates how much characterization is susceptible to end in stereotype figures. Priscilla and Rachel are distinct personae that resemble each other in their marital miseries: in
depicting the depressed Priscilla, Bradley says, “[s]he looked so pitiful and ugly, I reached across and pulled the curtain a little. Her swollen face, the scene in the dim light, reminded me of Rachel” (49).

Throughout the whole novel, direct presentation is disparaged as unable to convey realistically the complexity of people’s character; the best way to render it, Murdoch trusts, is through the characters’ actions and their encounters with others. In her attempt to reconcile the two extreme views of characters as either people or words, Rimmon-Kenan defines characters as “nods in the verbal design of text as well as non-verbal abstractions in the story” (35). The impression that the reader has of such textual nods in *The Black Prince* is that they cannot be subsumed under any general labels which constitute the basis of direct characterization. The non-verbal abstractions formed in the reader’s mind are notably multi-faceted.

Bradley the author is aware of this: “I am aware that people often have completely distorted general ideas of what they are like. Men truly manifest themselves in the long patterns of their acts, and not in any nutshell of self-theory” (xi). He is not a good practitioner of it, however. As an egoist character, he has to resort to theorizing people’s personality to remain self-conceited. Bradley is always involved in pattern-making. He gives people a label then interprets their actions in that light. For him, everybody belongs to a stereotype: Arnold to the group of the uncommitted, best-selling writers who write for the sake of profit; Rachel to the group of self-sacrificing wives who are never bold enough to disengage themselves totally from the shackles of unhappy matrimony; Priscilla to the cluster of those who have spent their youth in delinquency so deserve to be doomed to an unjust, unhappy married life; Christian is one of the steel-willed, scheming women who are always after the exertion of their own will-to-power; Francis is just one of those pathetic soft-hearted men who bereft of dignity easily latch onto others to scape a living; Julian is one of the new generation who being mainly cynic or hedonist rise against the conventions and the morals of their society without giving it a second thought. However, the unexpected reactions of these people to the turn of events creates a centrifugal force that never lets the various shots of them converge into any unified,
stable psychological portraits. Even the characters’ attempts in their postscripts to amend their portrayals in Bradley’s story instead of making them clearer makes them hazier.

Similar to the other personae, Bradley himself cannot be summarized into a single coherent image. His physical appearance keeps changing in the story as do those of other personae. He is nearly sixty years old but looks younger to the extent that Julian cannot guess his age; when in love with Julian he even transforms much younger: “[i]t looked fresh and young. The waxen imprint was still upon it. I really did look a different person. A radiant force from within had puffed out my cheeks and smoothed the wrinkles round my eyes” (175). More clearly than any other character, Christian points to this change: “Brad, what is it, you look extraordinary, something’s happened to you, you’re beautiful, you look like a saint or something, you look like some goddamn picture, you look all young again—” (189).

The complexity of Bradley’s character is crystallized in the inconsistencies between his decisions and his actions. As a participant in the events, he is seen acting the very things he obsessively made his mind to avoid. From the outset of his story, when Francis unexpectedly visits him to inform him of Christian’s return from America, he firmly decides to ignore them. He even writes letters telling them since he is not interested in them, they had better stay away from his life: to Francis he writes, “you will be kind and wise enough to leave me alone” (40). To Christian he corresponds, “[t]his letter is to say that I do not under any conceivable circumstances wish to hear from you or to see you . . . I have forgotten you completely” (41). Despite such seemingly straightforward dealing with the matter he directly goes to see Christian the moment she calls him! His justification is that it is necessary as an exorcism to belittle her will-power. Moreover, Francis turns to be his bosom friend even his pageboy as the plot unfolds. Another instance can be traced in his relationship with Julian; although time and again he convinces himself of the impropriety of making love to her, he eventually carries it out in a harsh way and on an inappropriate time when he has just heard the news of Priscilla’s suicide.

Such unpredictability is at the heart of all the other characters’ complexity. In Bradley’s account, none of them are like themselves the next moment they appear in the
narrative. This surprises Bradley the character who assumes that people’s personalities are fixed and their actions are justifiable on that basis. Christian and Arnold fall for each other; Rachel tells Arnold of Bradley’s interest in her; Roger succumbs to bring the item’s Priscilla desires to her; Julian leaves Bradley suddenly unnoticed at the middle of night despite her tender love for him. Francis enacts different roles, as an unwelcome nuisance, a doctor, a buffoon, a parasite, a psychologist, a buddy, a page, a witness Bradley’s innocence. Such complexities are doubled in the postscripts where other aspects of the characters’ personalities come forward. Through these challenging notes, Murdoch embeds an ironical mode into the novel suggesting that all human complexities and unpredictability are derived from one common source: egoism. As the editor in his postscript truly points to, each postscript is just its writer’s endorsement of his/her ego:

Whatever Bradley himself would have thought or done, it is difficult not to exclaim at the small-mindedness of these writers. Each piece is self-advertisement, ranging from the vulgar to the subtle. Mrs Heartbourne advertises her salon, ‘Dr’ Marloe his pseudo-science, his ‘consulting rooms’, his book. Mrs Baffin polishes the already much publicized image of herself as a suffering widow… Mrs Belling advertises herself as a writer. (361-62)

To such revelatory statements it should be added that, like the postscript writers, Bradley highlights himself in his narrative. His story is ironically the celebration of “self-love.” His mistake in taking his disguised egoism in his love for Julian even for Rachel as his muse costs him his sister’s life; he fails to respond morally to the desperate emotional needs of Priscilla who despondent of her married life turns to him.

Bradley’s characterization appears much more complex when an air of mystery is woven around the editor’s identity. Although the editor signs his forward as P. Loxias and accepts to be the very friend Bradley frequently addresses in his manuscript, the dramatis personae’s various accounts of his identity in their postscripts make the reader suspicious about his identity even his real existence. His own confession to be the only friend and companion of Bradley in his last days of suffering from cancer, his self-alleged twofold intention “to give to the public a work of literature” and “to vindicate the honour of my dear friend, to clear him, briefly, of the charge of murder” (362), his strong support of Bradley, his sharp critique of the others and his similar writing style to
Bradley’s provide a sound basis to believe that he is Bradley in disguise. In writing such an iconoclast form of the novel, Bradley the editor projects the whole process of artistic creation from its conception to its consumption; a sun-seeker who emerges from the cocoon of his old self dying before his own eyes, his very person embodies that artistic creation is first a moral strive for the author. A character, narrator and author, Bradley succeeds to simulate the truth when he assigns himself the role of editor (and by implication reader and critic) as well publisher of the novel. Unparalleled in the history of metafiction, such amalgam of roles by one persona truly makes *The Black Prince* Iris Murdoch’s magnum opus.

Some of Bradley’s narrative roles are assigned to Hilary Burde; he is the narrator of the formidable events that have deprived his life of joy and happiness ever since he was twenty-five. To alleviate his guilty conscience, he writes down this past in the form of *A Word Child*. His comments on the process of writing and characterization, his constant worry at yielding an objective, fair report of people and events, and his differentiation between himself as the character and the narrator via parenthetical insertions along imparting metafictionality to the novel demonstrate the moral impact of those experiences on Hilary. Shaken morally, he writes to catch hold of the meaning of those experiences. He writes to procure himself the world he lacked all his life—“I liked to live in other people’s worlds and have none of my own” (*AWC* 27). It is not the mere experience of those catastrophic events but the experience of being an author that facilitates his moral growth manifested in the text we are reading. Anxious to produce a truthful report of what he has undergone, he is more like Jake in *Under the Net* than Bradley in *The Black Prince*.

Lacking the complex role that Bradley enacts in *The Black Prince*, Hilary like Jake never acquires any knowledge of truth as deep as Bradley’s. Not supplemented by the views of other characters involved in the events, his account is, nevertheless, self-evident enough regarding the ineffable nature of truth. It is mainly his concern with characterization that casts doubts on the possibility of mimesis. His description of Arthur is just one revealing example:
Arthur was a little taller than Crystal, considerably shorter than me. He had a tentative humorous face of a rather dated sort. (Not that he was ever witty, he was far too timid.) He had soupy brown eyes and an apologetic much-chewed mouth and a well-grown but not quite drooping brown moustache. His hair was rather greasy, not long, hanging in lank brown waves. He looked like some unidentified person in a nineteenth-century photograph. He wore oval steel-rimmed glasses. This sounds like a prejudiced description. Let me try to amend it. He was an honest man devoid of malice. His soupy eyes could express feeling. (I do not wear glasses. My eyes are hazel like Crystal’s. Crystal and I had different fathers). (14-15)

Despite his wish to give objective portraits of people, since he focuses on events through the lens of his past consciousness it is not surprising that the snapshots he gives of people are of such a low quality that at best they bring to mind just typical models.

In another metafictional dash, Hilary is even aware of the conventional role that setting can play in characterization. According to Rimmon-Kenan, “the metonymic relation between external appearance and character-traits has remained a powerful resource in the hands of many writers” (67). Hilary the author is using this convention self-consciously when he writes, “[m]y ‘home’ was a small mean nasty flatlet in Bayswater, in a big square red-brick block in a cul-de-sac . . . I instinctively denigrate my flat: it was doubtless my own life which was small and nasty. The flat was certainly cramped and dark, looking out onto a maze of fire escapes in a sunless well” (AWC x, 2).

Nonetheless, availing itself of the tinge of irony that underpins its narrative structure, characterization in *A Word Child* does not fail to enhance the mimetic aspect of the novel. This effect is secured through the indirect technique of showing. Exposing the characters in their actions, dialogues and letters denunciates the black-and-white, thin images that Hilary produces when trying to describe them. All the people Hilary describes are typical, flat characters who are distinctly labelled. To name only a few, Reggie is “the office comic” (7), Arthur a “timid,” “simple” man, Crystal “a sweet gentle patient good animal” (14), Clifford “a glittering object, good-looking, clever, charming” (76), Laura a silly motherly figure protective all around her, and Freddie “a kind conceited man” (8). Since Hilary is a homodiegetic narrator, undoubtedly showing the characters is more reliable than his direct characterization. Supplementing each other,
nevertheless, the two techniques end up in animating highly individualized personae. They project that individuals are unique in both their external physical features and their behaviours.

Considering Hilary’s personality and the chasm in his character as a participant in the plot and as an author of that plot, what Murdoch yields in *A World Child* are complex individuals each with their own past, emotions and secret motives. The discrepancy between what is shown of the people’s personalities and what is told about them foregrounds this complexity. As the plot unravels, it becomes obvious that people do not fit into a fixed behavioural pattern but react to their situations mainly to satisfy their self-preservative drive. By the end of the novel we are certain that the inconsistency between the characters’ previous behaviours and their recent ones at the time of the story is drawn out of this drive rather than their consideration of the demands of their relationships. Laura’s introducing Hilary as her lover to Freddie to conceal her affair with Christopher and Hilary’s breaking off his engagement with Tommy as he gets some hope of maintaining his relationship with Kitty suffice to demonstrate that the characters’ unpredictable behaviours more than a clue to their complexity is a proof of their selfish identities that they invariably prop via various fantasy-stimulating agents.

For Murdoch, the past, beliefs, conventions are the agents that blur people’s vision of the reality about them by tainting their consciousness with tenacious fantasies. Here, the curbing effect of these indispensable agents in human life is especially traceable in the life of Hilary Burde. Suffering a miserable childhood and feeling guilty for the catastrophic death of Anne that ruined his Oxford career, he is so obsessed by his past that only a routine life can save him from a severe depression. Submerged in this routine, he fails to respect the demands of others. He cannot see that Christopher is having an affair with Laura; Tommy is desperately in love with him; Freddie does not like his Thursday’s visits to them; Clifford is serious about committing suicide and Crystal is unhappy about devoting her life further to him. His extreme rationalism and scepticism about God and in the possibility of knowing others are vocalized in his criticism of Christopher’s Buddhist practice. Such beliefs make him inconsiderate to the feeling of those around him. For instance, he has never taken care of Crystal as he should: “[o]f
course I knew that Crystal had stripped her life for me, that she was alone because of me. How I had planned once to surround her with friends, with sources of joy, to make up forever for those horrible childhood years . . . Did I measure her loneliness or try to imagine it? No. I never reflected on how she passed the long hours and days between our meetings” (244). In addition to his past and his beliefs, his strict adherence to social conventions deprives him of certain realities around him. He visits friends regularly believing that Laura is in love with him, Clifford harbour gay desires for him, and Crystal needs him. Christopher’s acceptance of his affair with Laura, Clifford’s suicide and crystal’s marriage to Arthur expose him to be totally fantastic in his relationships with other people.

Besides tinting the narrative with metafictional reflexivity, the complex characterization serves to introduce the Murdochian concept of freedom. Despite what seems in the first glance, the major cause of suffering of the personae in *A World Child* is not their useless absolute freedom but their lack of freedom. Callous to the moral demand of their relationships, almost all the cast are the slaves of their egoism. They do what they do actually in obedience to their self-centredness, not out of feeling sufficiently powerful. In this regard, the seemingly free characters are in fact the prisoners in their fantasy worlds who remain so as long as they fail to gaze at others. The striking irony here is that through portraying the way that people are slave to their fantasies Murdoch achieves a free characterization yielding individuals not nourished by her own fantasies.

In *The Philosopher’s Pupil* another peculiar characterization flourishes. The narration of the story through a witness-narrator who aims to assimilate the authority of the omniscient narrator (what Scholes calls “histor”) facilitates the formulation of free and unpredictable personae that, according to Murdoch, are the best similitude for people we daily encounter in life. A broad novel in vein of the realism of the nineteenth-century, *The Philosopher’s Pupil* is house to a vast cast of well-depicted characters. Although the modern technique of the stream of consciousness in its radical sense is not employed in the depiction of the characters’ inner life, majority of the narrative is allotted to expose their consciousness. However, this does not pinion it to cardboard characterization of
modernism that yields immaterial characters. The details of the physical features of the on-stage characters, on the contrary, make them as large as life.

Such simultaneous description of the psychological and physical characteristics is not a simple imitation of the previous literary styles of characterization, but has a twist to it that turns it into a parody with a Murdochian aesthetical goal. Developing this hybrid technique helps dispel the traditional unquestioned belief in the fixity of characters. Through it, Murdoch can stress the fluidity of characters and the irreducibility of personality. For her, since the consciousness is an ever-flowing stream, a truthful fiction should never render either the inner bearings or the outer appearances of the characters as a unified image. The images of almost all the characters in The Philosophers Pupil are incoherent. The diverse information that gathers around a name does not secure us the right to tag that character with a label distinct from others. A very eye-catching example is Professor Rozanov; like her other philosophers, remarks Bradbury, he is “unusual”: brought up as a Methodist, he begins as “a sceptic, a puritan, a linguistic analyst, a logical positivist.” Then rejecting “philosophy as ‘too hard for human beings’,” he develops interest in Greek history, returns “to philosophy as a neo-Platonist” and writes philosophical texts on great thinkers like Kant and Leibnitz and a treatise of his own which has the namesake of Murdoch’s own work, Nostalgia for the Particular (xvi).

To emphasize that describing people is always context-based, characterization here relies heavily on the discrepancy between what the characters think and what they actually do, how the characters are seen in the others’ eyes and what they actually are, what is accepted as their stable traits and the sudden turn they take in the course of events. For instance, George in the opening quarrel with Stella blames her of incapability of crying, “nothing touches you, nothing, you never cry like a real woman” (PP 10) but later on in hospital where she is actually weeping he thinks how much he hates her crying: “I married a princess. I hate seeing her crying, it’s so unnatural . . .” (22). Once Rozanov feels Pearl’s love for Hattie may rob him forever of Hattie, he sacks her interpreting her declaration of love for him as a cunning trick to remain with them. However, to Hattie he pretends he fired Pearl because of his certainty that she was George and Diane’s accomplice in the Slipper House scandal. After the scandal Rozanov
hides in his own house as he is “vulnerable to ridicule, and to mockery of spiteful misunderstanding.” This is in contrast to the image people cherish of him: for George, he lacks vanity and has “a lofty indifference to ‘what people say’”; for Tom, he never risks his “self-esteem” (413); and for Hattie and Pearl, he is so aloof and sunk in abstract world of philosophy that he is unsurprisingly indifferent to their lot.

