CHAPTER-IV

SOCIAL JUSTICE
One of Iris Murdoch's most successful novels, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) combines elements of realism and allegory to create a commentary on the moral shortcomings of the individual and society and how much society do justice with the individual. *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* moves around the actions of Prof. Julius King and Tallis Browne. Prof. Julius Kind and Morgan Browne, the philosophic minded philologist, the younger sister of Hilda Forster and wife of Tallis Browne, arrive separately from America. The marriage between Tallis and Morgan has failed, but Tallis's love for Morgan is still in tact in spite of her sexual relations with Julius King. Julius plays mephistopheles and brings disaster in the lives of Rupert, Hilda and Morgan, by sending Morgan's love letters (written to Julius) to Rupert and Rupert's letter (written to Hilda) to Morgan. They start feeling and acting as if they were actually in love with each other. Morgan and Rupert have to face humiliation when their romantic relationship is revealed. Julius also tries to create misunderstanding between Simon, Rupert's brother and Axel, the homosexual pair. On learning the part played by Julius King, Tallis tries to save the situation. Hilda divides herself from her sister and Rupert. Rupert commits suicide in sadness.
Julius successes in destroying Hilda and Rupert’s marriage but could not break homosexual bond between Simon and Axel due to their true love and faithfulness. Morgan, Hilda and her son Peter leave England. Tallis goes on writing them newsy letters and helping people in his own way.

*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* chooses to portray the hell of contemporary life. This novel like *The Time of the Angles* is dedicated to an allegorical proof of the existence of evil, Which Murdoch urges contemporary man to remember. It is aimed to reintroduce its palpable presence in to the permissive anti-evil consciousness of present liberal western society. The novel has been designed on the pattern of Christian allegory. Murdoch elaborated the Christian symbolism in the novel by associating Julius with Satan, Tallis with Christ and Tallis’s father with God. Morgan represents the human soul.

The plot is settled in a Post Christian era. The established moral values and social institutions have lost their relevance. The novel in fact witnesses the breakdown of institutions signifying, the solidity of the social structure and social justice is done with the good characters or not. According to Hoskins *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* is finally a part of Iris Murdoch’s continuing examination of the nature of love and morality in a Post Christian world of morality in a Post Christian World of Imminent chaos. At the center of the plot in *A Fairly*
Honourable Defeat is Rupert Foster, who lives with his wife Hilda at the Priory Grore, and is self-righteously happy. By any normal standards, both can be considered good. They are socially concerned and conscientious. As Hilda says,

I agree. Rupert, it's so super that after all these years you don't want anyone else. Most man of your age runs after younger women. It's so super that you wear a wedding ring and still write me love letters.²

They are truly doing justice with their marriage as Lundberg defines it; “The rules and regulations which define the rights, duties and privileges of husband and wife, with respect and love to each other.”³ Rupert, an upper-civil servant and a moral philosopher living in a complacent marriage of hedonistic altruism, is a good intentioned person. Like Marcus in The Time of the Angles, Rupert is writing ethical treatises on Good, on morality in a “godless world;” he is unaware of his true dependence on the power of vanished religion to sustain their hierarchies of value and decimation. He is vulnerable to the ruthlessness and violence which mock his pure morality. Rupert represents a cozy version of Murdoch’s own moral philosophy. Good, he knows, is love for people. He tells Hilda, “I am sure that love tells in the end. There are times when one’s just got to go on loving somebody helplessly with blank hope and blank faith”(p.26) He thinks he can write a great book on goodness not because he is a good
philosopher and an experienced man; but due to his moral direction. Murdoch remarks:

What Rupert had extra, he often told himself, was simply a confident sense of moral direction and the nerve to speak about it. He knew where good lived. Moralists are far too timid, he thought, especially now when they feel they have to placate the logical positivists and the psychologists and the sociologists and the computeralologists and God knows who else. They fill their pages with apologies and write everybody’s language but their own. Whatever his book was, it was not apologetic. (p.250)

He is writing a book on morality and believes not only that goodness is definable, attainable and distinctly preferable but also that man is capable of realising a level of good which would be higher and more desirable than his present condition. His theory is based on the platonic concepts of goodness and love. When Hilda shows her worries about Peter, her son who lives apart from his family and having no faith on God, Rupert comments,

You must remember, Hilda, that Peter belongs to the first generation that can really envisage the end of the human race. And he belongs to the first generation that’s grown up entirely without God”(p.20)

Through Peter, Murdoch discusses the true social, domestic and psychological status of upcoming generation. These youngsters are the bright future of the society but they are misguided by the blind-
modernity so they are running away from their responsibilities towards family and society. And they do complete unjust with the people around them as Peter does with his parents, who love him too much.

Simon, Rupert’s brother with Axel Nilsson, his homosexual partner come to congratulate Hilda and Rupert on their twentieth marriage-anniversary party. Hilda does not like them and points a question mark on the stability on their marriage. Hilda’s views about homosexuality belong to the majority of the society, who do unjust with them. But people like Rupert have his own point of view, “being homosexual does not determine a man’s whole character any more than being heterosexual does!” (p.16.) For Rupert man’s character is more important than his sexuality.

Axel and Simon are living like married couples. The accidental and revelatory meeting of Simon and Axel in Athens cliched the issue of their marriage. Like a husband, Axel has lectured to Simon. “Don’t tell me lies, even trivial once, and don’t conceal things from me. Love should be without fear.” (p.31) Like an ordinary husband and wife, Axel and Simon also have irritations. Peter by condemning Axel-Simon relationship voices the traditional social view against homosexuality. He tells Axel, “You keep your relationship with Simon a dark secret, don’t you! Oh you let us know because we’re your so called dear friends and we’re discreet. You can rely on us to tell lies
on your behalf. But you’d die if everyone knew. You would be ashamed!” (p.136) But Axel’s reply is “I would not be ashamed”. (p.137) Here we find a homosexual married couple moving in society and their relationship is known and tolerated by the discreet people. Murdoch makes us feel that they are like other married couples. Their attachments, fears and love are same. Like an older husband Axel dominates Simon. Every little thing is remaining in their marriage. Murdoch wants to convey the message to the people that society should behave equally with them too as they treat with love and respect to heterosexuals.

Morgan’s sudden arrival breaks the silence of the party. Morgan, Hilda’s sister Morgan is hardly human. Her state of mind throughout the book is clearly predicted in what she says when she arrives from America, “I don’t know what I’m doing.... I don’t know where I’m going. I have no thoughts. I have just got off a jet plane and I feel crazy.” (p.50) Here jet plane indicates her “rootlessness” Her inhumanity is visible when she fails to tolerate Tallis and his father Leonard living together. Murdoch reveals Morgan’s nature where the latter remarks, “it’s so unnatural for a man to love his father.” (p.96) Earlier her failure to respond to the pure love to Tallis, her husband, has driven her into the pleasure of physical indulgence with Julius. She gives a picture of her mind when she tells Rupert:
How very peculiar one’s mind is. There’s no foothold in it, no leverage, no way of changing oneself into a responsible just being. One’s lost in one’s own psyche. It stretches away and away to the ends of the world and it’s soft and sticky and warm. There’s noting real, no hard parts, no centre. (p. 96)

Morgan too represents evil though to a less extent. She has betrayed her husband by having sexual relations with Julius and then has even left the latter. Further she has betrayed Julius by having abortion of the child she conceived through him without informing him about her pregnancy. She is without having any principle that’s why she could not do justice as a wife as a lover and later as a sister. She wants to divorce Tallis so that she can start her new relationship with Julius. Rupert protests her to do so, “Everything about divorce is ugly and destructive and horrible.” (p. 94) Rupert’s statement proves his extreme goodness towards society. Rupert is in the favour of Tallis because he is also a good human-being as Rupert.

