Chapter Four
The House of Fiction: A Presentational Theatre

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.

Michel Foucault

Elaborating on the thematic self-reflexivity of Murdoch’s fiction, it is time to show that the metafictional mode is rooted more deeply in their structures. What is outstanding about her works is the way that they keep us in a world that constantly disrupts our “suspension of disbelief” while opening our eyes to the moral turpitude that is part of our life. For this end, she frequently signals that her fictive world is a made-up world reliant for its existence on the arbitrary quality of words’ denotations and on other fictional worlds rather than being a perfect replica of our everyday life. In other words, she involves in a metafictional practice Waugh explains as “frame-breaking”: a technique evolved out of the ironic mood of postmodernism to express the undeniable ontological affinity of historical world and works of art as they are both “organized and perceived through . . . structures or ‘frames’.” Having in mind The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of frame as a “construction, constitution, build; established order, plan, system . . . underlying support or essential substructure of anything,” Waugh posits that the question of ‘framing’ is the building block of contemporary metafiction. Its projection of the conventional formal organization of novels, in her eyes, strikes our mind with certain questions, “what is a ‘frame’? What is the ‘frame’ that separates reality from ‘fiction’? Is it more than the front and back covers of a book, the rising and lowering of a curtain, the title and ‘The End’?” (28).

Of course in reading any fictional works we know that they are not “real”; but we suppress the knowledge to have more enjoyment. Metafictional “frame-breaking” is a technique to make readers aware of the suppression that they normally do in their perception of artistic works. The experience of reading Murdoch’s novels not only
exposes us to the function of literary conventions and their provisional nature, but also jolts us into her God-like presence behind them. Her authorial intervention is never very explicit, as is the case in Martin Amis’s *Money: A Suicide Note*, and John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, but an implicit method to complete her project of shattering the illusion of reality. In this sense, she is more like the postmodern dramatists who signal their domineering control over the play while shattering “the fourth wall.” In dramaturgy, two distinct kinds of theatre have been distinguished depending on the perspective the dramatist wants the audience to take on reality: “representational theatre” and “presentational theatre.” Most postmodernists especially those associated with epic theatre (like Bertolt Brecht and Moises Kaufman) prefer the latter to the former since it attracts the viewers’ attention to the absolute dependence of human creations and perception on frames. Unlike the practice of “representational theatre” that wants the audience to take in the scenes as the real experience and, hopefully, be entertained, educated, enlightened, or moved by the performance, the practitioners of “presentational theatre” rely on the paradoxical practice of “frame-breaking,” techniques such as “apologetic prologue and epilogue, the induction (much used by Ben Jonson and by Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew*), the play-within-the-play, the aside directed to the audience,” to challenge the common passivity of the audience. Projecting the fictional status of the characters, on the very theatrical transaction, they take advantage of such metadramatic functions to make the viewers actively participate in the creation of the reality and get “the pure facticity of the representation” (Elam 81). The actors’ freedom to recognize even address the audience, in contrast to representational theatre that takes the audience as passive viewers, blurs the distinction between the fictional and factual domains and invites the audience to see that their everyday life is nothing more than the dramas they play.

As shown in chapter two and three, the alternation of framing and frame-breaking or, as Waugh explains, “the construction of an illusion through the imperceptibility of the frame and the shattering of illusion through the constant exposure of the frame,” is a conspicuous feature of Murdoch’s literary style. The current chapter aims to elaborate on two other techniques she employs to rupture the frame of her fiction in hope of achieving the “real” realism she believes the novel is capable of. The transtextual quality that she
imparts to her fiction makes it the notable example of frame-breaking, the essential deconstructive method of postmodern metafiction. Echoing Scholes that “[i]magination feeds on previous imagination” (214), Waugh notes that “explicit intertextual reminders are common in metafictional novels” (113). Although Murdoch’s personal symbolism give to her works an autonomous original air, they are, in fact, as will be shown, conducive to a more effective frame-breaking mode. Through these two devices, she sets her texts in the context of other texts and accentuates their semantic undecidability in the poststructuralist sense, on the one hand. And deploying them in a fiction teeming with numerous images of the dream worlds of her personae, on the other hand, she highlights the indispensable prerequisite of frames for both factual and fictional worlds.

In the following section the uncommon symbols in the select novels are elaborated on because, unlike the stereotype symbols, they provide the author an opportunity to loom large in her own work. Then the discussion zooms in on the transtextual expansion of the text, on the ways her narratives defy being reduced to a unified whole harboring a discernable definite significance. Mainly informed by Genette’s categories of transtextuality, the following four subsections intend to capture the essence of many occasions Murdoch blows any formation of frames on the formal level of her texts. However, it should be stressed that this drawing on Genette’s terminology is just for the sake of clear, effective organization of the line of argument, and never means that Murdoch’s texts are in any way supportive of the cause of structuralism. In contrast to modernists, as we shall see, she never relies on an inter-text to reorganize the seemingly medley of elements in her fiction. Never do the various semantic layers of her fiction fasten on a single, underlying myth that converges them into a unified whole. That is why her fiction always defies categorization. The transtextuality of her texts is one of the strategies utilized to display the complexity of reality and the difficulty to capture it in language in which words signify only in relation to other words. It helps her incorporate an ironic mode into her fiction, capturing the essence of reality and commenting on language as self-autonomous system of signs in its very linguistic entity.
4.1 Personal Symbols

A symbol, or what is referred to in C. S. Peirce’s semiotics as “sign proper,” is a sign in which the relation between the signifier and the signified is not natural and only a matter of convention. In this sense, all words are symbols since according to Saussure all verbal signs (with the minor exception of onomatopoeia) are arbitrary. In a more particular literary sense, however, a symbol is a word or phrase that has reference beyond what it literally signifies (Abrams 206). In contrast to “conventional” or “public” symbols that reinforce the suspension of disbelief “private” or “personal symbols” are potential means to jolt us out of the comfort of familiarity public symbols easily evoke in us. They are efficient tropes that remind us we are dealing with a world fabricated out of a chain of arbitrary, linguistic units. As shown below, Murdoch’s predilection to invent her own symbols seconds the metafictional disposition of her novels.

In Murdoch’s novels, things, places, events, even people are embedded with symbolic connotations. According to The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature, her novels have been described as psychological detective stories whose plots have operatic quality, combining comic, bizarre, and macabre incidents in a highly patterned symbolic structure (Drabble, Stringer, and Hahn 445). Here each of her select novels will be examined in the sequence they were published to have an idea of her frame-breaking symbols. Although it is very difficult to affix her symbols to definite referents, their possible significance can be guessed. Before anything else people are iconic in Under the Net. Jake stands for a Sartrean protagonist in his thought, actions and choices. His indebtedness to Sartrean philosophy is literally suggested by his return from France with cases full of French books. His obvious failure to keep his male relationships along his temporal, insignificant attention to female characters are Murdoch’s way to suggests that the existentialist endorsement of human absolute freedom actually flatters man’s vanity. While displaying Jake’s groundless vanity, the novel, like An Unofficial Rose, points to the limited role of human will in shaping events while accentuating the moral importance and accountability of its grain of freedom. Jake overestimates his freedom and his control over his life so much that he forgets all about the other’s wills. Such vanity finally deprives him of his friends and strands him to destitution and
desolation, an extreme situation that paradoxically inspires him to write his original work, *Under the Net*.

Anna Quentin, Jake’s girlfriend, represents the paradoxical nature of art. Her abandonment of club singing to establish a mime theatre signifies the heated linguistic contention in Murdoch’s time over the representationality of fiction. As Nakagami explains, she enacts as “an icon symbolizing, contradictorily, both art and inartificiality, the beauty of human utterance . . . and its impossibility to utter any kind of truth” (17). That is why Jake develops a confused, uncertain relation with her. He desires her but he cannot surrender to the commitments of the married life because he is not able to accept that she is more than a dream object, a separate being with her own complexity. His satisfaction to see Anna “outlined against the forest like a lonely girl in a story” (*UTN* 217) indicates his limited concept of art as just an aesthetic object. It is after he starts to learn her afresh, that he develops a postmodern concept of art, acknowledging its ability to be truthful despite its limitation as in *Under the Net*. Anna’s final return to singing not only undermines linguistic philosophy’s distrust in language but also reflects how true art is “unfathomable” as she turns to be in Jake’s eyes: “to find a person inexhaustible is simply the definition of love, so perhaps I loved Anna” (31). In this sense, Anna is highly a symbol of true art or, as Felheim remarks, “true love” (190).

Hugo Belfounder is another symbolic figure in *Under the Net*. Through him, Murdoch satirizes Wittgenstein’s rational disparagement of language in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922). His involvement in funny situations such as being Jake’s roommate in a cold-cure camp, getting a concussion when hit by a brick at a political meeting and going AWOL from hospital with Jake’s help before the dawn of the next morning of his admission there leaves no doubt that he is not a better person than Jakes. Revolving around the belief that almost all we say is at best a pack of lies, Hugo’s philosophical conversations with Jakes are reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s contention. In this light, his final turn to be a watchmaker is profoundly symbolic. This scientific endorsement of clock time, of chronological time which just accounts for the sequence of events is the direct outcome of his denouncement of the uniquely human need to “narrativize” life. As Nakagami explains, this denouncement is naturally followed by the
rejection of “human time.” Therefore, while under Hugo’s influence, Jake cannot work into an original writing. It is only when Hugo’s spell dispels after certain highly impressive events that Jake “becomes sure of his vocation as a novelist” (17). A defiance to Hugo’s radical ideas that reject the reliability of any account of our experience, *Under the Net* forms to celebrate the concept of time as experienced change.

Along these figures, fireworks, catching cold, Mrs. Tinckham’s paper shop even the net of the title are highly symbolic. To assign a referent to these is even more frustrating. Their association with the turning points of the narrative indicates their special importance to the structure of the novel. Harboring different meanings in disparate readings of the novel, they are really complex symbols. One is reminded of the fictionality of the novel when the conventionally non-symbolic things or situations offer themselves as symbols. Reading the novel in line of Murdoch’s ethic-aesthetic scheme of thought, these symbols are accountable in terms of Plato’s Myth of the Cave. Fireworks can be a satirical icon for the sun; the shop another from of the cave. Jake and Hugo’s voluntary exposure to catch cold in a cold-cure experiment suggests humorously that neither might the philosopher nor the artist have the panacea for man’s moral stagnation since both of them joined the camp for their selfish personal reasons. Consequently, the net embodies the allurements of fantasy that are integral the consciousness.

With almost anything having a conspicuous extended significance beyond the literal meaning, *The Bell* is Murdoch’s most highly-charged novel. Stressing that Dora’s fleeing from her husband and returning to him are both the consequence of her fear of him, Masong takes the very beginning of the novel as “a foretaste of a certain Murdochian literary motif.” He argues that it anticipates an “allotropic pattern of a single spring feeding different and sometimes opposing, streams” that provides the essential tension for a “tragic tale” (11-12). Dora’s contradictory aesthetic perceptions of the gallery paintings reveal that this allotropic pattern is actually a technique Murdoch uses to symbolize the tension at the heart of both concepts of art and love. Here just three evident examples of this pattern are discussed. The first is the bell which is present in two forms, old and new, in the novel. Both named Gabriel (“I am the voice of Love. I am called Gabriel”), this icon indicates that love and art are, in effect, Janus-faced concepts.
As Reierson quotes, it serves as “a reflection of the relation, in art and in life, of the natural and artificial, the unutterably particular to the intellectually ordered and arranged, the simple to the complex form.”

The second is ethics mainly bifurcated in the religious perspectives of Michael and James. A unique overlapping of the moral, aesthetical and religious symbolism is achieved in the novel through James’s and Michael’s resort to the imagery of bell to bring home their sermons. Drawing on the simplicity and the lack of any “hidden mechanism” in a bell, James sees it as an emblem of “innocence.” Comparing the candid call a bell makes to the wisdom that originates out of innocence, James stresses that innocence should be preferred over any desire for experience. Such belief makes him a deontological ethicist who believes that we should “work . . . from outside inwards” and turn to what is enjoined. For Michael, the bell is, however, the symbol of the individual’s sole responsibility in moral dilemmas. Referring to the bell’s dependence on gravity, he believes that man’s spiritual growth is totally in his/her own hands: “[t]he swing that takes it down must also take it up. So we too must learn to understand the mechanism of our spiritual energy, and find out where, for us, are the hiding places of our strength. This is what I meant by saying that it is the positive thing that saves” (TB 210-211). This makes him essentially an virtue ethicist, one who believes that “we must work, from inside outwards . . . to bring into existence that one and perfect individual which God in creating us entrusted to our care” (211).