The image of each character gets a further dimension when she takes unexpected move at the critical moments of the plot. The character that emerges through Diane’s social interactions and interior monologues never prepares us for the bold decision that she takes after she is disappointed of George’s reunion with herself. A small, unconfident, dependent, financially insecure prostitute who feels madly in love with George can never leave London for Paris; but she does and wins herself a secure life in Paris by the help of Milton Eastcote who saves her for himself. Adam appears to be a shy, taciturn, lonely introvert little boy who feels a distance between himself and almost anybody including his parents. However, in the seaside annual jaunt, his venture in the deep part of the sea to rescue his dog Zed spotlights his other dimensions. The image that materializes out of George’s view of himself and what people believe about him never justifies George’s feat of saving Zed from the other side of the beach when the others disappointed of finding it has set to leave the place. Even, Stella’s sudden disappearance from Como (Brian McCaffrey’s house to which Gabriel, his wife, invites her to be waited upon) and her long absence from her own house that leaves anybody curious about her whereabouts, surprise us as invincible in light of her admirable strong personality and her insistence on her undying love for George. Alex’s patient acceptance of Ruby after her defensive push that ended in Alex’s tumbling down the stairs and being laid up in hospital is in contrast to the superior air she has always felt and tried to keep in relation to her.

Besides the image of personality, the picture of the physical appearance of people can never be fixed because it is as well subject to the erratic quality of the consciousness of the people themselves or those observing them. In The Philosopher’s Pupil, accordingly, subject to various states of consciousness, a slight variation of each person’s image is offered. As an example, Alex is depicted at the beginning in the following lines:
She had an oval face and a pretty nose, and she had remained slim. She had long eyes like Brian’s, of a darker blue, which narrowed in thought and emotion in a fleeting cat-look. (Whereas Brian used to open his eyes wide and stare.) She painted her eyelids discreetly but never used lipstick. She had a long strong consciously mobile mouth. Her sleek well-cut copious hair was a light greyish blond, still managing to glow and gleam, certainly not dyed. (43)

Later on looking at her after she turned everybody out of her house in defence of him, George thinks, “how old and stiff and sort of ailing she has become, and she stoops and her skin has become brown and loose and dry, dirty-looking, and her mouth droops into those long gloomy furrows and her eyelids are stained and puffy, and why must she still paint them so. She looks pathetic and touching, and I never seen her look like that before” (486). There is another picture of her when she catches a glance of herself in the mirror: “[h]er face was flushed and puffy, her eyes framed by discoloured wrinkles, her hair hanging down in dull witchy strings. She thought, can it really and truly be that I am no longer beautiful? Tears came into her eyes” (384).

Owing to the particularity and fickle nature of the consciousness, nearly none of the characters typifies any category we may be inclined to impose on them. Despite the obvious respect for the individuality, what lends more to the postmodernity of such characterization is the irony interwoven at its heart. The characters’ names are mostly symbolic: Adam, Diane, Gabriel, George, Tom, and Rozanov. Moreover, two of the characters are given two peculiar names whose shorten forms cross the gender boundary: Alexandra Stillowen is always nicknamed to Alex, and Emmanuel Scarlett-Taylor to Emma. The ironical nature of such names mocks the gender-bound significance of common names. Such irony is more fortified when Tom and Emmanuel in two different occasions put on Judy’s cloths and feel like exposing themselves to the other in this transgender state.

Full of indefinable individuals, *The Philosopher’s Pupil* is not a suitable locus for the growth of a protagonist hero. As the plot builds up through the rhizomic development of various lines of the story, all the characters secure themselves a significant role in the narrative. It is through the expansion of these offshoots of narrative that the plot forms, so all the dramatis personae deserve the same attention as the others. All are heroes, the
center of their own lives. To prove themselves free and independent personages, all of them undergo self-exposed ordeals. Stella refrains from returning to George despite her excessive love for him. Adam takes Zed to the sea for swimming notwithstanding the risks that may threaten himself. George strives to approach Rozanov and beg his pardon notwithstanding Rozanov’s sheer disinterest in him. In his overexcited willpower, he targets Rozanov’s life though the cause of his subsequent death remains muffled in mystery forever. Tom prefers to discover the source of the hot spring for himself as he sees the private door left open before satisfying his curiosity whether Rozanov is still in town. His dogged determination to reach the fountainhead despite the risk of suffocation by the excessive steam and the possibility of the explosion of the contraption that makes the hot water available to the public clears his mind about his future and enables him to break Rozanov’s spell and ask for Hattie’s hand willingly.

Almost similarly, Emma, Rozanov, Gabriel, Diane, Pearl, Hattie, Alex, and Father Jacoby strive to overcome whatever threatens their self-identity. The plot is a record of the distinct personal experiences these characters undergo in an attempt to define themselves. The reliance on both techniques of telling and showing for the manifestation of such significant experiences leaves no other choice for the characters but to be dynamic round figures. The effect of wholesale creation of dynamic figures who strike us paradoxically as fictitious while filling us with admiration for their excellent simulations of everyday individuals is a subtle metafictional acknowledgement of dynamism as the essential feature of truthful characterization.

The ambition for truthful characterization is the raison d’être for the sundry cast of *The Bell*. Although the cast is limited in number in comparison to *The Philosopher’s Pupil*, it is comprised of more round participants. Accompanying diversity with dynamism helps the novel reflect the irreducibility of man’s personality. Almost all the personae like their counterparts in real life are unpredictable. They do not act typically but according to the outcome of their moral dilemma: either fantasy or imagination guides their actions. The dissemination of numerous turning points and surprises in the plot suggests two major causes of unpredictability. One is the inner conflicts man is
constantly involved in at the moments of choice and the other is the ever-changing situations always subject to the actions (and non-actions) of others.

Caught in moral dilemma, Dora, Michael, Toby and Catherine are indefinable since they embody a discrepancy between their intentions and final actions. At the beginning of the narrative when Dora is returning to Paul, we encounter a full account of her evaluative consciousness trying to decide whether to give up her seat to a standing frail old lady who is “leaning at an angle through the doorway, her feet trapped in a heap of luggage” (TB10). Although her inner voice persuades her to keep the seat for herself, to our surprise she does the otherwise: “She decided not to give up her seat. She got up and said to the standing lady ‘Do sit down here, please. I’m not going very far, and I’d much rather stand anyway’” (11). Michael cannot keep up his self-restrain not to indulge his homosexual tendency. Driving back from Swindon where he has taken Toby (an eighteen-year-old student who has joined the community out of interest and curiosity in his summer vacations) to show him around while purchasing an ordered cultivator, Michael suppresses his desire to touch Toby who falling asleep leans on his shoulder. He stops the car a little off the Lodge where Nick and Toby are sojourning so that Nick may not feel jealous of his ease with Toby. However, in a sudden impulse that shocks Toby and distresses himself, Michael kisses Toby who has thrust his head in the driver window to ask whether his eyes glossed like cats’ as he was heading towards the headlights of the land-rover.

Toby’s plunges in a moral conflict after Michael’s embarrassing kiss. When excavating the depth of his mind for the signs of his heterosexuality he finds that he is in love with Dora. He “had no intention of making any declaration to Dora or revealing by any word or gesture what was his state of mind. He took a proud satisfaction in this reticence, and felt rather like a medieval knight who sighs and suffers for a lady whom he has scarcely seen and will never possess” (222). Nevertheless, overjoyed and flattered by his success to fulfil Dora’s wish to pull secretly the medieval bell out of the lake, he gives away his truth emotions: “He fell upon Dora, his two hands reaching for her shoulders, his body collapsing upon hers. He heard her gasp and then relax, receiving his weight, her
arms passing round his neck. Clumsily, passionately, Toby’s hard lips sought her in the darkness” (229).

Not a focalizer, Catherine is not a well-portrayed figure as the three above. She is always seen through the eyes of the narrator, Dora and Michael. Therefore, her attempt to commit suicide by drowning herself after the new bell sank into the lake and her declaration of her love for Michael as he rushes to the scene are not signs of her unpredictability because they contradict the image that we have got of her via the consciousness of others. In fact, these events point to her unpredictability because they imply a discrepancy between what she has decided to do and what she actually does. Informed by Paul, Catherine knows all about the legend. Enacting the role of the legendary nun who prefers to keep the love of her lover in her heart than to confess guilty, she runs to kill herself. Rescued she cannot hide her love for Michael anymore. Instead, “she hurled her arms about his neck and seemed to cling to him with the whole of her wet body. Her head burrowed into the front of his jacket as in tones of frantic endearment she uttered his name over and over again” (291).

In other scenes, characters remain ineffable due to the influence of the choices of others on a shared situation. Dora shakes the hidden bell in the barn attracting many people to the scene after overhearing that Nick who somehow got about her plan is betraying it to Noel a journalist assuring him that the plan is not to succeed as one of the party (Toby) is no more cooperating. She suddenly changes her course of action because Nick’s and Toby’s actions affected the course of events. Michael, who has always resisted the temptation to confess his past to the Abbess, finally confesses her everything when Catherine’s unsuccessful and Nick’s successful suicide attract a negative publicity for them and Toby’s confession to James ruins his life for the second time. He does not confess whole-heartedly but because in the face of the other’s choices, it is the best choice. What keeps Toby from joining Dora to substitute the two bells is not self-inflicted. It comes about by the impact of Nick’s willpower. Revealing to Toby that he knows of his affairs with Michael and Dora in a make-believe sermon addressed to Toby at the Lodge, Nick forces Toby to go and confess to James himself if he does not want to be informed on. His own face at stake, Toby leaves Dora and the bell aside. Catherine
acts quite weirdly and commits suicide after the bell, contrary to her expectation, ends falling into the lake instead of entering the Abbey she is going to join as a nun. Her sudden reaction to the scene is not premeditated but the consequence of somebody’s tampering with the wooden part of the causeway: “two of the piers had been sawn through just below the water level” (299). Such surprising personae populate The Bell to suggest that people’s actions do not derive out of their own will but are mostly influenced by social conventions and others’ actions.

Apart from such diverse, complex characters whose experiences adds new dimensions to their personalities, The Bell includes another group of personae, who, though less depicted, are not flat. James Tayper Pace, Peter Topglass, Mark Strafford, Mrs Mark, Patchway, Father Bob Joyce, Sister Ursula, Noel Spens are not round in the sense the former are. Nevertheless, they have their individuality. In fact, what is ingenious and in a sense postmodern about such characters is their capability to pave the way for The Bell to connect itself to the real world both representationally and illustratively. These characters, as their names clearly suggest, are on one level symbolic. James Tayper Pace, the moral counterpoint of Michael Meade, is, as his name hints to, an orthodox moralist who believes in the strict adherence to Christian moral rules. Peter Topglass, a naturalist, with his eyes for details codified in his last name, is a spokesman of empirical science. Mark appears a cynic and Margaret a conventionalist. They work too hard and are similar in their moral believes to James whom they respect more than Michael as the center of authority. Patchway, a farm labourer, is a pragmatic who believes that rules should be updated and patched on to meet the modern needs. Noel Spens, whose character develops against the traditional conventionalism of Paul Greenfield, is an embodiment of modern liberalism. Even Father Bob Joyce and Sister Ursula and Mother Clare stand for religious people who adhere to the strict, austere conventions of religion.

Such symbolic functions do not stamp these characters as flat. Flashed at least in one occasion, there are still other dimensions to their personalities displaying their particularity. In the limited scope of the novel, each has at least one moment to invalidate the typical label that tends to pin them down. James is a serious orthodox, but is slow and
sentimental in revealing to Michael that Toby has confessed him all about what happened between he and Michael. Peter though an objective scientist is partially supporting his friend Michael in disputes: “Peter Topglass did not improve things by being blindly, and sometimes aggressively, loyal to Michael” (86). That is why instead of the unbiased persuading others to stop shooting animals he just repeats Michael’s standpoint: “I think the question is not one of efficiency. We’re agreed about that. The fact is that the shooting gives grave offence to some among us” (95). Despite the bland image that is portrayed of him through the eyes of focalizers as a cold-hearted, dour man, Mark Strafford, is the most rational and versatile character who never takes side biasedly with the opposite views of either Michael or James. He does anything from keeping accounts, giving a hand in rescuing Dora and Catherine to cooking. Margaret is not after all so spiritualistic as she appears to others. Her materialistic tendencies are implied in her strive to expand the market-garden and her deploration over Dora’s pretty sandals: “[w]hy, she wondered, had that young woman not brought a single pair of sound shoes with her? Those pretty sandals would be worn out in a few days” (89). Patchway, though finds shooting animals in compliance with his pragmatism, looks askance at the purchase of cultivator as it may reduce his own importance in the community. A liberal atheist whom Dora assumes would misreport the bell story “in thoroughly picturesque detail,” Noel is actually the newpaper that writes a moderate report of it and is sorry for ludicrous look of Imber Court in the press and its eventual folding up. Father Joyce, though a man of cloth, disapproves of the conventional song, “Lift it gently to the steeple,” as the choir music for the entrance ceremony of the new bell in the Abbey. Sister Ursula as a nun is not against the comfort that modernity adds to man’s life and votes for the purchase of the cultivator. And Mother Clare though following an austere life as a nun is a skilful swimmer and disrobing herself in time rescues both Dora and Catherine from drowning.

These people help project more fully the personality of the centers of consciousness and the twin Fawleys who accelerate the dissolution of the community and the plot by providing the reader with comparing grounds to form a more clear image of them. Despite their individuality, Dora, Toby and Michael seem to share a common ground: considerate of emotion, nature, freedom and personal introspection, and believers
in the exigency of self-knowledge for moral growth, they are spokespersons of romanticism. Nick and Catherine come into the light as the cases of extreme romanticism, namely, existentialism. It is their anxiety over their existence that leads them to suicide and schizophrenia. Dora turns to be the only person whose stay at Imber Court has an enduring moral effect on her future life.

For a truthful characterization of such a vast cast, the balanced deployment of both the techniques of telling and showing is inevitable. Their strategic alliance not only brings about a convincible depiction of the appearance, actions and inner life of the characters but also hints to the ephemerality and subjectivity behind that depiction; here as in all her oeuvre, Murdoch aims to display the flow of consciousness and its moral nature; that is, its ineluctable manipulation of the perception of reality. The characterization of the personae through multiple focalizations and numerous dialogues makes The Bell metafictionally suggestive of the ontological impossibility of truthful characterization since every observation is made by consciousness that is not, Murdoch argues in her philosophical writings, a value-free window. In her ethical arguments, Murdoch believes that man is a moral being who can attain a vision of truth and perception of the Good only and if only they could overcome the self-aggrandizing tendency of the consciousness to direct a sincere and selfless attention to others.

The Bell captures the moral struggle of man. Nearly all characters are in moral dilemma in which they are scarcely able to ignore the requisites of self-satisfaction. Dora, Michael, Toby, and to lesser degree James, Nick and Catherine are those to the process of their moral choice we are privileged. Although all the moments of their encounters with others are essentially moral, the other characters go through certain, critical moral decisions. Mother Clare dives to rescue Dora and Catherine and succeeds by the help of James and Mark. Margaret accepts responsibility for Catherine and accompanies her to London to be near her as she needs clinical help for her Schizophrenia. Between satisfying his own curiosity and considering the damage that his turn at the Court may inflict on Dora, Noel chooses the former and to her shock appears at Imber Court in time for the baptizing and entering ceremony of the new bell. Paul is selfish enough to persecute Dora in both his presence and absence.
The dissolution of the community and failure of them to see others highlights the blinding aspect of consciousness; in this regard, the characters’ unpredictability is interpretable as the outcome of the urge to draw consolation for the self whether through fulfilling the heart’s desire or following the indictments of an established value system. Anyhow, it scarcely derives out of a clear, though momentary, vision of the other.