Tallis Browne in A Fairly Honourable Defeat is another character actively involved in good. He stubbornly believes that humanity in all its guises is worth loving. He is an impoverished teacher of working class adults, a pacifist and an earnest social reformer. He genuinely and ungrudgingly tries to help everyone. In the process he suffers everyone including his patronising better class friends, his indigent neighbours, his misanthropic father dying of
cancer and his hysterically unfaithful wife Morgan. He represents Murdoch's vision of starting from real human needs as well as self-denying gentleness. He is a creature of the quotidian world, yet is outside it, detached and humbled. Tallis is directly in contact with his dying father Leonard, who suffers from cancer, his estranged wife Morgan and a delinquent teenager Peter. He knows his duties towards them. He values human life. He has a great love for his father. He tells Morgan, "I could as soon think of abandoning you as I'd think of abandoning Daddy." (p.214) As he can never think of deserting his wife for whatever foolish acts she does, so he can also never think of leasing his father, however nagging he becomes. He does not tell his father that he is suffering from cancer because this thing would break his spirit. Tallis understands the real problems of Morgan and Peter but his solutions for their problems are ignored. He tells Morgan, "You need deep belongingness and connections and stability." (p.213) But Morgan fails to understand and him owing to her false notions of 'freedom' and 'free-ways'. He suggests that Peter needs the help of psychoanalysis. Nobody takes him seriously and it is reported that Peter in America is caught for shop lifting and has to undergo the treatment of a psychoanalyst. Tallis is never getting a good response from them all but he doesn't stop doing good for others. Murdoch is just telling that the good people go on doing their duty towards others without seeking

The mischief maker Julius King, who reminds us Palmer Anderson of *A Severed Head*, has experienced pain in Nazi concentration camps, and he is now coming to pass on that pain to others. He is like Carel, Nietzschean in his compelling vision of life as a formless joke. For him, “Christianity is one of the most gorgeous and glittering sources of illusion the human race has ever invented.” (p.223). He finds evil exciting, fascinating and alive. Julius’s views about evil are, “It is also very much more mysterious than good. Good can be seen though. Evil is opaque.” (p.223) Julius king is a negative personality. For him good is dull and the path of virtue is totally depressing, and any body who tries to follow these is sure to get his spirit broken. His conspicuous remarks about good are:

My point is that the top of the structure is completely empty. The thing is truncated. Human beings have often dreamed of the extension of goodness beyond the pitiful level at which they muck along, but it is precisely a dream, and a totally vague one at that. It is not just that human nature absolutely precludes goodness, it is that goodness, in that extended scene, is not even a coherent concept, it is unimaginable for human beings, like certain things in physics. Only unlike physics there isn’t even any notation with which to indicate it, since it simply is not there at all. (p.224)
For Julius, goodness is non-existent. He doesn’t find any goodness even in the sufferings of saints. He thinks in order to be really gentle and selfless with moral impunity, “one would have to be god.” (p.225) Since he doesn’t believe in the existence of God, so for Julius, the virtues of gentleness and selflessness do not exist. His true nature is revealed in his remarks, “Few people just want other people to be happy. ... Most of us prefer our friends in tears. If by any unusual chance anyone does want others to be happy, he invariably wants them to be so as a result of his own bush bodying.” (p.221) Just to prove himself he plans a fatal conspiracy against both couples of Hilda and Rupert with Axel and Simon. Julius invites Simon into his flat secretly in the absence of Axel by taking an excuse of Axel’s birthday. There, Simon finds Morgan locked in a complete naked situation. Due to help Morgan, Simon gives his clothes to her. Julius finds Simon completely undressed. Julius starts to blackmail Simon for that night. In fear, Simon doesn’t dare to tell the truth to Axel. As a magician, Julius makes Hilda, Rupert and Morgan to act as his puppets:

But they are puppets, Rupert. And we didn’t need modern psychology to tell us that. Your friend Plato knew all about it in his old age, when he wrote the laws, after he had given up those dreams of the high places which so comptivate you. (p.225)

About love Julius remarks, “Human loves don’t last Simon, they are far for too egoistic.” (p.269) because human beings cannot live
without power. The weak gain power over the strong through “nagging and sulking and spite”. Julius by sending Morgan’s letter (written to Julius) to Rupert and Rupert’s letter (written to Hilda) to Morgan makes them feel that the other one is in love. For some time they actually start acting as lovers by telling lies and meeting secretly. Frailty of human attachments is proved in the case of Rupert, Hilda and Morgan. Here Murdoch is trying to prove that it is very easy to beguile human beings. People are vain and dreaming. A small suspicion makes them imagine all the details of other’s insincerity. Julius gives formula to make people fall in love: “Mix up pity and vanity and novelty in an emotional person and you at once produce something very much like being in love.”(p.406)

Julius is a glamorous demon.... whose cynicism enacts Murdoch’s definition of evil and who manages “a stunning amount of destruction.” 6 Julius tells Simon, “A necessary ingredient in a happy marriage is the ability to tell soothing lies to your partner.”(p.171) But the soothing lies of Rupert makes the channels of his communication with his wife Hilda blocked. On the other hand, Tallis thinks marriage to be “a symbolic blood relationship.”(p.214) Julius says , “well, we know what moves people.. Fears, passions of all kinds. The desire for power, for instance. Few questions are more important than: who is the boss?”(p.225) For him the most important thing in human relationship
is gaining of power. For him virtue is meaningless. He feels that it is the unhappy who like to feel virtuous. People gain satisfaction by comparing themselves with others. His deceptions are successful and his views about good and evil seem to be true when Hilda demands for divorce from Rupert under the impact of hatred, jealousy and unfaithfulness. Other side Simon decides to tell the whole truth to Axel to prove Julius completely wrong. Simon’s confession to Axel saves their relationship.

Through Simon-Axel relationship Murdoch is attempting to prove that sometimes homosexual love can be more powerful than the heterosexual love. Axel-Simon relationship is able to bear the onslaughts of Julius’s cunningness. Murdoch has already conceded that the only serious and important objection to homosexual marriages is that it is essentially unstable. The concession to homosexual marriage in this novel should not be considered a final judgement. Even in case of Simon and Axel marriage, the instability is admitted, examined and portrayed with sensitive respect for their individuality. Homosexual relations run more hazards of ‘an external social kind.’ The stability of heterosexual relation is expected due to the institution of marriage and procreation of children. Murdoch is pointing out that if persons suit each other they can stay together whether they have heterosexual relations or homosexual relations.
Murdoch does not want to make her good characters behave like the mythical characters of Milton's *The Paradise Lost*. She makes them human and they act in a human way revealing their power. Julius is successful in destroying the married life of Rupert and Hilda, the so-called perfect couple and also in getting Rupert and Morgan humiliated when discovered by Peter. When he tells all this to Tallis, he immediately convinces Julius for confession about the dirty game played by him. He makes Hilda see through the game and desire for immediate reconciliation with Rupert. But Murdoch by making her telephone break and car fail brings the supremacy of the contingent; and by showing the accidental death of Rupert makes the readers feel that tampering with the passion cannot go unpunished; and great harm can be caused by clever manipulators and caprice of circumstances. Tallis accepts his defeat in his attempt to save Rupert, but he is satisfied with the means used by himself. Thus the defeat of good by evil can from Tallis’s point of view be described as “fairly honourable” in as much as his methods were just and correct. Murdoch shows humanity which has glimpsed the dark terrors of soul needs a more concrete and complex moral structure to take the crisis of darkness. However, it may be pointed out that the crux of the meaning lies in Rupert’s suicide. Rupert is tormented because his conviction of the
good has been lost he reflects: “There was something which has vanished away out of the world forever.” (p.384)

Murdoch has described with relentless power Rupert’s final suffering and death. The novelist chooses his death as an inevitable lesson to convey her message which Rupert’s egocentric sufferings could not do. Murdoch has described the conflict between the good self and the bad self:

In reality the good self is very small indeed, and most of what appears good is not. The truly good is not a friendly tyrant to the bad, it is its deadly foe. Even suffering itself can play a demonic role here and the idea of guilt and punishment can be the most subtle tool of the ingenious self. The idea of suffering confuses the mind and in certain contexts (the context of ‘sincere self examination’ for instance) can masquerade as purification. It is rarely this, for unless it is very intense indeed it is far too interesting. Plato does not say that philosophy is the study of suffering. He says it is the study of death (Phaedo 64A), and these ideas are totally dissimilar. That moral improvement involves suffering is usually true; but the suffering is the by product of a new orientation and not in any sense an end in itself.8

The withdrawal of good from his life, he cannot tolerate. Deceit and cynicism, he cannot adopt as a way of life. He cannot masquerade the values which have been proved hollow by Julius’s supercilious manifesto. His suicide asserts his refusal to accede to Julius’s creed.
His death reaffirms the notion of good. The focus, no doubt, has a double perspective. Human being uphold a mechanistic psychology. They do play puppets. Once the machinery starts, it is self-propelling. But, so far as the human beings absorb their experiences and consciously try for something better. They reaffirm the belief in the authority of good.