Having in mind this different symbolic interpretation of the bell and the host of the distinguishing features of the old and the new bells, it is obvious that the actual bells are the incarnations of these two distinct religious treatments of morality. In this process of association, James and Michael themselves acquire some symbolic significance. James is associated with the universal moral rules and Michael with the particularity of each individual and situation. It is owing to this tension that the plot closes the way it does. Since Michael only values self-knowledge he cannot attend people properly. Moreover, as a strict follower of rules, James cannot see the uniqueness of the incidents at the community. The result could be nothing but the unanticipated disintegration of the community.
As the voice of love, one drowned for the true love of the medieval nun and the other for the self-serving of those out of the abbey, the bells further stand for the self-sacrificing love and the possessive love, the extremes that are, once more, mirrored in the difference of the twin Nick and Catherine. Underlining the uniqueness of the personae in *The Bell* as they are, more than their fellow characters in Murdoch’s other novels, fully realized on human scale and invariably symbolic, “Catherine and Nick Fawley represent respectively Good and Evil” (Spear 30). Although their reduction to such black and white terms is definitely unMurdochian, they can be considered as counterpoints. Their different motivations for joining the community and the distinctive life they live at Imber Court show how much they are similar yet different. Nick’s lonely pathetic boozer life at the Lodge and his despicable treatment of Toby forcing him to confess his immoralities to James puts Nick in contrast to Catherine who has hidden her love for Michael and chosen to be a postulant instead.

Having so many allotropic patterns of dichotomy, *The Bell* takes side with neither of the two poles. Instead, it offers the possibility to delineate human life and define certain concepts in an inclusive new way that is more reliable and truthful. Giving equal tribute to both sides of the binary opposition of love and art, the implied author encourages us to acknowledge the contradictions at the heart of these concepts as their inevitable part. As clear in the case of the twins who commit suicide near the end of the novel, neither the self-sacrificing love nor the selfish possessive love can grant man a glimpse of truth; accordingly neither James’s belief in universal moral rules nor Michael’s support of self-knowledge is effective for moral growth. For a grasp of truth both are needed. This perspective is manifested in the Abbess’s attempt to make Michael trust his good intentions. She wants him to believe that being generous with ourselves and others is the key to good work; the rest is by God’s will an automatic process:

> Often 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. Where we generously and sincerely intend it, we are engaged in a work of creation which may be mysterious even to ourselves—and because it is mysterious we may be afraid of it. But this should not make us draw back. God can always show us, if we will, a higher and a better way; 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. (*TB* 242-243)

In this regard, it is no wonder that Dora appears the most important figure in the story, the one qualified to narrate the “whole” story. She is the one whose introspection and openness for alterity supply her with a better comprehension of reality.

Calling the novel *The Bell* helps Murdoch revise the common concepts of art; a third bell, her narrative is definitely postmodern suggesting that to be truthful stories should go beyond the dichotomy suggested by the two bells; they should be both reflective of their author’s inner life and life particularities. In this regard, fictions like *The Bell* are even more valuable in cultivating mature sympathy in us than the bell whose indiscriminating call to the faithful and the faithless, according to Wagner-Lawlor, makes it a more significant moral tool than a plow (15). Tracing the conscious journey of a group of people toward the spiritual horizon, *The Bell* is not just, as Gordon (552) and Wagner-Lawlor (3) argue, a criticism of existentialism for its solipsism and absolute freedom. It is certainly about love, freedom and spiritual “maturity,” as Murdoch’s critics unanimously agree; but it is not, as Wagner-Lawlor formulates it, a conviction that individual salvation “has little to do with any specific form of faith” and cannot be achieved through good works (3).

Depicting Dora’s rescuing a red admiral butterfly in a train to Pemberton while she is distressed by the prospect of reunion with Paul, Murdoch symbolically highlights the essential aesthetic dimension of any good work. Although the scene turns to be an ironical foreshadowing of Dora’s final freedom from Paul, it can be taken as a theatrical gesture intended to encourage faith in the moral value of beautiful things. In this light, the butterfly is another symbol for the novel itself, a metafictional flash into the capacity of fiction. This metafictional revelation does not interfere with “the solid life” of the novel in which, comments Byatt, characters have a life of their own beyond the confine of the book (qtd. in Spear 32). On the contrary, it acts as an irrefutable evidence of the perfect fusion of the real and the symbolic in *The Bell*, a rare occasion in the history of fiction.

*The Unicorn* surpasses *The Bell* in its direct metafictional involvement; as a result, it does not reproduce the same perfect fusion of the real and the symbolic. Despite
this failure, the novel does not sink in its aesthetic value below *The Bell*. Its value lies in the very evident mechanical conformation of its structure to a pre-existent pattern in literary tradition. This throws the novel to the opposite pole of *The Bell*. While the latter is an epitome of a perfect fusion that can be made between the real and the symbolic, the former is an embodiment of what it is like to have the both realms least intersected before their falling totally apart. *The Unicorn* is then, the most artificial work among the select novels, but has enough grounds in the familiar world to evoke our willing suspension of disbelief.

Besides its people, events, and setting which are the most implausible among those of the other novels in his study, *The Unicorn*’s uncommon symbols of bat, golden salmons, unicorn, bog, and catching cold grab the reader’s attention to the working of a controlling mechanism. The weak little bat Denis brings to Hannah which dies shortly after definitely has symbolic connotation because of the emotional intensity of the scene, especially the immediate sense of repugnance and sympathy that it evokes in Marian. Its weak and vulnerable existence mirrors Hannah’s so much that Marian is struck with a desire to cry: “[w]ithout knowing why, she felt she could hardly bear Mrs Crean-Smith and the bat together, as if they were suddenly the same grotesque helpless thing” (*TU* 109). Its imminent death, then, foreshadows Hannah’s death near the end of the narrative. As a cave dweller which is very vulnerable out of it, this sickling bat is an apt symbol for the self-deluded people who are not willing to dispel their delusions. Seen in the light of Plato’s Myth of the Cave, its death, moreover, symbolizes what Murdoch regards as the implication of his myth: the sun, the truth, cannot be looked upon and perceived by the cave dwellers because of its excessive brightness. Through it she brings home her own ethical perspective that death, viz. unselfing is required for a glimpse of the truth.

This view that shedding egoism is morally illuminating is, moreover, embodied in the incident of Effingham being stuck in the bog. Hopeless of being rescued, he gradually forgets his “self” and intuits some sense of truth that he tries vainly later to catch hold of. Such near-death experience, a recurrent motif in Murdoch’s works, highlights, furthermore, the requirement of self-abnegation for recognizing the individuality of others. It is only after Effingham has his vision that he becomes, though momentary,
more attentive to others. As the course of events shows, he becomes more concerned about Hannah, Marian and Alice’s emotions and tries to console all of them.

Murdoch uses other animal imageries like golden salmons and donkeys to portray such moral quest. As Denis explains to Marian, salmons swim against the current, up the rivers to spawn at their own birthplace. An example of nature against nature in Denis’s eyes, their brave jumps that may cost their lives embody the process of willing unselfing that Murdoch thinks essential for being good. Hannah’s comment on their tough upward journey establishes this symbolism: “[h]ave you ever seen salmon leaping? It’s a most moving sight. They spring right out of the water and struggle up the rocks. Such fantastic bravery, to enter another element like that. Like souls approaching God” (116). This imagery shows that approaching truth is a self-sacrificing effort not done very willingly by everyone. Unwilling to dispel her fantasy world, Hannah eventually perishes in a fall from the cliff into the sea. Seen against the arduous journey of the salmons, her tragic fall has no other cause but her inability to forget herself in her seven years of suffering.

Although it is very difficult to assign them a symbolic import, it is for sure that donkeys play a symbolic role in the plot. Marian sees a group of donkeys on her way to Gaze for the first time; “[t]here was something dark ahead which turned out to be a little group of donkeys” (52). The key to a bookcase in Gaze is “found at last in the pannier of a brass donkey” (69) foreshadowing Denis’s rescue of Effingham from sinking into the bog by the help of a donkey: “Denis unloaded a bulky bundle from the back of the donkey. Swiftly and deftly began to cast the lengths of brushwood on to the dark surface of the bog. He pressed it in a little and laid more on top. The dawn light now showed the flat un-featured land all around. The path lengthened toward Effingham” (365). Another animal imagery that embodies moral quest, donkeys are the conceit for saints who know instinctively the necessity of self-abnegation in realizing the good. They are the positive forces in the novel capable to find their way in the boggy ground of the area. Their role in saving Effingham symbolizes saints’ volunteer helping others, accentuating that being good is the selfless automatic service to what is beyond the self. In this sense, they are the metaphorically associated with the unicorn which is a symbol of Christ.
The unicorn, the beautiful uncatchable white imaginary beast, is traditionally associated with virginity, beauty and uniqueness. It is a symbol of Christ that is used for Hannah. Max discusses with Effingham that they cannot understand Hannah’s suffering as long as they see her as a scapegoat, a unicorn:

‘In a way we can’t help using her as a scapegoat. In a way that’s what she’s for and to recognize it is to do her honour. She is our image of the significance of suffering. But we must also see her as real. And that will make us suffer too.’

‘I’m not sure that I understand,’ said Effingham. ‘I know one mustn’t think of her as a legendary creature, a beautiful unicorn –’

‘The unicorn is also the image of Christ. But we have to do too with an ordinary guilty person.’ (222)

Hannah’s revelations to Marian about her playing the role of God shows that even in her own eyes she has been a unicorn, but not a virtuous and self-sacrificing unicorn. As she explains,

It was your belief in the significance of my suffering that kept me going. Ah, how much I needed you all! I have battened upon you like a secret vampire, I have even battened on Max Lejour.’ She sighed. ‘I needed my audience, I lived in your gaze like a false God. But it is the punishment of a false God to become unreal. I have become unreal. You have made me unreal by thinking about me so much. You made me into an object of contemplation. Just like this landscape. I have made it unreal by endlessly looking at it instead of entering it. (473)

This wicked and self-aggrandizing motivation behind Hannah’s seemingly virtuous conducts hints to another symbolic implication of the unicorn. As Spear notices, Denis sees Hannah “as entrapped by her own sin, unable to escape; at the same time she is for him a sort of Christ-figure, expiating the sins of the world” (50). This duality of Hannah’s personality gives the unicorn a Janus-faced significance. Besides being an emblem of Christ, it represents how God has been replaced by ego, therefore brings Hannah forth as the forerunner of Carel Fisher, the pervert priest in *The Time of the Angels* who recreates God in his own image and substitutes the self “for the true object of veneration” (SOG 101) as his remark to Marcus affirms, “when I celebrate mass, I am God” (TOA 174). An eponymous symbol, the unicorn, moreover, stands for the moral trinity of love-beauty-truth to stress the moral value of art for the soar of the soul to the
good. An aesthetic object dealing with man’s selfishness, the complex reality of life and the contingencies of the world, *The Unicorn* is really a unicorn, metafictionally highlighting the sublime value of art that has never been acknowledged after Plato’s denouncement of it as an obstacle to man’s spiritual aspiration to wisdom.

Some of the symbols that alert us to an authorial presence behind the narrative of *The Black Prince* are the symbolic title, the water-buffalo lady bronze and the beach stones. As Spear explains, the Black Prince is an epithet for Bradley Pearson whose quest for love and truth is not rewarded since he dies like the historical Black Prince, the son of Edward III, whose death in the Hundred Years’ War never entitles him to his royal inheritance (76). Because the novel, as noted before, draws overtly and heavily on *Hamlet*, it should be kept in mind that whoever the Black Prince may be, he or she is associated with Hamlet.

The strange combination of an aristocrat lady on a water-buffalo in a bronze statuette and its frequent appearance in the novel stimulates our curiosity into its symbolic overtone. As Bradley describes, it is one of “the little Chinese bronzes, a piece which I had had for many years. A water buffalo with lowered head and exquisitely wrinkled neck bears upon his back an aristocratic lady of delicate loveliness with a many-folded dress and high elaborate hair” (53). Since truthful art is part of the thematic concern of the novel, it is not unjustifiable to take this peculiar figurine as the symbol of truthful art itself. It suggests that such rare art is a gestalt that draws its higher aesthetic and moral qualities out of an unprecedented attention to both nature and culture; the water-buffalo, a usually intractable beast, stands for nature and the eloquent lady for culture that is after order and justification in everything and every situation. Art ought to pay tribute to both if it wants to fulfill its moral potential. Harboring such symbolism, *The Black Prince* itself is a proof to the viability of such configuration. The water-buffalo lady is what survives both Priscilla and Bradley who are dead by the time the editor is writing his postscript on Bradley’s narrative; therein, he values Bradley’s story more than the statuette implying that it is a more successful and natural juxtaposition: “[h]ere upon the desk as I write these words stands the little bronze of the buffalo lady. (The buffalo’s leg has been repaired.) Also a gilt snuffbox inscribed A Friend’s Gift. And Bradley
Pearson’s story, which I made him tell, remains too, a kind of thing more durable than these” (364).