Producing a cast both individual and symbolic, characterization here is postmodern: a celebration of the plurality of personality which can never be fully portrayed as anyone is crippled by his or her own selfish drives. None is the hero of this mélange since attending others seriously is not their virtue.

Paul Greenfield is a selfish, despotic husband who draws sadistic pleasure from manipulating Dora’s life. Noel Spens, Dora’s lover turns to be, according to Levenson, no “tolerant alternative” to Paul (573). Like Paul, he is exerting his own will on Dora’s life, not believing in her share of freedom and happiness. As Masong refers to, Catherine is idealized in the eyes of the community for her “innocence, simplicity and transparency” (27), the features that James in his sermon points to through the metaphor of a religious bell. However, the course of events reveals her to be another egoistical person who obsessed with her secret love for Michael forgets all about his unhappy brother. Nick, apparently a victim of Michael’s previous homosexual desire that turned him into the current rogue estranged from people and normal social life, is not morally better than his sister. He has even been so obsessed with his ego and its emotional wound that he ends up being a drunkard, living in seclusion and oblivious of others around him. In Levenson’s words, “devoted to his own impossible agon,” he “brandishes his suffering and beats futilely against the prison of his ego” (565). James, Michael’s ideological counterpoint as Michael himself acknowledges in his introspections—“[h]e wondered how obvious it had been that he was saying the exact opposite of what James had been saying last week” (211)—is not a very difficult let alone the most difficult character Levenson claims (574). His “bluff virtue and good sense” intolerant of the nonconformity are truly insufficient to criticize the romanticism which Michael stands for (Levenson 574). It does not mean, however, that the Michael’s standpoint is sanctioned over James’s deontological perspective.
Michael is as blind and insensitive to the novelty of others as the other personae. He tampers easily with the innocence of Nick and Toby without considering the consequence for them. His feeling of guilt is more a self-saving strategy than the symptom of his moral improvement. Dora is the only figure potential of Murdochian virtue of acknowledging the individuality of others. She is like others selfish and carefree, but knows instinctively that “the community were easily, casually even, judging her, placing her” (135). This sensitivity to the judging and solidifying gaze of others along with the spin of the unexpected experiences stimulates in her a loving attention to Catherine that wipes away her selfish anxieties and opens a new horizon in her life. Her outstay along Michael at Imber Court does not imply their homogeneity, what Levenson (575) and Masong (22) undoubtedly assume in their respective emphasis on the uncertainty of their future and on their final acquisition of a better self-knowledge. The finale restricted to their focalizations still displays two discrete personalities. Michael is a man of faith who lost all his belief in the consoling promises of Mass; he leaves the Court as a self-obsessed helpless man devoid of any source of consolation. Dora, on the other hand, is a faithless figure whose recovery of rowing skill and triumph in learning swimming are more suggestive of her redirecting her conscious attention to things other than her ego than a hopeful reassurance of the restoration of romantic ideals in the modern time highlighted by Levenson in his stress on modern man’s potentiality “to regain his relationship with nature from which he is so estranged” (576).

In this sense, in contrast to Masong’s view, the finale does not brandish the self-knowledge as the remedy for good life. Michael’s defeat embodied in his leasing the lands and mansion indefinitely to the Abbey signifies that the prerequisite of good life is more than what Masong styles as people’s attentive awareness of “who they are and what their places are in the changing scheme of things” (28). Dora’s moral epiphany at the National Gallery, and later in the barn in the presence of the old bell provides the missing link essential to buttress the moral identity. The beauty and perfection of “Gainsborough’s picture of his two daughters,” as well as the carved scenes of Christ’s life on the old bell are powerful enough to kindle Dora’s imagination to see some reality and perfection beyond her ego. In her attention to these art-objects she is awe-stricken by the faithful strives of their artists to call into presence the reality outside themselves. Dora
is a moral character since she is able to substitute her fantasy of “witchcraft” with the reality of the bell: she begins to fall “under its spell. She had thought to be its master and make it her playing thing, but now it was mastering her and would have its will” (277). While under a vengeful motive to impress others of her own power, Dora could not appreciate the discrete existence of the bell. Her bewitchment is actually due to her attention to the details of the bell and her aesthetic experience than what Wagner-Lawlor calls “her imaginative re-cognition of sympathy with the long-dead artist” (13).

It is in the character of Dora that the value of art as a revelatory device to subvert the fantasy-ridden consciousness comes into the foreground. The moral improvement that the aesthetic experiences granted to Dora alerts us metafictionally to the potential moral function of The Bell as a novel. Familiar with Murdoch’s philosophical views, we easily identify that great man who said, as Dora recalls, “about perfection and reality being in the same place” (196) to be Murdoch herself. This makes The Bell a self-conscious novel that highlights its dependence on its author as both philosopher and novelist. The inscription on the bell says “Vox ego sum Amoris. Gabriel vocor. ‘I am the voice of Love. I am called Gabriel’” (229). On a self-reflexive ground, it explains the function The Bell as a novel performs. At the moment of fascination with the bell, Dora realizes that in her witchcraft she would not be able to speak out the prejudiced judgments of the community as fully and exactly as the bell can. Thus, she lets it talk for her exactly in the same manner that The Bell as a novel reverberates what the characters are ignorant of and Murdoch cannot capture fully in her philosophy: the contingency of life, the unintelligibility of the world of thought. Revolving around a hollow sound of a bell, The Bell is, therefore, the celebration of imaginative fiction as “the truth-telling voice that must not be silenced” (277).

To sum up, The Bell invites us to see for ourselves the shallowness of the concepts of personality posited in the moral traditions represented by each character. It connects the limits of the moral orientations of liberalism, empiricism, existentialism to their basic romantic solipsism. That is why any character acts jealously guarding the rights of the self or, in Murdoch’s comment about existential man, “like a neurotic who seeks to cure himself by unfolding a myth about himself” (“Sublime” 268). All are
preoccupied to make their own stories in which they are the hero. What makes Dora special in the plot is not her “relative lack of judgmentalism” that Wagner-Lawlor insists on (8). It is her having an eye for details. Undergoing a series of experiences, she grows capable of the Murdochian virtue of acknowledging the others.

In The Unicorn, similarly, no figure is the hero as no one precedes the others in moral status. Almost as late as the concluding section of the novel, it comes out that even Marian and Effingham, the outsiders who have come to live temporarily with the stage characters do not have a much different personality. As Jack Stewart truly puts it, all the cast are “trapped in a state of Gothic enchantment or illusion, a state the implied reader enters and absorbs, before learning to stand back and criticize it” (38). From Gerald’s announcement of Peter’s imminent return to Gaze until the end of the narrative, a series of revelatory macabre events open our eyes to the hidden nature of truth. Appalled by the behavior of the characters, we disengage our sympathy with them and immediately feel ashamed at our own gullibility for taking the apparent gothic world for granted. The shocking events flash that world as not a restricting world imposed by external forces but a self-imposed cocoon knitted by of the illusion-weaving consciousness of the cast, a world that even the indulgence of our own fantasy cherishes and solidifies. Here any illusions are not the by-products of the gothic atmosphere but highly conducive to it.

Hannah Crean-Smith is the buttress of this fantasy world. The owner of Gaze mansion, married very young to her cousin Peter Crean-Smith who is believed to have imprisoned her here because of her liaison, Hannah is submerged in her own fantasy world nourishing and nourished by the fantasies of those around her. When pressed by Marian for the reason of her insistence on staying at Gaze while she can leave the place with Gerald to whose desire she has surrendered, she confides in her how and why she has tolerated her seven-year confinement. Magnifying only parts of what Hannah confides to Marian about her inner life, Jack Stewart interprets Hannah as a hollow figure who battens on the others’ view of her, a ghost who needs others to materialize, “a blank or dazzling surface that mirrors the fantasies of those who gaze at her” (79). A perusal of the relevant passage invalidates Jack Stewart’s reading. She reveals to Marian that though a victim in everybody’s eyes she has been actually playing the role of God: “[a], Marian, it
is possible to go on and on and to suffer, to pray and to meditate, to impose on oneself a discipline of the greatest austerity, and for all this to be nothing, to be a dream” (*TU* 470).

She assures her that as a god she has relied as much on those around her as they on her:

“The false God is a tyrant. Or rather he is a tyrannical dream, and that is what I was. I have lived on my audience, on my worshippers. I have lived by their thoughts, by your thoughts—just as you have lived by what you thought were mine. And we have deceived each other” (472).

Playing the part of God, she cannot be what Jack Stewart describes as a “Ghostlike or schizophrenic” who “alienates herself from reality and becomes a hollow sham falsely animated by other people’s projections” (90). Her acceptance that despite the others’ attribution of their feelings to her “I had no feeling, I was empty. I lived by your belief in my suffering. But I had no real suffering” (474) illuminates her as a sadomasochistic self who depends on others to gratify her self-aggrandizement. In Miller’s words, “Such selves seek to ground themselves in others by drawing others to themselves, but each such self succeeds only in experiencing its solitude and nonentity” (qtd. in Jack Stewart 79). Gerald’s seduction of her is an unexpected twist in her fate that divests her of her godlike authority and satisfaction. Feeling threatened by his adaptation of a more effective power relation to her (that of a seducer than a jailor), she improvises a new role to replace her lost power.

Analyzing Hannah’s function in the novel spotlights her to be philosophically and symbolically its focal point. Her characterization not only animates the philosophical dimension of the novel but also qualifies her as the symbol of all other characters. Her self-confessed gain of vitality and pleasure from being the others’ object of gaze makes the reader curious about the nature of goodness. Moreover, it sets her aside as an archetype, the figure who like all other personae in the novel craves for self-satisfaction. Even it attracts attention to the textual existence of the characters in *The Unicorn*. Jack Stewart believes, “[h]er refusal to function free, authentic self underscores the metafictionality of her confession” (90). Her conscious denial of her moral or psychological core intensified in her palindromic name devoid of any metaphysical significance metafictionally reveals that she and all the other personae that have lived on
the role she has enacted are just textual signs, words on paper. She assures Marian, “[a]nd do you know what I have been really? Nothing, a legend. A hand stretched out from the real world went through me as through paper” (emphasis mine 471).

Apart from this covert metafictional hint to the linguistic construction of characters, Hannah’s statements are very revealing regarding the conventions of characterization and the actual style of characterization in *The Unicorn*. Ironically, despite her emphasis on her lack of individuality, Hannah is like all the other personae is the end product of the utilization of the two common traditional characterization techniques. All the cast of *The Unicorn* keep their individuality while possessing typical features. They are interestingly enough both psychological types and fictional types. That is, they feature certain psychological traits and are modeled on the other characters in Murdoch’s fiction. For instance, Hannah is an introvert woman who prefers silence and suffering as the best way to combat her unhappy life; she is reminiscent of Ann in *An Unofficial Rose*, Rosa in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, and Kathleen in *The Red and the Green*. Marian is a young girl proud of her freedom and confident of her ability to make people conscious of the happiness that freedom can bring them. In this sense, she is similar to Dora in *The Bell*, Rain in *The Sandcastle*, and Annette in *The Flight from the Enchanter*. Effingham is a man of inaction, one who instead of risking his self-esteem for his object of love draws pleasure and self-satisfaction from being only a courtly lover; he reminds one of the Count in *Nuns and Soldiers*, Felix in *An Unofficial Rose*, and Martin Lynch-Gibbon in *A Severed Head*. Denis is a self-erasing man who brings to mind Nigel in *Bruno’s Dream*, Tallis in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, and James in *The Sea, the Sea*.

The adoption of a limited third-person retrospective narration assigned to two focalizers more effectively allows for the utilization of both techniques of showing and telling, hence brings about a more truthful presentation of characters. Unlike the modern heavy reliance on showing and the realistic omniscient narrative’s preference for telling, the narration mode in *The Unicorn* strikes a balance between the two techniques to offer as-large-as-life presentations of its cast. Approaching others from two centers of consciousness gives rise to a narrative replete with descriptions of the physical features and characters. Limited to Marian’s and Effingham’s points of view, *The Unicorn*
ironically creates highly life-like characters, figures that are noticeably more vague and unpredictable than any in the novels analyzed so far.

The evident, self-conscious concern of the characters to adjust to the fairy-tale character-types never dampens their overwhelming individuality. Their unpredictable actions defy any definite labeling and make them stunningly individual. There are always some discrepancies in their behaviors that disrupt their conscious enactment of definable typical roles. Whether through diversity in their past and present reactions to certain situations, or in their motivations and the subsequent external behaviors or even sudden impulsive actions that do not go with their apparent scheme of things, almost all the cast are inconsistent, a feature that guarantees their freedom and individuality. Hannah’s unbelievable murder of Gerald is not in accord with her submissive acceptance of the confinement. Moreover, as McDowell notes, “[t]he golden image of Hannah as a suffering Christ is also flawed by her self-consciousness and by her tendency to regard herself as a dramatized figure. She, has, in short, batten on her worshippers because they have so unanimously believed in the transcendent nature of her pain” (358). When finally able to leave the house, in contrasts to the previous occasions, she escapes and drowns herself in the sea. Since she is to be a free individual, McDowell’s criticizing comment that “[a]s the mythic center of this novel, Hannah is not always convincing” is out of place (356).

As a free individual, like other personae, Hannah cannot fulfill completely her prescribed mythic function; that is why she appears as, according to McDowell, “the enchanted princess, the sleeping beauty, whose awakening to the reality of her situation spells not happiness but catastrophe” (357). Despite her influence on the flow of events, the catastrophe is not arbitrary but in accord to the operating frames controlling the plot. Her fate is determined by a local lore which prophesizes that she will die if she comes out of Gaze’s premises. The consequent disaster, moreover, is the outcome of an underlying psychological pattern that is to show, according to Jack Stewart, the “baleful power of Ate.” As he explains, “Hannah seems on the point of awakening to reality just as the curtain is about to come down. But she has not done the work of suffering and self-recognition that would purge her and so is bound to re-enact her violent impulses at the
end of the seven-year cycle” (90). Such paradoxical resistance to one scheme while conforming to the other ones dramatizes Murdochian concept of “limited freedom.” It signifies that man’s freedom is not absolute, the sole determiner of one’s actions but subject to others, contingencies and conventional beliefs.

Effingham Cooper, the former pupil of Max at Oxford and now the head of a civil service office in London, is another figure that has inconsistent behavior. Up until Hannah plays her role of a Sleeping Beauty, he manifests a stable self. He develops a romantic dream about his relationship with Hannah. To prolong and solidify the illusion, he resorts to literary tradition and assumes himself as a Courtly Lover. As Jack Stewart hints to his similarity to Dora, he is reluctant to give up the myth he weaves around himself to satisfy his “dreary trance-like solipsism” (82). An inscriber of his own role in the story, he resents the superimposition of the other’s myth on his own: “[Effie] needed time to decide upon his own view of the story, to regroup his emotions, to sketch out his own salvation. . . . He did not want Max to contain him in any picture of the destiny of Hannah. The story, after all, was his, he had suffered enough for it” (509).

As soon as she puts her mask aside and kills Gerald, Effingham is deprived of the role he has secured himself in the fairy-tale pattern. To avoid playing the roles that the others may impose on him, he sets immediately to yarn another story. In his new myth, Hannah turns to acts “as a doomed figure, a Lilith, a pale death-dealing enchantress: anything but a human being” (573), someone guilty that should get rid of. As a compensation for his shaken solipsism, he first turns to Marian while they are anxiously awaiting Peter’s return and the probable consequent disaster, then to Alice after hearing her public confession about her unrequited love for Denis. His fall for Alice, who has been unrequitedly in love with him for years, is not real and permanent, but temporary and impulsive. Days later, he spends time explaining everything for her and disengaging himself from her family forever.

