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DEMONS AND ANGELS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POWER FIGURE IN IRIS MURDOCH'S FICTION

by

AMIN ABDUL-HUSSEIN MALAK

A THESIS

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FOR MY PARENTS

ABSTRACT

The development of the power figures in Iris Murdoch's fiction [illegible] through three stages. The first stage comprises the novels from *Under the Net* to *The Red and the Green*. In this stage, the power figure, represented by Mischa Fox in *The Flight from the Enchanter* and Hannah Crean-Smith in *The Unicorn*, is both good and evil, innocent and guilty, kind and cruel. In the second stage, this duality disappears, and the power figure, represented by Carel Fisher in *The Time of the Angels* and Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, becomes totally destructive and evil. Concurrently, during this stage, Murdoch embodies, through the portrayal of John Ducane, the hero of *The Nice and the Good*, her vision that "all power is evil." In the third stage, covering the novels from *An Accidental Man* to *Nuns and Soldiers*, the power figure all but disappears: as the depiction of Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* illustrates, the hero comes to the wise recognition of the futility of power, and to the solid endorsement of love.

While the novels of the first two stages present power as a central preoccupation of the major characters, Murdoch's later novels dramatize love in action. This progress towards the incarnation of her main tenet that "love is a central concept in morals" represents a convergence of her liberal-democratic ethos of tolerance, respect for the individual's identity and pluralism, and her practice as a novelist.

Moreover, the dwindling dominance of the power figure over both the narrative and the other characters gives her later novels flexibility

and depth, and allows greater room for the characters to move independently of rigid authorial patterns. Thus, we may possibly see less reliance on eccentric characters, Gothic settings and cloak-and-dagger plots in future Murdoch novels. As she gains in artistic maturity, Murdoch continues to develop and refine the form of her novels, aspiring in the process to emulate the models set by George Eliot, Dickens and Henry James.

Mu[illegible]atment of the power figure, therefore, not only represents a maj[illegible]ern in her f[illegible]lso reflects significantly upon her moral and aesthetic vision.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE: THE FLIGHT FROM THE ENCHANTER 13

CHAPTER TWO: THE UNICORN 36

CHAPTER THREE: THE TIME OF THE ANGELS 61

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NICE AND THE GOOD 84

CHAPTER FIVE: A FAIRLY HONOURABLE DEFEAT 109

CHAPTER SIX: THE SEA, THE SEA 137

CONCLUSION 161

NOTES 173

BIBLIOGRAPHY 182

INTRODUCTION

The concern of Murdoch's major and minor characters with power represents a dominant theme in her works. The patterns of master-slave relationships that permeate her novels testify to the centrality of the issue. The novels dramatize, as well, practices of power that take diverse forms of psychological manipulation, blackmail, coercion and physical violence. The significance of power as a major preoccupation in Murdoch's fiction manifests itself, moreover, in the recurrence of a series of power figures who play the roles of god, saint, enchanter or demon to those surrounding them. The role that these power figures assume in the novels is pivotal and their pervasive presence creates the tension that generates the plot and motivates the action. By functioning as the novel's focal point, the power figure thus serves to incite the reader's interest. I argue, therefore, that understanding Murdoch's treatment of these power figures is essential to the critical evaluation of her literary achievement. This thesis shall, accordingly, focus on tracing the development of Murdoch's portrayal of those power figures that occupy the central positions in the novels. Through the analyses of the evolving process of their depiction, one can, furthermore, follow the dynamics of Murdoch's vision. In other words, I maintain in this thesis that Murdoch's creativity and ethics are demonstrated in the skill and subtlety with which she treats her power figures.

The contribution that the thesis makes to the steadily-growing scholarship on Iris Murdoch thus represents a fresh approach to her vision and aesthetics. Although the issue of power and the figures embodying power play a central role in Murdoch's fiction, their significance has never been fully explored in the existing body of criticism. Most studies concentrate on Murdoch's concepts of love and freedom, due probably to the author's recurrent emphasis on these themes. A. S. Byatt, for instance, maintains in her stimulating study of Murdoch that

> all Miss Murdoch's novels can in an important sense be seen as studies of the 'degrees of freedom' available to individuals, and it is from this point of view that I have approached them. . . .[1]

Byatt does, however, make occasional and illuminating references to power; in the course of her commentaries, she points out persuasively Murdoch's indebtedness to Simone Weil's ideas on "false gods," the compulsion to find social and spiritual roots, and the infatuation of the victims with their oppressors. Understandably, Byatt's observations on the power figures appear only when pertinent to the central line of her argument.

Another relevant study that touches on the issue of power is Zohreh Tawakuli Sullivan's doctoral dissertation entitled "Enchantment and the Demonic in the Novels of Iris Murdoch." As the title suggests, Sullivan discusses the role of "demons" in Murdoch's novels, and sets Murdoch's statements about the "demonic energies" wielded by power figures against a background of Greek, Christian and Celtic traditions. Sullivan states decisively her main point in the introduction:

> Iris Murdoch is not concerned with literal demons of either the Christian or the Greek variety; her sense of the demonic is most obvious, not in sense-experiences as with Keats, but in a kind of response to the existential situation--a response resulting from the protagonist's obsessive need to control, define, and remake others according to his pattern of perception. The opposing force to the demonic is that goodness or love which delights in letting things be as they are. In

> this paper, therefore, I am concerned with those demonic characteristics of fantasy which influence her protagonists to renounce contact with the actual and empirical world, for an intense perception of reality created out [of] their demonic need to impose form on reality.[2]

Sullivan asserts that the functions of demons and enchanters may be explored on the levels of psychology, myth and social commentary, and that the treatment of power in literature falls within the latter:

> As social commentary, the novel may be seen as an allegory of power, power conferred upon those who surround themselves with mystery and romance; more importantly, it is about demonic energy that emanates from a central figure who embodies the will to power.[3]

The major limitation of Sullivan's otherwise illuminating thesis is that it imposes too rigid a pattern on the power figures of the three novels it deals with: The Flight from the Enchanter, The Unicorn and The Time of the Angels, and sees them in black and white terms without allowing for an organic appreciation of the complexity of their characterization. This limitation undermines at times her reading of the novels, and results in erroneous interpretations of the characters' motives and actions.

As Sullivan's thesis focuses on the demonic characters and the motif of enchantment, Richard Todd's Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest concentrates likewise on this very particular issue. In the chapter entitled "Power and Enchantment," Todd asserts his "belief that power seems in more than one Murdoch novel to be equated with enchantment, and that the state of affairs which brings about this equation is indeed part of Iris Murdoch's Shakespearian interest."[4] It is undeniable that the novels of Murdoch contain several allusions to Shakespeare and that Murdoch has on numerous occasions declared her admiration for the verve and vigour of Shakespeare's talent. Eager to advance his argument, Todd overemphasizes, however, Shakespeare's influence on Murdoch's portrayal of the power figures to an extreme that strains the credibility of his argument about her indebtedness to Shakespearean patterns. Todd does not consequently appear to appreciate Murdoch's achievement on her terms and within her vision. He restricts, moreover, his comparative study of Murdoch's work with Shakespeare's to only The Nice and the Good and A Fairly Honourable Defeat because these two novels, as he tersely puts it, "raise most of the issues in a suitably convenient manner."[5]

Unlike Sullivan's and Todd's particular slants, Frank Baldanza's Iris Murdoch "presents a chronological critical survey of her fifteen novels published to date, for their general import and impact."[6] As part of the Twayne's English Authors Series, Baldanza's book surveys in an Olympian fashion Murdoch's life, philosophical writings, and novels, giving specific attention "to her development as an artist, and to her changing thematic emphases, as well as to general parallels and contrasts between the novels."[7] Given this wide frame of reference, Baldanza touches occasionally upon the relationships of power in the novels. Baldanza's most illuminating comment appears in the conclusion, where he perceptively observes that the tenor of Murdoch's work reveals a liberal-democratic stand:

> In terms of thematic content, she has dealt primarily with concepts of freedom, power, and love, and the latter closely allied to her interest in the nature of the good. She sees each moral agent's freedom as a severely limited but nevertheless valid range of choice. One of the primary boundaries of this range is the power exercised by "demons," "angels," or "alien gods" (the terms overlap), exotic and menacing authority figures whose overwhelming power is

> precisely that granted them by their victims, no more and no less. The key to greater freedom, and to escape from demonizing, is love, which is seen as the cherishing, within the essentially English liberal-democratic tradition, of the otherness of others who are conceived of as opaque, eccentric, totally different persons.[8]

From their depiction in the novels, these demons, angels and alien gods represent, as I see them, the strikingly exceptional individuals who exercise influence over others in order to achieve certain goals. The constant preoccupation (carried at times to extreme degrees of devotion and adulation) of other characters with these power figures establishes their dominance. As Frank Baldanza comments, these figures represent "the monstrously powerful, godlike, or tyrannical" characters whose "fiendish power over others is clearly a symbiotic phenomenon: although they may be rich, learned, or sexually magnetic (or all three), the real basis of their power is the masochistic desire for victimization on the part of their subjects."[9] The victims' vulnerability creates a vacuum that the enchanters or "alien gods," as Murdoch labels them, readily fill. Thus, as the novels dramatize this allegory of power, the enchanters' magnetism unnerves their admirers with such an intensity that it becomes sinister and dangerous.

Murdoch's objection to the practices of the power figures is, therefore, based upon their violation of the canons of her moral philosophy, especially her two cardinal concepts of love and freedom. According to Iris Murdoch, love is "a central concept in morals."[10] In The Bell, the Abbess utters the novel's most significant pronouncement: "Remember," she tells the morally bedeviled Michael Meade, "that all our failures are ultimately failures in love."[11] Murdoch's most comprehensive definition of love appears, however, in her essay "The Sublime and the Good":

> Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real.[12]

This definition reveals a liberal stance that advocates the supremacy of the individual being as a value in himself. It represents, furthermore, an integral part of her interest in a liberal-democratic theory of personality that upholds the sanctity and diversity of persons: in "Against Dryness," Murdoch spells out her understanding of liberalism as "a theory of man as free and separate and related to a rich and complicated world from which, as a moral being, he has much to learn."[13] [illegible] the novel, as an art form, becomes consequently her valuable vehicle for conveying this pluralistic ethos.

Murdoch's understanding of love emphasizes, as well, an outward-directed attention towards people and towards reality. Echoing the French mystic philosopher Simone Weil, Murdoch sees love as a matter of close and sympathetic attention to others.[14] As Rubin Rabinovitz perceptively observes, Murdoch's concept of love calls for a total rejection of power. He argues that Murdoch sees love as

> a human relation in which one person apprehends his fellow as equal; by intently focusing his attention on another person, the lover begins to understand that all of the individuality, complexity, reality which he feels he possesses himself similarly exist in another person. Love is imperfect when this equality is absent; if the lover sees himself as being either above or below the object of his love, the result is a master-slave relationship.[15]

The moral failing of all Murdoch's power figures is demonstrated by this inability to relate to others as equal; they strive to create and sustain a structure of relationships whereby their victims become their adoring dependents. The power figures do not usually meet others in love.

This point has indeed been emphasized by Murdoch herself in her television interview with the C.B.C. in 1981. She declared that love to her is closely associated with power;[16] her treatment of power, she maintained, complements and directly relates to love, making power the polar opposite of love.

The essence of Murdoch's argument about love represents, moreover, an anti-Romantic attitude that earnestly rejects any blinding involvement with the self:

> The chief enemy of excellence in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is outside one. . . . We can see in mediocre art, where perhaps it is even more clearly seen in mediocre conduct, the intrusion of fantasy, the assertion of self, the dimming of any reflection of the real world.[17]

This "mediocrity" of conduct assumes a great significance in understanding the behaviour of Murdoch's characters. Those who are solipsistically involved with themselves become not only morally deficient, but also entangled in the syndrome of slavery and enchantment. They symbolize to Murdoch a crisis of an age that has lost the sense of the value of a transcendent good and reality. In An Unofficial Rose, Murdoch's anti-Romantic novel, Randall Peronett embodies her conception of the solipsistic hero; he abandons his wife and family responsibility in pursuit of the enchantress, Lindsay Rimmer. Randall justifies his affair on the basis of a neurotically-cherished need for form and aestheticism. The description of Randall's infatuation with the superficial Lindsay reveals a moral blindness:

> She was his angel of unrighteousness, so he often told her, and through her he enjoyed a most exhilarating holiday from morals. She was, he delighted to tell her, a demon, but an angel for him, heartless, but warm for him, a natural tyrant, but for him a

> liberator, evil, but for him, good. She was indeed, his good, that towards which his whole being magnetically swung. The madness, the fine fury, had come at last.[18]

Randall's failure lies in his inability to recognize the needs and identities of others and in seeing the world solely through his own preoccupations and passions. Thus when Randall gives in to his solipsism, he fails to experience love and engages in a subtle game of power in which he, interestingly enough, becomes the losing participant.

Like love, freedom in Murdoch's canon means the ability to appreciate persons and things as they really are. In fact, Murdoch's definition of freedom so resembles that of love that the two seem interchangeable: "Freedom," Murdoch tells us, "is not choosing; that is merely the move we make when all is already lost. Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves."[19] This definition obviously indicates, as Rabinovitz explains, that Murdoch's understanding of freedom is "implied by love. If love is the actual recognition of otherness, freedom is one's capacity for this recognition."[20] While Murdoch's view of love represents an anti-Romantic stance, her view of freedom represents equally a rejection of existentialism, which sees individual freedom in terms of conscious choice and private will. This rejection is dramatized in The Sandcastle, whose middle-aged hero, William Mor, realizes sadly but wisely that a mere fling with a free-spirited artist cannot absolve him from family duties and social commitments. Murdoch criticizes Sartre's emphasis on extensive self-analysis on the grounds that too much self-examination can lead to total preoccupation with oneself and the failure to recognize reality. Murdoch, as Rabinovitz maintains, "would disagree most with a point like the one Sartre makes in Huis-Clos: 'l'enfer, c'est les autres.' People are hell to one another only when they refuse to observe and love one another."[21]

Murdoch's incisive definitions of love and freedom should accordingly illuminate our understanding of the motives and morals of the power figures in her novels. As an embodiment of her liberal and pluralistic world view, Murdoch's novels dramatize a thematic triumvirate of power, love and freedom. They depict, however, this thematic triumvirate not in a definite social or political context but within the confines of people's treatment of each other. The individual that she portrays functions as an independent moral entity regardless of class or ideological affiliation. A character's handling of and reaction to power fascinate her and excite her imagination to a degree that these become the novel's major concerns. The pattern that eventually emerges in the novels involves an interplay of power with love and freedom. Whenever human relationship is not based on love, that is, when the characters fail to recognize the freedom and identity of others as their equals, power surfaces automatically and operates as love's antithesis, leading to "a master- slave relationship." The world of The Italian Girl, for instance, reveals how the permeation of power in human relationship incites a destructive cycle that scars everyone involved in the power game. The Levkins of the novel relate to others through cruelty, enslavement and manipulation; their denial of love damages not only their victims but themselves as well.

Although the majority of Murdoch's novels contain prominent statements about the cardinal significance of love in moral life, they (the early works in particular) dramatize in effect power in action. A character's progress to moral maturity is depicted not in terms of acting with or for love but in terms of resistance to or rejection of power. This phenomenon is best illustrated in The Nice and the Good whose hero, John Ducane, concludes after his brush with death that

> nothing is worth doing except . . . not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, not to seek, seek, seek. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Love is the only justice.[22]

Ducane's revelatory pronouncement in this capsulated form concisely typifies Murdoch's handling of thematic concepts in her earlier works; that is, she posits one concept, love, as her ideal, but dramatizes its opposite, power. Thus, instead of showing love in action, she creates demons who enchant and enslave others.

Murdoch's failure to embody her vision of love in fiction reflects significantly on her portrayal of the power figure. Her preoccupation with the practices of power establishes and enhances the dominance of the power figure over the narrative to such a degree that the pattern becomes rigid and restrictive. This authorial design thus highlights another instance of the dichotomy between Murdoch's theoretical pronouncements and her practice in her fiction. On examining Murdoch's critical writings about the art of the novel, one surprisingly discovers that the tenor of these writings runs counter to the firm authorial control that her novels reveal. According to Murdoch, the twentieth-century novel is either journalistic, subservient to social conventions, or crystalline, saturated with neuroses. One of her objections to the latter relates to her contention that

> in such works we feel the ruthless subjection of the characters to the will of their authors. The characters are no longer free. The author does not even want them to be free. If they were free they would get in his way. His book is an attempt to work out his own salvation by an exercise of self-discovery.[23]

The danger of the author's total domination over character entails, as Murdoch postulates, rigidity that leads to the misrepresentation of the contingency of reality:

> There is a temptation for any novelist . . . to imagine that the problem of a novel is solved and the difficulties overcome as soon as a form has been evolved. But that is only the beginning. There is then the much more difficult battle to prevent that form from becoming rigid, by the free expansion against it of the individual characters. Here above all the contingency of the characters must be respected. Contingency must be defended for it is the essence of personality.[24]

Murdoch's stance has, interestingly enough, its roots in the central contention of her husband John Bayley, who argues in The Characters of Love that

> . . . an author's love for his characters is a delight in their independent existence as other people, an attitude toward them which is analogous to our feeling towards those we love in life; and an intense interest in their personalities combined with a sort of detached solicitude for their freedom.[25]

The models for Murdoch's ideal relationship between author and character are the nineteenth-century novels of Dickens, George Eliot, Balzac and Tolstoy. In her praise of George Eliot, Murdoch points out that she "displays that god-like capacity for so respecting and loving her characters as to make them exist as free and separate beings."[26]

Thus, while Murdoch declares that the novel should be "a house fit for free characters to live in," the schematized patterns that her novels illustrate leave little room for the characters to move. The rigid control that she exercises over them stems from an eagerness to dramatize the compelling influence of the power figure, to whom the other characters should gravitate.

I argue, accordingly, that Murdoch's progress towards artistic maturity is demonstrated in the three-stage development of her treatment of the power figures in her fiction--a development that involves overcoming the dichotomy between her moral vision and literary concepts on the one hand and her practice as a novelist on the other. In the first stage, comprising the novels from Under the Net to The Red and the Green, the power figure is portrayed as both good and evil. In the second stage, which covers the novels from The Time of the Angels to A Fairly Honourable Defeat, the moral ambivalence surrounding the power figure's motives disappears since he is shown to incarnate evil. Finally, in the novels of the third stage, from An Accidental Man to Nuns and Soldiers, the power figure is metamorphosed from a god-like being to an ordinary person with normal aspirations and limitations. This three-stage development of Murdoch's handling of the power figures best reflects on the process of convergence in her work between vision and practice, intent and exercise, design and the finished product. Murdoch's later novels reveal, I suggest, greater focus on love in action and less interest in power. As the dominance of the power figure over the narrative diminishes, the novel gains in both range and flexibility. The thesis thus aims at exploring the development of Murdoch's treatment of the power figures in various stages of her career by examining six representative novels that demonstrate the achievement of this diligent and talented writer.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FLIGHT FROM THE ENCHANTER

In The Flight from the Enchanter, Iris Murdoch dramatizes how power is wielded single-handedly by the central character, Mischa Fox. As the enchanter of the title and the novel's controlling figure, Mischa masterminds events from behind the scenes and seems to be involved with everything that goes on. The enigmatic Mischa thus operates as the novel's unifying element that focuses the reader's attention. He functions, moreover, as the precursor for a series of power figures that assume prominence in Murdoch's subsequent novels. The examination of Mischa's portrayal serves, therefore, as the basis for our study of the development of the power figures in Murdoch's novels. Such an examination helps, as well, to clarify the maze of critical interpretations of Mischa's character.