Justice is not done with Rupert's goodness. Only Simon and Tallis successfully resist Julius. In the end, a morally smug would scatter. Tallis continues as and where he began, in a life of charmless holiness and endless good works. Julius leaves for Paris though not improved but visibly touched by Tallis's goodness. The point which needs to be highlighted is that Tallis's goodness does not lack vitality. The world lacks the will to change. Goodness does not suffer defeat. It is the self-righteous idealism of Rupert which suffers defeat. The final impression of moral vigour comes through the character of Tallis only who persuades Julius that the enchantment must end. Tallis tells Julius to clear off. Julius's clearing off does not indicate the disappearance of evil from the world. Good and evil, justice and injustice, truth and lie are all the part of the scheme of the universe. Both will continue like Tallis and Julius, who symbolise "High incarnation and the prince of Darkness" in the novel. 9
And sometime when society doesn’t do justice with the good human beings at that time their goodness has to suffer a defeat - In one of her interviews Murdoch stated:

The fundamental picture in my novels is of a battle between magic and freedom or between magic and goodness. This may be put as a contrast between the artist and the saint the way in which the artist uses magic and the saint has given up magic is a continuous theme.\(^\text{10}\)

At the conceptual level, Murdoch’s though reveals that a saint identifies himself with everyone and he is no one’s spoiler. At the novelistic surface, it is the play of the magical element in life which is displayed in all its variety and is shown to be dangerous and an enemy of religion, goodness and justice.

Iris Murdoch in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) shows the true picture of the society through her characters and their relationship which are determined by social and domestic circumstances. By using different kinds of love or affection, Murdoch puts the questions that where justice stands in the materialistic modern world.

The “Sacred and Profane” of the title would then refer to the different kinds of love in the novel and their varying degrees of what
might be termed legitimacy. No relationship which is as one sided as those depicted in *The Sacred and profane Love Machine* could be considered totally legitimate: this is a work about the shades of grey that determine our perception of this measure, and about how much this perception could differ from the block and white ideas of legitimacy which tend to be used by society generally.

The brief summary moves around Blaise Gavander, a successful psychotherapist, is married to Harriet Gavander, who is depicted as simple, nurturing and plain. She is a pre-feminist wife who has completely devoted herself to her family at the expense of what might have been a successful career as a painter. Their seventeen year old son David is a typical moody adolescent. Blaise has a parallel family with his mistress Emily McHugh and their son Luca, a bit mentally disturbed. Blaise’s affair with Emily has lasted nine years, and Emily is tired of being the other woman. She wants Blaise all to herself. Yet Blaise does not want to forego Harriet and David. His trysts with Emily continue under the guise of his visiting a particularly difficult patient. Magnus Bowles, who only consents to see him in the evening. Magnus, however, is a fictive client invented for Blaise’s convenience by his neighbour Montaque small ‘Monty’, a successful novelist. Monty, as he is familiarly called, has just lost his wife ostensibly to cancer. After provoking by Montaque, Blaise confesses via a letter and
begs for Harriet's understanding and forgiveness. In starting Harriet hurts too much by her husband's deceit then she concedes. In fact she insists that Emily and Luca should become part of her family's life since their existence cannot be ignored. She also insists that Blaise spend more time with Emily, for Blaise has made it sound as if he has woefully neglected his mistress. Hence, she gives him ample opportunity to continue with the affair, much to Emily's dismay. She wants to marry Blaise, not be his mistress under his wife's approval. Harriet throws an absurd party for everyone to get to know one- another. Also in attendance is the strange and seemingly repressed homosexual Edgar Demomay who ridiculously and extravagantly fall in love with women close to Monty, including his recently deceased wife and Harriet. Edgar will not go away and lurks in Monty's periphery throughout the novel. In a drunken rage, Edgar, who is completely disgusted by Blaise's antics, accuses Blaise of having both worlds and of deceiving Harriet. Emily flees, disgusted by Harriet's seeming to control everyone's lives. Blaise follows her and decides to leave Harriet for Emily. Distraught, Harriet turns to Monty for love and assurance, but he refuses her. Meanwhile, Harriet has developed a close relationship with Luca, much to her son's dismay, for David feels as if he has been replaced by his younger stepbrother. To get her husband back she decides to flee from her marriage's wreckage with
Luca and David in tow but dies in terrorist attack to save Luca. Blaise marriages Emily in the end.

Society is “a web of social relationship.” Each and every relationship demands for love, truth and trust, to remain till end. It completely depends on human beings to select between ‘the good self’ or ‘the bed self’. Goodness and morality must be rewarded by society. Social justice must be done with ‘the Christ figure’. But in Murdochian world, the defeat of good, the decline of pure morality and the mockery of justice continues at the hands of evil.

Like Rupert Farster in A Family Honourable Defeat, Harriet Gavander personifying good is rich moral and powerful. She is the daughter of Major Derwant and is the wife of Blaise Gavander, a practicing psycho-analyst, and mother of a young boy David Gavander. She thinks tenderly about her dead parents. Harriet leads a very comfortable life with her husband and son in luxurious Hood House. She feels, “line an immense uninhabited continent.” And this for her is really a form of happiness. Harriet has a composed and unassertive temperament along with an “untroubled conscience”. She is thrillingly aware of being loved and loving. Love, as a matter of fact, is her whole existence. She loves her husband, her old fashioned kitchen, her son David, her brother Andrian and she loves the slow parade for the English year with its sad increasing store of memories. She is very
truthful in her roles and carriers, “every discontent into light of love to be consumed.” Like other Murdochian good persons Harriet thinks she leads a selfish life because her ‘otherness’ is ‘so much a part of herself’. Her charities are simple and pleasant; and her goodness extends even to the patients of her husband. In reality, she positively and half-consciously suffers from a sheer excess of “undistributed love.”(p.19), and it is proved when she feels love for her neighbour, Montaquote Small. Iris Murdoch defines her excess feeling of love, “Harriet loved Monty, not of course in a “sexy” way but in the way that she loved almost anybody whom she got a chance to love.”(p.43)

Harriet’s desire to be needed, to be at the center of her family, has been so abundantly fulfilled that she will always act rightly, with humility, with decency. Her salvation, as she sees it, and rejoices in it, lies in her formidable power to support those, she loves. She has abandoned her desire of being a great painter at the altar of marriage which gives her absolute fulfillment, that so far as her own ‘self’ is concerned, she is structureless. She has no desire to seek ‘self’ or ‘identity’. Being a strong part of the society, identity of ‘self’ is very essentials for every individual. According to Corley, “By self is meant that which is designated in common speech by ‘I’, ‘Me’ and ‘Myself’”. in the absence of ‘self’, Harriet does not want to be
'anything else but right behind him', looking at the world through Blaise's eyes.