Another symbolism that is unique and thought-provoking is the stones that Julian collects at the beach near Patara. They are such unique, beautiful individual entities that Julian decides to take them to Patara:

In the afternoon we drove across the flowery courtyard to collect our trophies and to look for more and we laid them out on the rough weedy lawn in front of the house. The stones were all elliptical and faintly humped and fairly uniform in size but varied immensely in colour. Some were purple spotted with dark blue, some tawny with creamy blotches, some a mottled lavender grey, many with swirling patterns round a central eye or strikingly decorated with stripes of purest white. As Julian said, it was very difficult to decide to leave any of them behind. It was like being in a huge art gallery and being told to help oneself. (268)

In their unique particularity, the stones suggest that art should preserve its individuality and avoid being reduced to just a universal interpretation of human condition. This is Murdoch’s actual project in her literary career. The Black Prince exemplifies such art that in Murdoch’s eyes has the power to liberate both the artist and the reader from the hazy dream world of fantasy. An exclusive account of Bradley Pearson’s life and hence that of those around him, it provokes thought about our own moral identity.

A Word Child contains a series of similarly personal symbols that engages our imagination. Straightaway, it kindles our curiosity about the referent of its title. Interestingly enough, it is the intersection of four thematic levels of the novel. As the plot unfolds, there is a certainty that almost all women in the novel desire a baby and due to that they are motivated to actions they have never done before. Laura offers him her home and love especially in prospect of Crystal’s marriage. Tommy dares to leave Hilary for another man at least momentary. Lady Kitty accepts Hilary’s love and admits to have an affair with him only to secure herself a child Gunnar can never give her. Despite her affection for Hilary, Crystal eventually marries Arthur before it becomes too late to have a child. So A Word Child embodies how the desire of female characters for a baby changes their lives. From another perspective, it indicates that the novel is an account of
the life of Hilary whose identity, as he himself accepts, is formed on words: “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” (AWC 21). As the temporal setting spans a period of five-weeks that ends in Christmas Eve, it can be deducted that the title is an epithet for Christ who speaks once he is born and grows into a messenger of God. From a metafictional perspective, however, it symbolizes the novel itself which being a linguistic art form acts as the surrogate for the child none of the women in the story could give birth to.

The underground tube Hilary usually resorts to is for him “a natural home.” More than a cosy after-the-office treat, its two platforms bars at Sloane Square or Liverpool Street stations are “the source of a dark excitement, places of profound communication with London, with the sources of life, with the caverns of resignation to grief and to mortality” (37). Considering the scenes with the underground setting and the amount of time he passes there in introspection, there is no doubt that London underground tube is a microcosmic equivalent to the actual outside world. Hilary likes to gaze at the flow of life there from the cosy spot of his ego symbolized by the platform bars:

Drinking there between six and seven in the shifting crowd of rush-hour travellers, one could feel on one’s shoulders as a curiously soothing yoke the weariness of toiling London, that blank released tiredness after work which can somehow console even the bored, even the frenzied. The coming and departing rattle of the trains, the drifting movement of the travellers, their arrival, their waiting, their vanishing forever presented a mesmeric and indeed symbolic fresco: so many little moments of decision, so many little finalities, the constant wrenching of texture, the constant destruction of cells which shifts and ages the lives of men and of universes. The uncertainty of the order of the trains. (37)

Obvious in this description is that the underground system stands for the contingent world in which individuals are just unique particles partly responsible for the life they live. In such a symbolic system, each train acts as the consciousness, “[t]he tram of consciousness, the present moment, the little lighted tube moving in the long dark tunnel” (38).

Another symbolic aspect of the novel surges up when Tommy makes five times “the joke about Crystal having changed from being a crystal bird into being a crystal
fish” (256). It indicates that Burde and Fisch are symbolic last names. In broad terms, according to Cirlot, bird is always associated with spirituality and fish with both fecundity and, because of its bobbin-like shape, the relationship between heaven and earth. In Christian symbolism, they respectively mean “the upper and the lower abyss,” and stand for the alpha and omega (9). This complementary relationship of bird and fish is further established in Christian symbolism when fish becomes associated with “profound life,” and comes to mean the “life-force” behind the world, “the spiritual world that lies under the world of appearances” (107).

Far from any of these connotations, the homophones of bird and fish in A Word Child refer to two morally contradictory personalities. Despite their individuality, Hilary and Crystal Burde are both introspective figures, close to change and afraid of action. Their counterpoint is Arthur Fisch who appears to be a more sensible and solid figure. His bold venture to teach Reggie Farbottom and Mrs Edith Witcher a lesson and restore Hilary’s desk to its original location after they have shifted it from its usual dominant place in their office room, as well as his sound argument to dissuade Hilary from messing around with Lady Kitty prove that he is not the clownish fool Hilary portrays in his account. A man of action with shrewd common sense and moral sensitivity, Arthur wins our approval. Instead of introspection, he gives his attention to others, especially Crystal and Hilary. As a consequence, the shift of Crystal’s maiden name to her married name is, undoubtedly, a symbolic event, signifying her change from an introspective to a more virtuous, open character. Therefore, Burde represents the egoistic aspect of personality while Fisch embodies the capability of man to live in the complex, contingent world which is always suggested by the image of sea, an attractive and awe-inspiring phenomenon. In her marriage to Arthur, she breaks the frame of her established personality and escapes the samsara of Hilary’s past selfish affair.

Encouraging us to see Murdoch behind the scenes, The Philosopher’s Pupil works mainly upon three conspicuous symbols—water, the fox and the flying saucer. Quoting Conradi, Bradbury points out that, in Murdoch’s works, water is an obsessively frequent symbol she employs to represent, as she herself accepts, “a deep metaphysical idea.” According to Conradi, continues Bradbury, Murdoch shows “a great ingenuity” to set the
plot in an imaginary spa town which symbolically acts as “a figure for Eros itself, the ‘natural’ spring of desire, and an object of ambiguous worship” (xv). Considering the introspective, self-obsessive propensity of those who frequent the bathes and the noncommunication epidemy among them, it can be said that these public places seem to mean more than an emblem of love. They are a symbolic locus even beyond what Bradbury calls “an erotic (phallic, venereal), a philosophical and, indeed, an operatic location” (xv). The interface between many issues Bradbury enumerates as that “of art, architecture, landscape, nature, community, venery and virtue” (xv) and a system that operates on an underlying exotic machinery, the bathes enact as the exquisite symbol of the consciousness. It represents the consciousness with all its dependence on the egoistic drives. Tom’s exploring descend in the baptistery room to see the springhead that feeds the bathes is a symbolic act, as noted before, to see the controlling drives of the consciousness.

The fox is a significant recurrent imagery in the novel. Its association with Alex (Alexandra Stillowen), the sixty-six year-old mother of the McCaffreys, is beyond doubt. In almost all the sections Alex is the focalizer, foxes are the focus of her conscious mind. The image that George evokes in our imagination of his mother is that of a typical cartoon fox: “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” (486). Moreover, she herself has empathy with the vixen she sees in the garden from her window: “[e]arlier in the day Alex had seen the vixen lying warily, elegantly, upon the grass while four cubs played round her and climbed over her back. The sight had pleased her, but also caused her some obscure pain, as if she identified with the vixen and felt a fear which was always there in the vixen’s heart” (367). For Ruby Doyle, with gipsy background, foxes “are evil, evil things, bad spirits. They bring bad luck. They make bad things to happen” (517). However, in the novel, the fox is endowed with another overtone.

A wild beast in comparison to the domestic dog Zed, the fox highlights the self-indulging freedom that any individual naturally desires. In her late sixties, Alex is
apprehensive about her relationship with Ruby who has been her maid ever since she was sixteen. Growing old together, she is worried that their mistress-maid relationship may get on an equal footing because of their growing loneliness and hopelessness. Her actual anxiety is, then, for her gradual loss of freedom and the consequent authority she has enjoyed for years. The fear of losing control over life is what she recognizes in the vixen with the four cubs. The detailed scene of zed and the fox’s eye encounter symbolizes the resistance of arrogant free individuals to acknowledge the free will of others and their significance in affecting the way life flows. It foreshadows Alex-Ruby conflict. Ruby is associated with a dog since after her unintentional thrust that ends with Alex’s tumbling down the stairs, she begins “to howl like a dog” (518). And the fox is the animal imagery for Alex’s conceited consciousness which is reluctant to accept the reality and importance of others especially Ruby. Alex loves the foxes and is furious with Ruby for letting the pest control people kill them all (an incident that the narrator later informs us has never succeeded since they managed to escape) because they restore to her that sense of freedom and power which the prospect of death and the wisdom of experience have made so ethereal.

The other memorable symbolism in *The Philosopher’s Pupil* is the flying saucer. George has a visitation by a flying saucer after he walks off the bath institute and reaches the Ennistone Ring believing he has murdered Rozanov. Years ago, William Eastcote saw a flying saucer. Since William has been revered both at his lifetime and after his death as a good man, the speculation is that definitely George should have undergone a great positive moral change at the time of the visitation. Believing that he has released himself from his obsessive relationships with Rozanov by killing him, George himself senses that he is another man: “[h]e thought, this is the first day, the first hour, of the new world in which everything will be entirely different. I have undergone a cosmic change, every atom, every particle is changed, I am switched over into a completely new mode of being” (539).

On his way towards the Ring, he has a weird experience; he sees the sun “no longer round but . . . shaped like a star with long jagged mobile points which kept flowing in and out, and each time they flowed they became of a dazzling burning
intensity” (539) then it grows a dark center and becomes like a sunflower. The cause is the approach of a silver saucer-shaped spaceship towards him. After its rays enter his eyes, he becomes blind for a while. Spear interprets this blindness as “a mystic, if not a religious experience,” an indication of the road to Damascus (92). However, since George is a student of philosophy, this drastic change in his personality that causes lenient and open encounters with those whom he could not communicate freely before signifies that his temporary blindness is just a parody of Plato’s Myth of the Cave. It shows how Murdoch adopts this myth to suggest that the truth is never fully comprehensible to man (it actually blinds those who seek it) and to stress that people are always dictated by some degree of egoism.

To conclude this section, it should be noted that deciphering Murdoch’s symbols is not very demanding because her narratives always point to the possible referents. Murdoch never leaves us alone in our hermeneutic activity. By preventing our fantasy from confabulating on its own, she engages our consciousness in the true mode of freedom that is for her an ongoing appreciation of alterity.

4.2. Transtextuality of the Novels

As noted in the previous chapter, Murdoch’s postmodern affinity never costs her the readability of her texts. The critical response to her fiction never doubted that she is a great story-teller. In one way or the other, critics have implicitly traced back this artistic virtue to “her sheer inventiveness,” “her intricate, often double, plot,” “her evocative and sometimes playful, detailing of her novel’s setting,” and to “her insightful portrayals of her characters wrestling with the ordinary ‘muddles’ of life,” techniques that mark her distinctive style in Reierso’s eyes. In the following section we will see that the real magic to the narrativity of her works lies in the air of familiarity that she invokes in her novels through “transtextuality.”

As Allen elaborates, transtextuality or textual transcendence is the new perspective Gérard Genette adopts to found the new poetics he entitles “open structuralism.” Replacing the confused and misleading tools in the traditional poetics since Plato, transtextuality helps him define poetics as the study of “the relationships
(sometimes fluid, never unchanging) which link the text with the architextural network out of which it produces its meaning” rather than an effort to establish “a stable, ahistorical, irrefutable map or division of literary elements” (100). This shift of focus from texts to architexts allows him to account for the extinction and birth of many literary forms over centuries and theorize cogently the endless formation and reformation of poetics. Here in the analysis of Murdoch’s novels, the term is used in a less technical sense, however. In a broad way, the study draws on some of the transtextual categories Genette defines just to endow the argument with a systematic texture and mark Murdoch’s metafictional techniques that expose the fictionality of her fiction while lending to its narrativity. The next part deals with the intertextuality of her literary texts.

4.2.1. Intertextuality

Before setting on the analysis of the intertextuality of the novels, some light should be thrown on the concept of “intertextuality.” As Allen points out in his eponymous well-researched book, “[t]he term is defined so variously that it is, currently, akin to such terms as ‘the Imagination’, ‘history’, or ‘Postmodernism’: terms which are, to employ a phrase from the work of the US critic Harold Bloom, underdetermined in meaning and overdetermined in figuration” (2). Identifying its origin in the twentieth-century linguistics, particularly in the seminal work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, he sets out to draw a large-scale map of various shades of meaning it evokes in various theoretical contexts: in the poststructuralist theories of Kristeva and Barthes, through the structuralist poetics of Genette and the hermeneutics of Riffaterre, on to Harold Bloom’s idea of “anxiety of influence,” to the feminist and postcolonial rebound to Bakhtinian view of language as a discursive social device and finally the postmodern analysis of the non-literary arts and the current idea of hypertextuality of the World Wide Web.

As Allen elaborates, Julia Kristeva’s articulation of intertextual theory in 1960s emerges out of her attempt to fuse the linguistic views of Saussure with the literary ideas of the Russian formalist M. M. Bakhtin. Finding a common ground in Saussurean theory and Bakhtinian ideas that were formed in opposition to the former’s disregard of social specificity of language, in her semiotic approach, Kristeva argues that all texts are the site
of ideological struggles; that is, in Allen’s words, “they embody society’s dialogic conflict over the meaning of words” hence cannot house clear and stable meanings. In Kristeva’s postulation, texts not only stem from the “social text” but remain within the society and history and always open to reform its textual relationship (36-37).