Although those who study the novel agree about the centrality of Mischa's role, they nevertheless attach varying and contradictory meanings to his actions. The critical spectrum ranges from calling him "a wicked Prospero"[1] and "the sinister Mischa"[2] to regarding him as a merciful deity, "a Buddha image,"[3] whom "we never see do anything even remotely demonic."[4] Avoiding the extremities of these one-sided judgements, I argue instead that Mischa, uncanny and complex as he is, symbolizes a duality of good and evil, innocence and guilt, compassion and cruelty.

Although Mischa is the novel's dominant figure, we do not meet him until Chapter Seven, and not before we have accumulated a number of impressions about his tantalizing character from second-hand sources. This deliberate delay in Mischa's appearance creates an aura of suspense and mystery around him. The first reference to Mischa, an indirect one, occurs in Chapter Two, where a Calvin Blick offers Hunter Keepe, the editor of a small suffragette paper, Artemis, a shady deal to purchase it. Calvin pursues the deal on behalf of a certain boss who "already owns three newspapers and heaven knows many periodicals and every kind of organized beastliness in print."[5] The identity of this press magnate is not revealed until the following chapter when John Rainborough, a high-ranking civil servant, tells Peter Saward, a consumptive scholar, that their mutual friend, Mischa Fox, is in England. It is during the course of this conversation, significantly enough, that the concept of the duality of Mischa's personality is first introduced. Rainborough, who provides us with valuable background information about Mischa, asserts that Mischa's identity consists of two halves, dark and light: "Blick is the dark half of Mischa Fox's mind. . . . He does the things which Mischa doesn't even think of. That's how Mischa can be so innocent" (p. 35). This significant statement serves in the reader's mind as a key to understanding Mischa's character.

Our conception of the duality of Mischa's nature is further enhanced by the effective use of eye imagery to represent his split personality. On his first introduction, the reader is given Annette's impressions as she sees his reflection in the mirror facing her:

> A man had come in and was standing by the door at the far end of the lane of clothes. Annette could see him in the mirror. She could see their three heads, her own bright and close, Nina's below her, a little in shadow, and the man's head far

> back over her shoulder, and quite darkened. Yet she knew that he was looking into her eyes. . . . The man stopped level with her, gave her a nod, and then stared directly at Annette in the mirror. She saw him clearly now. He was a stranger to her; and the most striking characteristic of his face was noticeable immediately, making everything else about him for the moment invisible. He had one blue eye and one brown eye. (p. 85)

Not having encountered Mischa before, Annette is thus unaffected as yet by the mystique of his charisma. The choice of the young, spirited and impressionable Annette, through whose indifferent, though slightly curious, feelings Mischa is introduced, serves to emphasize the intruder's physical features, of which the eyes are the most prominent:

> He was a slight man of medium height, with soft brown hair and a small moustache and a long tenderly curving mouth. But Annette could not help staring at his eyes. The blue one was not brownish, nor was the brown one bluish. Each had its own clear unflecked colour. There was thus a brown profile and a blue profile, giving the impression of two faces superimposed. (pp. 85-86)

The emphasis the passage gives to the two colours and the interplay (or lack of it) between them underscore the significance of the doubleness in Mischa's characterization. Commenting on the eye imagery here, John T. Gilligan argues ambiguously that "rumor has it that the first [the brown] reflects earth: the second [the blue], the sky. The combination of the two symbolizes his Olympian vision."[6] The eye imagery can, in my view, be better seen as a moral commentary on Mischa. Relying on textual suggestions, we can identify the brown with the dark or evil side of Mischa and the blue with the open or good side: "They stood facing each other, a few feet apart. He was unsmiling. She could see his blue eye. His brown eye was in the shadow" (p. 88).

Apart from the eye imagery, the subtle rendering of the novel's action further enhances this duality of Mischa's personality. He is shown to be involved with all the events in the novel, directly or by implication. His omniscience of all that goes on gives him a god-like quality. Although he appears in only eight of the novel's thirty chapters, his presence is felt almost throughout by the sheer preoccupation of the others with him--a preoccupation that is induced by fascination, fear or puzzlement. This invisible ubiquity characterizes the power figures of Murdoch's early novels. Mischa's pervasive influence thus creates the impression that he is the driving force behind all the actions, whether good or evil. While Rainborough describes him as "a man capable of enormous cruelty" (p. 33), Mischa himself declares twice "I love all creatures" (p. 145). This emphatic claim foreshadows a similar proclamation by Honor Klein, the "dark god" of Murdoch's fifth novel, _A Severed Head_, who likewise asserts: "I believe in people."[7] The events in which Mischa is directly involved do not, however, condemn him in the reader's eye; what makes Mischa look suspicious is not what the novel states or shows explicitly but what it implies.

Mischa's rescue of Rosa from the grips of the Lusiewicz brothers may, for instance, demonstrate his good side, and thus gain the reader's favourable response. The novel vitiates, however, his appeal by prefacing his solicited interference with Rosa's comment that "only darkness could cast out darkness" (p. 256). Rosa's statement suggests an equal footing between the destructive schemes of the Lusiewiczes and Mischa's exercise of power; the difference, in Rosa's view, is merely in shade and degree rather than in kind. Rosa thus fails to see in this instance the duality of Mischa's personality and this may explain her confused and hesitant reaction to him. Murdoch, on the other hand, clarifies the subtle distinction between the Lusiewicz brothers and

Mischa. While referring to them as "sinister" and "intruding demons," Murdoch describes Mischa as a god "deified by [his] surrounding followers."[8] Mischa's power stems, accordingly, from the surrender of will of the enchanted devotee and does not constitute clear-cut evil.

While Mischa relies on charm and fascination, Jan and Stefan Lusiewicz resort to threat, coercion and brute force. Mischa thus creates enchanted "followers"; the Lusiewicz brothers create resentful victims. Critics who study the novel often miss this symptomatic tendency of the Lusiewiczes to victimize as part of their symbolic incarnation of untrammelled evil energy. Admitting the "difficulty of framing accurate judgments about them," Peter Wolfe claims that "representing the coltish heroic order of an innocent mythical utopia, they refresh and enrapture us in the same way as they do [Rosa]."[9] Wolfe ignores here the destructive nature of their practices. Murdoch's creation of these two convincing and fascinating characters demonstrates her skill in embodying her vision of evil. They foreshadow, moreover, a series of émigrés that appear in Murdoch's subsequent novels. Rosa, taken by their seeming innocence and inexperience, seduced by their mannerism and exoticism, adopts them as victims of war and persecution. Rosa's support develops into an initial domination over them to a degree that they become her "slaves" and "protégés":

> Their dependence upon her was complete and their respect for her abject. Rosa even became worried at the degree of her power over them. They asked her permission for the simplest things, they made no choice without her opinion, they were her slaves. Rosa feared this power, but she enjoyed it too. There were days when contemplating the grace and vitality of her protégés, she felt as if she had received a pair of young leopards as a present. It was impossible not to adore them, it was impossible not to be pleased to own them. (p. 49)

Ironically, however, Rosa realizes that they are not as innocent as they appear and discovers, to her chagrin and fright, their selfishness and danger. Rosa's protégés thus manipulate her into sexual enslavement and take turns in making love to her. In their unbridled craving for power, they seem like a diminutive, almost ludicrous, embodiment of the Nietzschean superman; they brazenly declare their ambition for power: "We get strong, until we are stronger than anyone else. If one of us is so, we are king. If both of us together, we are emperor" (p. 69). The Lusiewiczes' aggression reaches its climax when Stefan symbolically sets fire to Hunter's hair as he proclaims himself "the master" of Rosa's house. The Polish brothers thus epitomize Murdoch's conception of evil pursuing its goals by vulgar and unsophisticated means. In their resort to physical violence they are the forerunners of Gerald Scottow in The Unicorn.

The aggressive behaviour that the Lusiewiczes reveal can, significantly enough, be further understood as Murdoch's dramatization of Simone Weil's idea of uprootedness. Simone Weil, by whose work Murdoch has been "much affected and instructed,"[10] deals in The Need for Roots with the psychological symptoms of social uprootedness:

> Uprootedness is by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed, for it is a self-propagating one.. For people who are really uprooted there remain only two possible sorts of behaviour: either to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death, like the majority of the slaves in the days of the Roman Empire, or to hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot, often by the most violent methods, those who are not yet uprooted, or only partly so.[11]

In their pursuit of uprooting others, the Lusiewiczes clearly illustrate the latter type of behaviour. As Rosa's relationship with them develops into a fierce power struggle, it appears quite natural that only Mischa can handle them. Accordingly, the solution is convincingly and succinctly revealed:

> Stefan did not belong to human society. This was why Hunter was powerless against them. The children of society could only be seared by such a contact. Nor could Rosa herself summon up the kind of strength required to do battle with such a being. Only some spirit which came out of the same region beyond the docility of the social world could do this work for her. Rosa knew that she must go and see Mischa Fox. (p. 257)

Mischa's rescue of Rosa from the Lusiewicz brothers is, however, shrewdly intertwined with another strand of the plot involving the tragic death of the immigrant dressmaker, Nina. As a refugee, Nina is sponsored by Mischa in return for seemingly trivial services. Mischa's demands, nevertheless, drain her will and create a damaging emotional strain. In her helplessness and submissiveness, Nina embodies the antithesis to the demonic energy of the Lusiewiczes. She thus illustrates Simone Weil's concept of "spiritual lethargy" of the socially uprooted. As A. S. Byatt comments, Nina

> has her moments of apprehension of the spiritual facts involved in her suffering at the moment of her death, but belongs rather with the afflicted--the slaves, refugees, uprooted, despised--studied by Simone Weil, than with Simone Weil's own spiritual search.[12]

As a form of escape mechanism from Mischa's oppression, Nina assumes that she is in love with him. According to Simone Weil, the victim of power often substitutes adoration for the humiliation of submission:

> The powerful, if they carry oppression beyond a certain point, necessarily end by making themselves adored by their slaves. For the thought of being under absolute compulsion, the plaything of another, is unbearable for a human being. Hence, if every way of escape from this constraint is taken from him there is nothing left for him to do but to persuade himself that he does the things he is forced to do willingly, that is to say, to substitute devotion for obedience.[13]

Weil's observations here represents an illuminating commentary on Nina's behaviour.

Mischa, on his part, never deigns to articulate his feelings towards her, and the novel yet suggests that he arrogates to himself an uncanny sexual domination over her:

> Time passed . . . and Nina began to find it harder and harder to make Mischa out. He came to see her at irregular intervals and asked politely how she was getting on. . . . On one of these occasions he took her hand, which he held rather abstractly for ten minutes, while he seemed to think about something else. On the second occasion he pressed her hand against his forehead before he finally let it go. This was possibly the happiest moment of Nina's life. But nothing further ever happened.
>
> That is, nothing happened of the things which Nina had expected or wanted to happen. (pp. 151-52)

The range and depth of Mischa's sexual charisma in the novel is shown to be extensive; he enslaves not only Nina but any woman that comes his way. He succeeds by exciting his woman slaves and refraining from going any further. Although Mischa's sexual charisma appears irresistible, we never find him performing any sexual act, to the point that he seems almost asexual. This sexual holding back connects sexuality with power--a theme that Murdoch develops further in subsequent novels, particularly in The Unicorn. By showing Nina's sexual as well as financial surrender to Mischa, Murdoch effectively illustrates the danger of a relationship that is based on power rather than love.

As Nina begins to gain relative financial security, she becomes, however, increasingly aware of Mischa's domination of her life. Her consequent attempt to recruit the help of Rosa, whom she sees "as a kind of archangel, a beneficent power, and in any case her only hope" (p. 156), fails. Mischa's instigation of the parliamentary inquiry relating to the issue of illegal immigrants further complicates her desperate situation. As Frank Baldanza observes, Nina

> is in no such danger, and her death represents the self-destruction of a neurotically fear-ridden woman who is too artificially isolated to feel solidarity with any other person. Her death illustrates succinctly a theme that Miss Murdoch has said is central to the book: power, such as that held by Mischa, carries as its concomitant a measure of evil that is inalienably part of its existence.[14]

It is important, however, to argue here that Murdoch dramatizes Mischa's culpability only through implication. Although the novel highlights Nina's infinite frustration with Mischa's oppressive domination, it does not link the suicide directly to him. This intricate method of implicating the power figure is intended to enhance the aura of "mystery in which Mischa's deepest motives are shrouded, for the reader as well as for characters within the novel," and "provides the fertile soil for all sorts of speculations, some of which are bound to be evil. . . ."[15]

This element of mystery in Mischa's portrayal underscores a basic characteristic in all of Murdoch's power figures: secrecy. According to Elias Canetti, to whom the novel is dedicated, "secrecy lies at the very core of power. The act of lying in wait for prey is essentially secret."[16] Thus Mischa's impressive ability not to reveal himself is one of his means to mystify those around him. Even Rainborough, supposedly the closest to him, admits his ignorance about a matter as simple as his friend's age:

> No one knows Mischa's age. One can hardly even make a guess. It's uncanny. He could be thirty, he could be fifty-five. Have you ever met anyone who knows? I'm sure even Calvin Blick doesn't know. No one knows his age. No one knows where he came from either. Where was he born? What blood is in his veins? No one knows. And if you try to imagine you are paralysed. It's like that thing with his eyes. You can't look

> into his eyes. You have to look at his eyes. Heaven knows what you'd see if you looked in. (p. 38)

This element of secrecy mystifies not only the other characters in the novel but also the reader, particularly as one tries to determine the moral underpinnings of Mischa's motives and action. We do not know, for instance, whether Mischa's intervention to liberate Rosa is selflessly motivated or is induced by a desire to win her himself. This ambivalence about the rescuer's intentions recurs in several other novels. In Murdoch's fifth novel, A Severed Head, Honor Klein, identified with Mischa as a power character, pressures the narrator-protagonist, Martin Lynch-Gibbon, to liberate himself from his illusions about the sexual imbroglio in which he is involved. He consequently faces the complex double-standards of the reality of a wife and a mistress. Honor Klein's help to Martin, however, draws him, intentionally or otherwise, into her sphere of influence; eventually, she wins him. We are left unsure whether Honor's energetic commitment to clear up the mess of Martin's life is an embodiment of Murdoch's concept of other-directed love or an illustration of subtle but self-seeking designs. Likewise, Mischa's motives and actions are shrouded in secrecy and thus left open to varying interpretations.

One effective method that Murdoch uses to shroud Mischa's motives in secrecy is to deny the reader access to his point of view. It is significant to observe that while the novel's thirty chapters contain several passages revealing the interior monologues of seven characters (Annette, Rosa, Rainborough, Peter, Hunter, Nina, and, very briefly, Calvin), all of whom orbit around Mischa, Mischa's mind is inaccessible. Authorial comment is, moreover, conspicuously absent. The lack of definite clues or guidance as to the good or evil intentions behind the manoeuvres of power explains the wide and conflicting range of critical opinions about Mischa. This absence of the power figure's point of view can be, furthermore, witnessed in most of Murdoch's earlier novels: as with Hugo Belfounder in Under the Net, Honor Klein in A Severed Head, and Emma Sands in An Unofficial Rose. In The Sandcastle, for instance, the narrative does not open up the mind of the domineering figure of Nan Mor, and this causes some uncertainty in our minds. Her sudden declaration of support in the banquet scene for her husband's intention to run for parliament--a move that she has stubbornly opposed earlier--can be seen as a sincere shift with her husband's interest at heart or as a mere subtle and selfish ploy to retain her hold over him.

Murdoch's skilful control of point of view heightens, moreover, the novel's suspense and dramatic intensity, and allows for sudden twists that surprise both readers and the characters involved with the power figure.

The secretive Mischa that Murdoch portrays in the novel thus illustrates Canetti's perceptive remarks about the wielders of power:

> Power is impenetrable. The man who has it sees through other men, but does not allow them to see through him. He must be more reticent than anyone; no-one must know his opinions or intentions.[17]

The deliberate restriction of Mischa's point of view lends a further support to the concept of the ethical duality of his nature, and reflects, accordingly, Murdoch's lack of total sympathy for him and the intention to keep the reader emotionally distanced from him.

Another effective method Murdoch employs to show Mischa's penchant for secrecy and intrigue is revealed in the detailed description of Mischa's palatial London house. Mischa buys a block of four houses and makes such drastic alterations to them that the new structure appears awesomely Gothic:

> Within this strange palazzo, so rumour said, the walls and ceilings and stairs had been so much altered, improved and removed that very little remained of the original interiors. By now, it was reported, there were no corridors and no continuous stairways. The rooms, which were covered with thick carpets upon which the master of the house was accustomed to walk barefoot, opened directly out of each other like a set of boxes; and the floors were joined at irregular intervals by staircases, often themselves antiques which had been ripped out of other buildings. (p. 200)

The profusion of the furniture and art objects in the house shows, significantly enough, that the owner suffers from a passion to possess, be it people or things. The description impresses upon the reader the lack of beauty or harmony in the whole setting:

> The more accessible parts of the house were known to be crowded with objets d'art of all kinds alleged to be worth a quarter of a million. This maze of splendours was described by Mischa's foes and acquaintances as 'mad', 'sinister', 'vulgar', or 'childish'. (p. 201)

The words "crowded," "of all kinds," "maze," as well as the four derogatory ones quoted in the passage indicate that Mischa's massive collection does not reflect taste or diversity but a confused conglomeration of objects.

The main room in which Mischa's party takes place is, moreover, covered with tapestries depicting animals in states of struggle, pursuit and enchantment:

> Three of the walls were hung with tapestries which completely covered all the windows. . . . They were profusely covered with leaves and flowers among which ran, flew, crawled, fled, pursued, or idled an extraordinary variety of animals, birds, and insects. No human figures were to be seen. Rainborough

> noticed in a glance a hound loping amiably in pursuit of a rabbit, an astonished encounter of a hawk and a pigeon, and a unicorn holding a conversation with a lion. (p. 202)

These tapestries reflect the morbidity of a mind and a taste that appreciates only those works of art that exclusively express power. The absence of human figures indicates the deprivation of warmth and humanity in Mischa's life. Through the description of such a complexly-structured house, the crowded furniture and the symbolic tapestries, Murdoch thus successfully highlights the intricate and intriguingly mysterious nature of the owner as well as his obsession with power.

Mischa's obsession with power and the focus given to the issue of power in general is best revealed in the patterns of imagery with which The Flight from the Enchanter abounds. The dominant images cluster into four groups: forest, sea, fish and machines. The first two sets of imagery reflect, once more, Murdoch's borrowing from Elias Canetti's Crowds and Power. In this impressive psycho-sociological study, Canetti accumulates detailed observations about the behaviour of the crowds in various cultures, societies and historical periods, and connects them with the dynamics of power. In her laudatory review of Canetti's book, Murdoch maintains:

> Canetti has done what philosophers ought to do: he has provided us with new concepts. He has also shown, in ways which seem to me entirely fresh, the interaction of 'the mythical' with the ordinary stuff of human life. The mythical is not something 'extra'; we live in myth and symbol all the time.[18]

Murdoch further comments that Canetti "speaks of power as fundamental to human nature and analyses power with dominantly 'political' imagery. . . ."[19] One such political image that Murdoch cites is the forest: "The German national symbol is the forest, which means also the army."[20] Canetti sees the forest in its "multiple immovability" as "the symbol of the army, an army which has taken up a position, which does not flee in any circumstances."[21] Correspondingly, in the novel, one notices that the references to the forest suggest an awe-inspiring quality. Nina and Rosa, whenever they become overwhelmed by forces greater than themselves, feel as if they are lost in a forest. In her dream, the frightened Nina sees herself "running through a dark wood" (p. 149). Shortly before her suicide, she is described as turning "round through a haze," stumbling "about in a forest of unfinished dresses" (p. 288). Nina's tragedy as a refugee displaced by war has been caused by the army, and this has led her to her present situation where "the frontiers of her childhood . . . no longer [exist] in the world" (p. 289); finally, it is her phobia of "uniformed men" (dressed perhaps as soldiers) which pushes her towards death. Rosa is, likewise, frightened by the forest. She refers to it during her meeting with Mischa to discuss her problem with the Lusiewicz brothers: she tells him that she is "lost in a forest." The two then argue whether Rosa, by seeking his help, has "come to the woodcutter's house," or "to the enchanter's house" (p. 262). The forest is accordingly shown to represent fear or bewilderment to both Nina and Rosa at their moments of acute weakness and vulnerability; it symbolizes a terrifying power that mystifies and overwhelms its victims. Conversely, the forest neither frightens Mischa, nor does he imagine himself lost _in_ it; when we first meet him at Nina's flat, the confident hero is referred to as "a man on the edge of a forest" (p. 86).