Harriet's extreme love, innocence and goodness blind her totally, that's why Blaise continues to have a double life for nine years. He shamelessly misuses her goodness. And other side it is her calm trust in Blaise that keeps the structure up of his spending days together with Emily, his mistress and their mental disturbed son, Luca, on the pretext of attending important conferences and studying in remote libraries. Where, Harriet thinks her marriage as most truthful and successful which represents the true meaning of marriage as Lundberg defines, "The rules and regulations which define the rights, duties and privileges of husband and wife with respect and trust to each other."

On the other hand Blaise thinks his relations with Harriet are insincere. It appears to him that he has married Harriet for snobbish social reasons. He has loved Harriet but has married her in muddle, comprising impure, deliberately blinded state, thinking this to be best possible. He feels he has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost by willfully excluding the possibility of perfection. Although as a husband he does complete injustice to her wife yet he tries to prove it right by saying that:

Men in other ages and societies had been able to have two, or may more, women whom they kept incarcerated in separate places and visited when they felt in the mood. An
elderly less-loved wife could be retained as an amiable companion, or simply out of pity, and should feel no resentment at that. A man, any man, surely needed various women; there were so many possibilities and styles.

Blaise finds himself in a great muddle when Emily demands for justice, "My Queen of Night, Remembers, how you used to call me that? I'm fed up with being Queen of the night. I want to be queen of the day for a chance." (p.81) Blaise discusses his problem with Montague Small, who has his own mournful past. Montague, an obsessive writer of detective thrillers, mourns for his dead wife Sophie who was unfaithful to him. His attempts at meditation are a failure because he is suffering from pangs of guilt for having killed his wife, hopes to get rid of his dreadful dreams and demons by practicing meditative discipline and Buddhism. His practice of meditation is disturbed by the arrival of Edgar Demornay, a lover of his wife Sophie and a scholar, who wants his love letters back (written to Sophie). Monty denies to return them after her death. Montague suggests Blaise to admit everything in front of Harriet. Blaise is afraid not for loss of innocence, but for the loss of reputation he would suffer when his relationship with Emily is known to society. On begin prompted by Montague, Blaise admits:

You will be surprised, shocked, horrified at what I have to tell you but I must tell you, not least because. I love you absolutely, and lying to you has become ultimately
intolerable to me. Some years ago (over nine years ago to be precise) I took a mistress. Her name is Emily McHugh and she is now over thirty... A child now exists, a boy, aged eight, and my duty to this innocent being is a reason why I have to tell you the truth, and should have told it long ago only I was a hopeless coward and did not want to shatter your and David’s peace and destroy your respect for me.... I wish heartily that all this had never happened, not only because it was so evidently from the start a complete mistake. There was and has been no real love, only a dreadful bondage, an involvement tormenting to me and exasperating to her.... But I ask you, madly perhaps, for your love as the only instrument of salvation. (p.121-122)

This letter brings a change in the pattern of relationship between Harriet and Blaise. Her faith of having a perfect family proves wrong. According to Davis family is, “a group of persons whose relations to one another are based upon consanguinity and who are therefore kin to another”. At first, she is shocked to know that her well trusted husband has been keeping a mistress and she has no knowledge. Blaise’s cheat breaks “the completeness of her world” and darkness seems to be staining all” the intricate channels of what have “once seemed so perfect.” Murdoch conveys Harriet’s feeling, “The gross details of infidelity did not touch Harriet so much as the theft of that intimate personal ten dress.”(p.144) No doubt, Harriet feels a great pain on learning Blaise-Emily affair but soon her good nature prevails.
upon her. Murdoch points out through Harriet that just like it is tough for evil doers to leave evils such as good people can not leave the path of good morality in spite of getting so much pain. As Vidya Bhusan defines morality;

Morality is concerned with good and evil. Every human relationship is governed by two considerations; what in fact exists, and what in fact ought to be. Every group prescribes for its members certain rules of conduct which ought to be observed by them. The family prescribes that the child should obey his parents. Husbands and wives ought to be faithful to one another.... The club or association prescribes that the members should be willing to work for its good. In short, there are found certain rules of social behaviour in every group which should and ought to be observed by its members. These rules and principles concerned with good and evil as manifested to us by conscience constitute. what is called morality. These rules are admitted at large by the community. Honesty, faithfulness, truthfulness, virtue are some of the moral concepts. When we say that a man is morally good, we mean that he is trust worth, faithful, honest and virtuous.  

Due to her goodness and pure moral, she takes command on the critical situation and sees it as her duty to love and to forgive. She thinks that by revealing his secret, Blaise has proved his faithfulness to her and his affair with Emily has been a matter of the post. Harriet proves that she literally believes in the marriage sacrament; after marriage, the life of husband and wife is one, so any disaster that
comes to anyone of them has to be faced together. They have suffered every pain together in the past so even now she wishes to suffer with him, “I am just glad you’ve told me the truth at last. You should have told me years ago. Aren’t I here to help you in trouble.” (p.127) For Blaise, Harriet’s goodness provides an easy solution to morally debased double life. How often the human selfishness makes the difficult task of virtue look easier and more attractive is stressed through Harriet’s example. She, in her own way, asserts egoism though of a morally more reputable kind. She becomes conscious of the power, her situation has bestowed on her:

She suddenly realized with an absolutely new feeling of energy. She was simply in control. All these people now depended upon her. She and only she, could, if it were possible at all, help, heal and avert disaster.”(p.166)

Both Harriet herself and Blaise forget that she is simply energized by her pain. Once she realizes that she alone can direct and encircle what is happening, she assumes a morally superior posture and allots Emily and Blaise the role of wrong doers. When she expresses her desire to meet Emily, there is a motive behind this spirit of ‘welcome’. As a matter of fact, “Harriet needed to swallow Emily whole, know the worst and be certain she could survive it.”(p.188) Harriet, then, becomes obsessed with herself, interested in herself, pleased with herself, with her ability to endure pain, with what she
calls her ‘power’. It is then, Harriet owned world, a world brought into being by Harriet’s so called goodness. Emily has an assigned and inferior role in the world.

In her acting as a healing angel, Murdoch starts to do unjust with her own son David, who desires for motherly love and affection in this critical time after deceiving by his father. All this affects David negatively. Murdoch defines his feeling of hatred:

David, expressionless, rigid, understood perfectly. He understood, as if he could physically see it, his mother’s desperate need to dominate the situation, to as it were encircle it. In so far as his father still cherished this other woman, he must do so authorized, motivated, powered by his wife. Harriet was reaching out urgent tentacles to grasp it all and hold it by her own force together. And David read in his father’s humble obedient look the present success of this holding. David did not try to explain to his mother how impossible any such acceptance was for him... He hated them, he hated the faces of his parents as they struggled and shifted to survive, to manage, to forgive. He felt crammed to the gills with the violence of his hate. (p.172)

Harriet like an actress plans to borrow money and selling her house to help Emily and Luca. Her goodness wins the heart of Emily and Luca, who says to her, “I love you, I saw you that night in the garden, and in knew you were magic like in dreams”. (p.183) As the novel advances, Harriet tries to control whole situation in her own way.
She tries to be social with Emily, arranges a party for her. But Edgar’s penetration into her attitude towards Emily and Blaise makes him point out that she has not been a ‘Healer’ but ‘an accomplice of evil’ he tells her:

Because you are good you think that you can save them, but it is they who will defile you. You must not assent to what is wrong that is not what the Gospel requires. You are believer in Christian marriage. One must be in the truth and you are not. You must come away so that he can see what he has done. As it is, he sees nothing. This is a lie, this man’s a lie, and he must live it and undo it. But you have put him in a position where he cannot stop lying. No one here, not even you, is good enough to redeem this thing. They will not tolerate your forgiveness, in the end they will hate you for it, they will go on intriguing as they have always done, they will find too late that you have not been a healer, but an accomplice of evil. He must decide, he must choose, that is where he has put himself. He has not acknowledged his fault, he is continuing in it, and you will be eternally his victim, abandoning him to wicked ways and conniving at his sin. For his sake you must not allow this foul thing to continue. You have not required thee truth of him. You must require him to decide. Vague tolerant pity is not true kindness here. You are trying to spare yourself. (p. 210-211)