Changing the focus from literary production to literary criticism, Ronald Barthes takes advantage of intertextual theory to disrupt the notions of stable meaning and objective interpretation. For him, the text is unbound and open to endless textual relationships; the consequence of this poststructuralist celebration of plurality of texts is what he styles as the “death of the author” and the “birth of the reader.” According to Barthes, explains Allen, the author is no longer responsible for the multiple meanings a text may yield, and the reader far from being the consumer of the fixed significance is free to engage in “the production of the anti-monologic text” (69). Unlike Bakhtin’s and Kristeva’s views of the literary texts as a mirror for the struggle of social discourses, Barthes builds his theory of the text on the etymology of the text. He writes: “[t]he plural of the Text depends . . . not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric). The reader of the Text may be compared to someone at a loose end” (qtd. in Allen 67).

Despite poststructuralists’ dependence on intertextuality to substantiate their emphasis on uncertainty, indeterminacy, and incommunicability of significance, and to support their belief in jouissance, the pleasure evoked out of the free play of signifiers due to the “liberatory release from the shackles of singular, monologic notions of identity and of meaning,” structuralists use it to argue for “critical certainty” or the possibility to identify a definite, stable import for any text. In his poetics, Genette introduces the term transtextuality to separate himself from the poststructuralist tradition. Through the five categories of this concept, he formulates the various relationships of a text to the bigger matrices he calls architexts, so sets five ways the meaning of a text can be stabilized. Intertextuality is only one transtextual subcategory which conceptualizes “a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts” and “the actual presence of one

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10 Intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, architextuality
text within another” (qtd. in Allen 101). Reduced now to allusions, quotations, and plagiarism, it justifies the pragmatic exploration of a text for a determinable meaning.

In Michael Riffaterre’s semiotics, elucidates Allen, intertextuality adopts a more limited scope. Unlike Genette’s poetics that disregards a work’s uniqueness and zooms in on its architext, the closed system out of which it is constructed, Riffaterre’s textual analysis refocuses back on the particularity of the individual work; he postulates that the meaning of literary texts depends on inter-texts which in contrast to the architext refer to “the semiotic structures which link up their individual words, phrases, sentences, key images, themes and rhetorical devices” (115). This foundation of the semantic level on the specific semiotic structure in each text accounts for the two other idiosyncratic foci of Riffaterre’s semiotics: the “referential fallacy” and “the self-sufficient text.” Riffaterre believes that a literary “text refers not to objects outside of itself, but to an inter-text. The words of the text signify not by referring to things, but by presupposing other texts” (qtd. in Allen 115). This anti-referential approach inevitably gives way to his stress on the textual autonomy of any work of literature by which he means the text can “control its own decoding” (116). To nullify the criticism that attacks his theory for its overgeneralization and ignorance of the culturally lost inter-texts, Riffaterre supplements it with the notion of “literary competence” by which he does not mean only the knowledge of texts and canons but as Allen stresses “an adequate possession of the sociolect.” According to Allen, it “involves the reader’s awareness of language as it is presently used in communication and as it has been used in previous eras,” a resolution that still has its adverse criticism (126).

Another form of intertextual theory evolves out of the works of the US literary critic Harold Bloom. Far from Barthes’s celebration of the “death of the Author,” his theory of the poetic production revolves around the role that specific precursor poets play on the continuance of poetic practice. In his books The Anxiety of Influence and A Map of Misreading, he suggests that poetry stems from poets’ deliberate misreading of the works that both influence and threaten them. So intertextuality in the Bloomian sense is more than a concern with the inability to avoid what Barthes styles the “already written and read”; it involves the misreading that writers and readers intentionally impose on those
influences to refuse their own failure to be original. The foundation of Bloom’s “anxiety of influence” on the presupposition that “there is one singular and inescapable canon of literature” stimulates strong reactions among feminist critics.

Protesting that such monologic description of the literary canon evades the fact that women writers have traditionally been excluded from it, feminism endorses another version of intertextuality. Elaine Showalter’s description of gynocriticism articulates a feminist theory of intertextuality: “the feminist study of women’s writing, including readings of women’s texts and analyses of the intertextual relations both between women writers (a female literary tradition), and between women and men” (qtd. in Allen 144). In Gilbert and Gubar, intertextuality retains its Bloomian psychological nature to account for an exclusively feminine phenomenon; examining Bloom’s theory in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, they argue that instead of Bloom’s “anxiety of influence,” as Allen quotes, the woman writer suffers from an “anxiety of authorship”: “a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate and destroy her.” They postulate that it is the desire for a precursor or tradition that let female literary figures imitate the previous female writes; for them, intertextuality is, then, summarizes Allen, “a matter of legitimation rather than of emasculating belatedness.” (146)

The debate that this stress on the need for an *écriture féminine* aroused even among feminist critics signals the adaptation of intertextuality in more recent species of literary theory. In an attempt to resist the poststructuralist effacement of the writing subjects, critics like Elaine Showalter and postcolonialist like Patricia S. Yaeger, W. E. B. Du Bois, Homi K. Bhabha, Henry Louis Gates employ Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia and dialogic imagination to substantiate their views that female and colonial subjects have similarly no other way of expressing themselves except through the dominant white-male language. In other words, their voice needs not a separate space of discourse to be articulated but is always present in the very language dictated by the dominant discourse. In fact, they posit that the way marginalized groups speak, write and read is always through a double-voiced discourse that opposes the monological principle
within language. Here, intertextuality again means the discursive struggle that gives language its time-sensitive social situatedness.

The potentiality of the term does not end here; it becomes one of the most favorable technical terms in postmodern literary and non-literary theories. Various anti-traditional modes of contemporary non-literary art are accountable through this term: form the transposition of established styles into original composition in music, through an vogue to parade earlier styles or incorporate “real objects” in painting, to the interest in producing collage photos out of specific visual intertexts from painting, photography and film, on to the dependence of cinema on literature. Stressing on the absence of a cultural norm and the replacement of reproductions for authentic versions, theorists like Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard and Fredric Jameson highlight pastiche as the only intertextual technique in the postmodern age. In contrast to parody that works in reaction to a norm, pastiche is just a mimicry without satirical edge; it is as Jameson describes, “blank parody, statue with blind eyes,” the artistic technique of a culture that no longer capable of originality has only the past to return to. In a word, it is “the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masques and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture” (qtd. in Allen 184).

Drawing on such cultural theorists’ emphasis on the hybridity of style as the major attribute of the postmodern age, critics such as Charles Jenks and Linda Hutcheon respectively identify “double-codedness” as the idiosyncratic feature of postmodern architecture and literature. In contrast to Jameson, however, they argue that postmodern styles are not a hopeless, aimless juxtaposition of traditional styles but a deliberate borrowing. The past is present in postmodern art just to underline the social situatedness of artistic creation and the conventionality of the artistic modes of representation. Postmodernism, thus, is neither a continuous of nor a backlash to modernism. It is, as both Jenks and Hutcheon agree, a unique contradictory phenomenon that maintains its originality and aesthetic value through restoring the original Bakhtinian nuance to its intertextual practice. A registration of multiple styles and codes to subvert and question the dominant establish form, postmodern art forms are majorly dependent on parody.
Postmodern parody is not a device to lament the loss of traditional styles but a valuable tool to celebrate the socio-cultural diversity of the postmodern age.

The integration of this paradoxical mode in literature has brought about two distinct kinds of postmodern fiction: what Hutcheon styles as historiographic metafiction and what Waugh more generally refers to as metafiction. Historiographic metafiction, as Hutcheon illuminates in her “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History,” is a species of the novel that draws heavily on history to undermine the objectivity of historical texts. As a retrospective account of the experiences of an individual at certain historical point, it spotlights history as a vast web of subjective texts and any new historical account as a new excrescence to such a web hence inseparable from the already-written texts. Metafiction is another widespread form of fiction in the postmodern era. A self-conscious fiction in Waugh’s definition, it is formed out of a more restricted sense of transtextuality. The novels like Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (1962), John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), Donald Barthelme’s *Snow White* (1973), Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler* (1979) A. S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1989) come to existence out of a desire to expose the conventionality of literary styles, genres and the way conforming to certain conventions opens a text beyond its own textual frame. Questioning the possibility of representation and highlighting the interconnectedness of all texts, metafiction is the irrefutable evidence to the centrality of intertextuality in the contemporary literary theory and criticism.

Considering all the foregoing, it is obvious that the intertextual study of a literary text should not merely be limited to an extensive exploration of its “background” or “context” in terms of the “sources” or “influences” that have lent to its existence. Despite its limited scope, however, a search for the sources is the best way to show the location of the text in an ever-growing web of texts. It can at least demonstrate that the trace of the past is always present in the works of future and inevitably affects their significance. This section relies on the intertextual theory to argue that Murdoch’s select novels primarily refer not to the world or even concepts, but to other texts and signs. Deploying Genette’s categories of transtextuality for the analysis of her six specimens, it aims to show that Murdoch’s literary writing involves, in effect, an intertextual practice. It discusses that, a
network of textual intersections investing a lot on representational fallacy, her novels never provide a key intertext to stabilize their significance. On the contrary, in line with the poststructuralist articulation of intertextuality, they consist of an open textual network that defies any momentary structuralist certainty about an underlying, definite semantic code. Being vague, ambiguous and polysemic despite their conspicuous conformation to certain conventions and generic forms as shown in chapter two, her novels are surely ironical trying to contain the complex reality into a unified form. Such an ironical mode leaves no doubt that Murdoch’s dependence on intertextuality is actually a tribute to the postmodern celebration of the plurality of significance, the play of signifiers and the pleasure of the unsatisfied, curious reader who is stimulated to take the novel as an open, unresolvable enigma.

4.2.1.1 Intertextual Accretions

Notwithstanding their entertaining aspects, Murdoch’s novels are very thought-provoking. In them, the shadow of her philosophical topics looms large. Her characters’ conscious or unconscious obsession with the same conceptual issues is her way to give a fairer and fuller treatment of the perspectives she denounced or ignored in her philosophy. The image of the philosopher is a recurrent image in her narratives; according to Bradbury, he is “a key figure, clearly depicted, though usually rather in the manner of those Renaissance paintings of the thinking scholar, or the intellectual man who has known and laid a public duty” (xiii). So preoccupied with philosophy, her novels are not “philosophic novels.” Highlighting Murdoch’s distinction between philosophy and fiction, Herman remarks that she herself was against writing such novels (551). However, so much interspersed with philosophical issues, it is not difficult to see Murdoch’s obvious attempt to extirpate system and abstraction from her fictional works. One can trace the philosophical views that lie behind the formation of each of her fiction although none of them dampens our imagination by didactic clichés. Taking the abundance of moral speculations and Socratic dialogues as “the greatest influence of philosophy” on her novels, Bradbury insists that “richly filled with characters, situations, emotions and textures,” they always nurture “a moral and speculative purpose and a dialogic solemnity” (xiii).
As noted previously, the specters of Plato, Sartre and Wittgenstein are recognizable in most of her fiction. Put in the mouth of her fictional figures, their views get another chance to be appraised, this time in her literary vessel. Besides the presence of Simon Weil, a French Christian mystic, can be sensed in the novels under discussion. Lending much space to their moral speculations, the select novels actually favor Weil’s stress on the self-sacrificing attention to the other. Weil is Murdoch’s only female mentor that, according to Conradi, provided her with the essential standpoint “to encounter Plato a new” (qtd. in Bok 75). Highly probable, it is through her that Murdoch gets familiar with the Buddhist texts and ideas that prop her ethics and are reverberated in her novels including *The Black Prince, A Word Child* and *The Philosopher’s Pupil*. The Weilian concept of spiritual attention is obviously behind Hugo’s opinion that “[o]ne must just blunder on. Truth lies in blundering on.” For, even “God is a task, God is detail” (*UTN* 258). It is moreover, the cause of Murdoch’s idiosyncratic way of characterization. The detailed, vivid images of her characters indicate her own moral awareness.

Her characterization is a suitable site to find the trace of another substantial influence. The fact that all her characters are egoistical, reminds us of the Freudian idea that we do not give up early pleasures. In *The Fire and the Sun*, for example, Murdoch’s approval of this idea is suggested in her statement that “all we really do is adopt a substitute” (*FAS* 38). She relies on Freud to confirm her skepticism about escaping illusion, that is the possibility of turning from Plato’s fire to his sun. She draws on his idea of “the ego” to argue that naturally man cannot set himself totally free from the net of illusions; the best he can achieve in his quest for truth is an ineffable glimpse of it. This does not mean that she is a pessimist as Gordon takes her to be (23). She just tries to underline the importance of moral struggles and the conscious self-abnegation for any spiritual soar.