Similar to the forest, the sea symbolizes mysterious and overwhelming forces. It is, moreover, identified in this novel with Mischa's vast and pervasive power. According to Canetti, the sea is "all embracing," "multiple," "dense and cohesive"; it also has an element of mystery lying

> . . . in what it contains and covers. The life with which it teems is as much part of it as its enduring openness. Its sublimity is enhanced by the thought of what it contains, the multitudes of plants and animals hidden within it.[22]

All these qualities can be easily applied to Mischa, who on two significant occasions in the novel is associated with the sea. His influence covers all the characters and penetrates various layers of society. Like that of the sea, his mystery excites all kinds of speculations and his legendary power puzzles even Peter Saward, the specialist in gods, kings and empires, who reflects:

> Mischa was a problem which, he felt, he would never solve--and this although he had got perhaps more data for its solution than any other living being. Yet it seemed that the more Mischa indulged his impulse to reveal himself in these unexpected ways to Peter, the more puzzling he seemed to become. (pp. 223-24)

The first occasion on which Mischa is identified with the sea occurs after the break-up of his party when he, accompanied by Annette, drives at full speed toward the sea. Near the shore, Mischa performs a ritual of sorts, as if communicating with the sea:

> He was staring at the waves like a man cornered by a strange animal. Terror and fascination were upon his brow. When Annette saw him she was yet more afraid. He was breathing hard and every now and then his mouth moved as if he were saying something the sound of which was lost in the roar of the sea. Already the water was covering his shoes. Then he bent down, plunged his hand into the foam at his feet, and put his fingers to his lips. He licked his lips, tasting the brine. (pp. 217-18)

Repeatedly referred to as a fish, Annette, after failing to seduce him, takes a plunge into the sea and is almost drowned; her act symbolizes the desire to delve into Mischa's world.

The second occasion on which Mischa is identified with the sea is when Rosa sees him for the last time toward the end of the novel. Through the binoculars, she sees him sitting alone by the sea, as if performing a prayer ritual:

> She moved the glasses slowly along. Then suddenly there was Mischa. He was sitting on the sand, barefoot, with his trousers rolled up to the knee, and the soles of his feet touching each other like a pair of praying hands. He was looking towards the horizon. The shock of seeing him was so great that Rosa lowered the glasses at once. When she lifted them and found him again he had got up and was standing with his feet in the sea. He stooped down and picked up something which seemed to be a starfish, and after looking at it, threw it far out into the water. Then he turned about and looked straight into Rosa's eyes. She flinched and handed the glasses back to Calvin. She could not believe that Mischa could not see her face and soul. For an instant, but only for an instant, she believed that he knew and intended all. (p. 307)

The passage moves from Mischa's appearance to his action and finally to his psychological penetration. In his posture, he looks like an Oriental god, and by granting life to the starfish behaves as such. This forcefully causes others to perceive and fear him as an omniscient and omnipotent god. Suddenly and surprisingly, that same god becomes merely "a tiny figure far below agitating its hands" (p. 280). The purpose of this abrupt shift in the narrative focus is to create an impression of the fading away of Mischa in his last appearance in the novel as Rosa leaves his Italian villa after having rejected his renewed offer of marriage. As well, this passage could indicate that power over others is power only when the individual's vision allows it to be. Initially, Rosa also falls prey to Mischa's power; at the end of the novel, she has, in a sense, rebelled against his magic. Her "flight from the enchanter" is a symbolic act of freedom, illustrated by her new vision. At first, through the binoculars (as in previous passages of the novel), Rosa's vision distorts

Mischa into a large, all-powerful god. Through her rebellion and flight, she sees him in a more realistic perspective, as a small and distant human being. Moreover, Murdoch's use of the sea imagery is meant to enhance the feeling of his loneliness; like all the other power figures in Murdoch's novels, Mischa is unable to interact with people without trying to impose his predatory will on them. A lonely figure by the sea is Murdoch's apt conception of a man who does not accept others as they are but rather sees all creatures as desperate for his protection, as he tells Peter: "Do you ever feel . . . as if everything in the world needs your--protection? It is a terrible feeling. Everything--even this matchbox" (p. 226).

Mischa applies, significantly enough, this presumptuous attitude particularly to women. His patronizing stance betokens a failure to achieve any close and balanced relationship with women. Mischa's view of women thus signifies an integral part of his overall concern with struggle: "You must tire a woman out," he declares, "even if it takes years. Then you will see what she is" (p. 143). It is important to observe here that all Murdoch's power figures see their contact with the opposite sex as nothing more than "a master-slave relationship." This phenomenon highlights and tightly connects sexuality with power--an issue that becomes progressively more focused in The Unicorn and The Time of the Angels. In his self-styled theory about women, Mischa's morbidity and confusion are revealed: "Has it ever struck you that women are like fish?" he tells Rainborough. "The female equivalent of Pan is the sleek mermaid. Their bodies are streamlined. They are proud of this, not ashamed as the psychologists say. A real woman is proud of this" (pp. 143-44). If Mischa is the sea, he may then deem it appropriate to contain all the fish-women within his sphere of influence.

Mischa's reference to women as fish represents one instance out of several involving fish imagery. Like Mischa, Rainborough sees the process of "becoming intimate with a woman" like "hunting fish with an underwater gun . . . . At one moment there is the fish--graceful, mysterious, desirable and free--and the next moment there is nothing but struggling and blood and confusion" (pp. 135-36). The woman that is particularly identified with fish is Annette: Rosa tells her, "You are like a little fish. You are completely smooth. You should have been a mermaid" (p. 68). Annette quits her school whose snobbish system she finds too confining and decides to learn directly from the "School of Life." Experiencing life entails, however, running the risk of encountering the ruthless Lusiewicz brothers or the cynic, Calvin Blick. Annette symbolizes freedom, youth and innocence, and her identification with fish is therefore quite apt since the fish represents "the natural forces man tries to capture, possess, construct."[23] At Mischa's grand party, Annette dresses, appropriately enough, like a fish: "She was wearing a sea-green three-quarter-length evening dress, extremely _décollettée_" (p. 203). The sea-green colour is reflected in "the large round bowl of green glass" (p. 202) in which the tropical fish are kept. Concentrating on the fish, Annette is shown feeling an affinity with them; this affinity explains partly why she attacks Rosa when the latter smashes the fishbowl with the paperweight. The fish here become the victims of Rosa's attempt to divert attention when Calvin shows to Rainborough her compromising picture in the arms of the Lusiewicz brothers.

The fish incident is the novel's central event, occurring in Chapter Fifteen, the "compendium of the themes and plot strands of the novel."[24] The significance of the incident lies not only in dramatizing Rosa's insecurity and moral limitation but also in demonstrating the power figure's omnipotence when engineering a single event, the party, whereby he can at once impress, enchant or control several people simultaneously. In a comment on the same incident, James Gindin makes the following confusing remark:

> The fish cannot survive. Once imprisoned the fish cannot survive liberation, as many of the people in the novel, once enchanted, can break away only by enormous suffering. Possession does not, however, always involve death, and enchantment is not always that decisive.[25]

It is difficult to see how Gindin sees the smashing of the bowl, leading to the fish's desperate gasping for life and to their eventual death, as an act of liberation. The fish only live in water, and depriving them of it means arbitrarily sentencing them to death. Their death cannot, moreover, be identified with a conscious and predetermined act such as undoing an enchanter's spell; the fish's so-called liberation is just an accidental act imposed on them without any consideration of their desires or interests. The real significance of the incident relates to the moral vision expressed in the book: people, when so much absorbed in their solipsistic concerns, destroy, deliberately or unconsciously, other beings. When Rosa hurls the paperweight, her sole concern is to save her name. The fish's death foreshadows, furthermore, Nina's death; both, the fish and Nina, are mere "incidental casualties" (p. 306) of Mischa's games of power. The fish thus not only function as symbols of innocence but contribute as well to the novel's overall concern with power.

Likewise, the machines contribute by serving as a significant image of power; they represent ruthless and insane powers that play havoc with man's destiny. The machine on which the socialist-oriented Rosa works is ironically named Kitty. Kitty stands as a symbol for the giant industrial machinery that oppresses and alienates the workers; it looks "like a contorted curling many-limbed creature with a tiny circular head, low down on the farther side, which spun madly round and round," making a

> . . . deafening chaos of sounds [out of which] Rosa was never able to draw any harmonious or repetitive pattern, although she felt sure that it was there, and that if only she could remember long enough and listen in the right way she would find out what it was. But it never emerged and the only result of this entertainment was that she began to make mistakes with Kitty. (p. 44)

By dramatizing Rosa's experience as a factory worker, Murdoch illustrates the contention of her essay "A House of Theory" that

> the Socialist movement should most explicitly bring back into the center of its thinking its original great source of inspiration and reflection, the problem of labor: the problem, that is, of the transformation of labor from something senseless which forms no real part of the personality of the laborer into something creative and significant.[26]

It is worth observing here that the portrayal of Rosa's experience with the machine represents one of those rare occasions in which Murdoch handles a contemporary social problem. Secondary as it is to the novel's central concern with the power figure's manoeuvres, the treatment of the worker's disenchantment with machines seems, paradoxically enough, the furthest Murdoch would go here in handling an issue that she herself urges to be examined and analyzed. The machine that oppresses Rosa is, however, the same one that the Lusiewicz brothers show "a remarkable aptitude with" (p. 46). Their promotion from ordinary workers to engineers--a change from being the machine's victims to becoming its masters--is equalled by their transformation from Rosa's protégés to her masters: "The power had left her now. The mastery had passed to the brothers. They were as gentle and as respectful as ever--but their eyes were the eyes of conquerors" (p. 60). As A. S. Byatt suggests, the machine's dehumanizing effect brings into focus the overall crisis, personal as well as social, that Rosa undergoes:

> Rosa, aware of the faults of the Welfare State diagnosed in 'Against Dryness', aware that modern liberalism is not enough, although descended from a family of battling reformers and suffragettes, has retreated into a kind of stultified identification with the oppressed and is operating a mindless machine in a factory. She is floating and unrelated.[27]

In addition to Kitty, the novel abounds with other machines: Agnes Casement's M.G. is her tool to enslave the feeble Rainborough; it takes a more powerful machine such as Marcia's Mercedes to undo the previous spell. Calvin's expensive camera, whose lens, he tells the bedevilled Hunter, "is the truthful eye that sees and remembers," serves as an instrument for blackmail. The airplane that he takes arrives at Mischa's villa in Italy ahead of Rosa's train; it is a tool superior to that of Rosa--a tool that only the power figure knows how to exploit fully for his purposes. The telephone boxes that Rosa sees along the road look to her as if they are instruments for the deification of Mischa: "They stretched before her like monoliths that mark the way to a temple; and in each one of them a picture of Mischa was hanging up" (p. 292). Being overwhelmed by Mischa's remote control over her, Rosa finds herself taking part in a ritual of Mischa's glorification: "She lifted the telephone as one might light a candle in a church without belief, and yet obeying the need for a ritual" (p. 293).

The most effective machine in the novel, however, is Nina's sewing machine. As a seamstress, Nina uses the machine that Mischa bought her. As she becomes more and more conscious of his domination of her life, the machine changes from a means of gaining her livelihood to a monumental instrument of torture, ravenously trying to devour her: "The machine was looking more and more like some animal through whose rapacious mouth Nina was drawing the cotton" (p. 148). In her nightmare, when Nina sees herself running through a dark forest, the machine is running beside her:

> . . . she could see its steel eye glistening in the darkness from time to time. As she ran, Nina was still pulling the cotton material towards her through the jaws of the machine. The creature kept opening and closing its mouth as it ran, emitting a high-pitched whining sound, and Nina was just able to pull the cotton through; but she was all the time in fear lest it should suddenly close its jaws fast. (p. 149)

The nightmare reaches its peak when the machine devours the world map, which represents Nina's hope of finding refuge somewhere away from Mischa's domination:

> As she turned she fell and the cotton suddenly billowed out, rising above her like a sail and descending to whirl itself round and round her limbs like a winding-sheet. Before it enveloped her she saw its pattern clearly at last; it was a map of all the countries of the world. At the same moment the creature began to savage the material, tearing it with its jaws, and then it sprang on top of Nina. She could feel its heavy paws upon her chest, and a deafening and continuous barking. (p. 149)

The sewing machine, owned by Mischa, symbolizes his power and Nina's slavery; it thus develops into an instrument for destroying her hopes of a free life.

Although the images of forest, sea, fish and machines may seem to function locally or ornamentally, they nevertheless contribute elaborately and cumulatively to the cohesiveness of a novel that deals ambitiously with a relatively large cast and a diversity of themes. The imagery, more specifically, highlights the novel's overriding concern with the issue of power: it imparts feelings of fear or pursuit or enslavement. The images borrowed from Canetti particularly invoke an all-engulfing quality that symbolizes overwhelming powers. The tight and close connection between the cluster of images and the novel's major theme to which they relate thus endows the various images with an overall pattern. The novel's central image, Mischa's eyes, embodies very specifically Murdoch's design of the dual personality of her power figure.

The duality of Mischa's character is, moreover, shown through the plot, point of view, and explicit statements, of which the most significant is the one made by the novel's scholar, Peter Saward, who observes "how strangely close to each other in this man lay the springs of cruelty and of pity" (p. 225). This blend of pity and cruelty in Mischa, when overlooked, causes a confusion of conflicting critical opinions about the novel to the degree that some find no real meaning in it, while others see it as "a retreat philosophically . . . an argument without a conclusion, or rather an analytic exercise."[28] We need, however, to remember that while Murdoch portrays Mischa as an open-ended problem, she does not sanction all his practices. She cannot condone predatory attitudes that run counter to her liberal-democratic ideals and certainly rejects the domination of one individual over another. The open-ended moral problem that the power figure represents in this novel continues, however, to dominate several subsequent works. In The Unicorn, Murdoch further develops her central concern with the issue of power and dramatizes the duality of good and evil once again, this time in a more focused and complex fashion through the character of Hannah Crean-Smith.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNICORN

As Mischa Fox in The Flight from the Enchanter is shown to be a blend of pity and cruelty, Hannah Crean-Smith, the power figure of The Unicorn, is portrayed as an antithetical mixture of spirituality and sexuality. This unreconciled duality in her character is embodied in an either/or formula: she may be "a beautiful unicorn . . . the image of Christ," or "she may be just a sort of an enchantress, a Circe, a spiritual Penelope keeping her suitors spellbound and enslaved."[1] Hannah's spiritual aspect identifies her with self-denial, love and perhaps martyrdom; her sexual aspect, on the other hand, identifies her with self-involvement, manipulation and murder. The novel marks as well a significant shift in Murdoch's vision of power, whereby she delves into the darker and more serious side of the issue; this is reflected in the violence that permeates the novel, concluding with two murders and two suicides. The shift in vision can also be related to the adoption of certain features of the Gothic romance such as an intractable landscape, a cloak-and-dagger plot, sexual feudalism and an incarcerated beauty in a castle perilous.

In his essay, "The Novels of Iris Murdoch," George Whiteside points out that ". . . unlike other Murdoch characters with charisma, Hannah enjoys it. She becomes enchanted with her own charisma and no longer wants to get away." Whiteside further adds,

> Under the Net, A Severed Head, and The Flight from the Enchanter did not end tragically because Hugo, Honor, and Mischa did not love their charismatic roles. Hannah's embracing her role ensures a tragic ending because it leaves no one, at the end, to break the spell.[2]

The difference between Hannah and the power figures of Murdoch's earlier novels runs deeper than Whiteside suggests. Although all the power figures in Murdoch's novels display an uncanny element of charm or magic that endows them with the capacity to captivate those around them, their charisma in the novels preceding The Unicorn can nevertheless be related to specific palpable characteristics that have their roots in the real discernible world. Despite "the attribution to her of nearly supernatural powers by her willing victims,"[3] Emma Sands's domination in An Unofficial Rose, for instance, is based primarily on her subtlety, intelligence and success as a writer of detective novels, and her able plotting of schemes such as the romantic affair between her secretary, Lindsay Rimmer, and the son of her ex-lover, Randall Peronett. In the novels prior to The Unicorn, characters such as Hugo Belfounder in Under the Net, or Mischa Fox in The Flight from the Enchanter, or Honor Klein ~~in~~ A Severed Head, acquire and wield power as an integral part of their personalities, separate from the recognition of others. Hannah's power, on the other hand, is imaginary, rooted in the minds of her admirers:

> Like Keats's Lamia, Hannah survives only so long as she can depend on the romantic imaginations of her audience to infuse and project meaning into an essentially empty and passive object; she dies when their faith in her wanes along with their existence as mirror images of her reality.[4]

Hannah's power, moreover, operates on the semblance of not having or wanting any power; as Max Lejour, the novel's philosopher, puts it, "to be powerless, to be a complete victim, may be another source of power"

(p. 116). The power figures in the earlier novels are shown as active; they initiate action and calculate the consequences in order to achieve a specific purpose. Hannah, conversely, is portrayed as passive; as a victim, she is acted on rather than acting, and when she does make a move she becomes either murderous (killing her jailor, Gerald Scottow) or self-annihilating (drowning herself). Unlike the other power figures who either represent the material and secular world or function conveniently in it, Hannah exhibits in her personality a religious or mystical dimension; hers may be seen, paradoxically enough, as the power of the saint or mystic who patiently and heroically renounces the self in order to approach God.

Hannah's saintly image is initiated by a seven-year imprisonment inside Gaze Castle, imposed on her as a punishment for an adulterous affair with her neighbour, Pip Lejour, and the maiming of her husband Peter Crean-Smith; by accepting suffering as an expiation of guilt, she gives her incarceration a spiritual meaning. In several of her conversations with Marian Taylor, the instructress hired to keep her company, Hannah shows a preoccupation with spiritual love; she says, "I think . . . that one ought to cry out for love, to ask for it. It's odd how afraid people are of the word. Yet we all need love. Even God needs love. I suppose that's why He created us" (p. 63). What further enhances the saintly image is that the characters around her seem readily susceptible to recognizing and approaching her as a spiritual figure. This image or myth of the beautiful priestess represents the genesis of Hannah's power over others and creates for her an audience, a circle of devotees who gather around her at evening whisky parties. A. S. Byatt sees, however, Hannah's suffering "not as a 'real' religious act but as an obsessional neurotic fantasy,"[5] of the kind described in Freud's Totem and Taboo; she, moreover, observes:

> It is not certain whether the myth has been woven by the others in spite of Hannah, or by Hannah in conjunction with, or even partially in spite of, the others and because of her own needs . . . .[6]

In order to undercut the myth surrounding Hannah's personality, Murdoch presents Marian's interpretation of her resort to religion as an instance of making virtue out of necessity: she tells Effingham Cooper, one of Hannah's devotees, that "Hannah took to religion, or the spiritual life or whatever the hell it is, like someone taking to a drug. She had to" (p. 139). The saintliness that the admirers fabricate for Hannah thus becomes another form of imprisonment for her, similar to the confining image the religious community in The Bell tailors for Catherine Fawley.