Edgar’s attack is double edged. As moral beings man must act boldly to combat evil. To perpetrate evil is also sinful. Harriet’s assumed role of a ‘forgive’ contributes to the proliferation of evil since
it makes Blaise complacent. It is Harriet’s duty to know the truth. However, she still persists with her illusion that what ever she had done so far was out of a desire to do well and act rightly. Even the party arranged by her she thinks is one of her right acts. But after Edgar’s outburst Harriet reflects:

She had thought she was in control, that she was the one who was looked to. But now it seemed that she was not in control after all, nobody was in control that she was a victim, that they were all victims.(p.214)

Any pretence to goodness is bound to be frustrated as it is already trained with the visions of self. The mind must be cleansed of all distraction. Spiritual wisdom flows only when the heart is purged from all corruption. In fact Harriet becomes a victim and is alienated from Blaise. Blaise decides to live with Emily rather than with Harriet. Harriet at once realizes that her angelic power and saint like goodness, mercy, forgiveness and sympathy are of no value. It is proved by Blaise’s decision that hypocritical people can never do justice with the good people. Murdoch also highlights the present lower status of women in the male-dominating society. According to Ishwar Tapa:

The social drive towards the woman was no more an emancipated personality, but become a slave of man.... Man made laws and man’s viewpoints decided her fate. As a woman she was dead. Her contribution to the cultural life of the people was not positive, assertive and realistic. It was negative and superficial.17
Women’s past and present, both conditions are pitiful, society needs to do justice with women by providing them their rights and freedom. Every woman should establish her own identity in the society at that time they can prove the true meaning of self, “the individual as known to the individuals.”

Generally good characters are shown passive and the authors go on harping on their qualities of self sacrifice and indifference to material prosperity. But in spite of begging for mercy Harriet decides not to accept defeat easily. The new consciousness those dawns on her undermines her hold on goodness and her sacred love for Blaise undergoes an alteration. She immediately shifts to Monty’s house. Her disowned rejected love needs other objects. She now plans to substitute a simple, happy married world for a series of mythologies which certainly are created by her newly acquired structure. Her wish to change the object of love from Blaise to Monty to Edgar is part of this mythology. But curiously enough, if she needs an object to assert her freedom, her saintliness too cannot operate without a loving object. Rejected by Blaise, Monty and Edgar, she flies to her brother Andrian, who is at Hohne in Germany and is killed in a terrorist attack to have saved the life of Luca by protecting him from bullets. These things show that her goodness comes to the forefront when it is the question of saving Luca’s life. But her death proves that social justice is done
with the goodness every time; it's not very common in the Murdochian world.

For Harriet, the habit of loving of needing particular connections prove to be very strong. She suffers towards the end from "a moral and emotional agrophobia."19 Harriet's death reaffirms the accidental nature of life and goodness both. Love, Harriet possesses in abundance but the real meaning of love is not understood. She seems to present the 'sacred love' and Emily represents 'profane love' and Emily wins in the end. Her abundance of love, pity and sacrifice align her to the sacred. As soon as these qualities are put to test the automatic elements involved in most love are exposed. Most efforts at virtue, if imperfectly understood, end in destruction. The process of Harriet's failure presents Murdoch's dissection of spontaneous and unwilling frailty even in characters. Whose urge to love and be selfless is very highly developed.

The Book and the Brotherhood (1987) is the twenty-third novel of Iris Murdock, first published in 1987 considered by some critics to be among her best novels, is the story of a group of close friends living in England in the 1980s. On the surface, civilized, well educated
characters move about in theoretical freedom, working out their destinies according to the dictates of reason and plausibility.

The novel opens on a scene of riotous confusion: a midsummer night’s ball at Oxford University, where a circle of friends who had met at college some 30 years earlier assemble to dance and drink until down. Gerard Hernshaw, the acknowledged leader of this elite band, has learned by phone that his ill father has died overnight. Gerard’s oldest and closest friends, Jenkin Riderhood and Duncan Cambus, are drunk and disoriented. Although Duncan seldom needs a reason for such a condition, in the aftermath of this midsummer night’s madness he can offer a good one. The dance has exposed his wife Jean to another meeting with a classmate, the Scottish-born David Crimond who is now charismatic and notorious Marxist philosopher. Once before, Jean had left Duncan for Crimond. This morning, she does so again. Jean’s defection confronts Gerard and his friends with a vexing dilemma. Although they fulminate at length against the predatory Crimond, they are bound to him by an old pact. Years earlier, they had formed a committee of all friends to subsidize Crimond so that he would be free to write what everyone then though would be an important book of political philosophy. “We were all Marxists once,” Gerard notes, but times and beliefs have changed. Still, their humane, liberal inclinations prevent the companions from going back on their
word. As Gerard says, "There's nothing we can do except curse privately that we're all spending our money year after year to propagate ideas we detest. Every friend wants to know the progress of the book. Crimond says that work is still continuing. After the party, Violet, a selfish mother provokes her child Tamar to leave studies due to money. Tamar goes to meet sad and lonely Duncan, where they make love—with each other. Tamar becomes pregnant; Tamar visits her friend Lily Boyne and asks her for advice. Lily helps Tamar to obtain an abortion. Tamar confesses her secret to Jenkin, Gerard's close friend. Jenkin promises her to help. Meanwhile Jean returns to Ducane. In agony Crimond calls Ducane for battle and Jenkin becomes victim between them and dies. The brotherhood believes that Crimond had murdered Jenkin but escaped official responsibility for his death. Jean and Ducane move to France. Tamar dares to oppose against her mother's injustice and starts her studies. Gerard decides to spend her rest life with Rose Curtland, who has waited decades in the expectation that Gerard would ask her to marry him. In the end of the novel when Gerard reads an advance copy of Crimond's book and is, in spite of himself, favorably impressed. "It's a synthesis," he tells Rose," It's immensely long, it's about everything."20

The Book and the Brotherhood fictionalizes the welter of contemporary life: the breakdown of coherent religious and moral
structures, and the problems confronting the individual living in a society which must take account of technology, Freud, Marx, terrorism, and the impoverishment of a moral vocabulary. Morality demands a common framework, a shared interpretation of moral terms. But against the array of conflicting explanations offered by Catholic moralists, Sartrean existentialists, logical positivists, Marxists, Stalinists, whatever, contemporary moral philosophy has contented itself with clarifying terms, steadily refusing to absolutise any one available set of moral concepts. Alasdair MacIntyre observes:

The acids of individualism have for centauries eaten into our moral structures for both good and ill. But not only this: we live with the inheritance of not only one, but of a number of well-integrated moralities; Aristotelianism, primitive Christian simplicity, the puritan ethic, the aristocrat ethic of consumption, and the traditions of democracy and socialism have all left their mark upon our moral vocabulary. 21

In The Book and the Brotherhood, more than in any earlier novel, the conflicting claims of different moralities seem to clash and invite the reader to come and choose, underscoring the historical and temporal nature of moral concepts. Faith in liberalism and democratic processes is trounced through the depiction of the brotherhood, the group of Oxford intellectuals, all once Marxists, but now unable to take Marxism in its modern forms. Jenkin’s tentative movement towards
liberation theology, a combination of Christianity and Marxism, is an indication of the possible relevance of a new morality for our time.