Murdoch’s goal in drawing on such moral and psychological and even philosophical ideas is to satirize the role of philosophy in man’s life. Building on many literary sources helps her complete her portrayal of, “the collapse of selfhood amid the collapse of Reason, of Eros and Thanatos,” to use Bradbury’s terms (xviii). *Under the Net* owes much to the French writers the like of Sartre, Beckett and the surrealist
Raymond Queneau to whom the book is dedicated. A hack writer obsessed with contingencies and convinced of the value of silence over language as the only possible way to contain truth, James Donaghue lives a life of phantasmagoria. In addition to these implicit yet dominant influences, *Under the Net* draws on other sources: for instance, Dryden’s “The Secular Masque,” Henry James’s and Joseph Conrad’s female characters, *Hamlet, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Leonardo da Vinci’s “The Last Supper,” and mythical and legendary figures like Medusa, Circe, Aeneas and Dido. Alluding to these writers and characters, the novel expands its semantic level and acquires a rhizomic network that defies our hermeneutic attempt to excavate a single definite significance. All her novels are similarly overloaded in meaning and extended beyond the book cover.

*The Bell* is formed amid another net of references. The allusion to real people like Elijah, Guy De Maupassant, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Kant, Dante, Julian of Norwich, and the literary individuals or types such as Anna Karenina, Little Red Riding Hood, Robinson Crusoe, the medieval knight and Dickensian rake indicates that *The Bell* is not an autonomous piece but just a node in the intertextual network that has given rise to it. *The Unicorn* relies for its semantic complexity on its extensive reference to Aeschylus, Plato’s dialogues such as the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*, Carpaccio, Mozart, Bach, Wagner, Blake, Andrew Marvell, Kant and Freud. It, moreover, builds on specific pieces of art like Mme de Lafayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves*, *Moonlight Sonata* of Beethoven, Paul Valery’s “La Cimitiere Marin,” as well as the legendary figure of Lilith and the imaginary figures like la princesse lointaine, Beatrice, Puck and Peter Pan.

*The Black Prince* expands its purport due to its interlink with such artworks as *Don Quixote, Hamlet, King Lear, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Henry IV, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Rosenkavalier, Emma*, and its reference to certain artists such as Dante, Andrew Marvel, George Herbert, William Hogarth, Goya, William Blake, Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Gustave Flaubert, George Meredith, C. S. Forester, and Robert Louis Stevenson. The allusions via which *A Word Child* enriches its semantic import are Wittgenstein, Chomsky, Mozart, Shakespeare, Allen Poe, Peter Pan, Miranda, and Aladdin, to name a few. In *The Philosopher’s Pupil*, the references are to a horde of philosophers the like of Plotinus, Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger,
Wittgenstein; to works such as Shakespeare’s sonnets, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Pied Piper*, Renoir’s *La Baigneuse au Griffon*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuse*, Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, *Tod in Venedig*, Scott Jopling’s *Sugar Cane*; to figures including Dante, Samuel Johnson, Mozart, Blake, Herman Melville, Dostoevsky, and fictional figures like Polyphemus, Sir Galahad, Cordelia, Caliban, and Peter Pan. The unique point about *The Philosopher’s Pupil*, as discussed in chapter two, is that its unusual detailed description of the various architectural and design styles of its setting foreshadows its literary, collage form.

4.2.1.2 Intratextual Allusions

The salient point about Murdoch’s novels is that they are never separate isolated narratives but a group of interconnected texts. Through this interconnection, or intratextuality, Murdoch ironically demonstrates that texts are dependent on other texts as well as the constructs of an author who decides on their linkage to the already existent textual network. Murdoch uses many techniques to pinpoint the interdependence of her texts. One is through recurrent symbols; for example, as Medcalf observes, “[s]wimming recurs in Iris’s novels as a symbol of capacity to live within the unpredictable, contingent world” (22). The swimming of Jake in *Under the Net*, Dora in *The Bell*, Hilary in *A World Child*, George in *The Philosopher’s Pupil* foreshadows their capability to change into good people. Another technique is through reference to the characters of her first novel *Under the Net*. In *The Bell*, Paul informs Dora that the legendary bell “was cast by a great craftsman at Gloucester, Hugh Belleyetere, or Bellfounder” (*TB* 39). Belfounder, actually, is the English family name that Hugo’s German family chooses for themselves after immigration to England: “his father adopted the name Belfounder when he came to live in England. He found it, I believe, on a tombstone in a Cotswold churchyard, and he thought that it would be good for business” (*UTN* 60). Once more Hugo is mentioned in *The Philosopher’s Pupil* as an acquaintance of Rozanov and William Eastcote; once in Ennistone after years, Rozanov is curious about Hugo:

‘You tell me Hugo’s gone too.’
‘Yes, Belfounder died several years ago.’
‘What about all those valuable clocks?’
‘He left them to that writer, I forget his name.’
‘I’d have liked another talk with Hugo.’ (PP 99)

These two techniques create the illusion that Murdoch’s fictional world is a coherent autonomous world that exists parallel to the external world. Therefore, to understand fully any of her literary texts, it is necessary to have a glimpse of her fictional world as a whole. Indicative of absence of any interpretation gap between her narratives, these methods encourage us to go through all her works to see how our perception is textually constructed.

4.2.2 Parodic Hypertextuality:

Postmodern intertextuality has its incentive in the very modernist fervent pursuit of the new which costs the destruction of the past conventions. To save the aesthetic expression from collapsing in silence without appearing repetitive and boring, postmodern artists engage playfully with the past, with the restoration of the past styles and techniques even recreation of the existent texts. Fredric Jameson interprets this excessive dependence on the past material and artifacts as the random cannibalism of the tradition, and takes pastiche as the defining feature of postmodern art; acknowledging its parodic objective, other critics like Jencks, Hutcheon, Eco, Waugh, however, identify postmodernism with an ironic mode. As Nicol explains, even popular cultural works come to integrate such ironic attitude (13); in its episodes, The Simpsons continually alludes to and parodies other films, cultural programs and events just to propose that originality is impossible unless it is exposed as a repetition. Similar to The Simpsons, Murdoch’s works depend on intertextual references and self-referentiality.

Any of her works including the six under-perusal novels project a major literary intertext whose theme, plot even character types are mirrored in them. Any temptation to restrict the meaning to that of the central intertext, or, in Genette’s terms, the hypotext that acts as the major source of signification for the text, is, however, subverted by a group other interwoven sometimes incompatible intertexts. Their subversive presence turns her novels into ironic shows, a display of how a text can keep its originality without destroying the past. Paradoxically imitating previous artworks just to tarnish the imitation by other imitations or complement it with the awareness that it is an imitation is the
method via which Murdoch constructs her fiction. Subverting their focal hypotexts by bringing into play other intertexts, the six select novels demonstrate that meaning is not fixed but subject to change because of the permanent reformation of intertextual relationships. In contrast to late modernists who, according to Jencks, remain “committed to the tradition of the new and does not have a complex relation to the past, or pluralism, or the transformation of Western culture,” these novels prove that Murdoch’s concern is “meaning, continuity and symbolism” (qtd. in Nicol 15).

Murdoch chooses the hypotext in each of her novels to be further undermined by overt or obscure self-reflexivity. An ironic attitude forms the essence of self-reference. The examples of its literary version known as metafiction can be found even before the postmodern age. English literature includes for instance Tristram Shandy (1759-67), Clarissa and Tom Jones for their self-conscious narrators. And American literary tradition contains the romances of Hawthorne, and especially Melville (Wolter 67). What distinguishes the postmodern version is its ironic nature to expose postmodernity. So as Nicol referring to Waugh puts it, postmodern metafiction flaunts itself as a combination of words on the page that at best can be related to other texts rather than the external world just to reflect the fundamental ontological similarity of the real life to the world of fiction “as constructed, mediated and discursive” (qtd. in Nicol 16). Endowing her fiction with self-reflexivity, in which they highlight their status as fictional by referring to themselves, Murdoch reaches a triad of goals. First, she puts the external world on par with the fictional world through an ontological revelation. Second, she avoids the inevitable silence to which avant-gardism leads. Finally, she secures the moral function she believes art is capable of fulfilling, that is, she succeeds to set her audience free of their selfish net by keeping them entangled in her literary intertextual labyrinths. Her work is, then, a credit to the view of theorists like Eco, Jencks and Hutcheon who take irony as “not necessarily an empty, cynical gesture, but a necessary negotiation,” “an inherently paradoxical structure” that serves a satirical role (Nicol 15).

The collaboration of transtextuality and self-reflexivity implants a deep postmodern air in her novels. As Nicol elaborates, for Hutcheon, postmodernism “is double or contradictory, that is comfortable with doing two opposing things at the same
time or representing both sides of an argument at once” (16). The novels of this study are all “both . . . and . . .” adduced in the ubiquity of the counterpoint characters in her fiction; the figures that are the spokesmen of counter ideas without being oppositional and dialectic. Similarly, her novels go beyond the original-traditional opposition in literary creation by being both self-reflexive and representative of the real world. Far from an aimless duality, they epitomize the parodic edge of postmodern art rather than the hopeless, desperate practice of pastiche. The aim in this section is to identify the hypotexts, the earlier texts, on which Murdoch’s narratives are grafted, in the six novels and show their role in fulfilling Murdoch’s moral wish to fuse beauty and truth in narrative art.

An account of the adventures of Jake through the streets of London and Paris, *Under the Net* is a picaresque story. The motif of vain pursuit exemplified in Jake’s chasing a woman he mistakes for Anna in Paris, the setting, the stock characters and the conspicuous ridiculous ventures of almost all of them mark the novel as a mock epic. One is reminded of *odyssey*. Believing that Anna is in love with him, Jake abandons her, feeling sure that she is always there waiting for him while he is on his journey to find himself. The adventures that Jake undergoes to reunite with her when he is desperate and destitute, and the final shocking revelation that Anna is fond of Hugo not him are a mockery of Odysseus’s adventurous journey to reunite with his faithful wife. Having Jake recount the story of his becoming a novelist, Murdoch fleshes out the age-old structure of *Odyssey* by issues more appropriate to the postmodern era. The colorful thematic strand dramatized in Anna’s mime theatre which project silence as the best available strategy to respect the contextuality of truth, and Jake’s self-consciousness as a narrator never allow *Odyssey* to be determinative hypotextually to *Under the Net*. Parodying it, Murdoch achieves two seemingly contradictory goals in her narrative caricature: life is not as serious as Homer has stressed in his epic, and the funny ridiculous aspects of life are actually of profound importance.

*The Bell* takes advantage of a double hypotext to express a significance neither of the hypotexts can connote by itself. Imitating a legend and integrating elements of a painting, it narrates a story that undermines its originality while attracting attention to its
hypertextuality, that is, in Genette’s terms, its status of being made on other texts. The anxious pursuit of a butterfly by the little girl in Gainsborough’s picture of his two daughters and more confident gesture of her elder sister are reiterated in a new version in the figure of Dora whose naivety and innocence, depicted in her impulsive rescue of the entrapped butterfly in her crowed train compartment at the beginning of the narrative, is contrasted to her certain, experienced self at the end of the novel.

Fig. 1. Thomas Gainsborough’s picture of his two daughters (1755-56).

The legend of the medieval nun who keeps silent not to betray her lover and drowns herself after the consequent weird fly of the bell into the lake provides a clear blueprint to cohere diverse strands of the novel. In fact, it does not function as a wholesale model for The Bell, on the contrary, underlays it by permeating into its various levels so that its resonance can be heard in each character’s life. On the whole, however, it does not settle the meaning of the novel which besides love houses other themes each in struggle to subordinate the rest.
The reference to these two hypotexts on the diegetic level of the narrative, nevertheless, not only foreshadows the future incidents in the fictional world of *The Bell* but anticipates the future of the novel and illuminates on the relation of fact and fiction. It makes *The Bell* a story of the process of artistic creation: first certain real incidents are reiterated in a cause-and-effect order with no aesthetic value so the legend of the drowned bell comes into being. Then as the time passes it gets associated with artistic pieces and is praised mainly for its aesthetic value as the beauty of the discovered bell engrosses Tom and Dora. So, as the artworks with some real backgrounds, the bell and the painting point the real status of *The Bell*. Creating a parallel between the bell and the painting, and without any direct metafictional involvement as in her other specimens, Murdoch suggests that art is always a symbol of life not its representation. Thus, to present truth art needs to disclose its identity as a symbol. Since *The Bell* is a web of signs, this conclusion is just another hermeneutic attempt to decode another possible rearrangement of its signs.

As repeatedly mentioned before, *The Unicorn* is a hypertext build on the fairytale genre. The characters themselves signal this affinity. The development of the plot towards the unexpected death of Gerald, Hannah, Peter and Philip is enough to show that the novel is a parody rather than an exact imitation of fairytales which typically have happy endings. Depicting a female beauty that in a trance-like state is reluctant to escape from the castle where she has been incarcerated for seven years, *The Unicorn* specifically has *The Sleeping Beauty* as its hypotext. In Charles Perrault’s version of the story, *The Sleeping Beauty* is a princess at whose birth a wicked fairy puts her under the enchantment that she will prick her hand on a spindle and die. Modified by the good wishes of another fairy, the curse is set instead that the princess will fall into a deep sleep for 100 years to be awoken by a prince. Despite the king’s forbidding the use of spindling in his dominions, when fifteen or sixteen in the absence of her parents, the princess out of curiosity tries the unfamiliar task of spindling; the curse is fulfilled and she falls asleep to be awoken and married to a young prince one hundred years later.