Marian, the British governess who suffering from an unrequited love for his boyfriend Geoffrey leaves London to reorganize herself in the far-away desolate setting of the novel in Ireland, is another unpredictable individual in the story. As her inquiry from Denis regarding the nature of the mystery at Gaze demonstrates, she self-
consciously seeks her place in the fairy-tale pattern of the story. She does want to be a
good force fighting the evil forces that imprisoned Hannah. However, as a forlorn figure
in search of love and happiness, Marian proves incapable of enacting her voluntary role.
As the plot unfurls, she is seen involved in a couple of affairs with almost all the people
around her, thus disappointedly ineffective in protecting Hannah let alone setting her free
of her miserable life. Her obsession with Gerald, Violet, Jamesie, then Effingham and
Denis, surreptitiously blunts her keen interest in Hannah’s future.

Her failure in rescuing Hannah and her subsequent trance-like surrender to
Gerald’s kiss (and his authority) opens her eyes to her bigger failure in breaking up the
fairy-tale frame that has restricted the characters’ freedom. The final catastrophe that
ensues out of her intervention into the pattern manifests that instead of invalidating the
pattern, she has set in motion its new cycles for herself, Denis and Alice. Marian gets
assimilated into the pattern in the very early days when Gerald develops the habit of
calling her “Maid Marian.” But it is not until the penultimate chapter that her deep
involvement in the pattern becomes evident. Her acknowledgement of a “blood guilt”
that will haunt her thereafter, in McDowell’s words, implies her knowledge of being
“implicated now in the innermost life of the castle, implicated more deeply also in the
wider life of mankind that she has yet been.” It is hence indicative of her moral growth,
her journey from “non-involvement to commitment, form innocence to experience, from
incorruption to guilt, from relative ignorance of spiritual possibilities to fuller knowledge
of them” (357).

Denis Nolan and Max Lejour are indefinable in their own way. A humble,
amenable servant, Denis is seen capable of reacting on the spur of moment. Being a
servant at Riders, he immediately leaves there when Alice tries to tempt him into an affair
at the bog. Later in the commotion that the news of Peter’s return ignites, he challenges
Gerald’s power. He then submits to Marian’s temptation at the bog. With the present of
more passionate lovers, he is the last one imaginable of relieving Hannah of her torturing
nightmare. However, to our surprise, he drowns Peter whom he has picked up from the
airport by driving straight into the sea at the dawn of the flood. Despite Jack Stewart’s
likening of Denis to Max, claiming that both “misjudge Hannah’s case, the one because
of his own goodness and the other because of his fixation on the idea of goodness, both assuming that her suffering is spiritual expiation and that she should be allowed to complete it” (81), a focus on these two characters demonstrates their contrasts clearly. Denis self-consciously attempts to fake the image of goodness. He succeeds since, as Marian observes, he replaces the dead Hannah, going under the burden of guilt and suffering. The golden haze that envelopes him as he leaves Gaze carrying his rare fish with him hints to that substitution. That light effect is reminiscent of the light that Effingham, influenced by his epiphany during his entrapment in the bog, sees haloing Hannah. Virtually assuming her identity, he similarly would enjoy the power that the mask would grant him. He goes away to avoid passing his suffering to others ignorant of the fact that, as proven in Hannah’s case, it is almost impossible for human nature. His confession that he killed Peter out of hatred and anger even jealousy does not put him on par with the good man Murdoch valorizes in her moralism. Motivated by self-desire rather that Hannah’s miserable condition, he is another figure manipulated by his ego.

Max, whose features bring to mind Rozanov in The Philosopher’s Pupil, is the vaguest individual in the novel. Although his non-involvement in the plot and his callous inaction against the tragic events persuade us to regard him as the most selfish persona in The Unicorn, his philosophical interpretation of the scene divulged in his talk with Effingham about Hannah’s condition illuminates him in a more favorable light. His seclusion at Riders to complete his book on Plato qualifies him as the most unbiased character in the novel. His philosophical inquiries have fortified his moral identity by curbing his self-obsession. It is his distant objective appraisal of Hannah’s situation that strikes the reader to the complexity of her character as well as the nature of the spell that has blindfolded those around her.

Never meeting Hannah, Max encapsulates her inner conflict in the words from Aeschylus: “Zeus, who leads men into the ways of understanding, has established the rule that we must learn by suffering” (190). This observation that by extension describes the inner conflicts of all the cast makes Hannah in Max’s eyes the “image of the significance of suffering” (222). In his elaboration on her condition, he remarks that the problem with those around her is that they are blind to her real self and take her only as a unicorn, a
Christ figure. Nobody sees her as “an ordinary guilty person” (223). Despite McDowell’s observation that for Max Hannah’s suffering is good (358), he is never sure that she is an epitome of goodness because he cannot tell her real motivations. Aware of the idea of Ate and the power that a complete victim can draw out of her situation, he cannot decide why she refuses to pass her suffering on to others. He knows that while transmitting one’s pain to another represents the abuse of power and the origin of evil, “to be powerless, to be a complete victim, may be another source of power” (224). Therefore, he highlights her other possible dimension. He accepts to Effingham that Hannah “may be just a sort of enchantress, a Circe, a spiritual Penelope keeping her suitors spellbound and enslaved” (225), a possibility that seems probable since both Effingham and Marian take her as such; when Effingham first visits her at the beginning of her confinement, she appears “marvelously strange to him, a fey, almost demonic creature” (214). Moreover, after Hannah shoots Gerald dead, Marian feels afraid of her and regards herself under some strange, “compulsive fascination” with her (513).

Gerald Scottow, the figure Marian describes as a “hunting and shooting type” (83), is another figure that cannot be contained within a definite image. There is an ironical twist in his characterization. At the beginning he appears to Marian as “thoroughly nice and ordinary and seems to be a sort of bailiff-cum-family-friend” (83). However, later he turns to have the upper hand in all his relationships. He commands all in Gaze and plays the role of Hannah’s jailor. He subdues Jamesie by coaxing him into a gay relationship with himself, controls Violet treating her as an old woman, manipulates Marian by coddling her and calling her “Maid Marian,” and masters Hannah by his avowed fidelity. These strategies secure him the absolute power he needs as a jailor. His last trick of seducing Hannah, which stirs her fierce resistance, is to perfect his authority. As Marian realizes in a flash after Hannah assures her that Peter’s cable was fake, “Gerald had, with one quick twist, as of one manipulating a whirling rope, bound her [Hannah], enslaved her, a thousand times more and then proposed that the situation should continue. Gerald must surely have known almost at once that the telegram was a fake. He must have telephoned New York. He might even have sent the telegram himself” (468). In this way, he is an individual whose amiability bewitches other people and captivates them to his will.
The cast’s submissive surrender to what he wants and says marks him as another enchanter-type that is in almost all her novels. A native and “an untrammeled force of nature” like Denis, he is, however, blind to the counteractions that his avarice for power may arise. In Marian’s eyes, he is “the centre from which the furies came” (37). What secures Gerald the central evil force in the novel is his awareness of “the abstract significance of Hannah’s agony.” As McDowell notes, “he has perhaps misled Hannah as well as others, tempting her to dwell somewhat too narcissistically on her situation” (358). The imprisonment in this unreal world brings even the most patient sufferers to the breaking point. That is why an unexpected amount of fury is vented in the closing part of the novel. Gerald’s attempt to fortify his upper position against the liberating schemes of Marian lets loose the evil at Gaze and Riders. Hannah shoots him. Denis kills Peter without any compunction and consequence but “losing his essential innocence and his rock-like integrity” (McDowell 356).

Considering the foregoing, what is unique about the characterization in The Unicorn is the projection of the characters’ undecidability. In her letter to Geoffrey introducing the people at Gaze, Marian accepts that “everything is rather ‘sort of’ here!” (83) This metafictional comment is applicable to even Violet and Jamesie Evercreech, Alice and Philip Lejour. Their indefinability props their individuality. Violet’s role in the novel is not clear. A distant relation of Hannah and the sister of Jamesie, she seems a creepy devoted housekeeper. While she is at her service, she blames Hannah as “a murderous adulterous woman” and waits impatiently for her punishment. In a private talk to Marian, she confuses her by informing her of Jamesie’s love for her while she herself fondles her hand. Jamesie, the chauffeur, who once set about to rescue Hannah and failed, enters in a gay relationship with Gerald, shows affection to Marian, delights in the cancelation of Hannah and Gerald’s departure and finally coaxes Marian to let Hannah go.

Alice and Philip too show very shocking behaviors. Her jealous reaction to stop Effingham from kidnapping Hannah along her unquestioning acceptance of his love for Hannah indicates that she is still in love with him. However, it shocks everyone including the reader that she was and still is desirous of Denis. As Hannah’s lover and the cause of
the strife, Philip is very passive. His unexpected, impassionate appearance to take Hannah away when we have already forgotten him as the capable redeemer makes his sudden death extremely pathetic rather than romantic. These personae like the rest are examples of “a beautiful unicorn” because their indefinability rivets readers to what is outside themselves. The skillful joining of the fantastic and the ordinary helps Murdoch to spread her own spell on the novel and make it a real unicorn, a beautiful distinct object capable of improving man’s moral identity.

The ignorance of this aspect of the novel makes critics like Levine (457) and McDowell (356) find fault with Hanna’s characterization. The various interpretations of her character, represented in Violet’s existential judgment of her as “a violent and guilty creature who has failed to achieve self-understanding” (Jack Stewart 90), Effingham’s romantic view of her as “a legendry creature, a beautiful unicorn,” and Max’s spiritual understanding of her as the “image of the significance of suffering,” foreground Hannah’s complexity. Nevertheless, McDowell believes that “[i]ndeed a suspicion obtrudes that the complexity is at times contrived and that Hannah’s problem is not at all points clear in Miss Murdoch’s own mind” (356). Emphasizing that Hannah “never seems as significant as her mythic content,” Levine points out that most of her personae “resemble fugitive types from a British manor house mystery who have somehow wandered into the wrong novel” (457).

The structural irony in Hannah’s characterization is that deviating from flat characters Murdoch actually ends in portraying a group who are morally typical. Despite all their differences, the cast in The Unicorn are invariably self-centered. Driven by their selfish desires, they are cocooned in their fantasy worlds. Indeed, the concurrence of their schemes of things imparts a phantasmagoric, gothic air to the novel. The characters are consciously involved in yarning stories out of their situations to eschew being pinned down in the each other’s stories, even in the plot in which they are entrapped. The novel closes the way it does because Hannah, Marian, Effingham, Gerald, Denis, even violet, Jamesie, Alice, Philip and Carrie are keen to dominate their own version of story by exerting their own impacts on the flow of events.
Their awareness of their influence on the plot privileges them to be more than flat characters. Even Max, whose passivity is eye-catching, is not flat since he occupies another indefinable center at least for Hannah and Effingham. As complex figures, however, the question of dynamicity remains a potentiality for them. Blindfolded by their illusions, their complexity does not guarantee an improvement of vision. The candidates for change and a better personality are Marian and Effingham, who as the narration ceases are in crisis of identity, and Denis and Alice, who seem to bury their sufferings in themselves to stop Ate. Denis’s departure from Gaze and Marian to stifle the strife in himself although may symbolically illuminate him as the good man, in fact, sheds doubt on his success and even that of Alice who generously lets both Denis and Effingham to abandon her forever since it gives the plot a cyclic pattern.

To sum up, what Murdoch achieves in *The Unicorn* is portraying the free play of its characters who while defying the control of the plot through inscribing their own actions underscore the importance of plot in literary narrative and how it is interlaced with the element of character. When dismayed at their inability to affect the plot with their own stamp, these self-conscious characters are happy there is a controlling plot that will put an end to the flow of events in a predetermined way ignorant of the fact that the plot is then driven by other characters so still potential of surprises. Being free, mortal beings, these personae beautifully highlight the absurd nature of the uncontrollable world which, her critics unanimously agree, is Murdoch’s major concern in her novels. In her concise comment, Byatt notes, “[t]here are those, including the first two, the Irish-Gothic-Platonic religious fantasy of *The Unicorn*, and the Nietzschean fable of *The Time of the Angles*, where the symbolic nature of the world constructs a fabulous story in which, nevertheless, the people are mortal beings, not figments” (xvii). Generally speaking, supported by her moral philosophy, it is in this way that characterization becomes her basic medium to revitalize the novel as the vintage artistic expression of postmodernism.

### 2.4 Narrator and Narration

In his study of the rise of the novel, Ian Watt emphasizes that the novel came into being as a “full and authentic report of human experience.” It had an “air of total authenticity” claiming “verisimilitude” (qtd. in Matz 32). Later on in the early twentieth-
For the novelist like Woolf, Cather, Lawrence realism appears, as Matz puts, “arbitrary,” so why not the invention of other conventions to make fiction truer to the new and ignored aspects of reality (32). Dissatisfied with the limited scope and rigid form of the novels of the past to deal with modern reality, they stimulate the emergence of a new narrative species by inventing techniques to project the ordinary reality. Instead of writing for didacticism, excitement or social criticism as did realists, they write to make the lived experience presentable in works of art by reflecting its intensity in rich details.

To warn against the threats of modernity and ward off the destruction it imposed on human values, transformation of the novel in both theme and form was inevitable. In tandem with many technical changes the like of the banishment of “perfect heroes, artificial plots, false endings, and the excessive detail,” modern novelists evade from the omniscient narrator. A narrow, flawed personal perspective replaces the omniscient, panoramic, impersonal viewpoint as the consequence of the belief in relativity of reality. Focalization flourishes in place of objectivity (Matz 51). Revealing the thoughts of characters through stream of consciousness technique eliminates the need for any external narrator. Booth believes that the modern narrator is dissolved in the characters, so in lieu of a single objective view, there are a couple of narrators: “any sustained inside view, of whatever depth, temporarily turns the character whose mind is shown into a narrator” (164). Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg, on the contrary, find modern fiction’s reliance on stream of consciousness an extreme technique that almost risked its narrativity. Confused between author and narrator, modernist novelists deactivated the latter to eliminate the role of the former in hope of expanding the mimetic dimension of their works. Substituting focalizer(s) for the narrator is a suicidal blow for the novel, since it dispenses with the fundamental elements of narrative which are “a story and a story-teller” (4).

The pronouncement of the death of the narrator in the modern novel has been supported by the negative publicity it has attracted. The favor for focalizers rather than
the narrator brings about a poor public receptions of modern fiction scandalizing it as “high art,” something reserved for the elite. Distinct in the narratological studies, focalization refers to the prism through which a story is textually presented; as Rimmon-Kenan elaborates, it is a visual stance that includes “cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation” (73). While the term narration, she puts, signifies a verbal “communication process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee” (2).

Focalization enables the modern novel to duplicate “ambiguity, plurality, [and] heterogeneity,” the attributes Matz ascribes to modern life (59). It leads to the emergence of multi-perspective narratives, notably in the works of Woolf and Faulkner, which reveal the events through the consciousness of a group of characters. Despite restricting the role of the narrator, the application of multiple focalizations was justified for triple reasons. Matz enumerates them to be “epistemological,” to show how perception occurs, “aesthetic,” to reflect more subtle nuances, and more especially “ethical,” to increase the appreciation of other people (53). Through diverse standpoints, continues Matz, the modern novel deliberates what has always been a tendency in the novel (59). Termed by Mikhail Bakhtin as “heteroglossia,” this tendency is the defining characteristic of the genre of the novel and refers to “a diversity of social speech types . . . and a diversity of individual voices artistically organized” (262). Aiming for “compositional unites” instead of unified wholes helps modernists to attract attention to the way linguistic styles embody socio-cultural values (Matz 59).