The novel begins with a reunion at a midsummer ball. A group of Oxford graduates has banded together in a “Gesellschaft” or Brotherhood in order to facilitate the work of one of their friends. David Crimond, the central character of the novel, is a brilliant, charismatic but eccentric political philosopher with radical ideas about how to transform society. Crimond is one of the original members of the Oxford set, probably in his mid-fifties. Unlike his fellow classmates, Crimond comes from a humble lower-class background, and his upper-class friends are not only impressed with his frugal, ascetic lifestyle, but also with his brilliant ideas and Marxist philosophy. However, his exclusive character and radical political perspective eventually alienates him from his wealthier, extroverted friends even as he continues to receive an annual financial subsidy from them to write a book. His charismatic personality draws women to fall in love with him. Few are able to resist his magnetic charms. At the same time Crimond proves to be a cold, demanding and abusive lover, casually indifferent to the needs of the women, who love him. His life is focused completely on the writing of ‘The book’. But as the years pass there is little evidence that such a book actually exists. All the friends
like, Gerard, Rose and Jenkin simply refer to themselves as the Gesellschaft or Brotherhood starts to doubt Crimond:

He doesn’t care about deprived people or social justice, he doesn’t go anywhere hear the real working class struggle, he’s a self obsessed theorist, he makes abstract web he’s wearing. (p.125)

Gerard, the natural leader of the brotherhood, is very keen about Crimond’s book. He is highly intelligent, cultivated and sensitive man, reasonably successful in the world. In a sense, he is the reader in response to the chaotic world. One takes one’s stand nearest him perhaps because he is the most ‘acceptable’ kind of upper-middle class liberal with a proper share of fairness and decorum. He was a Marxist at the appropriate time and retains faith in a fading version of socialist democracy, the only ‘decent’ belief in a post Stalin era. He also has the right amount of extra sensitivity and depth that marks out ‘the hero’ from the rest, and in any other novel he could easily have been the hero. But in Murdoch’s world only the doer of good can be the real hero. Only Jenkin Rederhood, Gerard’s friend is the real hero in the novel, whose “goodness” shows in his actions not only in words as Gerard does. It proved through their conversation and actions: Jenkin says to Gerard:

“You think you are on a ladder going up, and you do go up”, Jenkin says.
Gerard replies, "You think you're on a road going on and you do go on."
“You can't by pass where you are by an imaginary leap into the ideal
Alright, but it's better to have an ideal rather than just trudging on and thinking how different we all are” Jenking remarks. (p.110)

Murdoch clearly locates virtue in the road and the trudging rather than the ladder and the leap. The same distinction recurs much later in another exchange between Gerard and Jenkin. He says:

Don't walk so fast, Gerard. I'm just a practical chap; it's you who are religious. Yes, we keep telling each other, we do see life differently. I see it as a journey along a dark boggy road with a lot of other chap. You see it as a solitary climb up a mountain, you don't believe you'll get to the top, but you feel that because you can think of it you've done it. That's the ideal that takes you all the way. (p.246.)

Gerard replies with some dark reference to things looking like death up there which Jenkin characterizes as romantic myth. Gerard comes back with the conclusion, "I believe in goodness, you believe in justice."(p.247), this is an extremely interesting remark devotion to the idea of goodness may prevent one from being truly just. It calls out such a play of sensitivity and contemplation, such stirrings of the heart and mind that the fat self is pleased by the beautiful notions to which it has thrillingly responded. Due to Jenkin's extreme goodness and pure
morality, Gerard starts love him. He expresses his erotic and homosexual love to Jenkin, "it's a declaration of love." (p.361) But Jenkin lives for the welfare of the society; Gerard fails to notice it. Jenkin finds himself unable to decide anything between the prospect of tender human love on one hand and what seems to be a kind of duty on the other hand between anything. Jenkin wants to solve the problems and to remove the sufferings of others who become victim of circumstances like Tamar and Ducane.

Violet, Gerard’s relative is very cruel to her daughter, Tamar. She insists her to leave studies due to money, “At least now you can sell all those books- Don’t look like that and don’t say I’m trying to ruin your life because I ruined my own”. (p.104) Tamar is Violet’s illegitimate child to whom she could not abort due to old period when such abortion were illegal, secret and expensive, and there was no respected ‘right to choose’. Tamar forces a great problem created by her own mother. Murdoch defines her feeling:

Tamar had early understood the huge dark mass of her mother’s bitterness, she had seen how it was possible to expand all one’s spirit, all one’s life-energy, in resentment, remorse, anger and hatred. She could picture (for she heard enough about it) her mother’s relation with her mother, and felt even as a child, not only the automatic force of her mother’s desire to ‘get her own back’, but also in her own heart a dark atom of that
responding bitter anger. She had seen how a life can be ruined and had decided that she would not ruin her own in such a game of repetition. It might be said that recognizing a choice between becoming a demon and becoming a saint. She had chosen the later. (p.108)

Through her characters like Joan Blacket in *The Green Knight* and Violet in *The Book and the Brotherhood*; it is proved that Murdoch shows the true picture of society by creating intrinsic, virtual, customary and living character in her novels, who are righteous as well as wicked. Violet is the fine example of that parents who destroy the lives and future of their children in selfishness without feeling any guilty. It’s a complete sign of unjust done to the innocent children like Tamar. As Rose says; “She may not have wanted to see Tamar being so happy. Parents can love their children and envy them too.”(p.13)

Tamar is unknown from her disastrous future; which will bring by Duncane unwontedly. Tamar goes to meet Duncane, who is in great pain given by his wife Jean who has left him for Crimond. During a brief encounter with Duncne, Tamar becomes pregnant. For solution she meets her friend Lily. With the help of Lily, Murdoch portrays true condition of unmarried mother and illegitimate Childs in the society where men are equally punishable for the wrong deeds but society punishes only the victim:

No man wants a girl with an illegitimate child; they regard it as a slur on their manhood to take on a girl with
someone else’s child. If you’re trailing a kiddie it’s hell to get married, it’s even hell to have a lover. The chaps don’t like the idea that some little darling will suddenly open the door! Anyway, what about your career, what about your job, what about your mother? Are you going to ask violet to look after the little beast while you’re at work? Or are you going to give up work and live at home on national assistance? Think what it’ll be like year after year! The wretched infant will be miserable; it’s a right recipe for misery for two. It’ll hate its school, it’ll hate the other kids, it’ll be victimized, you’ll be victimized. It’s still like that, you know, it the ha ha, permissive society! And if by any chance you do marry and have other children, that child will be an outsider. (p.201)

Tamar gets it aborted under the pressure of circumstances because Jean has returned to Duncane once again. It’s like a chain of victim’s first Violet’s mother than Violet and after that Tamar, with whom society does injustice one by one and time to time. Society needs to change for the benefit of individuals. As Reuter comments, “Just as life is not a thing by a process of living, so society is not a thing but a process of associating”. Under a feeling of guilt to kill her child she finds herself die in pain. Murdoch defines her feeling as a guilty mother:

She had killed the good child, the true child, and created a venomous wicked thing, formed out of her own wickedness, an envious jealous killer, living upon the darkness of her own blood. The thought that this evil child
would kill her future children, would not let them live, or more cruelly would cripple them with foul sickness, with deformity, with insanity, coexisted for Tamar with the sense that she herself would not now live long, was beyond the reach of reason and love, was as darkened and solitary as if she had been immured in a bricked up cell and left to a certain imminent year torturingly slow death. (p. 346-47)

Tamar comes to Jenkin saying she needs help, extreme help, and as he talks to her, telling her to think it all out, the telephone rings and Jean desperately appeals for help too. She has discovered Crimond’s sinister note in Duncan’s desk, suspects a challenge to a duel in agony, rings Gerard and gets no answer, rings Jenkin and appeals to him to go at once to Crimond and find out if there is any danger. Jenkin’s immediate answer is “Yes, Yes, I’ll go at once, don’t worry... I’ll fly now.” (p454) Jenkin’s reaction proves that he is a man of action and extreme goodness. Like Tallis in A Family Honourable Defeat, when action is called for, her acts at once. Jenkin’s goodness and devotion is for the society but he recognized that without the transformed heart, no amount of structural change can really bring about change when “the exploiter and victim merely change places then justice’ll be done.”