Through imposing drastic changes on this traditional pattern, Murdoch criticizes the traditional established female roles as enfeebling and gender-biased. She attacks the
generic practice of fairytales to inculcate submissive, faithful, wifely female models as the natural, accepted norm of femininity by creating Hannah, a female hybrid of The Sleeping Beauty and Medusa. Living in a castle called Gaze, Hannah bewitches anyone who comes into her acquaintance and makes them her servants unwilling to interfere with her seemingly sacred suffering. Reduced to such passivity, they reflect Hannah as Medusa whose gaze could turn whoever she looks upon to stone. As her confession to her selfish intentions in playing the role of a submissive repentant reveals, Hannah is such a complicated figure that cannot be typified by either The Sleeping Beauty or Medusa. In this sense, the novel’s mocking of The Sleeping Beauty gives Murdoch an opportunity to attract our attention to the more complex reality of human inner life. Hannah’s unexpected reactions to events reveal her indefinability. Her incompatibility to the fairytale stereotype of submissive, innocent females is the effective strategy Murdoch deploys to express more overlooked aspects of reality specially the female identity. In line with postmodern art, she resorts to the past to comment on the ineffability of human experience.

The enigmatic tile of the novel along with Bradley and Julian’s intense and insightful discussion of Hamlet encourages one to see the affinity between The Black Prince and Hamlet. Of course, attempting to present the complexity of love and the demands of a truthful art, The Black Prince is a very different artistic project; however, the slight similarity of the plot and characters are strong enough to indicate its debt to the play. The character of Ophelia is shared by Priscilla, Bradley’s sister who commits suicide, and Julian, Arnold Baffin’s young daughter who elopes with Bradley; similarly Gertrude’s role is enacted by Christian, Bradley’s ex-wife, and Arnold’s wife Rachel, who is in love with Bradley; moreover, Francis Marloe, Christian’s brother, brings to mind Horatio. And Bradley Hamlet. Although narrated by Bradley, it remains naturally uncertain whether he did kill Arnold, it is for sure that he had enough reasons to do so. Hamlet-like, he can end Arnold’s life just out of an attempt to preserve his own “self.” Hamlet dares to kill Claudius just after being pierced with Laertes’s poisoned blade he learns from him that their seemingly entertaining fight is Claudius’s murderous plot. Similarly, Bradley could have acted on a selfish impulse, whether to impress Rachel whom he thinks hates Arnold and prove his identity to her, or to revenge Arnold for
depriving him of the love of all the ladies of the novel: Priscilla who is no longer; Rachel who being Arnold’s wife cannot love him properly. Julian whom he thinks Arnold has persuaded to abandon him; and Christian with whom Arnold has fallen in love. The other reasons that the dramatis personae enumerate in their postscripts such as paranoia, homosexuality, jealousy, depression and inferior complex, along with the possibility that Bradley is not the murderer at all not only complicate the issue, but also indicate the divergence of *The Black Prince* from its hypotext that by definition tends to dictate its significance.

A closer attention to the role of the female characters further proves that *The Black Prince* is not a carbon copy of *Hamlet* but its parody. Illuminating the life of the female personae, the novel is another version of the play dramatizing the way *Hamlet* has been read from Hamlet’s point of view. *The Black Prince* demonstrates that any individual is as complex as Hamlet, entangled in their own dilemma, and impossible to be pigeonholed. Priscilla’s suicide is induced not only by Bradley’s inattention but her own nonchalant attitude toward her married life. As expressed in the postscripts respectively, Christian (Gertrude) marries for the third time and becomes a successful business woman in her salon. For her, Bradley’s account is a fiction to appease him of the sufferings he endures in prison because it enables him to make everything fit his own picture. Julian (Ophelia) marries John Belling, the boyfriend that is dumped in Bradley’s narrative, and becomes a poet holding the belief that “[w]ords are for concealment, art is concealment. Truth emerges from secrecy and laconic discipline” (*BP* 358). Describing the events as the inventions of Bradley’s mind, she criticizes Bradley for his “unstudied personal emotions” and “immediate judgments” (358). Rachel turns to be a faithful wife who rejecting her “vendetta-like resentment” against Bradley wants anyone to see his cruelty in killing her husband out of an obsessive envy for his professional success. Murdoch knew that no other text than *Hamlet* could have offered her the stepping stone for giving such a vivid portrayal of human experience.

To reflect the limited world that Hilary cocoons around his sister Crystal and himself, Murdoch models *A Word Child* on *Peter Pan and Wendy*. Here again Murdoch invests more on other characters especially Crystal and Arthur to show that no one is
actually happy with the roles that Hilary has prescribed them. All the time, they are living a very different existence than what Hilary assumes. Crystal’s impulsive sleep with Gunnar at the very night of Anne’s fatal accident and her final consent to marry Arthur are the incidents that make her Wendy-like. Wendy determines to return to her parents rather than be with Peter in Neverland remaining a child forever. Similarly, Crystal raises her objection to remain a child, an inexperienced woman in the world Hilary wishes them to live in. Being the cause of Crystal’s excessive pain and distress, these occasions show, moreover, her disconcert with the myth of virginity Hilary has built around her. She dilly-dallies to marry Arthur since she is worried about Arthur’s attitude toward her when revealed that she is not the virgin that Hilary confidently brags to anyone. In this line, she is different from Wendy who chooses the actual world over the happy, carefree life she is enjoying in Neverland.

Arthur, like all other characters, viz. Laura and Freddie Impiatt, Christopher Cather, Clifford Larr, Crystal, Lady Kitty, Gunnar, turns to be a different figure than what Hilary projects. He is not a blockhead, coward, servile man, but a bold, kind, considerate and morally conscious figure whose appropriate firm actions put him in contrast to Hilary who at best acts promptly. He is another of those Hilary wants to freeze in his world as ever innocent, inexperienced and childish. His eventual success to win Crystal’s consent to marry him and his strong disapproval of Hilary’s insistence to continue seeing Lady Kitty secretly indicate that he is ruled by other principles and is not willing to conform to Hilary’s world of passivity and ignorance. His dissident role along with the disclosure of the shocking facts of the others’ life ruptures Hilary’s world to be nothing but a product of his fantasy.

As obvious in his haughty attitude toward the others and his always biased evaluation of incidents, Hilary is a Peter Pan. He is, however, characterized in a way to illuminate the ignored aspect of Peter Pan’s life. Underneath the satisfactory scheduled life via which he even domineers the other’s life, Hilary is an unhappy and wistful bachelor; owing to his vanity, he cannot escape this tormenting monotonous life; instead he intensifies the misery and pain he is undergoing by bringing about another loop of traumatic events ending in Lady Kitty’s death. His agonies illustrate the redundancy and
boring life that a figure like Peter Pan is leading despite the contradictory appearance. Here once again Murdoch accomplishes the presentation of minutes of life with the aid of a past pattern.

Out of the novels under study, *The Philosopher’s Pupil* is the only one that is clearly based on a historical event; George’s interior monologue after pushing the sleeping Rozanov in his bath, believing that he has murdered him identifies a historical hypotext for the novel: “I never did find out how Schlick’s pupil killed him. It doesn’t matter now” (539). A German philosopher, physicist, and the founding father of logical positivism and the Vienna Circle, Friedrich Albert Moritz Schlick (1882-1936) was assassinated with a pistol on June 22, 1936. Dismayed with the rise of the Nazis in Germany and the Austrofascism in Austria and despite the other members of the Vienna Circle, he stayed on at the University of Vienna till he was shot dead by a former student, Johann Nelböck, while ascending the steps of the university for a class. Nelböck was found guilty of a compos-mentis murder of which he never repented. Later after the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany, he was released although he had served only two years of a ten-year sentence.

Father Bernard’s finding Rozanov’s suicide note on his desk before seeing him dead in the bath only moments after George has left his room complicates the real cause of his death. On that point in the narrative, it really does not matter how he was dead since by that time *The Philosopher’s Pupil* has impressively illustrated the falsity of judging people and events from their behaviors and their external façade, emphasizing that human experiences are not straightforward. Although a detailed account of the life of the McCaffreys, a large number of whom are part of the story, *The Philosopher’s Pupil* offers a panoramic shot of the life of a philosopher through portraying his significance for and his impressions on those who know him. His return from America to his birth place Ennistone sets into motion a set of events that both precipitates his own death and trigger drastic changes in the life of the other personae.

The memories and hopes Rozanov revives in Alex who feels an unrequited love for him for years, the disappointment that his inattention and outright offhand dismissal of George brings to George, the anxiety that his inconsiderate plan to wed his
granddaughter Hattie Meynell to a young English man of his own choice provokes in Hattie and Tom, the disconcertment that his extreme abnormal possessive attitude to Hattie causes for her even for himself, his unfair dismissal of Pearl, Hattie’s maid, as a corrupt person and his unexpected encounter with Pearl’s revelation of her love for him give Rozanov’s death an significant dramatic effect. Fed by so many irresistible forces, his death alerts the reader that life is much more complex to be fully comprehended by the consciousness. The narrator’s insistence that the cause of his death can never be certainly settled even if the death was legally taken as an accident underlines more directly the inherent unresolvable moral dilemma: “[a] confession by George together with the production of the suicide note would certainly have posed some interesting medical, legal and indeed philosophical problems. . . .What would the law have judged George to be guilty of? And what indeed, as things stand, is he guilty of?” (543).

As the narrator summarizes in “What Happened Afterwards,” the other personae start a new life each after Rozanov’s death. Getting married on the next autumn, Tom and Hattie are living happily together; Hattie is going to the school of Slavonic studies, and Tom getting his second-class degree in English is working on his poetry and writing a novel. People believe he will turn a great writer. George writes plays and poems and reads history. He has become an ordinary quiet person who never mentions Diane’s name again after the weird event in the Common. He plays bridge well and talks a lot with his nephew Adam who has turned a tall slim solemn youth with large eyes by the end of the story. Reunited with George, Stella is happy and feels guilty she has not returned to him sooner. Divesting himself of priestly power, Father Bernard goes away to Paris with Diane. When she abandons him, he goes to Greece to live on Mount Athos preaching Zarathustra-like the absence of God, the doctrine of the Good and the particularity of the present. In Paris, Diane meets Milton Eastcote, a philanthropist who takes a flat for her near Notre Dame. Emma and Pearl remain friends and visit Hattie and Tom frequently. Emma continues his singing career. And Pearl chases after some education. Brian and Gabriel live at Belmont taking care of Alex. Living a while at Como, Ruby returns to Belmont having her pension. Such unanticipated shift of the course of life of the dramatis personae while emphasizing the impossibility to ascribe a specific cause for Rozanov’s death, gives Murdoch the perfect opportunity to show the potential of the novel in a novel.
that builds its hypertextuality on a historical event and imitates periodically the form of conventional realistic novels: the only way the novel can present reality is through convincing the reader that reality is much more complex to be represented and fixed in a piece of art.

Being so semantically connotative while highlighting its contrivance in many ways especially by making the reader aware of the presence of an authorial team or at least a plotter who for example puts a neat parcel inside the front door of the Slipper House in which Tom finds all the articles he left behind at the steaming room—“his shoes and socks and mackintosh and jacket and the knife which Emma had given him” (532), *The Philosopher’s Pupil* credits Nicol’s assessment that irony is “not just cynical, not just a way of making fun of the world. It demonstrates a knowingness about how reality is ideologically constructed” (13). In all Murdoch’s funny presentations of the world, the inevitable x-rays of the fictive mechanism make them examples of the postmodern irony which, according to Jencks and Eco respectively, alerts us to our imprisonment in a frame of cultural references and bridges the gap between the elite and the popular, the old and the new through “double-coding.”

From the cultural perspective, Murdoch’s subversion of the possible semiotic hegemony of the hypotexts on which she grafts her novels is a dramatization of the postmodern endorsement of little narratives. In contrast to the modernist strategy of referring the reader to a key intertext to recuperate its fragmented elements in a meaningful pattern, Murdoch’s novels resonate with Lyotard’s critique of *grande récit* in favor of *petit récit*. In this light, Murdoch novels are in line with the acknowledged postmodern novels such as Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* or Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* which, as Nicol remarks, instead of offering a single explanatory master-narrative lead us to “an ironic recognition of how master-narratives function, and the value of individual, localized stories or temporarily useful interpretive constructions” (12).