According to A. S. Byatt, the fantasy relating to Hannah's saintliness is manufactured

> by the need of the other characters for drama, for meaning, for 'a story'. And this fantasy is destroying a real and valuable freedom in the other characters, the freedom to live and act in the real world, amongst 'real messy individuals', the freedom from romantic necessity, which in the case of Randall in An Unofficial Rose we saw to be a dangerous value . . . .[7]

Through the characters surrounding Hannah, Murdoch dramatizes the human tendency to project inner desires to an outside object or person. This projection impedes Hannah's admirers from seeing her as real; as Max Lejour tells Effingham: "She is our image of the significance of suffering. But we must also see her as real. And that will make us suffer too" (p. 106). In other words, Hannah's admirers find in her a convenient object for their illusions. No one describes the situation better than Hannah herself, who tells the bedevilled Marian:

> Do you know what part I have been playing? That of God. And do you know what I have been really? Nothing, a legend . . . . You have made me unreal by thinking about me so much. You made me into an object of contemplation. (p. 258)

Murdoch presents, significantly enough, only one lone character who does not turn Hannah into "an object of contemplation": Denis Nolan, the clerk of Gaze Castle; he is shown to be Hannah's dedicated and selfless devotee, who alone tries to defend her by physically attacking the powerful Gerald. In his characterization, Denis embodies Murdoch's idea of the good man as ". . . the lover who, nothing himself, lets other things be through him."[8] Although the two establishments of Gaze Castle and Riders look down upon him as socially inferior, he retains a dignified aloofness and a solidity that matches Max Lejour's. The reader furthermore finds in Denis's various altruistic actions a welcome and reassuring contrast to the ferocious and self-seeking environment of Gaze Castle. The real significance of Denis in the novel, however, is that he represents Murdoch's conception of genuine self-abnegation, and, as such, may serve as a background for evaluating Hannah's spirituality. Hannah's suffering proves rewarding by endowing her with power and making her the focus for all those around her; as she tells Marian: "It was your belief in the significance of my suffering that kept me going . . . . I lived by your belief in my suffering. But I had no real suffering" (pp. 258-59). On the other hand, Denis, who believes in Hannah's goodness and acts with total renunciation of personal interest, regards suffering as valuable and as an integral part of religious exercise. "Suffering," he says, "is no scandal. It is natural. Nature appoints it. All creation suffers. It suffers from having been created, if from nothing else. It suffers from being divided from God" (p. 235). His religious acts and beliefs thus come across to the reader as more authentic than Hannah's. While Hannah's spirituality leads, consciously or otherwise, to the exercise of power over others, and hence the connection with the gallery of other power figures in Murdoch's novels, that of Denis rejects power and its concomitant practices of manipulation and enslavement. He illustrates, accordingly, Murdoch's idea that selfless other-directed love is the opposite of power.

Denis's genuine spirituality is manifested mainly through his care for animals, especially the fish, and his identification with light imagery. As A. S. Byatt comments, the hunt in this novel "is very real, where the hunt in The Flight from the Enchanter was largely in the imagery," and that Denis's protection of animals reflects "an uncorrupted version of Mischa's concern for all life . . . ."[9] In contrast with Gerald's and Pip's bloody hunts, Denis tries his best to save the animals, and it is noticeable that Denis is shown to be connected in one way or another with every single animal in the novel; as Frank Baldanza observes, "like many a D. H. Lawrence primitive, Denis is especially good in intuitive empathetic identification with various fauna . . . ."[10]

Apart from their reflection on Denis's personality, the animals are used for various other purposes. The bat that Hannah is concerned about dies; its death foreshadows hers. Tadg, "another of Miss Murdoch's golden life-force dogs,"[11] represents innocence and loyalty: his attachment to Denis parallels the latter's to Hannah, and it is fitting that Tadg and Denis are reunited in the end as if to compensate for his loss of Hannah. The wild donkey that Denis uses to save Effingham's life serves as a plot device for one of the novel's major episodes.

The most significant animals in the novel, however, are the unicorn of the title and the fish. While Effingham intimates that Hannah is identified as "a legendary creature, a beautiful unicorn," Max responds, "the unicorn is . . . the image of Christ. But we have to do with an ordinary guilty person" (p. 115). According to J. C. Cooper, the unicorn traditionally represents "chastity; purity; virginity; perfect goodness; virtue and strength of mind and body; incorruptibility. Having the two horns joined in one symbolizes the union of opposites and undivided sovereign power."[12] These attributes can be easily matched in Hannah: she is portrayed as pure and virginal (in the sense that she has abandoned sex for seven years), wields power (stemming from spiritual and sexual charisma as well as from her feudal status), and combines opposite elements in her personality as at once guilty and innocent, saint and demon, victim and vampire, adulterous and virginal. In Christian mythology, the unicorn represents "Christ, the 'horn of salvation,' the horn as an antidote to poison symbolizes Christ's power of destroying sin . . . ."[13] Within the latter context we could understand Hannah's resort to violence: she destroys sin, epitomized in Gerald, with Pip's double barrelled shotgun, before committing suicide. Murder and suicide are, paradoxically enough, condemned in the Christian faith; hence Max's commentary which suggests the duality in Hannah's personality as an "image of Christ," and "an ordinary guilty person."

Furthermore, Marian, whose name is a derivation of that of Christ's mother, can also be included in the unicorn metaphor:

> The bestiaries tell us that the unicorn can be trapped only by a virgin girl used as a lure. And they liken Mary, mother of Jesus, to this virgin because she is the medium through which perfect divinity enters the sinful world of flesh. Our Maid Marian is the virgin lure. Through her intercession Hannah has been entrapped in a new web of circumstance which will result

> in her undertaking a renewed burden of sin and guilt. Maid Marian herself is destined to stain her immaculate innocence in the pattern of events she has entered.[14]

The unicorn-virgin formula that we witness in this novel is a further development of Mischa Fox's unicorn pseudo-theory in The Flight from the Enchanter. Mischa, having primarily Annette in mind, claims that the virgin's naiveté leads her to the dragon to be eaten up. Marian, who can be viewed as a grown-up Annette, assumes that she can solve Hannah's problem by simply "making her see how lovely it is to be 'free'."[15] At one stage of the narrative, Marian even contemplates enlisting Gerald, the novel's dragon, to help her kidnap Hannah; "Such a girl," says Mischa,

> may be virgin in soul even after much experience and still believe in the legend of virginity. This is what leads her to the dragon, imagining that she will be protected . . . . the poor dragon has to eat her up . . . and that's how dragons get a bad name. (Flight, p. 142)

Like the unicorn, the fish and salmon in this novel can be identified with spirituality. The connection between the fish, in their innocence, beauty and bravery, on the one hand, and spirituality on the other is suggested by Hannah's statement to Marian: "Have you ever seen salmon leaping? It's a most moving sight. They spring out of the water and struggle up the rocks. Such fantastic bravery to enter another element like that. Like souls approaching God" (p. 51). According to A. S. Byatt, the salmon function as a symbol of purity and goodness that quietly defies the destructive elements:

> At the beginning of the novel Scottow tells Marian that the salmon have left after the great storm; 'now the moor is just another piece of bog and even the salmon have gone away'. So when Hannah tells Marian 'They've come back. Only don't tell Mr. Scottow,' there is already a sense of some secret good life going on, out of the eye of the wielder of power and violence, which reinforces Hannah's image for the leaping salmon.[16]

Byatt further notes: "The salmon here have to be seen in the context of the wider fishing and hunting imagery of the book, which recalls strongly the dominant image of The Flight from the Enchanter."[17]

Apart from Denis's close involvement with the novel's animals, he is as well identified with light imagery. As in The Flight from the Enchanter, light and darkness assume their traditional symbolic significance in this novel: while light is related to spirituality, darkness represents violence and power. Gaze Castle, a mansion without electricity and the scene of some gruesome events, is shrouded for most of the time in darkness, particularly in Hannah's room. As the name implies, the inhabitants of Gaze Castle do not see each other as 'real' but are lost in illusory gazing; Hannah describes how the people around her view her: ". . . 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" (p. 258). By skillfully modulating the shift between light and darkness, Murdoch conveys her moral meaning. Darkness usually prevails in the particular scenes where the destructive powers are winning: it is in darkness that Gerald violates Hannah, and it is in absolute darkness that Marian mistakenly lets Hannah out of her room. On the other hand, a character like Denis Nolan, whose major preoccupation is love, not power, is appropriately identified with light. This identification occurs on two crucial occasions in the novel. The first takes place when Marian, in the dark garden where the moon is "quenched in cloud," sees "a small light moving in the darkness." Then "the light suddenly darted at her and she stopped in her tracks, seeing her feet, her dress, abruptly illumined" (p. 66). On this occasion, Denis, holding the light, tells Marian that Gaze Castle is but a prison where Hannah is confined. The second occasion is when Denis comes to the rescue of Effingham. Sinking into the dark bog waiting for a slow death, Effingham transcends, for once, his self-centredness by the dawning metaphysical revelation about the transience of man's existence:

> Since he was mortal he was nothing and since he was nothing all that was not himself was filled to the brim with being and it was from this that the light streamed. This then was love, to look and look until one exists no more, this was the love which was the same as death. He looked, and knew with a clarity which was one with the increasing light, that with the death of the self the world becomes quite automatically the object of a perfect love. (p. 198)

From among all the characters in The Unicorn, it is Denis who comes closest to seeing anything outside himself as "the object of a perfect love." No wonder, then, that as Denis gets nearer to Effingham the light literally and symbolically increases: "Effingham continued to call. The light increased, still within darkness, but he was able now to apprehend his own form, to see his arms dimly, to be aware of space about him" (p. 199). As Effingham realizes that Denis has come to his rescue, the word "Denis" becomes "the happiest sound he had ever uttered in his life," and "the darkness had become a light brownish-bluish haze" (p. 199). While Denis is "about thirty yards, the light increased," and as he is preparing to pull Effingham, "the dawn light now showed the flat unfeatured land all around" (p. 200). Finally, Effingham is saved: "At last under his groping hand he felt a firmer surface and in a moment was sitting on the path. The sky was a cloudy blue and the sun was rising" (p. 201).

One aspect of the light imagery in the novel is reflected in the choice of names. Blackport is the village whose pubs do not cater to women; Greytown is the nearest station to Gaze Castle. Both names, which emphasize the lack of clarity in vision for the inhabitants in the area, reinforce the dominant dark tones. Lejour, conversely, is the name of the philosopher whose commentaries shed some light on the events and characters; as Robert Scholes observes,

> Max seems obviously designed to help us, for unlike Denis, he is not involved in these events. And if we distrust the simple theology of Denis, we hope for more from the philosophy of Max. From a philosopher named Lejour, surely we are entitled to expect light. And Max provides some: the best and clearest we get in working our way through this dark conceit.[18]

The significance of Max's introduction into the novel lies, as with Peter Saward in The Flight from the Enchanter, in his closeness to Murdoch's point of view; as a philosopher representing "ancient wisdom" and "classical Platonism,"[19] he can be an apt spokesman for Murdoch.[20] No wonder then that the novel's central statement is uttered by Max, who interprets Hannah's suffering in the light of the power concept of Até: "Recall," he tells his ex-student, Effingham,

> the idea of Até which was so real to the Greeks. Até is the name of the almost automatic transfer of suffering from one being to another. Power is a form of Até. The victims of power, and any power has its victims, are themselves infected. They have then to pass it on, to use power on others. This is evil, and the crude image of the all-powerful God is sacrilege. Good is not exactly powerless. For to be powerless, to be a complete victim, may be another source of power. But Good is non-powerful. And it is in the good that Até is finally quenched, when it encounters a pure being who only suffers and does not attempt to pass the suffering on." (p. 116)

This statement is significant as a theoretical base for the study of Hannah. As a carefully developed argument, it points to the core of Hannah's problem: that is, since she is not a Christ-like figure, it is to be expected from her to pass her suffering, through power, on to others. Max, in some respects, is shown to have great affinity with her;

as Byatt argues:

> In obvious ways Max is a parallel to Hannah; a different kind of enclosed contemplative. It has always seemed to me likely that the scholar--particularly perhaps the philosopher, who is . . . concerned with 'the central knot of being', with 'ultimate things', should be troubled by the problem of the half-contemplative.[21]

When Hannah bequeaths her entire property to Max, this indicates a recognition on her part of "a profound spiritual kinship in his quietistic contemplation of her spiritual vocation."[22] According to Robert Scholes, Max is Hannah's heir, just "as philosophy is the heir of theology."[23]

The affinity between Hannah and Max, however, assumes a greater significance than this mere allegorical chronology. Hannah's spirituality, in its unadulterated essence, bears many similarities to Max's intellectuality; both represent a special form of power. Spiritual and intellectual powers are not geared towards imposition on others. Both assert authority by sheer existence and usually take the form of teacher-student, guru-devotee, or younger-older relationships. Rejecting manipulation, coercion, or enslavement, intellectual and spiritual power figures in Murdoch's novels generally base their authority solely on the willingness and voluntary choice of the follower. In almost every novel, Murdoch presents a character who often plays the role of a sage or scholar or mystic, who utters the novel's abstract message. In this respect, Max and, to a certain extent, Hannah are the fictional descendents of a series of spiritual and intellectual power figures such as Hugo in Under the Net, Peter Saward in The Flight from the Enchanter, Bledyard in The Sandcastle, and the Abbess in The Bell.

As a manifestation of Max's intellectual power, the novel reveals how his former student, Effingham Cooper, gravitates towards him.

Effingham keeps coming back to his tutor, even though he is now a successful bureaucrat who regards himself as "the person with the most power, the only person who could really act" (p. 74). Though old, tired and confined to the writing of a book on Plato, Max exhibits considerable charm that fascinates his former student:

> Max Lejour had been a great power in his life. . . . He had taken Max without question as a great sage; and when he could himself still pass as a youth he had quite simply adored the older man. Later when, as men, they had inhabited the same world, Effingham had sometimes found himself feeling afraid of Max; it was not malice or even criticism that he feared, but simply the inadvertent extinction of his own personality by that proximity. Sometimes for a while he had avoided his former tutor; but always came back. (p. 83)

Although Max's formal role is simply to edify or tutor Effingham, the charisma he exercises suggests to the reader several lines of interpretation for the events in the novel. As Robert Scholes observes, Max's comments are essential to our understanding of the n[illegible] though not necessarily conclusive:

> Effingham returns to Riders . . . dreading Max's Socratic interrogation. But we, the readers, look forward to it. The mysteriousness of things has been getting intolerable, and we are anxious for more light . . . . But Effingham is a man of intelligence too, and his perceptions undercut some of Max's. Moreover, Max himself declares "I wish I understood more." Final answers are not going to be provided in this book.[24]

Balancing Max's intellectual power in this novel is the physical power to which Gerald resorts as a means of establishing a reign of terror. Unlike spiritual or intellectual power, physical power involves the use of naked force or coercion or any other means of instilling fear. According to Elias Canetti, "power in its lower and cruder manifestations is always better described as force; it is by force, for example, that prey is seized and carried to the mouth."[25] He further elaborates on the subtle distinction between power and force:

> When force gives itself time in which to operate it becomes power, but when the moment of crisis arrives, the moment of irrevocable decision, it reverts to being pure force. Power is more general and operates over a wider space than force; it includes much more, but is less dynamic. It is more ceremonious and even has a certain measure of patience.[26]

Canetti's comments can thus define the basic differences between the dynamics of Mischa's and Hannah's power on the one hand and the direct compelling actions of Calvin and Gerald on the other. In the way he is shown to wield his physical power, Gerald represents a fictional descendent of Calvin. Both are feared and hated by others, and do not hesitate to use naked force: Calvin beats Hunter; Gerald beats Denis, whips Jamesie, and throws Pip Lejour out of Gaze Castle. Both make efficient use of machines to serve their schemes: Calvin uses his camera for blackmailing, aeroplanes to travel faster than others; Gerald drives to the station just in time to give the desperate Marian a ride, and often takes aeroplanes to make quick and surreptitious trips abroad. Both are slaves who receive orders from a master: Calvin from Mischa Fox, Gerald from Peter Crean-Smith. However, Gerald, unlike Calvin whose identity is totally crushed by Mischa, excels in power tactics. He eventually becomes a master and assumes full authority: at the peak of his triumph he seduces Hannah; Denis comments, "Gerald is Peter now. He has Peter's place, he is possessed by Peter, he even looks like Peter. He is no longer what keeps Peter away from her. Nothing keeps him off her now" (p. 269). If Calvin's wielding of physical power is shown to be restrained and at times even funny, Gerald's is serious and murderous. Physically strong and awesome, Gerald imparts fear, even when he does not intend it; as soon as he enters the station, where Marian has already arrived, the group of local people to whom she is talking disappear altogether, and the reader's initial impression about Gerald is accordingly derived from this incident. Marian's first impression of him is, interestingly enough, favourable; she admires his good looks and observes his physical strength: "He was a big handsome man with a smooth, fresh-complexioned, powerful face and something of the mien of a soldier" (p. 15). She finds him pleasant and courteous, and at one point even contemplates taking him as a lover. Later, however, when she realizes that he is Hannah's master jailor, she begins to see his potential danger and fears he might whip her into submission. Gerald's outlook towards life is articulated in a statement he makes to Marian: "Happiness," he asserts, "is a weak and paltry thing and perhaps 'freedom' has no meaning. There are great patterns in which we are all involved, and destinies which belong to us and which we love even in the moment when they destroy us" (p. 177). Like a typical tyrant, Gerald sanctions aggression by putting it in the guise of a supreme pattern to which the victim has no choice but to submit. Gerald's statement may illustrate that "the world of Gaze is a place where order, system, and meaning all exist because they are imposed from without";[27] its advocacy, however, for the annihilation of the individual's will clearly runs counter to Murdoch's liberal ideology.

Gerald's physical power manifests itself pointedly in sexual domination over his victims; he enslaves sexually those he conquers physically. The following conversation between Marian and Denis demonstrates this phenomenon:

> 'What happened?'
> 'Scottow gave him a tremendous whipping.'
> 'Good heavens, poor Jamesie. But--'
> 'After that he was Scottow's slave.'
> 'You mean--he abandoned Hannah--he went over to Gerald?'
> 'After Scottow had laid hands on him like that, Jamesie worshipped Scottow and Scottow took Jamesie. That is how it was.' (p. 156)

Jamesie is yet another example of Simone Weil's idea (referred to in the previous chapter) that the powerful, when they carry their aggression beyond a certain point, end up being adored by their slaves. It embodies as well the Até-based concept of the transfer of power: Gerald who has been Peter's slave, transfers his suffering to Jamesie, the victim he enslaves. The most blatant instance of Gerald's exercise of sexual domination, however, takes place with Hannah's seduction, which tarnishes her saintly image. From his confirmed homosexual practices with Peter, as a slave, and Jamesie, as master, we can interpret Gerald's sexual violation of Hannah not as a shift in sexual preference but rather as a willful attempt to bring everyone at Gaze Castle under his absolute control, since Hannah is the centre of their adulation. By controlling Hannah, Gerald installs himself as the supreme master and ensures, with an iron fist, his reign of terror over the entire household. It is only within this context of violence and sexual domination that the novel's central event, Gerald's violation of Hannah, becomes plausible. In turn, Hannah's retaliation with violence becomes equally understandable to the reader; for, as far as Hannah is concerned, Gerald's resort to sexual power and sexual domination has consequently defiled her saintliness and eradicated her passivity.