The modern linguistic fragmentation, exposing the unified discourse as illusion, is moreover, complemented by narration inconsistency which is, in Matz’s term, “psychological,” projecting the quality of the consciousness rather than different social outlooks (60). The third-person and introspective first-person narrations are merged in the form of limited third-person narrators to give a more exact replica of the external and internal spheres. The dominant mode of narration in radical cases like Joyce’s Finnegans Wake, this inconsistency disrupts the evenness of objective narration further by including explosive feelings to make for eroticism which was treated only obliquely and morally in the previous fiction. The integration of all these fragmentations in the modern novel helps enhance the representationality of this medium to capture the multifacetedness of reality.
As the modern innovations for a truer form exhaust, the modern skepticism which has given birth to them in doubting the realistic forms rises out of their ashes and gains so much strength this time to doubt the possibility of “representation” at all. Built on this extreme skepticism, postmodern fiction centers on “mediation” not “immediacy”; it celebrates language games believing that reality can never be captured in language hence introducing the exposure of the language apparatus as the only job of the novel. Ironically, however, it achieves presenting the unrepresentable: “the world’s non-interpretablility” (Brooke-Rose 163). Focalization still adds to the heteroglossic aspect of the postmodern novel, but its idiosyncratic feature is self-conscious narration, the interest in how narration produces an illusion of reality. In the third book of Plato’s Republic, as Rimmon-Kenan points to, Socrates talks of diegesis and mimesis as two distinct way poets render speech: in the former, poets reproduce all the speeches in their own words so diegesis means the same as “telling”; in the latter, they create the illusion that they are not speaking, what is more commonly known as “showing” (109). Having these distinctions in mind, David Lodge concludes that in contrast to realistic novels in which mimesis and diegesis are dovetailed or even modernist texts in which mimesis comes to the foreground, postmodern novels give primacy to diegesis (370). Disconcerted by realists’ adulteration of mimesis with diegesis, modernists preferred a full turn to mimesis. Henry James’s injunction “dramatize dramatize!” encapsulates this new tendency, a trend that prizes “showing” as the ideal for modern narrative fiction so much that Lubbock states: “[t]he art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself” (62). That is why accompanying the traditional techniques of dialogues and monologues stream of consciousness abounds in modern novels. Stricken with the paradoxical nature of language as both a medium for truth and a constructor of truth, postmodernists felt the necessity to turn to telling as the sole means of communication in any verbal medium. They believe that always showing or mimesis is subordinate to telling and diegesis since creating any illusion or mimesis is done through words and diegesis in any narrative. This absolute faith in diegesis becomes the fountainhead of the postmodern novel which distinguishes itself from its modern ancestors, in Lodge’s formulation, by substituting “stream of narration” for stream of consciousness (370).
Of all the seven types of speech presentation McHale defines through a progressive continuum from purely diegetic to purely mimesis\(^8\) postmodern narration invests on no particular one. Its objective in employing whichever of them is to parody its conventionality and inefficiency in imitating reality. In drawing on such speech varieties, the postmodern narrator becomes self-conscious. In contrast to the modernist maximization of information while minimizing the informant, the postmodern novel sticks to informants who are obsessed by the way information is communicated. In their obsession with the act of narration, they echo a Derridean view of language projecting how all language is in operation a kind free indirect discourse, hence incapable of an objective representation. For Derrida, language “always ‘quotes’ other language, constituting itself on linguistic iterability and cultural clichés whose direct utterers are nowhere present” (Rimmon-Kenan 118).

In this linguistic preoccupation, postmodernist writers aim more for multi-story narratives than poly-vocal texts. Still faithful to the redemptive power of fiction, writers like Murdoch set to portray the opacity of people to revitalize the moral potential of fiction. It is the difficulty and necessity of imagining other centers of consciousness that turns her fiction into multi-story narratives in which no story is central. In an attempt to comprehend their surroundings, her characters get into story-making but none of their tales is superior to others. Put together, these stories dramatize the truth about human consciousness that her first-person narrators, as Byatt avers, fail to learn (xviii).

Avoiding the predilection of nineteenth-century novelists for omniscient narrators, Murdoch invests primarily on the first-person and limited third-person narrators. The former are witty, conscious of their narrating role while the latter taint their point of views by those of a group of focalizers. To hook their readers, they deploy all signs of overtness that Chatman lists in the order of increasing perceptibility: (1) “description of setting,” (2) “identification of characters,” (3) “temporal summary,” (4) “definition of characters,” (5) “reports of what characters did not think or say,” (6)

\(^8\) From the most diegetic to the most mimetic, they are “diegetic summary,” “summary, less purely diegetic,” “indirect content paraphrase,” “indirect discourse, mimetic to some degree,” “free indirect discourse,” “direct discourse: monologue or dialogue,” “free direct discourse: first person interior monologue.” For further details see Brian McHale, “Free Indirect Discourse: a survey of recent Accounts,” *Poetics and Theory of Literature* 3 (1978): 249-87.
“commentary” (220-52). What is conspicuous about them is their unusual disposition for commentary; their comment on both story and narration differs from the nineteenth-century narrator. Murdoch’s narrators comment to undermine the suspension of disbelief rather than reinforce it. In addition to judgments on and generalization about the characters and events, they highlight the difficulty of representing the world, the inefficiency of language and the essential function of fictionalization in our perception.

Out of her twenty-six novels, six have, to use Rimmon-Kenan’s terminology, “homodiegetic” narrators: they are first-person male narrators participating in their stories. Narrating their own significant experiences rather than being a witness to others’, they are more specifically “auto-diegetic” (99). Their subjective voices are rendered in a distinct form that has, as Matz comments about The Sea, the Sea, “little of the confusion and uncertainty” characteristic of modern fiction (118). Instead of restoring to stream of consciousness to reveal an amorphous consciousness, they are busy yarning tales to protect themselves in their cocoons from the indefinable and unknowns. James Donaghue in Under the Net (1954), Martin Lynch-Gibbon in A Severed Head (1961), Edmund Narraway in The Italian Girl (1964), Bradley Pearson in The Black Prince (1973), Hilary Burde in A Word Child (1975), and Charles Arrowby in The Sea, the Sea (1978) are all engaged spiderlike in spinning yarns that though veiling their own visions illuminate the reader through their inherent gaps and contradictions and the affixation of the others’ stories that undermine their own versions of events.

Her third-person narrators are extremely intertwined with focalization. It is strikingly obvious in the various chapters Murdoch allots to the characterization of distinctive personae and to the continuation of story from their specific angles. In Bruno’s Dream, for example, the narrator follows Bruno, his son Miles, Miles’s wife Diana, her sister Lisa, Bruno’s son-in-law Danby, his maid Adelaide, and Adelaide’s cousins, Nigel and his twin brother Will. The multiplication of focalization not only adds to the facets of the prism the story is seen through but adds facets to the story itself making it impossible to determine the truthful account. As a non-verbal factor of narrative that can only be expressed through language, it necessitates the use of free indirect discourse (FID) which confuses the voice of the narrator and the focalizer. The employment of FID helps
Murdoch intensify the stylistic and semantic complexity of her fiction since it, according to Rimmon-Kenan, articulates plural attitudes and lets what Perry calls “alternative patternings” co-exist (117). In her elaboration on the benefits of this technique to literature, Rimmon-Kenan notes that it is an index to both mimesis and literariness of a narrative text. Attributing a polyphonic quality that imparts to the thematic level of the narrative such as depicting a developing self as, Bronzwaer’s interesting discussion of a novel by Murdoch shows, FID undoubtedly enhances both the mimetic and artistic status of her novels. Murdoch successfully meets her aesthetic standard by investing on the highly realistic mode of FID.

Despite their obvious discrepancies, both kinds of narrations (the first-person and the limited third-person) share an affinity in fulfilling the moral obligation Murdoch feels in giving currency to the individuality of human beings in fiction. A narration may contain narrations within it that turns the actual narrative into multi-level narrative. Distinguishing between extradiiegetic, diegetic and hypodiegetic levels of narrative, Rimmon-Kenan implies that the transition from one to the other can be a matter of style or contribution to the theme. In most of her fiction whether narrated by tricky auto-diegetic narrators, or by the limited third-person ones stuck to a small number of focalizers, narrative levels imbricate to suggest that reality is always colored by its narration and, thus, the binary opposition of fact/fiction should be erased. Through such overlapping, Murdoch interlaces a paradox into the texture of her narratives best encapsulated in “whoever you invented invented you too” (53) : a sentence from Christine Brooke-Rose’s Thru (1975) which is built on, as Rimmon-Kenan puts it, “the interchangeability of narrative levels” (97).

A burning issue on the agenda of the narrator, unreliability is highlighted as the natural feature of any narrator in Murdoch’s fiction. Unlike modernists, she does not rely on unreliable narrators to project the shattered value systems or the split self; her fiction illustrates, indeed, the inevitability of unreliability in its inconsistent, multifarious stories. A reliable narrator is “one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth” (Rimmon-Kenan 103). Postmodern fiction debunks the issue of reliability as a myth, something impossible
due to unrepresentationality of language and unrepresentability of reality which are the central concerns in Murdoch’s novels. Her narrators are unreliable whether because of their limited knowledge, personal involvement or problematic value-scheme, the main sources of unreliability in Rimmon-Kenan’s words (103).

None of her autodiegetic narrators is very young like Pip in *Great Expectations* or even idiot, an extreme case of unreliability epitomized in Benji in Faulkner’s *Sound and Fury*; they are in fact adult and mentally normal whether in their thirties as in *Under the Net*, *An Italian Girl*, and *A Severed Head*, or in their middle age as in *The Black Prince*, *A Word Child*, and *The Sea, the Sea*. What proves them not trustable is the accompaniment of their narrow knowledge of their surroundings with their excessive evaluations of them. Her third-person narrators are also unreliable informants; they are restricted to the consciousness of certain number of characters not all of them and see the world just through their eyes. A few of her characters remain as mysterious to the reader as they are to the other characters. Stripped of any overt moral observations, such narrators invalidate the question of moral unreliability that arises whenever a discrepancy is felt between the narrator’s values and those of the implied author of a piece of work. Letting the moral stands of various people to emerge into the foreground, they engage the readers into a moral activity and let them see the difficulty of moral judgment what Murdoch requires for any ideal true fiction.

This happens in her first-person narrations as well where the other standpoints find a gap to vocalize themselves undercutting the authority of the narrator. In addition to the character-narrator clash of values, Murdoch takes advantage of three more other ways of creating unreliable moral narrators which Rimmon-Kenan identifies as such: “when the facts contradict the narrator’s views. . . .when the outcome of the action proves the narrator wrong. . .and when the narrator’s language contains internal contradictions, double-edged images” (104). Employing these techniques of unreliability, Murdoch never lets any counterpoint standpoint prevail. More than aiming to attract attention to the views of the implied author through the unreliability of the narrator, she wants to point to the immorality of moral generalizations.
The recipient of the narration communication, viz. the narratee, comes to play a significant role in some of her works especially her first-person novels. Using Rimmon-Kenan’s terminology, her narratees are always extradiegetic (i.e. they belong to the first narrative level), and heterodiegetic (not a participant in the story narrated to them) (106). They are not personalized like those to whom Marlow narrates the story of Lord Jim, but are frequently addressed by the narrators as “you” in A Word Child, and The Philosopher’s Pupil, or as “reader” in Under the Net and The Black Prince. Such narratees are passive and silent obvious in the lack of any actual sentences on their side or the narrators’ inference from such statements. In short, in Rimmon-Kenan’s terms, they are “covert” (107). Their covertness is another sign that the narrators are self-conscious. They have been the implied readers inevitably transformed into covert narratees for the narrators to be self-conscious.

To provoke more reflections about the textuality and fictionality which are the hallmarks of self-conscious narratives, various titles are assigned to certain portions of her narrative texts. The inclusive page numbers that separate various sections show that each story has a predetermined form, a plot that requires certain events or characters to come on stage. As a collection of textual blocks put together in particular orders, such novels are in alliance with postmodern fiction trying to lay bare the underlying mechanism of fiction as an autonomous system. For example in The Black Prince, the content page is an indispensable part of the novel. This appendage adds another narrative level to the narrative drawing attention to the presence of the narrator or a compiler. A Word Child is written in the format of diary, each chapter designated by a weekday: it starts from “Thursday” and ends with “Christmas Day.” Her other novels rely heavily on other techniques of self-consciousness and their forms are rendered in the familiar realistic format compartmentalized whether solely by numbers or by the word “chapter” preceding those numbers.

“A flawless fusion of the mundane and the marvelous, laughter and lyricism, farce and philosophy” peerless, as Bradbury avers, in the history of the novel (ix), Under the Net is a postmodern, metafictional narrative. It differs from the self-aware narrative of Lawrence’s Tristram Shandy. Both are metafiction, but Under the Net like the rest of
Murdoch’s metafictional works integrates irony in its overall structure including the diegetic level. James Donaghue (Jake) is a young writer whose decision to write his first original work ends in the netlike narrative of *Under the Net*. As the narrator of the text, he is extradiegetic giving retrospectively an account of part of his life. Yet his overttness apparent in his frequent addressing of the reader and his tendency to reveal the appropriate information whenever it suits his plot, puts him in Rimmon-Kenan’s category of narrators who lose their reliability since their “interpretations, judgments, generalizations” deviate from those of the implied author (106). Since he is the implied author as well, the incorporation of generalizations rendered in the present tense in the past account of his narrative signals this inconsistency. His unreliability as a narrator is more underlined in the unsolvable mysteries in his account. Although Hugo’s account lets him fill some gaps in his narrative, there are still so many other unresolved gaps in it that sheds doubt not only on the reliability of his narration but makes it also postmodern in its possible versatility.

A narrator-author, Jake is suspected of double unreliability. His inability to give a faithful account of the story disqualifies him from the Murdochian norm of the truthful author. He is seen stuck under the obligations of narration: developing characterization, scene and plot according to their established standards. Whenever he wants to make a character or a scene, he uses the present tense in the middle of the account of events in the past. Besides in disrupting the boundary between the past and the present, the postmodern quality of this novel is seen in its exposition of the process of characterization and setting, the way they usually go astray from the rendering of the particular which is the hallmark of truthful fiction. In Jake’s case, it is shown that when geared toward generalization, characterization can ruin the credibility of the plot and shed doubt on the reliability of the narrator. Murdoch’s own norm of characterization pops out as the contrast to Jake’s characterizing which is undermined by the fact that none of the characters fit his descriptions.

For Murdoch, creating free, indefinable characters, as encountered in the cast of *Under the Net*, should be the inspiration for fiction. Jake, the author, cannot meet this requirement. The characters he makes are basically typical and amid their mysteries
homogeneous. The vague image Jake gives of Finn, whose relationship with him is a matter of mystery, is that of a nonentity, someone who cannot do any important tasks on his own and always depends on him:

He never makes haste. I find it hard to explain to people about Finn. He isn’t exactly my servant. He seems often more like my manager. Sometimes I support him, and sometimes he supports me; it depends. It's somehow clear that we aren’t equals. His name is Peter O’Finney, but you needn’t mind about that, as he is always called Finn, and he is a sort of remote cousin of mine, or so he used to claim, and I never troubled to verify this. But people do get the impression that he is my servant, and I often have this impression too, though it would be hard to say exactly what features of the situation suggest it. Sometimes I think it is just that Finn is a humble and self-effacing person and so automatically takes second place. When we are short of beds it is always Finn who sleeps on the floor, and this seems thoroughly natural. It is true that I am always giving Finn orders, but this is because Finn seems not to have many ideas of his own about how to employ his time. Some of my friends think that Finn is cracked, but this is not so; he knows very well indeed what he is about. (UTN 7-8)

Such image of him does not match with what he appears in the course of story. As soon as they are certain that they have to leave Madge’s house, it is Finn that finds a place for himself in their mutual friend’s flat, Dave’s. He has not waited for Jake’s ideas. When having nowhere to go Jake finally resorts to the same flat, it is again Finn who suggests him to seek the help of Anna, Jake’s ex-girlfriend, as Dave does not concede to have Jake at his place. Later on when he is locked in Sadie’s flat, it is Finn who picks the lock and sets him free. It is, moreover, with the help of Finn that he kidnaps Mister Mars. In all this occasions Finn is the master mind and Jake the fool. When Jake introduces himself, it is even learnt that Finn was the one who put him “on the boat for Holyhead” (23). To Jake’s surprise, he even finally returns to Ireland in contrast to Jake’s certainty that he would never go there.