So resistant to the dominance of their hypotexts and engaging the reader in the fictional territory, the narratives under discussion invalidate the traditional roles of the writer and reader as the producer and consumer of meaning and bespeak how creation of
a text is actually the result of their interaction. As Nicol puts, Sarraute takes the investment on this mutual interaction as “a measure of the health of novel rather than an indication of its imminent demise” (20). As noted earlier, for Murdoch, the novel is the potential art that can furnish the people of this godless age with the essential light for their truth-seeking quest. Discerning its comic form, she insists that it is open and engaging enough to act as an incentive for moral perfection. As Bove elaborates, she believes that “[i]n an individual’s apprehension of nature and art (which reflects, more closely than nature, the reality of life), one can momentarily forget oneself. Any movement away from the self is seen as moral improvement” (15).

These unique forms of Murdoch novels, the works that clearly project their Janus-faced forms, repudiate Hutcheon’s proclamation that in the twentieth-first century postmodernism is already “a thing of the past” an institutionalized movement with “its canonized texts, its anthologies, primers and readers, its dictionaries and its histories” (qtd. in Nicol xv). They are instead sufficient proofs of Nicol’s certainty that “the conditions of ‘postmodernity’ still seem to shape the contemporary world, and much aesthetic and cultural production (novels, film, TV, etc.) still clearly deploys strategies and generates effects which have been defined as postmodern” (xv). All her novels under discussion work on an apparently contradictory feature. On the one hand, like most postmodern fiction, they jolt the reader into a more conscious awareness of meaning production; on the other hand, they anticipate all the possible readings and deny the reader the joy of unearthing a potential significance. This makes them unlike some undeniably postmodern fiction, such as Beckett’s, which are tough to comprehend. The inherent playfulness at the heart of these novels, indeed, qualifies her as one of the other postmodernists, novelist like Thomas Pynchon, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, William Gibson, Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis, who, in Nicol’s terms, “are among the most popular, acclaimed, and . . . enjoyable, writers in contemporary fiction” (xiv). The pleasure that her contradictory fiction offers to the reader is not that of escapism, of empathizing, or of indulging the fantasy-life. It is the pleasure of exerting the intellect and opening one’s heart to what is beyond the self. Replete with symbols, reflexive elements, and transtextual techniques, her novels aim to satisfy the reader’s desire for pleasure while taking advantage of reading activity which,
in Borges’s eyes, is “more modest, more unobtrusive, more intellectual” (qtd. in Nicol xiii). In sum, they intend to turn their readers to good people.

4.2.3 Architextuality

According to Genette, “architext” is the proper and true subject of poetics; it is the genetic blueprint that determines the way individual works of art rearrange their elements into what they are and evoke certain response and feeling from the readers who are already familiar with the defining features of that potential backbone. As he claims in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, the architextual aspect of a text deals with “the reader’s expectations and thus their reception of a work” (5) since it signposts the genre and sub-genre that is behind the apparently unique configuration of that work. It is, in short, what helps the reader uncover the inherent significance of a particular text. As the analysis of her select novels will show in the following section, Murdoch’s works are very demanding and unique in this regard; devoid of any single prominent architext to control their narrative elements, each of them actually challenges the reader’s expectation by integrating a couple of architexts. Rather than a key to meaning, her multiple architexts both challenge the Renaissance and much of the eighteenth-century insistence that literary types are fixed and should remain “pure,” and present a hurdle to passive reading. Engaging both the reader and the writer in the active task of creation, they are effective enough to stimulate jouissance in them as poststructuralists may suggest and satisfactorily successful to make both writing and reading activities morally instrumental.

The first novel of a daring female philosopher, *Under the Net* was taken as a conventional novel for a while after its appearance. It took critics “a period of reflection,” Pondrom notes, to notice its “aura of social comedy” (405). A first-person narrative focused on the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of Jake, *Under the Net* is actually far from the traditional realist novels which cherish the plot. It, however, cannot be subsumed under the modern novel category since it still keeps its grip on some sort of strict plot. The various occasions of farce endow it with a comic air, but it is not enough to make it a comedy. The thought-provoking conversations and scenes along the farcical events may stimulate us to see it as a case of “high comedy” which, in George Meredith’s definition, does not involve the spectators emotionally but evoking “intellectual laughter” makes
them see the incongruity and insincerity in human behavior (qtd. in Abrams 30). However, its self-reflexive aspects, the fact of being the long-awaited literary creation of a hacked translator who consciously deals with the conventions of plot and characterization quivers our certainty to call it any kind of comedy. The adventures, humility and destitute that Jake undergoes along with some incidents like falling asleep in Props Room of Anna’s miming theatre, getting drunk, swimming in the Thames, meeting Mrs Tinckham in her cave-like paper shop, moreover, as noted earlier, remind anyone of the story of Odysseus. Nevertheless, this low, trivial imitation of some episodes of the great epic does not guarantee labeling the novel a mock epic. Any of the mentioned architexts subvert the dominance of the others and enrich the meaning and the structure of the novel by their own tradition. Their constant interaction leaves their discursive struggle for dominance unresolved and the act of reducing the novel to any distinct traditional category impossible.

As seen previously, The Bell is a novel with numerous thematic strands. As Byatt explains, “[i]t is a novel about goodness, the good life, the power, cruelty and religion. It is also funny, sad and moving” (x). Such diversity of themes requires something more than one conventional unified form to be expressed. As the critical response to the novel affirms, The Bell has, in effect, incorporated a unique amalgam of numerous literary forms. Byatt regards the world of the community a firm ground for “social comedy (and pathos) of the traditional English novel” (xii). Masong observes it as a religious tragedy. Aware of his unMurdochian claim since Murdoch regards the actual tragical events of life unrepresentable, he insists that The Bell is “a tragedy of the divine, precisely because the old bell, the very image of the religious Other, is replaced” (29).

The gathering of a group of people from various backgrounds in an imaginary place outside London, where they freely try to figure out their way of living and chose their moral attitudes, reminds one of the central human desire for an ideal social structure. Recognizing this aspect of the novel, Franko includes it in the category of utopian fiction; emphasizing that, in its broadest sense, utopian impulse has been equated with “social dreaming” and conscious of the multi-focused approach of The Bell on many issues in human life, he believes that the novel is an opposition to the limited traditional way of reading utopian texts (207). The complex thematic formula of the autonomous life in
Imber Court is a strategy to foreground social relationships as the apt focus for literature and to invite metafictionally our attention to the social, aesthetical and psychological value of utopian texts. In this sense, *The Bell* is self-reflexively utopian and an exemplary credit to modern theory of utopian fiction. Underlining the opportunity that utopian fiction gives to authors to express “something urgent and imperative” (154), Rossen acknowledges Firchow’s claim in his study of *Modern Utopian Fictions: From H. G. Wells to Iris Murdoch* that, since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the function of literary utopias has shifted from being treaties about ideal society into more and more satiric reactions to the technological age. Although *The Bell* bears out his contention and being suspicious of the possibility of having perfect humanity or society reflects “the dehumanizing aspects of modern life” (153), it is not negative at all. Indeed, it is cheerfully engaged in signaling its “artistic nature,” a dimension that, according to Rossen has usually been overlooked in the study of utopian fiction (154). Incorporating elements of magic, surreality and imagination reminiscent of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, it pays tribute to art in general and fiction in particular as the only potentially instrumental help in ushering man on the quest for perfection.

The integration of so many architexts in a novel that seems, on the surface, very alike conventional realist novels is the formula in *The Unicorn* as well. As discussed earlier, *The Unicorn* generically owes much to fairy-tales and gothic novels. It has at its center a sleeping beauty whose seven-year span of unfair suffering and captivity comes to an end when her recently-appointed governess feels responsible to wake her out of the spell. Having a beauty at its focus paves the way for *The Unicorn* to avail of the generic features of gothic novel as well. Set in an uncanny, off-the-map atmosphere specifically a gloomy castle called significantly enough “Gaze” in which Hannah has been imprisoned for seven years, and drawing heavily on terror and mystery, *The Unicorn* is undoubtedly gothic in the extended sense of the term in Abrams’s definition. Similarly, it represents “event which are uncanny or macabre or melodramatically violent,” to “deal with aberrant psychological states” (78). In fact, Murdoch creates the wired brooding

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11 “Fairy tale” is the English word for *märchen*, a German term that refers to “tales of enchantment and marvels.” Like many other folktales, they usually have undergone transformation through each recitation before getting finally recorded. (See “fairy tale” and “märchen” in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Ed. Chris Baldick. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 99,147.
world of *The Unicorn* to portray the depth of human egoism. All the personae here are enchanted one way or the other with their ego’s fantasies. But the good are those who consciously set to compensate for their blindness by undergoing a volunteer or sincere suffering.

This psychological mission opens the way for another generic intersection. To be a vivid portrayal of a fairly large number of people, *The Unicorn* incorporates the tradition of psychological novels. Murdoch’s owe to Dostoyevsky, the father of the psychological novel, has been acknowledged in the critical response to her novels. Like Dostoyevsky, she involves in portraying a detailed sketch of the thoughts and feelings of her characters to present a more convincing image of the complexity of inner life. In her clear depictions, she wants us to see that human beings are not passively receptive of what is outside the self but are entangled in an ever-present moral struggle that usually ends in the stabilization of the self rather than appreciating what is beyond the self.

The emphasis on the moral dimension of all conscious intake of the external world, highlighted in Effingham and Max’s talk over Hannah’s situation, seems a good pretext to subsume *The Unicorn* among the novels of ideas. Indeed, reflected obviously in the stage characters’ introspections, the novel is replete with many ideas reminiscent of the philosophical perspectives that have given rise to Murdoch’s Weltanschauung. However, since none of them is prioritized over the others and their concurrence is just to subvert our presuppositions and make us aware of our perception mechanism, *The Unicorn* easily evades being pinned down. Its emotional intensity is another factor that helps it resist being labeled a novel of ideas. Counterpointing reason embodied in the centrality of a philosopher in the life of a group of characters, the emotional reactions of the characters to the events pinpoint the reason-emotion struggle at the heart of man’s moral choices hence support the ethical dimension of the novel. The overwhelming anxious feelings of Hannah and Marian’s disconcerted concern for her which express their “sensitivity to beauty or sublimity,” moreover, underline the novel’s affinity with the sentimental novel which, according to Abrams, emphasizes the sensuous and emotional mode of experience through “the tearful distresses of the virtuous, either at their own sorrows or at those of their friends” (191). The focus on emotions is the very characteristic that opens the horizon of Murdoch’s novels especially *The Unicorn* to the
vision of the possibility of being good. It is a proof that despite Thomas Hobbes’ claiming in *Leviathan* that human beings are innately driven by, as Abrams puts it, “self-interest and the drive for power and status” (190), there is still hope to live a selfless, committed life.

The selective resort to so many established forms along with the conspicuous zoom on the ideas of morality and beauty gives substance to *The Unicorn*’s metafictional potential that according to Scholes is the inherent disposition of all forms of fiction. As the plot unfolds, it is obvious that despite the seemingly tragic fall of most of the characters, the novel is in fact an endorsement of art’s capability to help man purge his/her moral defects. The way all the characters evoke both our pity and fear and the misery and unfortunate wretchedness they undergo leave no doubt that *The Unicorn* is an imitation of the tragic form as well. A group of ordinary, common people being neither thoroughly good nor utterly evil, none of the cast is actually an Aristotelian tragic hero who is “better than we are.” They are, nonetheless, mock-tragic heroes who eventually set to settle their moral dilemmas they face even if none of them chooses the good in the moments of decision. An interface of such architexts, *The Unicorn* is a novel that has fused the postmodern celebration of plurality right in its structure. It has dialogism, desired highly in postmodernism, at the very level of its architexts.

The multiplicity of architexts is the issue that *The Black Prince* deals with more self-consciously. The fact that Bradley’s work is a different art form for each of those who write postscripts on it indicates that his piece has borrowed enough of various generic features to arouse diverse expectations in each reader. In addition to a realistic account of a series of incidents in the lives of a group of people, narrated by a first-person narrator who naturally deals with his own thoughts and feelings more exclusively, the novel is, indeed, an autobiography; that is, Bradley’s record of his own life from birth to death. However, the doubts that the postscripts shed on Bradley’s reliability furnish his story with adequate convincing clues to be taken as a memoir: an account of certain events as the author has experienced them rather than as they actually happened. More a record of how he eventually creates his long-awaited original work than how he develops his self, Bradley’s story has many features of metafiction but they are not dominant enough to overlay the psychological motif of the novel.
As the lengthy description of his burning desire to consummate his love for the young Julian Baffin shows, Bradley has romantic tradition in mind when writing about that period of his life. The way he describes his falling in love with Julian and the suffering he tolerated through the whole affair, from his attempt to keep mum about it till their elopement to when she dumps him and escapes to her family and even after when he is incarcerated for murdering her father Arthur Baffin, goes in line with many love stories. In the meantime, the egoism that is obvious in almost any of the characters’ behavior and feeds their communications refocuses *The Black Prince* as a psychological novel, a narrative intending to shed light on the relationship of inner life and external behavior. It displays that self-interest is the sole drive that domineers man’s social relationships and suggests that although it is a constraint to man’s moral perfection, it is essential to make morality a matter of free-choice. Human beings can be good only if they themselves determine to attend to what is beyond the self.