Telling Tamar to stay till he returns, he hurries out looking for a taxi. He never comes back. He goes down to the basement of his flat where the deadly game arranged by the suicidal Crimond is being played. The
bullet, fired by Duncan and meant by Crimond for himself, hits Jenkin as he opens the door at the crucial moment and appears in the doorway, and he slumps down dead-killed by accident.

Like Jesus Christ, Jenkin ‘a Christ figure’ is cheated by his own friend. Jenkin acts as a savior for all others. He is a non dramatic, unpoetic Christ of some kind, an accidental savior. The reaction of others to his death plainly bears out the Christ association. Each one thinks that he has sent Jenkin to his death, and each one mourns deeply, using, in some cases, the very words, “He died for me.”(p.495) The relation of this to the death of Christ for mankind is unmistakable. The deluded nature of the active, self-reproaching imagination and its role in grief is mildly satrisied through the mourning of the characters like Rose, Gerard, Tamar and Ducane.

Although society does not do justice with Jenkin yet her death proves beneficial for the society; Jean and Duncane move to France; Gerard decides to spend his rest life with Rose and finds Crimnd’s book ‘marvelous’, At last Tamar, who was a maimed creature transforms and becomes powerful after a religious conversations and her long acquaintance with Jenkin. She is “endowed with an extraordinary authority”(p.509) and is, “ready to trample on anyone.”(p.509). Tamar’s newfound faith has given her the strength and determination to oppose her mother and starts her studies once
again. Through Tamar’s struggle for study and her victory, Murdoch highlights importance of A-level and preparing for university. Murdoch herself remarks:

Things that interfere with your education are prima facie a pity.... to be worrying about sex when you ought to be doing you’re a-levels, caring about your work and having a happy time, “I’m not interested in promiscuity.”

In the comparison between Gerard and Crimond one side and Jenkin on the other, Fourrez defined it the difference between the “moral o conviction” and the “moral of responsibilities.” Jenkin in The Book and the Brotherhood clearly upholds the “moral of responsibilities.” Jenkin’s tentativeness and faith fit well with Fourrez’s remark about the “moral of responsibilities”:

Moving towards an ethics of responsibility may represent a step forward for individuals. Who thus, in an act of trust and hope, say, “This is what I might make of my life.”

Although Jenkin proved man of responsibilities yet the killing of Jenkin is evidence of evil in the world. Recognizing one’s responsibility for such evil, one’s involvement in the network of human relationships, recognizing that no man is an island, is an important matter. The members of the brotherhood are shocked into thinking about this, and this is necessary however inaccurate and muddle the thought-process may be at the beginning.
Looking at these somewhat 'poor' materials out of which Murdoch has constructed her contemporary saint, one realize that she sees truthfulness, humility and love as the supreme virtues. Faith and hope of a dramatic kind do not seem as important; on the contrary they are shown to be dangerous like Grimond, feeble and false like Gerard. Jenkin has the right king and degrees of faith' inner certainties out of which he instinctively feels and acts. Jenkin represents morality at both the private and public levels; as a person in a circle of friends, and as a member of society. Through him Murdoch gives the total moral picture. At the level of public and social morality Murdoch asserts the need for justice and the recognition of human rights for all human beings.

In her 24th novel The Message to the Plane (1989), Murdoch concentrates on the connection between the ordinary world and for want of a better world through goodness and holiness of 'the Christ figures'. Here in the novel, Murdoch differs goodness from holiness through her characters Marcus Vallar, an extraordinary holy individual and Alfred Ludens, a Christ figure of holy morals and goodness. The novel is about, will society recognize their greatness and would do justice with them. Marcus Vallar, Jew, infant prodigy, mathematical
genius at nineteen, and master-painter, outstrips his teacher Jack Sheerwater, turns philosopher and disappears in search of pure recognition, knowledge and universal language. While the world speculates, the group with which he interacted cannot forget him. Jack, who taught him painting, is now unable to free himself of Marcus’s painting and becomes rich just because of Marcus’s painting style. Alfred Ludens, secretly hoarding the painful memory of Marcus’s anger at his insensitive rejection of a declaration of love from Irina, Marcus’s school girl daughter, still longs to know whether Marcus found what he was seeking, or found even the understanding disciple. Gildas Herne, an Anglican priest, is left without faith as a result of Marcus’s criticism. Patrick Fenman, penniless Iris–poet, lies dying in Jack’s house, as the novel opens, in the belief that he has been cursed by Marcus. Considerable time had passed since Marcus disappeared from their midst. All the friends including Jack’s wife Franca and his mistress Alison make a decision to bring Marcus back and ask to revive Pat by revoking the curse. Ludens seeks him. Marcus cures Pat through an act that seems to be a miracle and it is soon given out that he was responsible for raising one from the dead. Meanwhile Ludens falls in love with Irina, who, convinced that her father is mad and tired of caring for this genius, arranges to have him confined in an extremely elegant and expensive institution. He is accompanied thither by Irina,
pat (now his devoted servant), and Ludens who loves him and urgently presses him to record the answers—the great synthesis—which Ludens is sure he has found.

There his fame as a healer spreads and a group of seekers who call themselves the stone-people, worshippers at Stonehenge, gather to see him daily. Marcus, testing out his own powers shows himself to them in silence, showing in a dignified, mysterious way. Ludens, hating all this, pressed Marcus to write, think and speak. Meanwhile, Franca and Alison both propose Ludens for marriage but he denies to accept their proposal because of his true love for Irina. Both, Franca and Alison aware him from Irina. At last, Marcus reaches a point where he sees that ‘magic’ must be abjured. All though this period, and for some time before, he has been meditating on the Holocaust and the suffering of the Jews, his people. As he declares his unworthiness to an enraged multitude, stone are flung at him. On midsummer’s day, when a great miracle had been awaited, Ludens discovers him dead on the kitchen floor, his head near the open door of the gas over and a note to the effect that he has died of his own will. Irina serves her father, but manages him, bending things to her will, pretending to return Luden’s love but only using him as long as he is needed. She makes a bolt for freedom and ‘happiness’ with Lord Claverden, her secret Gentile love, the moment her father dies, displaying a self centeredness which is
unsurprising and human but not admirable. But it is true that a good human being can never leave goodness so Ludens, who himself in great pain given by his true love Irina’s cheating, reunites Jack and France.

*The Message to the Planet*, suggests a search for the ultimate philosophy, the secret that lies, not being physical life, but behind the very essence of spiritual life itself. Once again, Murdoch visits the question of the Good and how it applies to society. In this novel, this question centers around Marcus, who anchors the novel as a character from myth. Sometimes a saint, sometimes Prospero, sometimes a lunatic and Ludens, who is the representative of extreme goodness and loyalty with pure morals in life. Each of the other characters in the novel have to find their way through eccentric marriages, chaste romances, resurrections and mysticism in a world where all the familiar rules no longer apply. All the solutions are complicated and costly. And ‘the Christ figure’ like Ludens bears injustice from society in spite of having great faith in humanity.

In the opening scene, the solidity and density of the selfish world is projected through the trails of Franca, Jack’s wife. Jack, Marcus’s painting teacher is supremely selfish. He must have Alison, his young mistress and also Franca, his older wife, and he must have them
together, in the same house. While talking with Gildas he admits it shamelessly:

‘On your theory’, said Gildas, ‘everyman needs two women, a quiet home maker and a thrilling nymph.’

‘Yes’ said Jack, ‘and that suits them too. Women are an alien tribe, they are not like us, the understand themselves through us, like plants and animals, we make them exist, they are, quite unconsciously, terrifying, they are sibyls, priestesses, queens of the night, they are frightened of themselves, they need a man to calm them and make them into friendly deities.29

In the name of truthfulness, openness and modernity Jack professes eternal love for Franca and absolute love for Alison in the same breath. In reality Jack is truthful to none. He is doing injustice with their true love and blind faith because in the comparison of love, sex matters for him, “Sex is the fundamental energy which produces everything that’s good, it joins flesh and spirit, it’s the only spiritual thing that is available everywhere.”(p.19) That’s Jack’ however, sees no one except himself, is abundantly clear.