The violence that prevails in the novel manifests itself not only in the type of power relationships among various characters, but also in the severe and ominous landscape dominant throughout. In this sense, the landscape serves as a commentary on those who populate it, and can be seen as an extension of their violent state of mind. Murdoch conveys the immediate reaction to such a hostile landscape through the eyes of an outsider, Marian--a reaction characterized by fear: "She found the vast dark coastline repellent and frightening. She had never seen a land so out of sympathy with man" (p. 16). The reader is made poignantly aware of the smothering dreariness and desolation:

> The bare limestone desert receded, rising in clearly marked shelves to form low humpy plateaus which lay one behind the other like huge fossilized monsters. A few miserable reddish shrubs and little east-bent hazel trees clung to the rock, which the sun had turned to a pale gritty yellow. (p. 16)

The appalling landscape, the entire Gothic setting of two eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mansions, dolmen, dark chambers and mysterious staircases that cause an "insane panic" for Marian right from the first chapter onward are meant to set the mood for the novel.

In her essay "Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Magician / The Magician as Artist," Linda Kuehl argues that Murdoch's Gothic settings

> complete the tyranny of form over character. In representing the receding background of an impenetrable reality, the scenery is merely decorative and, in making pretexts for intrigue, hints of future violence and traces of past horrors, it implies merely facile excuses for sensationalized behaviour. Most important, though, in symbolically exteriorizing states of minds, it dwarfs the characters by stressing their stock Gothic and fairy tale characteristics.[28]

Kuehl's position is extreme and uncharitable to Murdoch's achievement in this novel. Murdoch's portrayal of such an unruly landscape does pave the way for the horrors that occur later, and there is nothing wrong with an author's manipulation of scenery to create a specific impact on the reader. The scenery, moreover, cannot be called 'merely decorative,' for it echoes and extends the atmosphere created by the characters and events, and becomes thus skilfully woven into the fabric of the novel. I find instead A. S. Byatt's following observation more accurate:

> . . . the landscape has 'mythical' quality, a kind of Romantic necessity . . . a lack of messiness or 'give' which is something Miss Murdoch suspects. The use of the landscape in this book in general is very powerful; it is related both to our sense of that which is not human and thus mysterious, and to the uncompromising, again, non-messy, nature of spiritual events which take place.[29]

Among the various elements of landscape that figure prominently in the novel is the sea. One feels its presence throughout as a violent and destructive force: as Gerald warns Marian, ". . . it is a sea that kills people" (p. 16). The sea serves as an integral part of the intractable surroundings. We receive the first description of the sea through Marian's eyes; it has the same desolation and ominousness as the whole landscape:

> The sea was a luminous emerald green streaked with lines of dark purple. Small humpy islands of a duller paler green, bisected by shadows, rose out of it through rings of white foam. As the car kept turning and mounting, the scene appeared and reappeared, framed between fissured towers of grey rock which, now that she was close to it, Marian saw to be covered with yellow stonecrop and saxifrage and pink tufted moss. (p. 13)

Later when Marian tries to swim in the sea, she becomes aware of its murderous nature:

> From up above it had seemed serene and calm and indeed it still looked fairly calm a little way from the shore. But some twenty yards out the smooth surge gathered into enormous waves which with sudden violent acceleration came tearing in to destroy themselves upon the shingles, which they then sucked sharply downwards and backwards with a grinding roar. Beyond the wild snowy curl and retreat of the foam the sea now looked, in the bright sunlight, inky black. (p. 39)

While Marian is summoning up her courage trying to swim, one of the local people warns her not to, since two swimmers have been drowned the week before--a foreshadowing of two more significant drownings later: Peter's and Hannah's.

The sea in this novel is moreover a further development of Elias Canetti's reference to it in Crowds and Power as a power symbol. While the sea in The Flight from the Enchanter is portrayed as more or less in tune with man, the sea in The Unicorn represents an element in nature both superior and hostile to man. The powerful but serene sea in The Flight from the Enchanter is identified with the figure of Mischa Fox, while the violent sea in The Unicorn is identified not with a specific character but with physical power in general, in the sense that both are crude, callous and murderous. This change in the depiction of the sea relates to the gradual shift in Murdoch's treatment of the power figure--a shift that entails a progressive penetration into the darker and evil side of power. As a further distinction from the sea in The Flight from the Enchanter, the sea here functions on two occasions as an active plot device; it thus becomes more subtly integrated into the structure of the novel. On the first occasion the flooding prevents Effingham and Lejour from joining Hannah and Marian at the crucial moment before Peter's supposed arrival; had they been with her, Hannah might have been saved. The second occasion occurs when Denis drowns Peter while driving him home. In The Unicorn, the sea, whether an image or a plot device, is thus strongly linked to power struggles among various characters and works more effectively than earlier as a catalytic element in the destructive cycle of violence and death.

If the sea can be identified with violence and physical power, the salmon, related as they are to spirituality, represent those innocent forces that resist its tyranny. In their function as symbols of innocence, the fish here play the same role as in The Flight from the Enchanter; they are, however, given more focus and dramatic significance here. In their attempt to reach their mating places, the salmon brave the elements and risk their lives:

> '. . . they eat and eat and become big powerful fish. Then one spring they come back up the rivers to spawn, and come back to their own birthplaces.'
>
> 'Up a river like this one? How can they? You'd think they'd be dashed to pieces on the stones.'
>
> 'Some of them are. But they have great strength and cunning. Both are needed to move upward against such a power coming down. It is nature against nature. I have seen one trying to leap up that waterfall there and banging himself on the rocks and falling back, and then at last he leapt sideways on to those stones at the edge, and wriggled along on the land and got himself into the water above the fall. They are brave fish.' (p. 235; my italics)

The impressive struggle the fish wage against the physical forces of nature serves as a commentary on the passivity and ineffectuality of those characters in the novel victimized by power. While the fish resort to "strength and cunning" to overcome elements superior to them, Hannah and her supporters do not emulate or follow this example. The spiritual forces in nature, in order to survive, cannot afford to be passive, but have to combat actively and assertively aggressive forces. We can, therefore, conclude that Hannah's withdrawal, Max's seclusion, Marian's ineffectiveness, and Effingham's hesitation reveal helpless passivity in the face of the oppressive and ferocious power that Gerald wields. Good must be active and assertive, Murdoch suggests, in order to counteract evil.

Apart from their "strength and cunning," the fish's determination to reach their spawning grounds embodies a theme of physicality, that is, sexuality. This connection is reinforced by various characters' sexual activities which take place by the salmon pool. Unlike the fish, however, whose sexuality is a harmonious and integral part of their nature, sex in the human world causes confusion and leads to guilt (an issue that is dramatized and explored more fully in Pattie's relationship with Carel in The Time of the Angels). It is by the pool that Alice assaults Denis and later manipulates Effingham into making love to her. The salmon pool witnesses, as well, Denis's guilt-ridden first sexual experience with Marian.

The salmon's integration of both spirituality and sexuality parallels and contrasts with Hannah's disharmonious mixture of spiritual charisma and sexual charm. Distinct from her saintly image, Hannah has her own sex appeal that captivates all the men in the novel with the sole exception of Max; this appeal represents a form of power over her admirers and implies culpability. While the fish represent a harmonious blend of sexuality and spirituality, these elements are unreconciled in Hannah. This tension explains the various sexual references to her as the beautiful enchantress, as Circe, and "as a great courtesan . . . a woman infinitely capable of crimes" (p. 264). Nowhere in the novel, however, does the reader find as many descriptions of Hannah, put in specifically sensual terms, as in the last chapter: after the chilling events at Gaze Castle, Effingham reflects:

> He did not feel that he had killed her. It was rather as if she had attempted to kill him, a beautiful pale vampire fluttering at his night window, a belle dame sans merci. . . . What had made the noticeable, the crucial difference at the end was her terrible descent from her pinnacle of isolation, her unspeakable surrender to Scottow. And if that made so much

> difference did it not suggest that her vigil had had a spiritual meaning after all? She had been their nun and she had broken her vows. (p. 317)

As if to summarize the whole story of Gaze Castle as well as the open-ended moral question of Hannah's personality, Murdoch gives the following incisive commentary, voiced by Effingham:

> It had been a fantasy of the spiritual life, a story, a tragedy. Only the spiritual life has no story and is not tragic. Hannah had been for them an image of God; and if she was a false God they had certainly worked hard to make her so. He thought of her now as a doomed figure, a Lilith, a pale death-dealing enchantress: anything but a human being. (p. 317)

With such a statement, the reader's all-round image of the novel's central character becomes almost complete. Like Mischa Fox, Hannah, as a power figure, has a double profile: a light or good one and a dark or guilty one. In The Italian Girl, Murdoch's next novel, the power figure can be seen as split into two Russian-[illegible]sh characters: David Levkin and his sister, Elsa. David, identifying himself with light, attempts towards the end to expiate the sins of his sister: "You see there are two kinds of Jews," he contends. "There are the Jews that suffer and the Jews that succeed, the dark Jews and the light Jews. She is a dark Jew. I am a light Jew."[30] This combination of dark and light elements is, to all appearances, what Murdoch intends the reader to grasp about Hannah's image as a power figure. In the early stages of the novel, the danger arises of the reader's total sympathy for and identification with the power figure; the commentaries of the last pages, however, should preclude that possibility. Accordingly, by the end of the novel, the reader is made as distant from Hannah as is artistically and morally possible.

As in most of her earlier novels, Murdoch denies the reader access to the mind of Hannah--and, for that matter, to that of Gerald--thus distancing us emotionally from the power figures. Instead, we have most of the action related to us through the two outside characters: Marian and Effingham. According to Robert Scholes, these two characters "are representatives of our point of view. They come from the world of realism into a world of romance. They are, like Lockwood in Wuthering Heights, necessary intermediates between those two worlds. . . . [They] believe in a set of liberal, enlightened virtues: freedom, individual responsibility, personal choice."[31] Although these two characters are fashioned to appear closer to the reader's temperament and experiences than the others, Murdoch nevertheless undercuts the positions they take and the judgements they make. In other words, she shows that they too can be readily fallible. As she has done with Rainborough in The Flight from the Enchanter, Murdoch treats Effingham ironically by focusing on his naïve romantic egotism; she specifically shows how he soon wastes the valuable metaphysical illumination he experiences during his brush with death in the bog. Marian, on the other hand, represents Murdoch's vision of liberalism reduced to naiveté when the eager concern with freedom makes the individual unaware of certain paradoxes in reality. Marian assumes that the effect she thinks she has created on Hannah will enable her to solve all Hannah's problems: "She felt above all, as a sort of categorical imperative, the desire to set Hannah free, to smash up all her eerie magical surroundings, to let the fresh air in at last; even if the result should be some dreadful suffering" (p. 147). The use of the Kantian "categorical imperative" within such a context entails an obvious contradiction in terms, because "freedom means absence of command; it cannot be imposed."[32] As Sullivan points out, Marian's "inability to see beyond the limits of the liberal tradition leads ultimately to Hannah's death."[33]

Regardless of the naivété and fallibility of Marian and Effingham, each character is too essential to the novel's central concern with power to be relegated to the marginal significance of "necessary fringe figure,"[34] as Baldanza argues. Ineffectual as they are shown to be, they incarnate the sincere and ordinary human impulse to fight the demonic forces of destruction; at least they try. Without these two, the novel would be imbalanced and depressingly overwhelmed by the domineering evil characters. These two characters enrich, furthermore, the meaning of the novel by offering us strands of "metaphysical possibilities" that Scholes underscores: "In this book . . . we are not entitled to make any final choice among the various metaphysical possibilities offered us. But the book is far from meaningless. There is a meaning in its lesson in relativity."[35] Expanding Scholes's position, Sullivan enumerates the various philosophical perspectives that the characters surrounding Hannah project:

> The characters in the novel often parallel each other, not merely for balance and pattern, but to suggest contrasting philosophical viewpoints to counteract the possibility of an absolute or dogmatic solution: the Platonic and the Christian response to Hannah--Max and Denis, the contemporary Liberal and contemporary Romantic--Marian and Effingham; the demonic extension of the Romantic view is embodied in the creators and controllers of the absolute pattern within which Hannah is imprisoned--Peter and Gerald.[36]

This rich and meaningful diversity of philosophical stands that the characters surrounding Hannah embody in their opinion of her results primarily from the uncanny blend of saving and destructive elements in her personality. The dual personality of the power figure in The Unicorn is a continuation of what the reader has already witnessed in Mischa in The Flight from the Enchanter; here, however, the issue is handled in a more morally focused fashion with spirituality being polarized against sexuality, and with the adoption of certain features of the Gothic romance. The deployment of the Gothic machinery "serves to keep Hannah's precise nature and significance compellingly mysterious to both the other characters and to the reader,"[37] and it also allows Murdoch "to expose the hidden drives which limit the choices man presumes to be open to him."[38] In both respects, the Gothic technique proves to be a useful medium to relay Murdoch's moral vision of power. Compared with Mischa, Hannah's involvement with power entails deeper penetration into its dark side, and also serves to explore the meaning of religious experience. With the treatment of Carel Fisher, the power figure of The Time of the Angels, Murdoch delves still deeper into the dark side of power; as well, she presents a fresh insight into the complex interlocking issues of religion and sexuality.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TIME OF THE ANGELS

In an interview with W. K. Rose, Iris Murdoch says, ". . . I think this business of sexuality and spirituality is very . . . ambiguous and hard to understand."[1] The core of The Time of the Angels (1966) is this very ambiguous issue of sexuality and spirituality, an issue that fascinates and intrigues Murdoch. In this novel, she develops in a more focused manner what she has already treated in The Unicorn, that is, the conjunction of sexual and spiritual power. The Unicorn ends, however, without giving satisfactory, clear-cut conclusions. Murdoch herself admits this.[2] The reader is uncertain whether Hannah's manipulation of her power position is good or evil. Judging from the depiction of Carel Fisher in The Time of the Angels, Murdoch's position appears more definite. In its essence, as a study of evil, The Time of the Angels attempts to depict sexual and spiritual energies which are used as tools in the service of self-deification and enslavement of others. The shift in Murdoch's approach coincides with a further intensive employment of Gothic machinery.

As in The Flight from the Enchanter and The Unicorn, Murdoch portrays in this novel a character who exercises exceptional power over the people in contact with him. However, while Mischa's power in The Flight from the Enchanter pervades several levels of society, Murdoch restricts Hannah's power in The Unicorn to the households of Gaze Castle and Riders; Carel's power in The Time of the Angels is still further confined, reaching out only to his household and, to a minor extent, to his brother Marcus. This progressive restriction in the sphere of influence of the power figure suggests a transition from social to spiritual power--a transition that "reveals a contracting and inward metamorphosis" occurring "in increasingly grim stages."[3] More significantly, however, the restriction of the power figure's sphere of influence coincides with Murdoch's shift from a dualistic depiction of power, composed of both good and evil elements, to a monolithic portrayal of its essential evil. Although her vision of power in The Unicorn emerges in more sombre colours than in The Flight from the Enchanter, Murdoch's stance remains basically the same. By analyzing Murdoch's employment of certain novelistic elements such as imagery (for instance, the two colours of Mischa's eyes) or characterization (as in the portrayal of the saint-murderess Hannah), we realize that Murdoch presents her power figures as potentially both good and evil. In The Time of the Angels, however, the duality disappears and the power figure becomes identified with complete darkness. The characterization of the atheist priest, Carel Fisher, represents the culmination of Murdoch's view that any pursuit of power is not only potentially but essentially destructive.

Carel's destructiveness is conveyed to the reader through the type and pattern of relationships that he establishes with others, specifically with the black servant, Pattie. The nature of this relationship is not built on equality but rather on the tyrannical imposition of will. The intertwining of sex with power parallels and reinforces the pattern we have already witnessed in The Flight from the Enchanter and The Unicorn; that is to say, the power figure regards sexual connection with others merely in the context of "master-slave relationship." Significantly enough, Murdoch herself articulates this close connection between sex and power:

> Everybody I imagine agrees that sexual energy is so enormously diffused and so various in form that it covers all kinds and aspects of human life. Certainly it is connected with this sort of worshipping and extension of power, with the way in which we make other people play roles in our lives--dominating roles or slave roles. So this sort of drama is a fundamental expression of sex, though it has taken aspects connected with power in what seems to be a much more primitive sense.[4]

In Murdoch's view, sex as a tool in the power scheme can only be transcended by love, and in this novel she successfully dramatizes the complex struggle between love and sex. This struggle, according to Murdoch, often takes place in what she calls her "closed-up" novels: novels of rigid patterning and eccentric characters, such as A Severed Head and The Italian Girl, as well as the three novels we have dealt with thus far. She spells out her conception of the difference between love and sex this way:

> Love obviously in its genesis belongs with sex, but it's able to transcend sex--I don't mean in any sense moving away from carnal expressions of sex but simply that sex is a very great mystifier, it's a very great dark force. It makes us do all kinds of things we don't understand and very often don't want to do. The kind of opening out of love as a world where we really can see other people and are not simply dominated by our own slavish impulses and obsessions, this is something which I would want very much to explore and which I think is very difficult.[5]

Sex should, as Murdoch accordingly suggests, be guided and enriched by the morally superior concept of love and one can confidently observe that the tenor of Murdoch's fiction points in this direction. Depicting the moral failure of her power figures, Murdoch reveals that their pursuit of sex represents their means to tantalize, to manipulate and to control rather than seeing it as a humanly pleasurable experience or as a "carnal expression" shared with another person.

Carel's means of securing his control over Pattie involves the deliberate and systematic obliteration of her identity: "I want to bind you in chains you can never break,"[6] he tells her. Pattie's attitude towards her enslavement, on the other hand, is complex, and the novel succeeds in showing this complexity. In several passages, Pattie's feelings are dramatized as a mixture of fascination and uneasiness towards Carel. Her surrender involves elements of fantasy and self-delusion: "Her will was his. He was the Lord God and she was the inert earth which moves in perfect obedience" (p. 223). As if to suggest that Pattie sees her enslavement as a romantic experience, Murdoch often describes Pattie's feelings in a manner reminiscent of Emily Brontë's description of Catherine's love for Heathcliff:

> She loved Carel and she could not love anyone else. Even to say this was to say something too abstract. Into the web of her being which was interwoven with Carel no alien thing could penetrate, it was too dense, too thick, too dark in there. She was knitted to Carel by bonds so awful that it was a frivolity even to call them love. She was Carel. (p. 164)

Although the above passage is clearly put in Murdoch's words and not those of the uneducated Pattie, it does not suggest that Murdoch sanctions the relationship. The careful choice of words such as "could not," "web," "interwoven," "dense," "thick," "dark," "knitted to," and "bonds so awful" implies Pattie's helplessness and total lack of will. A relationship involving domination on the one hand and resigned submission on the other represents, as the novel reveals, an egregious violation of Murdoch's central concept of love. The reader can easily conclude that Carel's sole intention is to keep Pattie under his control as a convenient sex object within his easy reach. The reader can also tell that his suicide towards the end of the novel is not a sign of love for Pattie and sorrow at her departure, but rather a sign of defeat and self-resentment for his failure to keep her under permanent control. Taking Pattie too much for granted, therefore, is not an expression of love but an act of pure will and sexual domination.

The references to sexual slavery in this novel echo similar ones in *The Flight from the Encounter* and *The Unicorn*. However, while Nina's or Jamesie's enslavement is suggested either through the narrative or by another character, Pattie's is shown clear and focused through her own inner awareness: "She began to know, first vaguely and then more consciously, what it was to be a slave" (p. 32). This projection of Pattie's perceptions of her reality gives her characterization an illuminating depth. Pattie's attachment to Carel represents, moreover, an embodiment of Canetti's description of slavery in *Crowds and Power*. According to Canetti, the principal motive for the development of slavery was "the desire to turn men into animals":

> A single slave can best be compared to a domesticated dog. The dog has been detached from its pack; it is isolated and under the orders of its master. When its own pursuits conflict with these orders it is made to give them up, in return for which it is fed by its master.[7]

Correspondingly, Murdoch reveals that "Carel took her into his possession with a beautiful naturalness and tamed her by touch and kindness as one might tame an animal" (p. 29). To Carel, then, Pattie is merely a slave, a possession, a beast to be tamed and manipulated.