Not only Finn but all other characters including Anna, Sadie, Madge, Mrs Tinckham, Dave, Hugo, the French novelist—Jean Pierre Breteuil, escape his categorizations. They act more freely and behave more differently than the personalities Jake the narrator-author creates for them. Anna is not as docile, intelligent, and decent as Jake believes in. After organizing a mime theatre only to attract Hugo, she continues her
job as a singer in French night clubs. Sadie is not so hard-hearted, seductive and foolish as he depicts. She is not after Hugo, or even jealous of Anna. Madge is not a decent, simple girl who earns by typing, but leans on others for her survival. She turns to be Finn’s girlfriend, in fact a slut. Mrs Tinckham is not the confidant and omniscient figure Jake makes of her. She does not know about the man who has put his rooms for rent on her advertisement board. Even, at the end of the novel, Jake the character does not confide in her his determination to be a novelist. Her query to the reason why just two of her cat’s (Maggie’s) kittens are Siamese undermines the image Jake sets of her as a cat-lover familiar with their language. Dave is not the anti-philosophical philosopher who will kill the interest in philosophy altogether, but, as his reasoning with Jake regarding the case of Mister Mars demonstrates, he is another capable Socrates who highlights philosophy as the highest human accomplishment. In his enthralment with specificity of things, Hugo is not the stoic Jake takes him; on the contrary, he is passionately involved in politics and in love with Sadie. Winning the Prix Goncourt prize for his *Nous Les Vainqueurs*, Jean Pierre Breteuil proves to be not a best-selling author but a successful French novelist who launches a French film Studio ready to hire Jake as a script-writer.

Jake’s unreliability as a narrator-author is more supported by his own characterization which does not correspond totally with the image of him that forms out of the scattered information throughout the narrative. As the novel unfolds, Jake the character comes into light as an alcoholic who does not have the self-respect he claims. When bereft of dwelling and money he deviously tries to acquire some temporarily. He is ready to take advantage of anybody even those he is ashamed of or he dislikes such as Hugo and Anna, or Sadie and Sammy respectively. He has a parasitic clinging on all he knows. He readily lies (to Anna, Sadie, Sammy, Lefty, Hugo, and Mrs Tinckham), steals (Sammy’s dog, a coronet among Anna’s prop things, some flowers from Covent Garden Market) and smuggles bottles of cognac from France to satisfy his crave for drink. He is the fool who always needs Finn. He still goes to drinking bouts, smokes heavily and works for radio. Interestingly enough, he never accepts these features as part of his direct characterization; he attributes them to other characters instead.
In addition to his introductory comments about each character, Jake’s prompt post-characterizations are another sign of how the obligation of the conventional characterization is restrictive. Their corrective nature show that in order to have autonomous, free characters, characterization must not be treated as separate from the plot. For example, to complement his view of Finn as a nonentity, he adds after Lefty “waved vaguely to Finn as if he knew him,” “Finn is someone who never gets introduced” (108). Another instance is when to justify his lying to Mrs Tinckham concealing his decision to be a novelist, he immediately concludes that “I am very conservative by temperament” (284). Such generalizations come to the foreground as the inherent fault with the any direct characterization.

A critical issue in direct characterization, generalization can have a falsifying effect on the narrative setting as well. Especially while describing London streets and districts, Jake resorts to generalizations which are challenged in the actual account of the story. The area around Hugo’s flat above Holborn Viaduct, for example, is depicted drenched into an uncanny loneliness, “we could see no living being. Not a cat, not a copper . . . the place was mute around us, walled in by a distant murmur which may have been the sound of traffic or else the summery sigh of the declining sun” (102). A page later this dead silence is already a myth. When Jake, Finn and Dave get into Hugo’s flat, they face the deafening noise of lots of starlings which are fluttering outside his window as if they were in a cage. Another notable instance is when he disvalues the area west of Earls Court as the contingent part of London, a region not “necessary” and with no “sufficient reason” (26). But these areas turn to be the hotbed of events, hence indispensable to his narration.

Integrating so many personal opinions of Jake in the narrative of Under the Net, Murdoch, the arch-implied author of the text, shows how much narration can be subject to the subjectivity of the narrator hence never objective. In favor of indirect presentation, she parodies the technique of direct definition whose explicitness, economy, supra-temporality and liability in yielding rational, authoritative and static impressions have made it a favorite in the hands of traditional novelists. For the very same reasons, Murdoch disparages it as an obsolete technique that cannot encode the particularity of
personality. It can only bring into the foreground the false images of reality that has sat deep in Jake’s consciousness. *Under the Net* with so much consciousness about the process of narration is actually a metafictional enterprise which, as the analysis of its other aspects in the following chapters illuminates, imprisons the reader into a netlike complexity to bring out the nature of narrative in a way affiliated to the postmodern cause. It proves “the imaginative embodiment of Murdoch’s artistic creed,” than what Kiernan Ryan emphasizes to be “the palpable proof of Jake’s metamorphosis” (xiv).

Another labyrinth that retains the reader inside its fascinating reflexive edifice is *The Black Prince* (1973). Causing no frustration as is usual in the American radical metafiction, this first-person narrative is truly the epitome of metafiction. The complexity of its structure and characters attributes to it the similar characteristics Wolter traces in Brown and Irving’s metafictional narratives (78-79). Bradley’s obsessive comments on the features and functions of great art, its essential difference from fantasy, its ontological dependence on the idea of perfection, and his anxiety to carry out such beliefs and ideas makes him a self-conscious narrator. Indeed, what qualifies him as a perfect postmodern narrator who ironically just constructs a version of reality while striving to imitate it include: his deliberate pauses to describe the characters and cast self-criticism on his role as a narrator, his failure to keep his omniscient consciousness distinct from his narrating consciousness, his intermittent addressing the implied reader, his anticipation of the criticism his narration could arise, his sensitivity to plot elements (the opening scene, climax and ending) and setting in short his full-awareness of the difficulty of telling and writing a truthful account of a lived experience. Bradley’s endorsement of irony as the only viable device to catch truth and his stress on the inevitability of art to reflect on itself gives currency to metafiction as the truthful art Murdoch credits in her philosophy. Bradley is aware of the metafictional aspect of his book: “[m]y book is about art. It is also, in its humble way, a work of art: an ‘art object’, as the jargon has it; and may perhaps be permitted, now and then, to cast a look upon itself” (*BP* 55).

Enlightened through the hard task of creative writing, Bradley realizes what Scholes identifies at the heart of all metafiction “[there] is no mimesis, only poiesis. No recording. Only constructing” (7). The interesting point about such narrators is that by
focusing on the relation of mimesis and truth, they reveal aspects of human experience absent in the account of traditional narrators. Their mingling of fact and fiction, states Wolter, involves readers in “a discourse about the fictionalization of reality” and encourages them to decide over the question of truth for themselves (78). Examining Brown’s *Wieland* and Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle,” Wolter stresses that instead of “an organizing, detached, omniscient, and reliable narrator” the narrative center in the former is occupied by “a self-consciously, uncertain fabulist who uses the freedom of her creative imagination,” and in the latter by a narrator-editor “who leaves it to the reader to construct a reading of the several texts he has collected” (78-79). Similarly, a fabulist-editor looms large in *The Black Prince*. In his foreword, Bradley laments the difficulty of telling his story from a pure narrating consciousness not affected by the knowledge that the course of events have brought to him. His impatient incessant reference to the overhanging of a fateful incident plus his tendency to complement his information with parenthetical statements as well as the integration of his general ideas in the present tense in his narration not only vindicate his lamentation but also suggest how being an omniscient narrator is always a temptation to any narrating consciousness, which naturally egoistic, primarily aspires to self-defense through the privilege of absolute knowledge.

The ironical role of Bradley as the narrator is more prominent if we assume *The Black Prince* as a bildungsroman. A male writer obsessed by the question of love, Bradley writes of his own experience trying to be objective. A couple of years later, more wiser by this artistic practice, his solitude in prison and his exposure to music, he decides to publish a more truthful version of it by giving space to some of the characters’ views of the course of events as well as his own enlightened self. The result is the unusual multi-layered format of the novel and an ironical narrator who under the guise of an editor-publisher projects the evasiveness of truth. Bradley acts as a fabulist and an omniscient narrator at both hypodiegetic and extradiegetic levels. On the former, he is the narrator-author who thinks that love is the only incentive and truthful topic for great art. On the latter, he is the editor-publisher who narrates the story of his useless attempt to capture the essence of love.
Taking the nom de plume of P. Loxias allows Bradley to serve a double function that is highly conducive to the presentation of the unrepresentability of truth. The tension that such Janus-faced narrator generates allows the novel to echo the Murdochian belief in the redemptive power of art when it acknowledges the immanence of chance, contingency and diversity in life. Another rationale behind Murdoch’s characterization of Bradley as both an autodeiegetic and a heterodiegetic narrator is to disrupt the established binary opposition between “historian” and “romancer” which Brown defines as follows: “the observer . . . who carefully watches, and faithfully enumerates the appearances which occur, may claim the appellation of historian. He who adorns these appearances with cause and effect . . . performs a different part. He is a dealer, not in certainties, but probabilities, and is therefore, a romancer” (qtd. in Wolter 75). Allowing the story to be appraised by some of the characters, Bradley the heterodiegetic narrator enacts as an omniscient narrator, in a sense a historian. However, his judging of those views in “Editor’s Postscript” as egoistic reminds one of Bradley the autodeiegetic narrator who is too ready to adorn his experiences with pre-judgments. This resemblance signals the inseparability of his dual role: a pure historian or a pure romancer is a myth as each is to some extent the other.

Being both inside and outside his own story, Bradley Pearson is closer to Murdoch than her other narrators; he has the same relationship to her that Bradley himself identifies between Hamlet and Shakespeare. On Hamlet, Murdoch comments “the presence of Shakespeare in that play as a kind of trembling emotional excitement, something that makes it, in fact, a rather dicey play. It could have all gone wrong in some way, but it hasn’t” (qtd. in Bellamy 32). The Black Prince, in this sense, is very similar to Hamlet; while Murdoch places herself at the center of the novel allowing her artistic ideas to be vocalized through Bradley, Bradley retains his individuality as an independent, free character.

Starting from without (editor’s foreword, years later) to within (Bradley’s story that happened much earlier) then reverting to without again enables Murdoch not only to defy the chronological narration but also to make the shift from an omniscient narrator to a subjective point of view back to the omniscient possible. As Wolter presumes, such
change within a work of fiction “may not be a flaw, but highly significant” (75).
Embracing Bradley’s account and his pseudo-counterparts’ (the four postscripts) within the editor’s consciousness, Murdoch mocks the convention of reliability. With a trustable start and an objective conclusion, *The Black Prince* parodies, as critics believe Faulkner’s *Sound and Fury* does, the “customary demand for a conventional novel” (qtd. in Wolter 75). Here, Murdoch not only attacks the conventions of reliability but also criticizes the question of reliability as irrelevant. Letting four characters undermine the account of Bradley who frequently repeats her own ideas of art, Murdoch attacks the traditional literary criticism that acknowledges any narrator who assimilates the author’s views as reliable: “If the implied author does share the narrator’s values then the latter is reliable in this respect, no matter how objectionable his views may seem to some readers” (Rimmon-Kenan 104). Moreover, duplicating the editor’s status for Julian in her postscript as Mrs Belling, Murdoch shows that reliability is an irrelevant issue in reading a text since nobody can be reliable. The comments of Mrs Belling who has the privilege of reading all the other postscripts like P. Loxias himself get condemned as a self-aggrandizing story in the editor’s account which becomes in turn subject to the same criticism.

A novel in which all aspire to narrate in hope of supplementing the truth, *The Black Prince* is, then, a postmodern metafiction. To project the concept of reliable narrator as an outdated convention, it allows six narrations to compete for the trust of the reader with no success. Among its characters, Arnold is a best-selling writer, with whom Bradley the perfectionist writer is in conflict; Julian likes to be a novelist but becomes in the end a poet; Francis turns to be a psychoanalyst writing a book entitled *Bradley Pearson, the Paranoiac from the Paper Shop*; even Christian has written some short stories while living in America. Encompassing so many characters who have a passion for writing at one time or the other in their lives, *The Black Prince* is noticeably a self-reflexive novel playing with the concept of fiction on many different levels. The fact that the reader, exposed to so much preoccupation with the idea of creation, is left alone uncertain of who is telling the truth makes *The Black Prince* further akin to any metafiction, a playful discourse about truth and the way it is constructed.
Published two years after *The Black Prince*, *A Word Child* deploys a more subtle yet noticeable way to illuminate the inexplicable nature of truth. More in line with *Under the Net* than *The Black Prince*, it is another of Murdoch’s first-person novels in which the impossibility of objective perception and a truthful recount of events stand out in relief. Although unlike *The Black Prince* it does not deploy flaunty metafictional devices, *A Word Child* secures for itself metafictionality mainly though the employment of an extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator, free indirect discourse and heavy reliance on parentheses in a memoir format. These tactics and devices add up to a retrospective narration which resists the unifying control of narrative form without disrupting it totally. Such juxtaposition of tactics leads Murdoch to an ironical contrivance: a narrative scheme molded on the pre-conceptualized organizing pattern of diaries whose fundamental fragmentation instead of amplifying its unifying, organizing effect exposes the all-knowing status of Hilary Burde as a retrospective narrator.

A man of routine who even routinizes his relationship with people, Hilary is the central character of the memoir he has accomplished to write. Since he has lost his grip on the organizing and thought-soothing pattern of his life years ago, he decides to write years later to regain his sense of power and control over his life that seems otherwise too baffling in its absurdity and arbitrariness. As a narrator-author, he, consequently, writes an extraordinary diary in which he self-consciously tries to combat the seemingly desultory nature of life. He sets to writing with a hope to make the concatenation of the past events perceptible to himself. His aim to be as truthful and objective as possible ends up with a narration that paradoxically flaunts his unavoidable presence as a narrator. The insertion of parentheses in a narration that is basically built on free indirect discourse attracts attention to the inextricable mingling of the experiencing and narrating consciousness of Hilary and the authoritative role of the latter. Although on the surface the parenthetical excrescences are there to enhance the objectivity of the narration, they are actually the ironical tools jolting the reader into realizing the authority of Hilary the narrator-author over choosing and orchestrating events, feelings and thoughts through their amplification, condensation, or even their distinction as his own or those of his past self.
Separating the feelings, judgments, queries, inferences and sarcastic comments of his narrating self in the parentheses arouses the reader’s curiosity about the nature of the contextual text. A heedful attention to the syntactical structures of the main textual body shows Hilary’s preference for free indirect discourse as his technique of narration. The following two samples will suffice to illustrate the way Hilary depends on this technique to fortify the reliability of his account narrated from a distant angle in time. The first one describes how Hilary interprets his obedient submission to Kitty’s command of helping Gunnar as his commitment to truth and life:

And now I was sitting on Paddington platform one, watching the departure of the nine-five for Birmingham New Street, and thinking, as it was about time to do, about Gunnar; and as I thought about him I felt my racing mind becoming quiet, as someone who after appeals and hopes contemplates as a reality his irrevocable sentence at last. I could have no dealings here with dreams. In this sterner context my ‘feelings’ about Kitty were indeed the merest feelings and I knew that I could be harsh with them. They existed as something beautiful but totally irrelevant, like a flower one might notice on the way to the gallows. Nor must I even tell myself that my task here was one which Kitty suggested and imposed. This flattery too must be denied me. Life, or truth, something deep and hard which could not be evaded, suggested and imposed this task. (emphasis mine, AWC 227)

The second one is a sample of those parts of his narration Hilary interrupts by parenthetical interjections. It gives an account of his attempt to infer how much Lady Kitty is cognizant of Crystal and Gunnar’s affair:

Kitty had said, ‘Oh, you have a sister?’ So (unless she was deliberately deceiving me?) Gunnar had not told her about what happened on the night of Anne’s death. This was not improbable. She had said they had never discussed that time in detail and Gunnar might well have felt this piece of nightmare reminiscence to be unnecessary. He must simply detest the memory of it. That is, if it really happened. But had it happened? (emphasis mine 257)

As obvious in these examples, free indirect discourse lends an immediacy effect to the narration. The reader feels the events fresh as Hilary the character experienced them. To a certain extent even the parentheses are employed to secure the immediacy of the main narrative. Nevertheless, their presence ironically serves another function as well. In fact, their accompaniment with free indirect discourse with its deictic terms and
emotive interjection in a past-tense narration which is embellished by Hilary the narrator’s intermittent comments on the process of narration and the difficulty of describing people or experiences imparts a postmodern sense of reliability to the narrative. On the one hand, involved in writing his own memoir, Hilary resorts to parentheses and metafictional comment to save his free indirect discourse from the intervention of his narrating consciousness and keep distinct his past self from the present one. On the other hand, the same amalgamation of techniques invalidates reliability as the salient criterion for first-person narrators. This gives the novel its tone of metafictionality.