Another generic form that complicates the architextual dimension of *The Black Prince* is drama. Murdoch’s interest in drama originates from her admiration for Shakespeare which she repeatedly points to whenever there is an opportunity. In a discussion with John Bayley and Martin Dodsworth at the British academy in 1991, she talks of the “great religious power in Shakespeare” (qtd. in Spear 16). Her engrossment in Shakespeare’s dramatic skill and his success to create a simulacrum of human life with all its complexity and mysteries inspires her to adopt many dramatic techniques in her own artistic output. Of course, it took Murdoch a while to master the techniques for her own ends and to fuse the dramatic and the narrative. Taking the dominance of the actors, actresses, theatre, plays in all her novels as the unmistakable sign of her obsessive interest in drama, Spear believes that the dramatic has acted differently in her later works where it “has become less spontaneous and more of a structural device” (119). In contrast to the earlier novels that rely on just little theatrical scenes, *The Black Prince* is one of her novels that have a more deliberate dramatic structuring.

Self-reflexively, the novel attracts attention to this fact when Bradley’s narrative is referred to as a drama and its characters the dramatis personae; both thematically and stylistically, Bradley’s narrative is noticeably intertwined with drama. The editor refers to it as drama. Bradley himself sometimes calls his tale “my drama” and other characters
believe that life is a drama and everybody has their own “little dramas.” He goes with Julian to the opera of *Rosenkavalier*. He interprets *Hamlet* for her. The editor P. Loxias makes us more sensitive to the dramatic affinity of the novel. In imitation of the three acts of most common form of nonmusical dramas, Bradley organizes his narrative in three parts. His extensive use of details produces further dramatic effect. *The Black Prince* like all other novels by Murdoch relies greatly on description. In his collection of essays, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, Alain Robbe-Grillet talks of different usages of description in the twentieth-century literature; he argues that, originally used “to make the reader see” the pre-existing reality—outside literature—“of a world which the novelist seemed nearly to reproduced, to copy, to transmit,” description comes to assert “its creative function” in modern novels (qtd. in Nicol 21).

Murdoch’s over-commitment to details and particularities, which has been attacked as “outmoded and unnecessary” in Nakagami’s words (13), is explainable in this dramatic light rather than her endorsement of any distinct use of description Robbe-Grillet identifies. As obvious in *The Black Prince*, Murdoch’s use of description is both realistic and modern. She employs details to construct a world that both evokes the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief and exposes its fictionality. In this sense, her double-function descriptions are theatrical and akin to “spectacle” with which a dramatist makes a separate but familiar world. To enhance her plots and fulfill her artistic moral objective, she makes characters, place and actions easily conceivable while she disrupts any fantastic submergence in her fictional world through dramatic and metafictional techniques. Endowed with careful casting and elaborate scene-setting like *The Philosopher’s Pupil* and *The Sea, the Sea*, what is idiosyncratic about *The Black Prince* is its meager but unanticipated use of stage directions. There are moments in his narrative, when Bradley reports the incidents using short sentences in the present tense rather than continuing his past-tense narration. For example, he uses simple present tense to explain the mise en scène: “[f]or the moment however behold me sitting with Priscilla and Francis. A domestic interior. It is about ten o’clock in the evening and the curtains are drawn” (*BP*116). A longer quotation is more revealing; Arnold is visiting Bradley to apologize for having gone off with Christian in the tumult of the others’ taking Priscilla to hospital:
The telephone rings again. 
I go and lift the receiver. 
‘Brad! I say, is that really you? Guess who this is!’ 
I put the telephone down, settling it carefully back onto its stand. 
I went back into the sitting-room and sat down. ‘That was her.’ 
‘You’ve gone quite white. You’re not going to faint, are you? Can I get you something? Please forgive me for talking so stupidly. Is she hanging on?’
‘No.’ I put the thing—down—The telephone rings again. I do nothing. 
‘Bradley, let me talk to her.’
‘No.’
I get to the telephone just after Arnold has lifted the receiver. I bang it back onto the rest. 
‘Bradley, don’t you see, you’ve got to deal with this, you can’t shirk it, you can’t. She’ll come round in a taxi.’
The telephone rings again. I lift it up and hold it a little way off. 
Christian’s voice, even with the American tang, is recognizable. The years drop away. (emphasis mine 63)

Besides being a self-reflexive technique revealing the nature of narrative, the obvious mingling of the narrative and the dramatic in *The Black Prince* exposes the conventionality of theatre and how much it can still serve man’s egoism. Raising suspicion about his reliability, a considerable amount of the text encasing Bradley’s narrative displays him as a stage director who has assigned the other characters certain roles for his own ends. It, moreover, alert us to realize how as the reader-audience we have willingly suspended our disbelief until the play is played out. By the end of the novel when the editor emphasizes “and after art there is, let me assure you all, nothing” (364), we are encouraged to see Bradley’s narrative as neither reliable nor a piece of art. Leaving us with “nothing” after these words, it is truly Murdoch’s novel that glitters as the actual art Bradley brags he is writing. The characterization of Bradley as a director-type whose “capacity to action” Spear regards as his tragic flaw (86) makes *The Black Prince* an artistic proclamation assuring us that no one as self-conceited as Bradley can be a true artist.

Hilary in *A Word Child* has Bradley’s tragic flaw to a lesser degree. To this end, the novel similarly avails of the interaction of a number of architexts. Of course not as dramatic as *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*, it still depends on dialogues and descriptions to keep the story plausible. In addition to such indebtedness to drama, the actual concern of the characters with a mime production of *Peter Pan* not only parodies
theatrical productions but also puts the novel on par with drama, parallel with yet distinct from reality. The romantic irony integrated in Hilary’s narration is best explained through its dramatic imageries. Hilary builds the illusion of representing the reality only to shatter it gradually to show how reality has actually escaped him. He thinks that he is the playwright of his life, having everything under his control. Following a strict daily schedule, he even envisages that the people in his life are playing the roles he has written for them. But as the plot develops, it becomes evident that they are not puppets but the directors of their own lives. Their active involvement in the direction the story takes undercuts Hilary’s romantic irony. It is a case of a structural irony where Murdoch indicates that man is by nature a fabricator of fictions.

The theatrical spectacle and dialogues in *A Word Child* complements its first-person narrative with a better view of the narrator. For a deeper characterization, however, the more appropriate form of the psychological novel needs to be adopted. The discrepancy between Hilary’s interpretation of events and what actually happens provides us with a good opportunity to see Hilary’s hidden motives and actual intentions. The excessive amount of the text devoted to Hilary’s obsession with other people and what they feel and think about him allows *A Word Child* to claim kinship to psychological novels commonly called the novels of the “inner man.” Bringing to mind Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, Hilary’s hint that he thought to name his account “The Memoirs of an Underground Man or just simply The Inner Circle” (*AWC* 39) affirms the trace of the tradition of psychological realism in the configuration of the novel. Such discovery sensitizes us to the ghost of other works in the same genre that loom large in the semantic horizon of the novel, enriching both its significance and that of their own.

The focus on Hilary’s inner life does not mean that *A Word Child* is mute on the social reality of his time. Hilary’s oversensitivity to his social background and his current status as a proletariat, Freddie Impiatt’s and Clifford Larr’s living on a higher social stratum and their capitalist views expressed in their usual discussion of monetary value and their criticism of Marxism are good evidence to the social and political overtone of the novel. The funny way that the characters swap roles, especially the episode Mrs
Witcher and Reggie Farbottom usurp Hilary’s place in his office room which Arthur in a bold act restores to him after a while, transforms the narrative from a social novel into a social comedy. The comic form helps Murdoch add edge to her social criticism and display more satirically the moral ineptitude that the struggle to rise in social status can inflict on human life. Furnishing the novel with metafictional clues in the form of a self-consciousness narrator aware of his role in rearrangement of his past experience and the difficulty of characterization, Murdoch further boosts her criticism suggesting that moral stagnation, beyond man’s soul, tarnishes artistic expression and causes dysfunction of art works where instead of presenting truth, they serve the egoistic drives of both the author and the reader.

The title of *The Philosopher’s Pupil* and its voluminous size creates in us an expectation that the piece must be a conventional fiction with philosophy as its major motif. However, the more we read the more certain we get that the novel depends on more than one architextual pattern. Surprisingly, devoid of any philosophical conversation of the kind that is strewn the pages of *Under the Net* or *The Unicorn*, it cannot be called a philosophical novel which devotes significant proportions to the questions normally addressed in discursive philosophy. Of course, one of the main strands of the novel is the obsessive relationship of a former favorite pupil to his philosopher tutor (George and Rozanov) but that cannot make a fictional work clearly philosophical. What, however, associates *The Philosopher’s Pupil* with this subgenre is the opposition set between philosophy and literature embodied in Rozanov’s failure to finish off his treatise and N’s conscious attempt to tell a story.

Two distinct impulses that appear contradictory at the first glance are significantly noticeable in the narrative of *The Philosopher’s Pupil*. On the one hand, the realism that its narrator self-consciously concocts for his narration through an ostentatious molding of his material in the established form of realist novels indicates the presence of a metafictional impulse to subvert any illusion of representation. The cliché titles N chooses for the chapters and his stress on being an efficacious narrator and witness to some of the events in the face of so many occasions of impossible access to the thoughts, feelings and conversations of the cast betray the realistic cause he sets to support. On the
other hand, the excessive details and descriptions of the people and places improve the representational aspect of the novel. On the other hand, they point to a dramatic impulse. A symptom of the novel’s reliance on drama as an architext, the dramatic air of the novel, actually, has the metafictional impulse to its support, both exposing the god-like presence of the authorial voice by creating an autonomous realm distant yet engaging enough to build up the reader’s moral identity.

Full of dialogues and bizarre dramatic events that head toward the eventual tragic end of Professor Rozanov, the novel completes its debts to theatre by its extremely minute setting that imitates stage directions closely. Setting, here, mirrors the theatricality of the plot. Even the deliberate narration is theatrical; according to Spear, such narration keeps the reader “aware that a story is being told, just as an audience in the theatre must be aware that what is happening on the stage is not life but a metaphor for life” (73). Enacting the role of a witness, N expects the reader to join him as an onlooker and take the action and the events for real. However, in his ostentatious resort to the architext of the conventional realistic novel, he makes realism as in theatre removed.

This collaboration of the metafictional and dramatic impulses equips Murdoch to invent a possible narrative method apt to present the complex reality. Since she believes that truth lies in the interrelations of people rather than solely in man’s inner life, in introspection and angoisse for which she attacks Sartre, she willingly intakes the techniques of drama which essentially revolves around the interaction of the dramatis personae. For her, “[t]he novel, the novel proper that is, is about people’s treatment of each other, and so it is about human values” (SRR 138). That is why her novels markedly deal with the interaction of the characters with the world around them and bring various ideas to the forefront though their dilemmas. The fusion of the metafictional and the dramatic in The Philosopher’s Pupil reflects uniquely a truthful fact: the accidental and the intentional or the necessary are aspects of truth and have equal value in its configuration. This is the implication of the opening scene of the domestic quarrel of George and Stella and the much later event of Rozanov’s death; as Bradbury puts, “[t]he scene we witness could well be confused with a willed act of murder—just as an act of murder might, much later in the story, acquire the confused contingency of an accident”
(xv). In this regard, coincidence has a special significance and function in Murdoch’s novels though it has aroused the criticism that, in her hands, it is “far beyond the convenient, the plausible, or even the possible” (Levenson 578). A strategy she shares with Thomas Hardy, coincidence is the way Murdoch dramatizes the contingent and unanticipated side of reality.

Being full of these occasions and leading toward the death of Rozanov, *The philosopher’s pupil* is the celebration of fiction over philosophy. In its weird setting of baths with a hidden source, steaming springs, a complicated system and the locked doors, the novel mirrors its own structure and highlights the working of love, sympathy and invention as the requirements in any truthful fiction. Rozanov’s death has a dramatic effect for the story. It embodies the failure of philosophy to account for contingencies as well as puts Rozanov among other figures whose “scapegoat death,” as Gordon notes, “creates a new world, a new consciousness discontinuous with the old, for others” (116). The last chapter “What Happened Afterwards” is a manifestation of the new world that Rozanov’s death evokes. The final happy world of the McCaffreys implies that the philosopher, according to Bradbury, is the looser not to “the nihilist or justified sinner, the failed priest, the prostitute-slave, the strong wife, the moralist or the gypsy mystic” but to “the powers of Eros and Thanatos,” and more importantly “the playful processes of fiction.” Encompassing the plentitude, playfulness and contingency of life in the narrative, the real winner is “the inventor, the plotter, the one who shapes, fantasies, contrives, discovers, puts right” (xix). The only stipulation *The Philosopher’s Pupil* makes for the supremacy of art over philosophy is that it must illuminate its fictionality.

**Works Cited**