While Pattie's submission to Carel reflects a dehumanizing process initiated by this "very great mystifier," sex, her relation with the rectory's porter, Eugene, represents Murdoch's transcending ideal of love. The tenderness and mutual concern of the two characters that are "convincingly emblematic of goodness and innocence"[8] are touchingly conveyed in the novel. Pattie is shown to feel that she can warmly communicate with another human being on open and equal terms, with no threat of domination:

> He [Eugene] was so 'full of himself.' Something glowed out of him, some light perhaps from his very earliest childhood, which seemed everything that Pattie needed and had always lacked. Also he seemed to her an innocent person and this warmed her heart in an almost mysterious way. Pattie coveted his innocence, scarcely knowing what this meant, she rubbed herself dog-like against it. (pp. 90-91)

The reader is bound to find the progression of the relationship between Pattie, a half-Irish black woman, and Eugene, a Russian émigré, of great interest, not only in its portrayal of interpersonal love, but also in its racial and social implications. Though not fully developed, Pattie's relationship with Eugene represents yet another instance when Murdoch touches upon a social problem in contemporary Britain. More significantly, however, her aim is to counter-balance the claustrophobia of Carel's solipsistic world with a wider, more open vision of racial harmony among people.

What further distinguishes Pattie's relationship with Carel from that with Eugene is that Murdoch elaborates little on how the former developed. The reader has to accept it as part of Carel's demonic control over his household--a control that is prevalent from the very beginning. One passage, however, introduces the reader to the genesis of the affair:

> She entered into Carel's presence as into the presence of God, and like the soul of the blessed, realized her felicity not through anything she dist[illegible] saw but by a sense of her own body glorified. (p. 29)

The description here of Pattie's feelings is couched in vague and mystical terms such as "God," "soul," "blessed," and "glorified." Thus, the passage clearly suggests the illusory nature of the affair. On the other hand, Eugene's initial attraction to Pattie is concretely sexual, as conveyed by the following description:

> She was as a woman ought to be, large-bosomed, monumental. Her hips curved in a hesitant and then in a huge confident parabola and there was plenty behind. Her breasts, rounded, two great firm spheres let into her body. She sat, her legs a little apart, showing a line of slightly tattered petticoat where her skirt was stretched over her knees. He liked the rather untidy, tousled, unkempt femininity of her and the way her shoes were always falling off. He wished she would smile at him more, he liked that sudden display of magnificent white teeth. She was much given to looking at him and the gravity of her eyes disturbed him. He was disturbed by her very dark eyes with the spots of fiery red at their points, and by the curiously straight dusky hair which floated about her head as if it were not really attached but simply followed by a kind of magnetism. (p. 53)

This long and detailed passage, interesting for its minute observation of Pattie's physical features, emphasizes three aspects of her body: size ("large," "monumental," "huge," "plenty," "big," and "great"); shape ("parabola," "tight," "perfectly rounded," "untidy, tousled, unkempt," and "straight"); and colour ("pink," "white," "fiery red," "very dark," and "dusky"). Eugene's interest in Pattie's body clearly indicates that the root of his attachment is sexual, a preoccupation which gives him pleasure.

Significantly, however, the passage may suggest something more in its movement from physical description to words denoting feeling and thought: from such words such as "curved," "petticoat," "body," to others such as "gravity," "wished," "disturbed" (used twice), "curiously," and "a kind of magnetism." This movement parallels the shift from the concentration on areas of the body with sexual connotations, such as "bosom," "breasts," "hips," "legs," and "knees" to the upper, less erotic parts of the body such as "teeth," "eyes," "hair," and "head." By this shift, Murdoch implies that Eugene can transcend and sublimate his sexual urges, and that he does not regard Pattie solely as a sex object. He recognizes her as an individual of separate identity and respects her as she is: "He felt at ease with her, as he usually did with people who had no pretensions and no position" (p. 51). His attitude thus embodies Murdoch's concept of love.

Eugene is therefore introduced as a character to serve as an indirect adversary to Carel's destructive behaviour and ideas. A refugee and a victim of violence and war, Eugene reveals strongly human pathos and tenderness; his childhood reminiscence, with which Murdoch closes the novel, is especially moving in its representation of an experience to which the reader can relate. This comes, moreover, as a relief after the heavy dose of bone-chilling action and the violent, eccentric behaviour which permeates the body of the work. Part of Eugene's charm lies in his lack of bitterness towards others, as well as in the absence of any illusions about his own life. This impression is particularly poignant when we meet him for the last time as a sadder but wiser man:

> To grow old is to know that not circumstances but consciousness makes the happy and the sad. He was a sad man and he would never make the happiness of others or live in a house like ordinary people. (p. 252)

Although he develops a greater awareness of the bitterness of his reality, he loses neither his faith in himself nor, again unlike Carel, his sense of attachment to others. His is a morally significant instance in which the process of power identified with Até in The Unicorn is resolutely rejected: unlike Hannah, Eugene refuses the infectious transfer of suffering to others. As a departure from the pattern set by other refugees in Murdoch's novels, such as the Lusiewicz brothers in The Flight from the Enchanter and Elsa Levkin in The Italian Girl, Eugene's suffering does not breed more suffering or domination over others; rather, it leads him to a sharper and consenting recognition of reality.

Eugene refuses, as well, to follow the other extreme of the refugee behavioural pattern (or what the critics call the Simone Weil syndrome) of passive acceptance of suffering, as epitomized by Nina in The Flight from the Enchanter. Unlike Nina, whose neurotic, suicidal insecurity drains her will and leaves her totally dependent on the mercy of the power figure, Eugene's sense of hope and reality reinforces his self-confidence and faith in others. Neither a victim nor a victimizer, Eugene learns to respond assertively to his suffering, transcend it and then extend love and warmth outward; he represents, therefore, a significant development that enriches the impressive gallery of convincing refugee characters in Murdoch's novels. Within the context of suffering and domination, Eugene thus serves as a balance to Carel. Although the two live in the same house, they never come face to face in the course of the action. While the novel does not present Eugene as Carel's equal in the extent of his power, largely because of the former's passive and gentle character, it does present both as polarized opposites. Whereas Carel is cynical and closed within himself, Eugene is open and confident:

> Eugene suffered from no sense of inferiority. He was filled and stiffened by his Russian essence, just as he knew that English people were filled with their Englishness. . . . Eugene had lost, in his long battered exile's life, not a single grain of this confidence. (pp. 51-52)

Carel confines himself to his dark and befogged house frequented by spiders and mice; Eugene invites Pattie out to show her the snow and the river.

The most obvious technique by which Murdoch contrasts Carel with Eugene is the skilful manipulation of light imagery. Carel is repeatedly identified with darkness. His room is constantly dark, even when he conducts his first interview with Marcus. The black cassock he always wears is part and parcel of a sinister, dark self; in Pattie's mind, the priestly habit is identified with his power over her: "She looked up at her master, tall and dense in his black cassock as a tower of darkness" (p. 37). Moreover, Carel's rectory is frequently befogged, intensifying the darkness of the atmosphere.

As a contrast to the darkness associated with Carel, the novel presents Eugene as "an essential counterweight to Carel, the white figure against the black one" (p. 192). Throughout the novel, Eugene is repeatedly identified with light. His old country house in Russia is called Byelaya Doleena, which means "White Glen or White Glade in English" (p. 216). His room in the rectory is the only brightly lit place in a house that is perennially either befogged or dark. When Muriel contemplates the oppressive, overbearing effect of her father, she immediately thinks of Eugene, and the contrast between the two men is spelled out in terms of light imagery: "But the dark image descending had already brought into view its illuminated counterpart, Eugene" (p. 144). At the peak of Eugene's moment of happiness, when he decides to marry Pattie, the novel presents a series of images passing through his mind in terms of an interplay of colours:

> He gazed at the skyline. The gilded domes and spires twinkled in the sun, a pale whitish gold, blending into the heaped buttresses of the snow. The painted many-pillared façades, blue and terracotta under the blurred chequerings of the snow, stretched away diminishing along the endless quays, each window with its tall snowy crest, each capital traced out in arabesques of white. He looked at the long low city upon its huge frozen river. The sun shone for him from a sky of lapis lazuli upon the solemn fortress walls, upon the striped turrets of the Resurrection, upon the vast gilded dome of St Isaacs, upon the rearing bronze of Peter, and upon the slim pure golden finger of the Admiralty spire. (p. 162)

The beauty of the picture painted here stems from the brilliance of the colours of the golden domes, white snow and the "sky of lapis lazuli." The mosaic of colours parallels Eugene's happy memories and present hopes.

Murdoch's handling of light imagery works cumulatively; that is, she introduces short passages depicting light or darkness and repeatedly identifies those images with either Carel or Eugene. Apart from the foregoing quotation, which achieves a crescendo of light and colour imagery, the effect of the images is enhanced by several and constant repetitions rather than by the intensity of each image or through a cluster of fully-developed, elaborate images. In spite of this somewhat stark depiction, this does not suggest that the light imagery is ineffective in this novel. As a solid and recurring pattern, imagery functions effectively to round out the characters of Carel and Eugene.

Eugene's Russian icon, the novel's central image, is closely related to the light imagery: "The icon blazed . . . like a star" (p. 52). The icon bears a great emotional significance to Eugene, reminding him vividly of his past settled life in Russia. More significantly, however, the icon relates to the novel's central concern with the moral tension between good and evil in a world without God. Although Murdoch presents Eugene as an agnostic whom one would expect to be indifferent to a religious symbol, the icon carries a heavy moral significance--an emphasis that equals its emotional value: "He loved it too as a blank image of goodness from which all personality had been withdrawn" (p. 62). To Eugene, the icon possesses "miraculous" characteristics that have caused people to confess their crimes and enemies to be reconciled (p. 62). The function of the icon is, moreover, to reveal the moral bankruptcy of most of the characters in their failure to appreciate it as a work of art. Significantly, not even Eugene values the icon on aesthetic grounds, although it is a source of strength for sentimental and spiritual reasons. The other characters are, without exception, overwhelmingly indifferent, an indication of their inability to transcend their selfish concerns. The perception of art, as Murdoch dramatizes in the beautifully-rendered scene of Dora's experience with Gainsborough's painting at the National Gallery in The Bell, liberates the self from solipsism--an affliction that prevails in the world of The Time of the Angels.[9]

As a complement to the exceptional attributes and emphasis given to the icon, the image leads us to transfer its significance as a religious symbol into the novel's central concern with the issue of power. In this sense, the significance of the icon goes beyond its emotional and spiritual value to Eugene and functions as a centre of power in its own right that counterweighs Carel's "spiritual" power. In the chapter following the incestuous scene involving Carel and his daughter, Elizabeth, in one of Murdoch's masterly coincidences, Marcus brings the icon to Carel's room. After declaring in no uncertain terms that he denies God's existence, Carel catches sight of the parcel containing the icon. Its description serves as a commentary contrasting what takes place around it with the image's shining spirituality.

> Under the direct light of the lamp, beside the insipid pallor of the flowers, the solid wooden rectangle glowed golden and blue. The three bronzed angels, weary with humility and failure, sat in their conclave holding their slender rods of office, graceful and remote, bowing their small heads to each other under their huge creamy haloes, floating upon their thrones in an empyrean of milky brightness. (p. 188)

Early in the chapter, Carel is given inhuman attributes: he is shown to "gleam like enamel, like porcelain." The "bronzed angels," on the other hand, are endowed with human feelings like "humility" and "failure," and such human adjectives as "graceful" and "remote." Apart from its humanization of the angels, the major emphasis in this passage falls on the weakness, remoteness and dignified humility of the angels as a contrast to Carel's vigour and arrogance. By using such adjectives as "slender," "creamy," and "milky," Murdoch is symbolically pointing to the receding influence of spirituality and religion as a controlling power in our lives in the face of the dehumanizing evil of individuals like Carel. In her effort to reclaim religion, Murdoch aims at dramatizing the spiritual vacuum created by the absence of religion--a vacuum that may be dangerously occupied by unscrupulous power figures.[10]

Like the Trinity of the icon, the other opposing force to Carel's influence, the trio consisting of Marcus, Norah Shadox-Brown and the Bishop, is equally ineffectual in counterbalancing Carel's power. As they are depicted, each one has a specific quality that makes him or her unable to face up to the challenge of Carel. Norah, "a left-over Fabian who covers the thinness of her thought with an iron will,"[11] lacks the sophistication to understand a phenomenon like Carel and hides her superficiality with a strong emphasis on a morality based on good manners and common sense. She represents the do-gooder type who, in her enthusiasm for propriety of behaviour, becomes unaware that her services and advice are not appreciated by their recipients, one of whom, Muriel, in an extreme comment, calls her a snob "just gratifying a sense of power" (p. 46). The reader cannot, however, dismiss her as entirely useless, for she proves very helpful to Muriel in a time of desperate need. Describing her and her dramatic role hyperbolically, one critic even goes so far as to say:

> She is that rare creature in Miss Murdoch's fiction, a capable and realistic person. She does not, however, confront Carel at any time, and her efforts to expose his madness do not affect the action of the novel. And so a potential source of dramatic conflict is lost.[12]

Joining forces with Norah, the Bishop serves as the only source of comedy in this sombre novel. Murdoch skilfully undercuts the authority of his office by repeatedly referring to his relish in eating and drinking. He is shown to make such absurd statements as "the Anglican Church has been noted for its eccentrics," or "let him who is without neurosis cast the first stone" (p. 99). The Bishop and what he stands for come under Elizabeth Dipple's severe criticism. In her 1982 book, Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit, Dipple pursues a traditional Christian line and rejects the Bishop's theoretical vagaries:

> He not only participates in the theory of demythologizing and depersonalizing Christianity, but he is also separated from human striving, simple morality, life in a world his pastoral function should attach him to. He goes very far indeed in giving Carel . . . a kind of identification with mysticism of the via negativa sort, justifying his loss of faith and eccentric, evil behaviour as part of a step forward for the soul, in keeping with the historical rejection of such symbolic ideas as Christ. Thus a good theory can be wrongly applied, or more precisely, theory again shows its inadequacy.[13]

Dipple's persuasive argument here underscores the Bishop's ineffectuality in recognizing and combatting evil, both on the practical and theoretical levels.

Carel's main theoretical opponent, however, is his brother, Marcus, whose statements represent, in the main, Murdoch's own position on religion and morality. Commenting on Marcus's religious stand, A. S. Byatt observes that Marcus, like Rupert in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, is unaware of his "true dependence on the power of the vanished religion to sustain his hierarchies of value and discrimination."[14] The novel, however, articulates in explicitly rational terms Marcus's need for religion to sustain his moral values:

> He did not believe in the redeeming blood of Jesus, he did not believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, but he wanted other people to believe. He wanted the old structure to continue there beside him, near by, something he could occasionally reach out and touch with his hand. (p. 103)

This attitude is very similar to that of Murdoch, who indicates that, although religion may not be relevant in the modern world, its symbols cannot be dismissed entirely; hence her tacit approval of Eugene's intuitive veneration of the icon. In her interview with Jack Biles, Murdoch bemoans the disappearance of religion as one of the most significant phenomena in our modern world. "I am not myself a Christian believer," she declares,

> but I was brought up as a Christian and I feel close to Christianity. I believe in religion, in some sort of non-doctrinal sense--in a Buddhist sense. I think people miss this particular steadying influence, this spiritual home and spiritual center.[15]

Religion thus serves, to both Marcus and Murdoch, as a "steadying influence" or a spiritual authority that inspires trust and confidence. In a long quotation at the beginning of Chapter Twelve, Murdoch presents an excerpt from Marcus's on-again off-again book on morality in a world without God. The line of reasoning in the passage suggests first an anti-existentialist stand by disconnecting the idea of Good from those of personal will, choice and action. It then reveals a Platonic vision:

> If the idea of Good is not severed from the idea of perfection it is impossible to avoid the problem of "the transcendent." Thus the "authority" of goodness returns, and must return, to the picture in an even more puzzling form. (p. 128)

This passage once again echoes Murdoch's philosophical writing, especially two of her essays, "On 'God' and 'Good'" and "The Idea of Perfection."

Marcus's philosophical stand, however, undergoes a certain change. During the two brothers' last meeting, Carel, in a symbolic show of contempt and violence, slaps Marcus. As I see it, the slap represents, in a deep sense, Carel's sole act of love to anyone in the novel; he makes, for once, a genuine effort to let Marcus be aware that his evil is real and that his rejection of Christianity and his severance of all contacts with the outside world should be taken seriously. Marcus misses, however, the meaning involved and, instead, ecstatically assumes that he has struck the real solution to Carel's problem by moving from the idea of Good to the idea of Love:

> His great book would not be about good, it would be about love. In the case of love the ontological proof would work. Because love was a real human activity. He would save his brother by loving him. Carel would be made to recognize the reality of love. (p. 211)

Although Marcus's new position moves even closer to Murdoch's belief that love is "a central concept in morals,"[16] the prescription of love as a specific cure for Carel is neither correct nor can it be representative of Murdoch's attitude:

> The philosophical truths Marcus arrives at are indeed Murdochian and therefore to be accepted as norms; but their unearthly Faustian context belies their effectiveness. Love as the answer to Carel's disbelief and perversity is essentially irrelevant to Carel's problems, though it is a valid solution in the larger context of the novel. The realization (of love as an answer) comes too late not only because Carel is dead, but because by denying otherness he has long bypassed the possibility of love as a contradiction in his view of being.[17]

Marcus's prescription represents therefore a sentimental solution that is not rooted in the reality of Carel's evil. That Marcus is not even aware of his brother's incestuous relationship with Elizabeth reinforces our belief in the inadequacy of love as a solution. Marcus is thus shown as a weak and ineffectual character who loses miserably in face of his brother's evil schemes. Moreover, Marcus's weakness here parallels that of Rosa and Rainborough in The Flight from the Enchanter, Marian and Effingham in The Unicorn and foreshadows Rupert's vacuous theorizing in A Fairly Honourable Defeat. All these characters represent the "inheritors of the Liberal tradition of a world which seems to have lost power."[18] Their failure, together with the collapse of universal moral codes such as religion or social ethics, registers a dangerous phenomenon in twentieth-century reality. Rubin Rabinovitz interprets Marcus's ineffectuality in the light of Murdoch's statement that the truly good should not be friendly to the bad but rather be "its deadly foe"; he maintains that "Marcus's mistake in the novel was his attempt to be friendly towards his brother; because of Carel's evil, Marcus should have treated him as a foe."[19] Rabinovitz makes a further observation to explain why Murdoch portrays Marcus, together with Bledyard in The Sandcastle and Douglas Swann in An Unofficial Rose, "as an unsympathetic character who nevertheless expresses a number of ideas" that are close to those of Murdoch: "It may be," he suggests,

> that Miss Murdoch, in an effort not to be dogmatic, is careful to relegate any character who might become her spokesman to a relatively insignificant place in her novels.[20]

Moreover, Murdoch highlights the ineffectuality of her spokesmen through the effective employment of ironic distance between her own philosophical ideals and the characters who voice similar views in her novels. Reflecting her liberal leanings, she reveals the critical stance of the philosopher who considers no single belief, even one that he or she may hold, to incorporate the be-all and end-all of truth, to which everyone ought to subscribe. Hence the somewhat ridiculous figure cut by Marcus in *[illegible] Time of the Angels*.