Although Hilary the narrator is conscious of the blindfold that generalization is to the perception of truth, the distinguishing feature of Hilary the character is his predilection for generalization. His blind belief in Crystal’s virginity is a notable example:

Crystal, at thirty-seven, was still a virgin. Arthur was in love with her, but nothing happened, that I certainly knew. This evening I thought the atmosphere was rather more charged than usual, as if I had interrupted some particularly intense discussion. This annoyed me. Arthur was rather red in the face, and Crystal made little awkward darting movements to simulate some neutral and innocent activity. Perhaps they had just been holding hands. (13)

He readily pins down all the people around him and anticipates their actions and behaviors according to the image he has made of them in his mind. He even tries to condition them and accustom them to same fixed treatments by imposing his routine on them. He allots one specific weekday to those he is in touch. Thursday belongs to the Impiatts; Friday to Tommy; Saturday to Crystal; Monday to Clifford; Tuesday to Arthur; and Wednesday and Sunday to himself. Moreover, it is not until the closing of the novel that the characters act out of the way he has conditioned them. For instance, about Arthur’s habitual departure after his own arrival chez Crystal he says: “I never lingered long on Thursday evenings. I liked to condition those about me, and Arthur was conditioned to reach for his coat as soon as I arrived. He had in fact already reached for it” (15).

So much blind by his fantasies and illusions, he cannot see the moral demands of the situations he is engaged in until too late. Obsessed to satisfy his own desires, he does
not take seriously Clifford’s constant hint to his intention to commit suicide and ignores him totally till he needs him to recover his own sense of the self. When he eventually turns to Clifford, he has already ended his life. Since his narration is mainly rendered through his past consciousness, it is with the progress of the plot that the reader gets an insight to the depth of his selfishness. The dialogues and inconsistent behaviors of those Hilary is in touch on a routine basis project the biased limiting perspective of Hilary the character. Hilary sees Arthur, for instance, as a timid, simple man who cannot object to him; however, Arthur outspoken criticism of Hilary’s secret meeting with Lady Kitty goes to the extent that he chucks him out of his flat. Moreover, while for Hilary Lady Kitty is the incarnation of truth and beauty, people including Biscuit, Clifford, Arthur and Crystal regard her as a wanton, destructive femme fatale.

In fact, by the end of the narrative the reader has no doubt that people are not exactly the flat personae Hilary depicts since they are entangled in their own net of fantasies. In this sense, *A Word Child* is an indirect presentation of various personae’s subsistence upon illusions and self-fortifying fantasies. Although restricted to Hilary’s focalization, it is a convincing portrayal of the unreliability of man’s perception in general and a reliable revelation of the unreliable nature of all narratives in particular. Therefore, it is, in a way, a celebration of metafiction as the only morally potential narrative form.

The ways through which the narrator distinguishes himself from his experiencing-self reflects the moral significance of writing and narrating for Hilary. Anxious to produce a faithful account, he not only encompasses his narrating evaluations in the parentheses, but also leaves traces of himself as the narrator in the text to prevent confusion between his narrating consciousness and his past self. His reluctance to reveal the name of his hometown located in the north of England foregrounds his narrating authority in manipulating information. In five occasions he replaces it with a dash: “Crystal, I will not go back to—! You know that! Don’t be insane” (336). More metafictionally, he even highlights his being the author of the narrative. To name just a few, he starts his description of Christopher with, “I will briefly explain Christopher” (2). And about Crystal he says, “Let me try to describe Crystal” (14). Even he is aware of the
text as his own creation: “I suggested in the last paragraph that it was my rude and rugged nature that put women off, but there is more than a hint of self-protective romance in this explanation” (35). Or even to explain his morning with Christopher in detail, he hints to his writing activity: “[w]e now, after the interlude recorded above, reverted to the sort of conversation we usually had on Saturdays. I had admired one of his mandalas and said he ought to have been a painter” (emphasis mine 46). In addition, when recounting the background story that elucidates his past debacle and his mysterious, odd life at the time of the intradiegetic story, he clearly announces that what he is recording is not an exact reproduction of what he has told Arthur but a trimmed more truthful version of it in a coherent, unified form:

I will now tell the story which is at the centre of this story, and which it was necessary to delay until the moment when, in this story, I told it. I will tell it now, as far as it can be told by me, truthfully and as it was, and not as I told it that Friday night to Arthur. In telling Arthur I omitted certain things, though nothing of importance, and I doubtless told it in a way which was sympathetic to myself, though, since I gave him the main facts, I could not in telling it excuse myself. I also told it somewhat in fits and starts, with pauses in which Arthur asked questions. And there were details which I filled in later when, in the days that followed, I spoke of these matters to him again. (111)

Such frequent hint to Hilary’s role as a narrator, undoubtedly, makes A Word Child a self-reflexive novel in which Hilary flaunts the process of its composition. Nevertheless, they are not adequate evidence to subsume him as a self-conscious narrator as Bradley in The Black Prince. Hilary does not attract attention to his story-telling to flaunt, as any self-conscious narrator would do according to Abrams, “the discrepancies between the patent fictionality and the reality it seems to represent” (168). Writing in a diary form is Hilary’s technique to build up his readers’ trust in the reality of his story rather than shattering their illusion that what they are reading is fiction. What is ironically conspicuous in his narrative is that no matter how a narrator tries he cannot yield a truthful report of reality since it is more complex and complicated than it seems, obviously a matter of mystery that a transparent blueprint of clear causes and effects. The opaqueness of others (as their motives remain mysterious to us), the contingent nature of life as well as the fantasy-driven mechanism of consciousness leaves no chance for a truthful picture of the world. Therefore, the next possible image to the ideal one is one
projecting the obstacles to such perfection. Hilary Burde writes *A Word Child* not to exonerate his sins and selfishness but to expiate them. The order that he inflicts on the irrational, arbitrary world through writing enables him to inhibit madness and have a grip on his life. Paradoxically while serving his self-preservation drive, Hilary’s composition captures the muddle of life and demonstrates that egoism is what pulls people more deeply into that muddle. With such comments on man’s psyche and fiction, *A Word Child* is subsumable under the category of postmodern literature.

The exposition of the machinery behind the convention of reliability is the crux of the metafictional concern in *The Philosopher’s Pupil*. Here, in an untraditional section that adds overt metafictional effect to the narrative, the narrator sets to win the reader’s trust in his reliability. Despite the fact that he enacts a significant role in the plot, his explanatory statements in this section are meant to deny his presence inside the narrative and elevate him from the inevitable unreliability of the homodiegetic to the more trustworthy position of the heterodiegetic. His denial, however, cannot confer him to that level properly. He remains in the two, being both a character-narrator whom other characters refer to and in case of Stella refuge in his house and consults him, and a conscious omniscient narrator who is aware of anybody’s state of consciousness. Being less than a heterodiegetic but not a purely homodiegetic, his presence affects the plot more than he claims; it even produces an effect that there is ontologically no difference between the two kinds of narrators: both are equally either truthful or fictitious.

His self-expository strategy to enhance the reliability of his narrative involves him more paradoxically with the two narrative levels of extradiegetic and intradiegetic as well. By overtly addressing his role and tricks he is using, he creates the illusion of being outside the story while being literally within the frame of his narrative. In a sense, his attempt to feign ubiquity sheds light on the function of all narrators: no matter what mask they put on, they are always discursive functions; the narrator is always restrained within the walls of his narration and gains its identity out of that narration. The use of the past tense in a third-person narration helps ‘N’ talk from without his story. Yet, his voice comes from within the fictive world of his narrative.
Such narrator imparts an outstanding metafictional quality to the novel despite its otherwise common traditional veneer. The iconoclastic clarification of his role makes him a self-conscious narrator, a narrator that by extension comments on the conventions of narration. From the very start of his declaration, he feels the need to pause to set the scene and provide the necessary background of the people that are to populate that scene. It is here that the ancient history of the town is explained, the queer bath institute and the cast are described. This complementary stuff could have been integrated within the natural third-person narrative, but the narrator prefers to reveal them in the separate section to build up his own all-seeing power besides the factual air of his narrative. N’s consciousness of telling a story is further obvious in his liberal use of such terms as account, story, tale and fiction and openly referring to himself as the narrator. For instance, he says, “later in the evening, after the conversation recorded above, he and Emma had got rather drunk together . . .” (BP 213); or, “Some notion of ‘the best families’ persisted, well mixed up with high ideals and moral leadership, but even this, by the time of our story, had virtually disappeared” (117). To disclose where Stella has fled, he even honestly tells, “I should explain that I, N, the narrator, am about to intrude (though not for long) into the narrative, not to exhibit myself, but simply to offer an unavoidable explanation. People in Ennistone had been wondering wither Stella had fled, where she had so mysteriously gone to. Well, she had gone to me” (emphasis mine 355).

Moreover, his zeal to follow all the standards of narration further acknowledges that he is aware of his role. He faithfully believes in the beginning, climax and ending. Disrupting the plot to set the past, he projects the beginning by framing it. He stirs in the reader an expectation of climax when he projects its necessity: “the evening had no dramatic climax” (390). At the last page, he confesses that he is assigning an end to his story in consonant with an arbitrary convention: “the end of any tale is arbitrarily determined. As I now end this one, somebody may say: but how on earth do you know all these things about all these people?” (558)

N’s self-conscious adherence to the rules of telling a story along with his covet to ensure absolute reliability for himself turns his narration ironical. It both encodes a limited discourse and an omniscient one as he tries to surpass being a witness to be a “histor.” There are many occasions in the narrative that N emphasizes being present at
the scene or hearing the events from a participant character. He is among the crowd that is drawn to the Belmont garden by the considerable noise there: “[t]he considerable noise of the united voices, penetrating through Victoria Park, drew a number of late home-comers including myself (N, your narrator)” (emphasis mine 385). Along with three other personae, he follows George who humiliated by the youngsters in the garden leaves the Slipper House to the Canal: “[i]n the confusion not everyone noticed (but I did) that he was followed by two women, first Valerie Cossom, and then Diane. Following the two women padded the priest, Father Bernard, and after Father Bernard padded I” (emphasis mine 385). He is the unseen observer of the event that brought Tom and Hattie together: “[w]ho drawing back his curtain in the early morning saw, in that clear sunny light, through empty streets, Tom McCaffrey running away with Hattie Meynell? I did” (529). To assure his readers of the factual state of his account of the “Slipper House riot,” he attributes it to Tom, who seems to be the one who triggered it: “[t]hat it was really quite an innocuous and accidental business, at first at any rate, and in no sense an conspiracy, is made clear by the foregoing account which I had from Tom himself much later on” (374).

Some stylish aspects to N’s account prove him, indeed, to be more than a witness. In “Our Town” chapter, he introduces himself a self-effacing narrator. However, the eye-catching quotations and parentheses in his narrative nullify this claim. Indeed, they indicate an ironical structure on which the narration is built. On the one hand, N wants to be an absent histor; on the other hand, his presence at the time of the events and his acquaintance with the characters always rule out its possibility. To be above his story as he aspires to, he has no other choice but don a histor mask in parentheses and quotations. The effect is contradictory, however. The very punctuations point to him. N’s differentiating his narration as a witness from that as a histor lends a paradoxical tone to his narrative endorsed in postmodernism. Bradbury implicitly underlines this aspect: “N’s is not a first-person tale, and the story has a secure and four-square narration; hence he seems to be there to secure a tone of familiarity, delivering the book as apparently a kind of reportage, and so making some of its quite striking strangeness” (xiv). This duality is the sign of a subtle dramatic irony. N tries to give an objective look to his account, ignorant of the fact that it is impossible. His narration as a witness reveals this
impossibility more effectively. Rendered in free indirect discourse, it is a convergence of
the characters’ and the narrator’s voices, hence an evidence that the seemingly objective
narration is never purely so.

In fact, the narrative as it appears on the page is an exquisite manifestation of
heteroglossic capability of the novel, and in this sense metafictional. Bradbury believes
that “N is framed himself. As if to insist that the real mode of the novel is that of
dialogue” (xiv). The quotations are direct reminiscences of the actual speakers. The
parentheses, as explained, contain N’s voice as the omniscient narrator and make it
possible for N to exist as the heterodiegetic narrator. And the free indirect discourse
combines the voice of N as the character-narrator with those of the focalizers he limits
himself to. The numerous voices do not lead to a cacophony but, orchestrated by
Murdoch’s art, compose a perfect harmony to flaunt the fictionality of the novel. The
textual features project this fictionality even further by pointing to the textuality of the
narrative. Along the single quotation marks and parentheses, asterisks, blank spaces and
parodistic titles in the style of realistic novels highlight the dependence of narratives on
the commonly accepted signs and established conventions. Helping N bring to life the events
as a historical record, they, nonetheless, expose their fictionality. At the end, N himself
implies that being a histor never guarantees a pure account of truth. His role is “to listen to
stories” as N does and to concoct his account out of many accounts he has come across
(558). In this sense, a histor is naturally engaged in talebearing that lends much to the
thematic concern of The Philosopher’s Pupil. He is himself a textual function following
certain conventions to gain his identity.

In addition to the textual signs, what spotlights N’s role is the repetitive
information about the setting and the people that obliquely highlights narrative
conventions: it sounds unusual, and whence reminds us of what is the norm: a narrator
must not fill his narration with redundancy that affects the plot in no way. For instance,
since the historical ejaculation of the “Little Teaser” is once elaborated in “Our Town,”
its repetition later in the after-swimming scene when Diane is seen sitting between Father
Bernard Jacoby and Mrs Belton on a wooden seat near the basin is just a way to
accentuate the conventionality of the narrator’s role. Integrating so many reflections on
the nature of narration, there remains no doubt that *The Philosopher’s Pupil* is metafictional.

*The Bell* foregrounds the heteroglossic nature of the novel in quite a different way. The narrator here is a cousin of N in *The Philosopher’s Pupil*. Although more successful in hiding his or her presence in the narration than N, he or she fails to get at the ideal self-effacing. The narrator is extradiegetic and heterodiegetic telling a story whose plot is paradigmatically resonated in the legend Paul, the hypodiegetic narrator, recounts to Catherine and Dora. The term paradigmatically here designates that *The Bell* is a resonance of the legend Paul has come across while studying the Abbey’s old manuscripts only in limited sense of integrating similar incidents in its plot in which the cast develop different causal relationships to each other. In other words, it is the elaborated form of the same plot formula carried out by different agents; in a sense, the legend is its mise en abyme. Far from imitating Paul’s seemingly objective omniscient narration, the narrator of *The Bell*, instead, sticks to the focalizations of Dora, Toby and Michael.