In the Franca’s case, she is much less simple than Jack’s. That fact that she gives her husband whatever he wants masks a strong self-centeredness. Her selfishness in concealed under an appearance of directed selflessness until it turns unnoticed into resentment and a perfectly masked desire for revenge. She smiles lovingly and calmly, but thinks of smashing Jack’s head of plunging a knife into his side
torment her. France is unable to decide whether by simply carrying ‘the banner of truth’ one can deny the existence of evil, unable sometimes to separate the grain of truth from the surrounding selfish evil in her own heart. There is no simple division into an appearance of saintliness and a reality of wicked revenge. Franca and Jack from the subplot, the materialistic world untouched by spirit. Neither is really in touch with Marcus. Jack may have taught him painting and his own imitations of this pupil’s style have made him a popular and rich painter, but of all the group, he is the least involved, relating to him only in a spirit of idle curiosity. Franca, too is indifferent with these two, one is in a world made familiar by Murdoch’s earlier novels; selfishness as an indelible characteristic of erotic love is an issue explored over and over again.

The world inhabited by Marcus Vallar, however, in another case altogether. Patrick, Marcus’s friend is extremely ill and thinks it all happens due to Marcus’s curse. All friends, Jack, Gildas, Patrick and Ludens decide to bring back Marcus to cure Pat. Ludens agrees to go but having a doubt because earlier he has rejected Irina’s love who is Marcus’s daughter due to her age by saying that, “Please stop, you’re becoming hysterical, I don’t want to hear about these school girl emotions, what do you expect me to do. I’m years older than you, you’re a child, and I don’t find you in the least attractive.”(p.161) But
when Ludens tells about Patrik, Marcus agrees to cure him and cures Patrick magically beyond imagination.

Through her main characters like Marcus 'as a holy figure' and Ludens 'as a good figure', Murdoch proves the existence of truth, faithfulness and justice in society. Ludens is by far the most important character. He thinks, loves, acts, and interacts with every other character, and as for as the novel as novel is concerned, is the centre of the book. He is also the reader, reacting as the reader might to people and events; flawed by good' mistaken but redeemed humanity. He blindly believes in Marcus’s knowledge. He needs to understand Marcus and learn the nature of his message. That’s why he records Marcus’s thoughts and words. He learns also that Marcus’s confessed "inability to love"(p.292.) was only a redefinition of love, and that the old muddled concept has to be rejected so that the new one may be better understood. As this point one must turn to the figure of Marcus Vallar. Irish Murdoch’s exchange with the Indian spiritual leader, J. Krishnamurti says, “She is interested in the extraordinary human being.”30 He may manifest “the rising up of man into the divine.”(p.164), which is a familiar aspect of “avatar” according to Indian notion .31 He may manifest divinity’s descent into the human, which is the Christian notion of Incarnation. Here, through Marcus,
Murdoch explores the predicament of the man who grows towards godhead.

Marcus as mathematician, painter and philosopher is the composite of all human learning and understanding. Ludens is convinced that if only Marcus will press on past the perimeters of consciousness, he will find the hidden answer. But Marcus realizes that this is virtually beyond human understanding. He says:

At the one step beyond, where one imagines glimpses of a final formulation, thinking is no longer a source of satisfaction or even a rational activity, it is a form of torture, a sacrilege which is its own punishment. And if one cold even name it, its name would only ever be understood by very few persons. This too is a doom which must be faced, to know that which only few can know, and which cannot be further explained. (p.162)

To this philosophic mode of being is now added an extraordinary dimension, the spiritual. He has strange powers if he curses, people die; if he touches they come to life. Marcus’s daughter Irina thinks he is mad so she admits Marcus in a very advanced mental hospital for treatment, accompanied with Ludens who love her and Patrick to support him. There Patrick popularizes Marcus’s magical deeds to cure him. The society known as the seekers or stone people start to believe him and come for his darshan daily. All this incidents provoke him to act like an avatar. In the luxurious institution to which
is confined, the realization of power and his hold over people encourages him to play the holy man’s role. He begins to make appearance to the crowd, a silent, robed figure. Ludens is greatly distressed by Marcus’s abandonment of philosophy for holiness. He convinces Marcus to come back into reality from illusion:

You are not evil, Marcus, you are not a monster, comeback to reality, come back to ordinary sense. You’re not perfect, nobody is but you’re a good man, you harm no one your feeling that you could help people, even heal people was a good truthful feeling now perhaps you feel that time is coming to an end, that may be right too, but you mustn’t lose it, the hope, the faith, the sense of direction, the sense of a mission. (p.378)

During this period Marcus comes to terms with his human limitations and confesses to the crowd that he is not fit or worthy and that he cannot be, though he wished it, a savior (p.384). There is rage and rejection and stones are flung at him. Marcus clocks himself in a room and commits suicide. When Ludens returns, he finds him dead in a room. His death takes the awareness of suffering to the extremist limit, going beyond the human, stepping out of life in to death. Total identification demands powerlessness, a breaking out of the powered self for which the only appropriate image is death. To take it a step further, powerlessness can be manifested only in the moment of actual death. The only helpful analogy is that of Christ.
In the end Irina leaves Ludens for her new lover Lord Claverden. But Ludens doesn’t leave his goodness and faith in love. He tries to solve Jack’s problem because Franca and Alison both has left him. Ludens convinces Franca to return to his husband and reunites them both. At last, with the victory of her faith and love, she finds her freedom. Murdoch herself proves the victory of love and shows her last hope of enlightenment in the darkened world where injustice is done to her good and holy figures. Through the death of Marcus, however, Murdoch steps beyond the good and human to the holy and superhuman. Marcus says that for the deepest search, a painful metamorphoses:

At a certain point one is compeued to develop a conception of insight, or pure thinking, which is not recognizably “moral”, something which simulates, or is, the rising up of man into the divine, as if one were being driven into the goodness.(p.164)

Marcus’s death is a sort of message to the humans of planet earth. On midsummer’s day, when the seekers had hoped that there would be a great miracle from him, he is found lying dead on the kitchen floor with his head near the open door of the gas-oven. The link with the gas-chambers is inescapable but the cause of death is left deliberately ambivalent. The note declares that he dies of his own will, not by his own hands. He conveys a message to die with free will as Jesus Christ died with his own will three days after crucifixion. Iris
Murdoch in *The Message to the Planet* has placed the good and the holy in separate categories, embodying each in a separate figure; Ludens, the good and human and Marcus the holy and separate. She suggests that the holy differs in its assumption of suffering, while the good attempts to alleviate it.

Good characters in the novels of Iris Murdoch always find themselves isolated and consciously or unconsciously they identify themselves with Christ. They suffer and are neglected by the world but they persist in following the path shown by Christ. Her good characters believe in gospel of love and sacrifice and are seldom rewarded for their goodness. Iris Murdoch focuses our attention on the sordid affairs of the present materialistic world where goodness is a negative virtue and is rarely rewarded. Certain minor characters are somewhat practical in their philosophy. Murdoch probably believes that this world, in spite of various cultural and scientific advancements, is still not free to accommodate Christ-like characters. Anne's visionary Christ in *Nuns and Soldiers* says, "Where do I live? I live nowhere. Have you heard it said that birds have nests and foxes have holes but I have no home?" 32 repeating the famous Biblical words,"Birds have nests, foxes have holes but Son of Man has no home to live."
References


2. Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honorable Defeat*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), p.25. For all textual reference the same edition has been used. The page numbers are indicated in the parenthesis after each quotation.


20. Iris Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood*, (London: Vintage Classis, 2003), p.125. For all textual references the same edition has been used. The page numbers are indicated in the paranthesis after each quotation.


23. Ibid.


28. Ibid.

29. Iris Murdoch, *The Message to the Planet*, (London: Vintage Classics, 2000), p.75. For all textual references the same edition has been used. The page numbers are indicated in the paranthesis after each quotation.