Murdoch's major concern in this novel focuses on how Marcus's "passionless morality," together with "the unimaginative, common sense of Norah Shadox-Brown," is defeated by Carel's "impassioned amorality."[21] As the novel's embodiment of power, Carel imposes a rigid, self-serving vision on the few people with whom he allows himself to interact. By mere position as a priest, he enjoys a concomitant spiritual power over his congregation. As a substitute for his rejection of the Christian faith, Carel directs his energies towards self-deification: "When I celebrate mass I am God" (p. 187). Moreover, in his self-imposed seclusion, his talk about religion and his eventual suicide, Carel serves as a fictional descendent of Hannah in *The Unicorn*, with the focus on dark and evil aspects. While with Hannah there may be a degree of sincerity suggested in her suffering and spiritual exercises, Carel's seclusion from the outside world stems from a contemptuous attitude towards others. Murdoch relates Hannah's source of spirituality to a vision which is, at least in theory, Christian; with Carel, however, Murdoch attributes the roots of his arguments to Heidegger, whom she equates with Lucifer:[22] Heidegger's Sein und Zeit is Carel's main reference, a substitute for the Bible. The excerpt from Heidegger's book at the beginning of Chapter Fifteen embodies a "sense of meaningless existence that would be anathema to Murdoch's increasingly Platonic sense of an existence centered round the objective values of love and goodness."[23] As if to highlight the absurdity of Heidegger's thought, the passage is presented through the eyes of Pattie, who sees it as sheer nonsense.

The shift from Hannah's world and vision in The Unicorn to Carel's [illegible] represents a transfer from at least partial innocence to evil a[illegible]icism. Carel embodies the anti-Christ figure whose nihilism supersedes the traditional religious concepts of faith, hope and love by a satanic formula: "There is only power and the marvel of power, there is only chance and the terror of chance" (p. 184). Not only does Carel espouse an anti-Christian ideology, he also practises it. His most shocking behaviour takes place in the scene where he is in bed with his daughter, Elizabeth. To the reader of Iris Murdoch, incest is nothing [illegible] there are several instances of it in the novels prior to The Time of the Angels, the most striking being in A Severed Head, where Martin discovers Honor Klein in bed with her half-brother, Palmer Anderson. The shock in this novel, however, is rendered more poignantly because the incest scene is presented through the eyes of Carel's other daughter, Muriel. Commenting on this incident, Martin Neil Kaplan attempts to give it a sophisticated but unilluminating Freudian twist, claiming

> That Muriel sees their embrace in a mirror symbolically suggests . . . Muriel's identification with Elizabeth. What Muriel sees in the mirror is a reflection of her own desires as much as those of Elizabeth. The conclusion to this scene re-works the old formula. In place of credible resolution, terror [illegible] again augmented, and again by coincidental intrusion.[24]

The suggestion carried in the last sentence is that Murdoch rigs the scene in order to intensify the terror. Although terror or shock is certainly intended, its dramatic function is not merely the creation of a Gothic mood, but rather the reinforcement of the novel's moral vision by the presentation of the whole scene through the eyes of Carel's daughter. Furthermore, no strong indications exist to suggest that Muriel is sexually attracted to her father. The reader's shock equals that of Muriel since Carel is, regardless of his outlandish behaviour, still portrayed as a priest and a father up to this point. Murdoch, however, in an attempt to prepare us for the shock, prefaces the revelation by a scene in which Carel, while seducing Pattie, addresses her as his "black goddess . . . counter virgin . . . Anti-Maria," and closes with a blasphemous parody of the "Hail Mary": "Hail, Pattie, full of grace" (p. 169). Through Carel, Murdoch thus reveals "the essence of the demonic."[25]

As she has done with other power figures in her novels, Murdoch tries to distance them emotionally from the reader; as they increase in villainy, there is more reason to deny the reader access to their minds. One critic, however, interprets Murdoch's control of point of view otherwise:

> Since the reader is forever excluded from the minds of Miss Murdoch's villains, it becomes possible for the unwary reader to succumb to the persuasive force of the villains' arguments, just as most of the characters in the novels do, and undoubtedly Miss Murdoch intends it this way . . . . the reader's being fooled is the point of narration.[26]

Murdoch's intention is definitely the opposite of what this statement suggests; she scrupulously tries to spare any sympathy on the reader's part towards the villain. Her villains may utter strong and carefully developed arguments, but they serve to fool neither the other characters nor the reader. The statements of Calvin, Gerald, or Carel, even if they are seemingly of high moral or metaphysical calibre, are spontaneously contradicted by the destructive acts of these characters. If anything, the whole point of the narrative is therefore to guard the reader from being taken in by the power figures' statements.

Apart from her control of point of view, Murdoch's handling of the setting shows symbolically that Carel's destructiveness extends to his surroundings. The bombed-out unconsecrated church and the demolished landscape are chilling reminders of the "sublime" landscape in The Unicorn. The perennial oppressive fog is a major factor in the overall depression.

> As in Dickens's Bleak House, the darkness of the fog (described fifteen times in the course of the novel) not only provides a functional symbolic setting, but multiplies in implication as it penetrates into the house unnerving its inhabitants, and as it merges with the darkness of Carel's cassock, Carel's black humour and blackness of being.[27]

Although the setting is not as physically murderous as that of The Unicorn, it certainly consorts aptly with the violence of Carel's actions. The landscape, the fog, the dark cassock, the subterranean noise, and the dark house all create a Gothic atmosphere that further reinforces the need for illumination to dispel the darkness the power figure casts over those in touch with him as well as his surroundings. As Frank Baldanza persuasively argues, "the isolation of the household ensures a concentration of the reader's attention and reinforces the literal and figurative incest that pervades the characters' complex erotic entanglements."[28] Moreover, the impenetrability of Carel's rectory parallels similar situations we have witnessed with Mischa's intriguing

London house in The Flight from the Enchanter and Hannah's frightful Gaze Castle in The Unicorn. The arcane and repellent residences that Murdoch deliberately relates to her power figures are meant to reflect their penchant for tantalizing others through secrecy and mystery--qualities that Canetti identifies with power. These houses also enhance their separation from the rest of humanity and their inability to generate warmth and establish sympathy with the outside world.

In this predominantly sombre novel, Pattie alone is able to extend warmth and sympathy beyond herself. Her flight from Carel's demonic world to work with refugees represents, significantly enough, the novel's sole assertive act of hope and salvation:

> Like mankind, she is alien to the tyrannous, shaping God and capable of defection. She also possesses enormous insight and ultimately resists the final excess of Carel's demonic persuasion. The story of Carel's misuse of Elizabeth breaks the bond of his power, and Pattie reverts to her own instinct which asks for survival.[29]

The significance and symbolism of Pattie's decision, and to a lesser degree Eugene's action, becomes wastefully lost in the novel's final effect. The power figure is practically left unchallenged and free to exercise his will and to annihilate the will of others. However, through this poignant dramatization of Carel's overwhelming domination, Murdoch advances deeper into the dark and tantalizing world of her power figures. The focus on Carel as a symbol of evil gives, furthermore, both solidity and plausibility to his characterization:

> His evil is thematically coherent and dramatically convincing. As a fictional character, he represents an outstanding achievement for an author whose major concern is to create full-bodied characters. He is made up of aesthetically harmonious qualities that match one another.[30]

The solidity of the main character thus gives unity to the novel; this unity is further enhanced by the setting and the novel's central imagery of the angels. Moreover, the interplay of light and darkness reveals in an audaciously graphic manner the symbolic conflict between good and evil. This interplay is sustained and enriched in Murdoch's next novel The Nice and the Good (1968).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NICE AND THE GOOD

In an interview with W. K. Rose, Murdoch makes a clear distinction between her "open" and "closed" novels:

> I see there's a kind of alternation between a sort of closed novel, when my own obsessional feeling about the novel is very strong and draws it closely together, and an open novel, where there are more accidental and separate and free characters. I would like to write the second kind. *The Nice and the Good* is a pretty open one, I think--perhaps the most open one I've done yet.[1]

In another interview with Ronald Bryden, Murdoch reiterates the same point about *The N[illegible] the Good* when she compares it with an earlier work, *The Italian Girl*:

> *The Nice and the Good* is much more loose-textured and larger in scope, more full of light and air. At least I hope so. I'm trying to make my novels more full of light and air, and I think this one is better, from that point of view.[2]

While the structural openness of the novel is, as Frank Baldanza observes, gained at the cost of greater diffuseness and lack of concentration, "it is especially important to note the thematic emphasis of this work in whose interest the openness was attained."[3]

The openness of *The Nice and the Good* reflects to a large extent Murdoch's handling of the issue of power as part of her profound interest in the nature of good and evil. Her dramatization of the cross-intertwinings between love, sex, power, morality and religion is further developed and enriched in this novel. While the world of *The Time of the*

Angels is dominated by power, The Nice and the Good is illuminated by a vision of love and a rejection of power. In The Time of the Angels, Murdoch presents a destructive power figure; the novel's atmosphere is appropriately dark and its events tragic. In The Nice and the Good, the essence of Murdoch's vision remains basically the same, but the approach is different. The Time of the Angels calls for a rejection of power: when power dominates, disaster cannot be averted; The Nice and the Good calls for an endorsement of love: when power is checked, universal harmony is secured. In addition, Carel's mad pursuit and exploitation of power embodies evil; conversely, in this novel, Murdoch reveals the obverse side of the situation by showing that abandoning power incarnates the good. Thus, while the sordidness and terror that predominate in The Time of the Angels leave the reader with a bizarre and negative feeling, the blissful pairings with which The Nice and the Good concludes create, though often criticized for being rigged and implausible, a quite positive effect. Moreover, it is significant to observe here that this novel is one of the earliest of Murdoch's works that contains no active demon or villain, apart from Radeechy, a practitioner of black masses who shocks everyone by shooting himself in his Whitehall office. As A. S. Byatt argues, in Murdoch's "more remote and Gothic novels, her powerful central characters are largely symbolic, rigidly contained in a philosophical myth designed by the author. This novel has no mythical centre and is the better for it."[4] Dealing with a large cast and setting, and with the action spread across various geographical locations, Murdoch, accordingly, creates a situation in which the temptation to acquire and wield power is resisted; instead of power, love and forgiveness prevail.

Unlike the condensed action and the contracting locale in The

Time of the Angels, the action in The Nice and the Good takes place in two main locations: London, where the novel's main character, John Ducane, lives and works, and Dorset, [illegible]ere Ducane's director, Octavian Gray, has a seashore house, Tres[illegible]hich lodges most of the novel's characters. This expansion in [illegible]tting represents a relief from the claustrophobic atmosphere of The Time of the Angels. The novel shifts between various places: thus, from London offices, for instance, to Trescombe, and from a London air-raid shelter where Satanic rituals have been performed, to a grotto where Ducane almost meets his death. There are, furthermore, references to places as far away as Australia, India, and Dachau.

The novel's various scenes are populated by a large cast of characters of diverse backgrounds. Although all are related in numerous ways to John Ducane, who acts as their father confessor, each has a relatively autonomous part to play in the narrative. Thus, unlike the three novels discussed so far, we do not witness a single character such as Mischa, Hannah or Carel suffering from the tyrannical need to impose his will or pattern of thought on others. Furthermore, as distinct from the previous novels, the narrative structure here resembles that of a detective work dealing with a suicide committed in the first page. As in a typical suspense story, the circumstances surrounding Radeechy's suicide immediately raise several urgent and sensitive questions for government bureaucrats. John Ducane is the senior civil servant assigned to the task of conducting a one-man investigation to solve the riddles involving the case; in this way, he is brought into the core of the action. To say, however, that the novel starts like a detective story does not mean that its ultimate concern is simply suspense. Apart from dramatizing all the mysteries relating to the crime, Murdoch develops the plot further by paralleling Ducane's investigation with a second inquiry of greater significance: "an ethical self-examination which leads him [Ducane] to just moral choices, and from a plateau of conventional niceness to a higher plane of goodness."[5] The transition from the criminal to the moral investigation is carried out smoothly and imperceptibly, and in the process the issue of power progressively gains greater focus, becoming eventually the novel's central concern.

By the very nature of the responsibility assigned to him, Ducane is empowered with extraordinary authority to probe into the personal lives of the people involved in the crime. Authority, however, is nothing new to him. Almost all the characters find him sympathetic and trustworthy, divulging their personal problems to him and soliciting his advice. As Richard Todd points out, Ducane, "who elicits and responds to confidences . . . seems surprisingly unaware of the power which this gift bestows."[6] Throughout, a motif of power, or more precisely, of authority, is developed coherently, and builds Ducane into the novel's "god" figure; as he confidently tells Biranne~~,~~ ~~one~~ of the people involved with Radeechy's suicide, "McGrath has no power over me. But I have power over him and I am going to use it."[7] In a similar vein, Mary Clothier, a friend of the Grays who resides at Trescombe, tells him that he alone has authority over Pierce, her rebellious son (p. 266). Even Biranne, who dislikes Ducane, eventually surrenders to him, saying, "I put myself into your power" (p. 237). In such a position of power, the temptation becomes real to abuse the authority he enjoys over the others. Murdoch tempers, however, Ducane's power by juxtaposing his bureaucratic responsibility with the emotional impasse in which he finds himself with his ex-mistress, Jessica Bird. Murdoch reveals Ducane's awkwardness and hesitation in handling Jessica, relating this limitation in his personality to the moral scruples he evinces in wielding his bureaucratic power. In short, he refuses to "judge the mistake when he was the mistake" (p. 76). As a further indication of his reluctance to wield power, Ducane has to be induced to undertake the official investigation of Radeechy's suicide, for which he feels himself inadequate in spite of the professional esteem in which he is held.

By depicting the central character as morally scrupulous about his actions and motives, Murdoch attempts to embody in Ducane the image of the good man whose personal ethics guard him against the temptations of power. In this respect, Ducane recalls Michael Meade's thoughts and aspirations in The Bell. Michael and Ducane, both fully developed and sympathetic characters, agonize over how the good should relate to power:

> Michael had always held the view that the good man is without power. He held to this view passionately although at times he scarcely knew what it meant, and could connect it with his daily actions only tenuously, or not at all.[8]

Michael is, however, portrayed as a character whose life is riddled with acute internal conflicts, of sexual and spiritual nature. The bewildered Michael is therefore unable, despite his sincere attempts, to define a course for himself:

> He felt himself compelled to remain in a region where power was evil, and where he could not honourably find the means to strip himself of it completely. His lot was rather the struggle from within, the day-to-day attempt to be impersonal and just, the continual mistakes and examinations of conscience. Perhaps this was after all his road; it was certainly a road. But he was irked by a sense of the incomplete and ill-defined nature of his role.[9]

The turmoil and vibrations of Michael's inner thoughts are reworked in

Ducane's case. Unlike Michael, however, Ducane is less vulnerable and morally more solid because, as the Grays describe him, "Ducane's a man who doesn't make muddles" (p. 63). Moreover, whatever internal struggles Ducane undergoes stem from his care not to be tempted to abuse the power he is endowed with. By abandoning power and later by resigning his high-ranking position, Ducane solves the tension that afflicts Michael, and embodies Max's central pronouncement in The Unicorn:

> Good is not exactly powerless. For to be powerless, to be a complete victim, may be another source of power. But Good is non-powerful. (The Unicorn, p. 116)

The narrative thus initially reveals the systematic development of Ducane's bureaucratic or legal authority as the investigator of a suicide. In this novel, and perhaps for the first time, Murdoch presents power in its genesis, and the kind of authority with which Ducane is endowed is both plausible and natural. The reader follows Ducane's authority step by step as his character unfolds. By efficient detective methods, he ensnares McGrath, the semi-rogue blackmailer, who in turn leads him to the involvement of another civil servant in the case, Richard Biranne. Ducane, who dislikes Biranne for an uncharitable remark that he has once made about Ducane (p. 37), succeeds eventually in cornering him and obtaining a full confession. The interest aroused in Biranne's role in Radeechy's suicide serves to shift the reader's attention from Ducane's successful detective accomplishment to his enquiries into the nature of his life and his ethical values. After Biranne's confession, the suspense dissipates, to be superseded by the search of the Trescombe characters for avenues out of their moral and personal quandaries. A reviewer of the novel erroneously claims that "there is a basic dislocation between

Ducane's investigation in London and the life of the Dorset household," and that "the two main cogs do not satisfyingly mesh."[10] The novel does, in fact, continue to retain our interest even after the riddles relating to the crime have been solved. The reader's suspense regarding the crime is purposely aroused not as a sensational device for its own sake but as a context within which Murdoch's moral concerns may operate. The novel's real value thus resides essentially in its fresh insight into how a man like Ducane, who seriously yearns to be good, handles power.

Ducane's aspiration toward the good is revealed in the subtle and complex argument that develops in his mind about being the moral arbiter of other peoples' lives:

> Ducane knew, and knew it in a half-guilty, half-annoyed way as if he had been eavesdropping, that there were moments when he had said to himself, 'I alone of all these people am good enough, am humble enough, to be a judge.' Ducane was capable of picturing himself as not only aspiring to be, but as actually being, the just man and the just judge. (p. 74)

The attitude Ducane takes about judging has significant dramatic impact on the stream of events in the novel, since the choices he makes decide at the critical stage the happy conclusion. In her review of the novel, A. S. Byatt extolls Murdoch's ability to reveal the characters' inner debates as a distinguishing quality of her talent:

> One of Iris Murdoch's great gifts as a realistic novelist . . . is a gift for analysing conscious thought in her characters as well as unconscious impulses and emotional states. Her characters think and what they think and how (and how intensely they habitually think) affects what they do, which is what we find in life more often than in novels.[11]

The depth and seriousness with which Murdoch depicts Ducane's deliberations thus enhances the density and plausibility of his characterization.

Ducane's aversion to judging is mentioned twice: first, early in the novel, when Murdoch details Ducane's reluctance to choose the career of a judge: ". . . the whole situation of 'judging' was abhorrent to him. He had watched his judges closely, and had come to the conclusion that no human being is worthy to be a judge" (p. 74). At this stage, the moral and personal powers attached to the post of judge are presented in the form of a well-organized argument; in Ducane's mind, the judge "like a king or a pope" approaches his prisoner from a position of superiority, which is bound to make him almost inhuman. The argument represents a poignant tension between Ducane's "rational mind" and his "irrational heart" (p. 74). Later in the novel, Murdoch solves the tension happily with the heart winning the struggle. In a passage of strongly emotional and emphatic language, Murdoch presents Ducane's major revelation, as he goes through a near-death experience in the grotto:

> He thought, if I ever get out of here I will be no man's judge. Nothing is worth doing except to kill the little rat, not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, not to seek, seek, seek. To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Love is the only justice. Forgiveness, reconciliation, not law. (p. 305)

The fervour and moral implications of Ducane's revelation are similar to Effingham Cooper's thoughts in The Unicorn during his brush with death in the bog; Ducane, however, retains the meaning of his experience and acts accordingly. Later, for instance, he chooses to forgive by not divulging Biranne's connection with Radeechy's suicide, thus saving the former's career.