The choice of the limited-third-person narration technique is very significant here in highlighting the heteroglossic nature of the novel and fulfilling the moral function Murdoch expects from truthful art. Deploying the plural focalization not only distributes the discursive authority among three other figures and allows for the discursive dialogues, but also sheds doubts on the ontological possibility of an objective, truthful omniscient narration. The discrepancies of the focalizers’ judgments of a person or event in the narrator’s account of these consciousness displays very subtly and maybe inadvertently that the omniscient narration is at best sincere report of the narrator’s perception of the events not a truthful account of what happened. The contrast of the limited narration to the wide scope of the omniscient one established in realism attracts attention to the conventionality of the latter’s claim to a truthful knowledge and its unattainability in practice. A truthful narration that omniscient narrators in realism claim is just an established literary convention and in practice never fully attainable.

The limited third-person perspective is morally and aesthetically a fruitful technique of narration. It aesthetically increases the narrator’s self-efficacy, which has
been an ideal in storytelling, while morally offering a more truthful representation of reality through multiplying the centers of consciousness and letting the cacophony of voices be audible. The technique, nevertheless, has an ironical twist to it that shatters the illusion that self-efficacy is ever fully possible. The irony is the pivotal role of free indirect discourse in such a mode of narration. In McHale’s suggestive scale of possible ways of speech and thought representation, “free indirect discourse” occupies the middle ground between the two extreme of “telling” and “showing.” It is neither purely a “diegetic discourse” nor a “mimetic discourse.” In his view, it is “[g]rammatically and mimetically intermediate between indirect and direct discourse” (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 113). Despite the disagreement about the defining features of FID, there has been no doubt in the twentieth-century literary criticism that it lends ambiguity of perspective to the narrative.

Quoting Brinton, Bray lists “the exclamation marks, the evaluative words and phrases,” “and the present [and future] time-deictic” words along with “the third person and past tense of indirect report” as the key features of FID. Many theorists consider the ambiguity to be beyond textual markers or, as Rimmon-Kenan puts it, just “partly linguistic.” According to Rimmon-Kenan, Golomb calls FID a “combined speech” which more than the co-presence of two voices is a combination of the narrator’s voice and a character’s pre-verbal perception or feeling. Bal talks of “embedding” in FID: the coalesce of “two utterances, two focalizations, or an utterance and a focalization.” Perry even regards FID as part of a larger interpretative phenomenon. It helps the emergence of “Combined Discourse” in which an alternative pattern, “always incongruent with the formal frame” is activated (114). Quoting other critics who see “dual voice” more than a literal concept, Bray gives an illuminating compact list of them as such: emphasizing the subtle fusion of “the two voices of the character and the narrator,” Pascal distinguishes there “a tone of irony, or sympathy, of negation or approval, underlying the statement of the character.” Calling the style “quasi-direct discourse,” Vološinov defines it as discourse in which “the author’s rhetoric and that of the hero begin to overlap: their voices merge; and we get protracted passages that belong simultaneously to the author’s narrative and to the hero’s internal (though sometimes also external) speech” (emphasis mine). Ginsburg similarly tags the style as a “completely bivocal utterance” since it
“contains two sets of contradictory signs, one pointing to the speech of the characters and the other toward the narration” (40).

Obvious in Bray’s detailed survey in his experimental research on how readers process point of view in FID and acknowledged in Rimmon-Kenan’s narratological study, there is a linguistic opposition to this claim of the literary-oriented narrative theorists that FID promotes “dual voice.” The linguists believe, as Rimmon-Kenan generally puts it, in a “‘orthodox’ view” that “limits FID to a linguistic combination of two voices” (114). Bray’s elaboration of the stance of some of them is very insightful. According to him, in the style Banfield names “represented speech and thought,” a character’s consciousness is never being narrated. On the contrary, it is just represented unmediated by any judging point of view. The represented expressions are allusive to just one “subject of consciousness,” that of the character not the covert or “effaced” narrator. Resistant to the notion that the narrator must be both “the source of knowledge and language in the text,” Galbraith argues, “the so-called merging of a narrator with a character can be more adequately described as the absence of a narrator,” since any “prolonged confusion about whose consciousness is being followed does not constitute proof that more than one consciousness is being followed at the same time. Rather, at these moments of ambiguity, a SELF exists but is not identifiable.” Fludernik denies common notion of “dual voice” insisting that “all language, even in free indirect discourse is the language of the current speaker or text.” Making a list of “expressive features,” she claims that they are not the markers of a character’s voice but the narrator’s capability to “appropriate” the “figural idiom.” She hypothesizes, then, that “dual voice” exists “on a higher level,” what she calls a “discourse-strategic level” when the reader constructs a “voice” of the character, picking “expressive” elements “in the interpretative process” (qtd. in Bray 40-41). With this total denial of an inherent duality of voice in FID, the linguistic-based narratology invalidates the function that is generally assigned to it:

Even when different segments can ultimately be attributed to identifiable speakers and more so when they cannot, FID enhances the bivocality or polyvocality of the text by bringing into play a plurality of speakers and attitudes (McHale 1978). In cases of an ambiguity concerning the speaker, it also dramatizes the problematic relationship between any utterance and
In his experimental study to check Fludernik’s claim that dual voice is the product of the reading process, Bray gathers enough evidence to doubt Fludernik’s view and find a way to settle the dispute. Instead of sanctioning one or the other of the conflicting views, he adopts a compromising stance in his conclusion:

Rather than a ‘fusion’ of the narrator’s and character’s voices in free indirect discourse then, perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of a balance of two perspectives in ambiguous passages of narrative, which can sometimes be resolved one way or the other by subsequent linguistic cues. In other cases, the ambiguity may never be resolved and both points of view may remain in play. (48)

This conclusion is more cogent to the study of FID in postmodern fiction and feeds the current analysis of Murdoch’s novels because it still maintains, through a stress on the free-play of discourse levels that brings to mind Derrida’s sous rature “under erasure,” that FID is a heteroglossic technique of representation despite the linguistic opposition to the possibility of “dual voice.” Commonly associated with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel, FID turns in Bray’s conceptualization to be the most readily available technique to inject that ironic plurality into narrative that postmodern aesthetics is after.

Having in mind Murdoch’s call for truthful art, FID is the best narration technique for its conception. It enables the author to create a narrator capable of leading the reader more interestingly in and out of the character’s consciousness. It gives the narration a touch of intimacy since what may seem as a narrator’s omniscient account turns to be actually the innards of some character’s mind. By divesting the narrator of its monopoly on moral values and authorizing any character to contribute to it, the passage rendered in FID loses its didactic finality.

Having three focalizers, The Bell is majorly built on FID. Deploying this technique obliterates the presence of the narrator by creating, in Gard’s words, a “flickering and subtle immediacy in representation of consciousness [of the character]” (qtd. in Bray 47); it, moreover, paradoxically gives him/her the primacy as the narrating
agent. In this way, it excludes any possibility of pure self-efficacy and allows for a more truthful sketch of reality. In addition to FID that ironically exposes the narrator behind the masks of the three characters, there is other evidence in *The Bell* to his/her presence. One is in the description of setting at the beginning of the seventh chapter: “It was Saturday evening, the same day as the Meeting recorded above, and the afternoon heat had lingered on, becoming thicker and hazier and seemingly undiminished. The sky was cloudless now, rising to a peak of intense blue that was almost audible” (emphasis mine, *TB* 121). Being an example of FID as “now” suggests, the vignette betrays the presence of the narrator in the adjective clause “recorded above” which even indicates the narrator’s awareness of his/her role as a writer-narrator. The other is in the account of the course of events after the new bell falls into the lake:

Dora was fairly near to the lake by now, on the right-hand side of the causeway. At what had happened she felt intense horror mingled with excitement. She felt partly as if she must be responsible for this new disaster, and partly as if its magnitude made her own escapade pardonable by comparison. She came to the back of the crowd, watching her chance to get a nearer view. Then someone pushed very roughly past her. *Dora said later* that if it had not been for that violent shove she would not have paid attention and not have started to wonder. (emphasis mine 285)

Here “Dora said later” is an indirect hint to the narrator since it implies that she talked about the events to somebody. That somebody cannot be anybody else but the narrator because the events are being narrated now from Dora’s perspective. In fact, Dora’s determination to tell the story to her friend Sally, an art teacher to whom she is going to join in Bath, at the end of the novel fuels the speculation that Sally herself is the narrator of *The Bell*. This hypothetical identification of the narrator, moreover, is another challenge to the chronological linearity of the novel since it gives credit to a cyclic pattern of the plot; the novel is actually the story Dora told to Sally. Therefore, the beginning lags behind the ending and the ending is the real beginning of the story. The narration of a story that has already been told by one of the characters incorporates a metafictional message that any fiction is a fabricated stuff based on some facts. As an “involuted novel,” the term Abrams applies for the self-conscious narrative, *The Bell* has its thematic level reverberated in the actual story. “These legends usually have some truth behind them,” Paul assures Dora, “[t]here are records of a famous bell here, but no one
knows what happened to it” (39). This declaration is a metafictional comment on the status of *The Bell*: like the embedded legend it is built on a grain of truth hence is a truthful fiction. Playing, thus, with the narrative levels, the novel effaces the borderline between reality and fiction not in line with the modern self-conscious texts that, according to Bradbury, aim “to suggest that there may be no reality apart from its narration” (97). It dissolves the binary opposition, however, to put fiction on par with reality as the only means to perceive it.

The resonance of art’s function and art’s content in its narrative makes *The Bell* a self-conscious novel. There are much more compelling evidence to this effect. It has a reflexive theme. Dora and Michael are the last ones who leave the Court. This implies a bond in their characterization. In terms of Murdoch’s definition of the moral character, they are the only promising characters because of their sensitivity to the beauty of art and nature. Dora’s learning to swim and her attempts at water-color sketches of the Court after her visit to the National Gallery shifts the course of her life are positive changes that specifically qualify her to carry the theme of the novel: art and reunification with nature are capable of curbing man’s fantasy-ridden consciousness hence morally significant. Dora’s aesthetic experience in the Gallery clearly valorizes incomplete, selfless art as the valuable art:

… her heart was filled with love for the pictures, their authority, their marvellous generosity, their splendour. It occurred to her that here at last was something real and something perfect. Who had said that, about perfection and reality being in the same place? Here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour, and by making it part of her fantasy make it worthless. Even Paul, she thought, only existed now as someone she dreamt about; or else as a vague external menace never really encountered and understood. But the pictures were something real outside herself, which spoke to her kindly and yet in sovereign tones, something superior and good whose presence destroyed the dreary trance-like solipsism of her earlier mood. When the world had seemed to be subjective it had seemed to be without interest or value. But now there was something else in it after all. (196)

Her brooding over the plan to replace the bells as “a work of art” (222) is a metafictional illumination over the nature of bad art. Dora’s failure to “play the witch” (205) with the help of Toby as her “sorcerer’s apprentice” (218) signifies that any art is
condemned to failure when motivated and planned out of the author’s selfish desire. Dora’s determination to recover the old bell is a selfish revenge on the community: “[i]t was as if, for her, this was to be a magical act of shattering significance, a sort of rite of power and liberation” (218). Similarly, any selfish, fantastic artistic attempt is worthless and false since it replaces the ambition to reveal the truth with a claim for self-exhibition.

Besides being self-reflexive, The Bell has, as mentioned earlier, a self-conscious narrator whose attempt to hide his/her self behind the masks of the focalizers fails. He or she looms large behind the text when the reader is addressed while describing Dora’s charms for Toby: “[s]he had, certainly, a magnificent head, with those flat tongues of golden brown hair shaping it, like something in an Italian picture; and for the rest, she was well rounded, buxom you might say” (emphasis mine179).

Reflecting the accidental nature of life while being about other topics like love, desire, consciousness, morality, religion, art and beauty, The Bell goes well with Murdoch’s notion of art. In “Existentialists and Mystics,” she insists, “art is not discredited if we realise that it is based on and partly consists of ordinary human jumble, incoherence, accident, sex.” In contrast to her more experimental previous novels, The Bell is a more four-square attempt to create a real world of feelings and behavior while cherishing, in the same vein, metafictional themes and patterns. The success of dovetailing the traditional novel forms with the postmodern metafictional patterns makes Murdoch acknowledge The Bell as a “lucky” novel, in the sense that everything worked well in there. It conforms to Murdoch’s aesthetic ideal of the formless form by striking, “an easy balance,” as Byatt notes, “between conscious aesthetic patterning and the immediacy of particular experiences” (xii). The Bell would not be so “lucky” if it did not employed FID for its mode of narration.

Published five years after The Bell, The Unicorn is a more conspicuous attempt to accommodate the contingency of life in the inevitable artistic form of the novel. Instead of “an easy balance,” here the novel is lopsided as contingencies violently take hold of the course of events in the last one-third of the plot. Highlighting the source of this battle between form and absurdity in Murdoch’s poetics as her ambition to contain both the Kantian notions of the beautiful and the sublime in an artwork, Medcalf notes that the
battle in *The Unicorn* as in the precedent novels, namely, *A Severed Head* and *An Unofficial Rose*, is “in danger of becoming too self-conscious, with a paradoxical tendency to turn towards a compelled contingency for her characters” (15). In “The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited,” she asserts, “[t]here is then the much more difficult battle to prevent that form from becoming rigid, by the free expansion against it of the individual characters. Here above all the contingency of the characters must be respected. Contingency must be defended for it is the essence of personality” (271). Her aesthetic ambition, then, is to deconstruct narrative form, that is, to integrate enough contingency into plot to unravel the form as soon as it hinders its wild rhizomic expansion. Her huge injection of contingency into *The Unicorn* is not a drawback as Medcalf implies. It is not a thoughtless surplus but a deliberate contrivance to present the truth of everyday life and the capacity of fiction to present it. Contingency, thus, makes the novel positively self-conscious displaying that metafictionality is the requirement of fictional truthfulness.

The only way to indicate the difficulty of containing the sublimity of human life in art form is through irony, a golden technique that lets fiction keep its form while cherishing the challenges to it. That is why *The Unicorn* employs the ironic narration technique of FID. Through it, the novel not only lays bare the narration convention metafictionally but also has a moral quality imparted to its narrative. The employment of an extradiegetic narrator allows for a conspicuously functional FID. Although narrated in the third-person, the events are seen through the consciousness of Marian and Effingham. The recurrence of the deictic words (such as this, these, now, tomorrow . . .), emotive interjections (viz. well, anyhow . . .), and the shift in addressing the same personae (e.g. Marian is referred to whether by her name or the girl) unveils the embedded ironic effect of the narration. The integration of these elements in a third-person past narrative counterpoises the natural remoteness and retrospection of the narration with the immediacy of the events. The narrator remains both objectively above the narrative and very close to the events, responsible for the particular way they are recounted.

Such a paradoxical role of the narrator who in narratological jargons remains on the borderline between the heterodiegetic (narrating in the retrospective third-person format) and homodiegetic (seeing through the eyes of two characters) alerts us to the
actual mechanism behind all narrations and reminds us that objective narration is an illusion since all narrations are rendered through a specific perspective. But the irony here is that the deployment of focalizers instead of an omniscient narrator usual in fairy tales enables the narrative to achieve objectivity though the very act of highlighting the ontological impossibility of a pure objective report.

The deliberate assignment of a third-person narrator limited to two focalizations for such a fairy-tale pattern, moreover, provides a challenge to unity of form of the novel. The nearly alternative shift of focalization to Marian and Effingham in a symmetrical order ends in a staccato string of thirty-five chapters, a form that is paradoxical in itself. On the one hand, it impugns the dominance of the unifying pattern of the fairy-tale. Emerged out Marian’s and Effingham’s encounter with of the appalling complexity and ineffability of life and individuality of people, the fragmentary structure defies the continuity of the fairy-tale form that naturally tends to regulate the plot. On the other hand, it projects the indispensable reliance of any narration on patterns for its comprehensibility. Encompassing a great deal of contingencies in the life of a dozen of characters, the chapters are solid proof of how patterns are essential to tame and contain the formless mess of life.

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