John Gilligan claims, however, that Ducane is incapable of discerning good from evil; he further argues erroneously that Ducane tries

> to take refuge in the Liberal tenet: 'no man should be judged by others.' The weakness of Liberal morality has been a central concern for Murdoch, and in this novel the moral education of John Ducane, a paragon of Liberal flaccidity, becomes a governing motif.[12]

Gilligan seems to ignore Murdoch's moral vision, the roots of which are essentially liberal, which maintains that to judge others is an imposition that stems from a pretension to moral superiority. Murdoch's position is made abundantly clear in The Bell, where she shows how the Imber Community wrongly judges Dora Greenfield as morally inferior without even making the effort to know or understand her; to redress indirectly the community's attitude, Murdoch concludes the novel with Dora, who in a state of renewed self-confidence, is the last person to leave Imber after the collapse of the community:

> She looked at the Court. She could not help being glad that Michael and Catherine would not live there, and their children and their children's children. Soon all this would be inside the enclosure and no one would see it any more. These green reeds, this glassy water, these quiet reflections of pillar and dome would be gone forever. It was indeed as if, and there was comfort in the thought, when she herself left it Imber would cease to be. But in this moment, and it was its last moment, it belonged to her. She had survived.[13]

Significantly enough, Ducane's forgiveness of Biranne is made contingent upon the latter's reconciling his estranged wife Paula. Ducane's demand here may appear as a form of moral blackmail and an imposition of private justice. If it is blackmail, it is only so in the sense that it is meant to serve as a demonstration in reverse of the real blackmail that McGrath practices. Since the intent of this "private justice" is genuinely selfless and charitable and the terms and manner of its execution are entirely clear and convincingly presented, one cannot therefore see it "as punishment but as a kind of creative, therapeutic discipline in encountering the reality of other persons."[14] Ducane's forgiveness of Biranne represents, therefore, an authentic expression of his basic suspicion of power. Through the characterization of Ducane, Murdoch thus unequivocally maintains that the good man does not pass moral judgements on others but accepts them as they are. More important, Murdoch develops the power situation in the novel in such a way that Ducane's moral ideals are put into practice, leading to the dismissal of secular laws that unquestionably convict Biranne as an accessery to a crime. Regardless of the implied dark underside of his personality that enjoys the position of authority and in spite of the vulnerability of giving in to McGrath and his wife's blackmail and manipulation, Ducane comes very close to Murdoch's vision of moral excellence and selflessness. As a symbolic culmination of his moral maturity, Ducane moves from the niceness of the flashy, possessive Kate Gray to the goodness of the caring though ordinary Mary Clothier. One critic argues, however, that Ducane makes a "somewhat disappointing compromise" by marrying Mary Clothier. "Thematically," he maintains,

> their pairing off is appropriate. From the perspective of dramatic expectations, however, one might have hoped for a stronger profile of Mary to make their love more satisfying.[15]

The marriage nevertheless represents a further manifestation of Ducane's rejection of the role of the power figure, as his "status, in the eyes of the cast, alters from godlike to human."[16] Unlike The Time of the Angels, which dramatizes the destructive consequences of the dominance of power, The Nice and the Good shows how pleasant and fresh life can be when love, as Murdoch understands it, prevails and beautifies human relationships. However, a reviewer from The Times Literary Supplement glibly argues that

> The Nice and the Good, like all Miss Murdoch's novels, is a love-story, that is, a story designed to discover more about the character of love by analyzing, mobilizing and juxtaposing characters.[17]

The writer regrettably misses Murdoch's deeper understanding of the concept of love, along with the serious and focused attention she pays to it in both her fiction and philosophical work. To her, love goes beyond a transient emotional affair between people, and assumes a supreme moral dimension as a healthy and indispensable attitude towards life. In this respect love entails a rejection of any form of imposition and manipulation--a rejection, that is, of power; love, therefore, serves as the antidote to power.

Murdoch's attempt to portray a life guided by love rather than dominated by power is achieved through several fictional devices: the prevalence of light and sun imagery, the emphasis on colour, space where the open sea is integral to the landscape, the extensive use of animals, the distinctive role of younger characters in the narrative, as well as several explicit and lengthy moral statements about love and forgiveness uttered by a relatively large number of characters. While the absence of most of these elements engenders the depressingly nihilistic world of The Time of the Angels, their presence in The Nice and the Good creates a "novel full of pictorial detail,"[18] reinforcing an optimistic vision of love.

When Murdoch describes the novel as "full of light and air," her statement is literally true. Unlike The Time of the Angels, where most of the setting is dominated by darkness or fog, The Nice and the Good is dominated by light. In contrast to the wintry atmosphere of The Time of the Angels, the events of The Nice and the Good take place during the summer, when the sun shines most of the time, imparting a warm Mediterranean atmosphere. The warmth of the atmosphere is but a reflection of the sensitivity and warmth the characters feel for one another. Moreover, the sun, omnipresent in this novel, is a source of warmth and illumination. In this respect, Murdoch manifests her indebtedness to Plato's use of the sun and light imagery in the cave episode in The Republic, which she explores in depth in her book The Fire [illegible]n. In a commentary on Book Six of The Aeneid, where Aeneas des[illegible]nto the unde[illegible], a survivor of concentration camps, describes to Mary the futility of such a metaphorical pilgrimage into darkness: "It's very dark and stuffy and one is more likely to feel frightened than to learn anything. Let the school-room of life be a light airy well-lighted place!" (p. 273). Paradoxically, an opposing vision is later incorporated, when Ducane, in his "descent into the underworld" achieves self-illumination and insight into the conflict between power and good from a dark, airless, and claustrophobic place. Nevertheless, the theme of light is predominant in the novel. In another passage, Ducane reflects on the good "as a single distant point of light" (p. 182), and, significantly enough, when Ducane descends into the dark air-raid shelter of Whitehall, McGrath holds a torch downwards; after he refuses to give in to McGrath's blackmail, he takes the torch, in a symbolic move, to illuminate his way upward. From this moment on, the riddles regarding the suicide begin to resolve themselves.

As a further development of the sun and light imagery in the novel, Murdoch on three occasions gives the sun human qualities, a technique used to reflect the state of mind of the characters involved. When Paula receives her first letter from Eric in which he tries to blackmail her emotionally into renewing their relationship, we have the following description immediately before the text of the infuriating letter: "The sun dazzled angrily upon the water. Frowning against it she slowly unfolded the letter" (p. 41). Here, as if identifying with each other, both Paula and the sun are angry at the letter, which she indignantly tears into pieces. In another episode, we witness Ducane on the point of raiding Biranne's house, a chore which he morally abhors:

> It was now nearly nine o'clock in the evening, and the dense dusty air, heavy with its heat, hung over London like a half-deflated balloon, stuffy and sagging. The yellow sunlight was tired and the shadows were without refreshment. (p. 193)

The tiredness of the sunlight reflects Ducane's impatience with the tug-of-war game he is playing with Biranne. In Chapter Two of the novel, the large cast of the Trescombe household is presented having tea:

> The lazy sun, slanting along the front of the house, cast elongated rectangles of watery gold on to the faded floral wallpaper of the big paved hall . . . . beyond the clipped descending lawn and the erect hedge of raspberry-and-creamy spiraea, rose up the sea, a silvery blue, too thin and transparent to be called metallic, a texture as of skin-deep silver paper, rising up and merging at some indeterminate point with the pallid glittering blue of the mid-summer sky. There was something of evening already in the powdery goldness of the sun and the ethereal thinness of the sea. (pp. 18-19)

This poetic description reflects the relaxed atmosphere in the house. The skilful interplay of the colours of the golden sun, the blue sky and the silvery sea creates a soothing and tranquil holiday atmosphere. The harmony and beauty of the surroundings reveal a nature that is in sympathy with man; nature thus becomes a positive element that reinforces the vision of love.

The colours in the above passage are typical of the brightness that pervades almost the entire novel. In The Nice and the Good, Murdoch carefully identifies the colours of what she describes, an emphasis which is a natural result of the prevalence of sun and light on the scenery, where various colour shades can be specified. Two other elements, the summer weather and the seashore location, act cumulatively to make the process of colour identification both necessary and desirable. Only on two occasions, when darkness predominates, these bright and shining colours are absent. The first is when Ducane descends into the air-raid shelter at Whitehall, and the other, when Pierce and Ducane are trapped inside the grotto. These two places, the one identified with black masses and the other with smugglers, deny the people involved in them, Murdoch suggests, the pleasure of functioning and enjoying life in the open. The dark atmosphere of these two underground situations, symbolically significant as it is, does not, however, dominate the novel.

The emphasis on clearly defined colours indicates that values and visions by which characters and their actions can be understood are clear and definable. Thus, the choice and the degrees of the shades of colour, along with their corresponding moral connotations, are a helpful indication to the reader. We can discern, for instance, McGrath's seedy nature from the description in the first page of the novel: "The office messenger, McGrath, a pale-blue-eyed ginger-haired man with a white face and a pink mouth, stood shuddering in the doorway" (p. 7). These colours of McGrath's face are referred to later when it becomes clear that he is involved in selling the story about Radeechy's suicide to the press:

> Ducane was irritated by McGrath's . . . colour scheme. A man had no right to have such red hair and such white skin and such pallid watery blue eyes and such a sugary pink mouth in the middle of it all. McGrath was in very bad taste. (p. 64)

Like McGrath, Judy, his wife, who connives by sexual means to ensnare high-ranking people while her husband photographs them in compromising positions, is also given a distinctive "colour scheme," but with a clear slant towards the sensual:

> The warm light caressed her, revealed her, blended with her. Her black hair, dusted over with a sheen of brown, seemed a slightly greenish bronze, and the shadow between her large round slightly dependent breasts was a blur of dark russet. (p. 195)

In contrast to this murky picture of a lascivious woman, Murdoch paints a more harmoniously coloured portrait of Paula, Mary and Kate walking along the shore:

> Outlined against the pale blue light, the figures of the women seemed monumental in the empty scene. They walked slowly and lazily in single file, Paula first, dressed in a plain shift of yellow cotton, Mary next in a white dress covered with small blue daisies, and Kate last, in a purplish reddish dress of South Sea island flowers. (p. 119)

In the passage describing Judy, predominantly dark colours are purposely tempered by the use of such words as "blended," "dusted," "shadow," "slightly," and "blur." This modification of colour suggests Judy's shady behaviour and ambiguous morals, and serves to create an image of an almost immoral woman. In the passage describing the dresses of the three women, the colours, especially the yellow of Paula and the white of Mary, are bright and definite, colours which serve to suggest moral solidity. Of the three women, Kate alone wears blended colours (purplish and reddish) which link her with Judy. The sensuality of the colours, and the ostentation of the South Sea Islands floral design, suggest dubious motives and behaviour. The description of Judy is, furthermore, restricted to her body, while that of the three women relates to the colour of their dresses; it is thus Judy's flesh that counts, while with the three women it is their personalities and appearances.

Like light imagery, colour imagery is given metaphorical significance in this novel. In his advice to Pierce, whose difficulties in his love affair with Barbara make him see everything in a black light, Theo, one of the novel's philosophers, says: "Keep the blackness inside yourself. Don't pass it on" (p. 155). Here the mature Theo goes along with Pierce's metaphor in the same scene which equates evil with blackness, and advises him, in words reminiscent of Simone Weil, not to pass his suffering on to others. In fact, Theo's statement is a reiteration of what Willy has already advised Pierce: "You will suffer. Only try to trap the suffering inside yourself. Crush it down in your heart like Odysseus did" (p. 108).

Related to Murdoch's concerted use of sun, light, and colour imagery is her treatment of the sea. As in The Unicorn, the sea in The Nice and the Good is omnipresent in the background. However, unlike The Unicorn, where the sea is ugly and "kills people," The Nice and the Good presents a "calm sea over which the afternoon sun lays a shallow golden haze" (p. 276). Thus the sea in this novel is safe and, moreover, adds beauty to the surroundings by reflecting an interplay of various shades of colours:

> The smooth sea was a light luminous uniform colour of blue, scattered over with twinkling, shifting gems of brightness, and divided by a thin dark blue line from the more pallid empty blue sky, into which on such a day it seemed that one could look infinitely far. (p. 119)

Even Pierce's adventure in the grotto, a foolish flirtation with death, ends with Pierce, Ducane and Mingo unharmed; by providing Ducane with a suitable setting in which to make a significant moral decision, the experience proves, after all, to be positive. Furthermore, Murdoch utilizes the anxiety and excitement surrounding the grotto episode as a climax leading to the novel's happy finale. As an added significance, the expansiveness of the sea creates an atmosphere of open space which is singularly absent in Carel's rectory in The Time of the Angels. The wide-open spaces correspond with the characters' breadth of mind and tolerance towards each other: they all can stand each others' idiosyncrasies and problems without any one individual having to deploy tactics of power to impose his will upon others as Carel does.

Another fictional device that Murdoch uses to portray a life guided by love is the marked role, upon both real and metaphorical levels, that animals play. As in The Flight from the Enchanter and The Unicorn, animals represent innocent life energies operating outside the machinations and power schemes of human beings. Here, however, animals are used more extensively than in any of her earlier novels; they populate the book, exist side by side with the characters, and are an integral part of the scenery and the action. It is worth mentioning that in Murdoch's "closed" novels, the animals appear vulnerable, confined and victimized. For instance, Mars, the caged dog in Under the Net, is used as a pawn in the power struggle between the narrator-protagonist, Jake Donaghue, and one of his rivals, who owns Mars. Talented and affectionate, yet aged and unwanted, Mars looks so pathetic that the temperamental Jake takes pity on him and decides to keep him. Mars's fate typifies the lot of a series of struggling but mostly surviving animals that we meet in Murdoch's earlier novels. The animals thus seem dependent on man and at his mercy; in this respect, they are often identified with the victims of power; as one of the characters in

A Fairly Honourable Defeat comments on a hedgehog that later drowns: "They're such defenceless beasts."[19] However, in the novels following A Fairly Honourable Defeat, where the dominance of the power figure begins to diminish progressively, the animals look more independent and assertive. In The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, Harriet's ferocious dogs become instruments of justice: they punish the morally lax Blaise for his deceit and irresponsibility. Murdoch's deployment of animal imagery thus enriches her thematic concerns with love and power. Although, one might, at first sight, be inclined to dismiss her achievement here as mere local embellishments, it is clear that the dramatic function of the animals reinforces and extends the novel's meaning. Moreover, from among the large number of animals in The Nice and the Good, Mingo, Pierce's dog, plays a distinct role as a plot device indispensable to Murdoch's handling of the grotto episode, where his unexpected presence saves Pierce and Ducane from death by exposure. Mingo becomes a blessed ray of warmth which joins Pierce and Ducane. Murdoch catches this emotional moment and conveys it movingly and sympathetically:

> Unprotesting silent Mingo, warm Mingo, was at last adjusted with his bulky body between them, his head emerging at the bottom of the sweater. After a moment or two Ducane could feel the sparkling painful particles of warmth beginning to stream into him. A little later he felt something else, which was Mingo licking his thigh . . . . They lay like two broken puppets, lolling head to head. Ducane felt a faint shuddering and a wet warmth touch his cheek. Pierce was crying. He put a heavy limp arm over the boy and made the motion of drawing him closer. (p. 304)

At the end of the novel, Montrose, the cat that belongs to Pierce's girlfriend, Barbara, and Mingo are paired off, like the rest of the characters; both peacefully share the same basket, a reconciliation which acts as an extension of the harmonious sexual union between Barbara and Pierce.

The characters who have the closest affinity with and love for animals in this novel are the younger ones: Barbara, Pierce and the twins. Like the animals, they basically represent innocent and potential life forces that are neither interested in nor entangled with any serious schemes of power. Their introduction into this novel is yet another distinction from the three other works discussed thus far. These four characters, who play a relatively active role, reveal concerns and issues outside the mainstream of events. The world of the novel is thus extended beyond the strictly adult concerns. The estrangement between Barbara Gray and Pierce Clothier, for instance, stems primarily from their growing up and their not being able to adjust themselves to their sexual desires. They re-enact in part and on a lower level the emotional turmoil that takes place around them. As Ducane puts it: "These young people have got to suffer, we can't save them from it--" (p. 106). Their suffering, trivial as it may seem viewed from an adult's perspective, is part of their coming to grips with their reality. Pierce's melodramatic adventure in the grotto is one of Murdoch's devices to develop the novel's plot towards a climax and then tie everything up in a happy dénouement. In this respect, Pierce's action is similar to Don Mor's hazardous adventure in the school tower that represents the climactic event in The Sandcastle. Like everybody else in the novel, Barbara and Pierce are reconciled to each other, thus fitting conveniently into the novel's ending in which the characters are paired off. The unassigned conversation between the two indicates subtly and economically the movement toward sexual and emotional harmony that would eventually exist between them:

> 'Was that really it?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'Are you sure you did it right?'
> 'My God, I'm sure!'
> 'Well, I don't like it.'
> 'Girls never do the first time.'
> 'Perhaps I'm a Lesbian.'
> 'Don't be silly, Barbie. You did like it a little?'
> 'Well, just the first bit.'
> 'Oh Barb, you were so wonderful, I worship you.' (p. 337)

Edward and Henrietta Biranne are the only two characters in the novel that do not undergo any drastic emotional changes. As Willy Kost describes them, the twins "are the only people who are not in turmoil" (p. 191), and they remain so until the end. In their own unique ways, they impart an aura of vitality, casualness and innocence. They exhibit great interest in and knowledge of things as diverse as birds, seashore stones, flying saucers, and space-time continuum. Their fascination with their physical surroundings and their love for the people with whom they are in touch do not mean, as Theo cynically puts it, that they behave "like people condemned by a god to some endless incomprehensible search" (p. 96), but serve rather as a contrast to their elders' solipsistic involvement with themselves. The asexual nature of their behaviour gives their actions and statements an innocence that is not to be found in the adult or adolescent characters. Murdoch's closing-off of the novel with the twins is intended to impress upon the reader that all ends well; this is meant, as well, to be a pleasant contrast to the suicide at the beginning of the novel.

The final element that transforms The Nice and the Good into a distinctively emphatic statement of Murdoch's idea of love is the large number of long theoretical statements about love, uttered not by a single character but by at least four. In The Time of the Angels, Carel's cynical statements are given such prominence and centrality that they threaten to prevail as the novel's main idea. The sheer frequency and length of the statements about love, forgiveness and reconciliation in The Nice and the Good give it a completely opposite tone from that of its predecessor. This may be a result of a conscious effort on Murdoch's part to redress in The Nice and the Good the imbalance of the preceding novel. Such statements include: Willy Kost's idea about salvation through love and art (p. 109), the meaning of happiness (p. 179), and "the need to be gentle, to forgive each other, to forgive the past, to be forgiven ourselves and to accept this forgiveness, and to return again to the beautiful unexpected strangeness of the world" (p. 191); Ducane's statement that one must accept what misfortune and chance bring (p. 206), and that "all power is sin" (p. 315); Mary's resolution that "there is only one absolute imperative, the imperative to love" (p. 307); and finally, Theo's mystical vision "that nothing matters except loving what is good. Not to look at evil but to look at good" (p. 344).

What characterizes these statements is their epigrammatic nature that makes them of particular significance over and beyond the immediate context in which they are being uttered. All can be taken as representative of Murdoch's own position, since they are uttered by sympathetic characters and echo Murdoch's philosophical writings. They all point to her central belief in the necessity of love and the avoidance of power in human relationships. Although these statements are uttered by four characters, their content and emphasis have a choric effect, as if they are uttered by only one; this further points to Murdoch's strong endorsement. The frequency and intellectual appeal of these statements enhance the novel's moral meaning.

The frequent introduction of lengthy abstract statements entails, however, damaging the reality of the characters by emphasizing their mental and rational reasoning at the expense of their emotional and psychological reality. A theoretical statement alone about or from a character is not sufficient to create a rounded and plausible character if it is not backed by ample detail about the emotional process the character undergoes. This becomes particularly serious with Ducane, since he is portrayed through a plethora of abstract and theoretical statements that almost make him two-dimensional. It is obvious that Murdoch is intent on showing Ducane's moral scruples about whatever action he takes, especially when it relates to the bureaucratic power or the moral authority he enjoys; yet Murdoch overdoes this in certain passages to a degree that Ducane's characterization is reduced to a highly patterned and complex cerebral exploration, as we can see in the following sentence:

> What Ducane was experiencing, in this form peculiar to him of imagining himself as a judge, was, though this was not entirely clear in his mind, one of the great paradoxes of morality, namely that in order to become good it may be necessary to imagine oneself good, and yet such imagining may also be the very thing which renders improvement impossible, either because of surreptitious complacency or because of some deeper blasphemous infection which is set up when goodness is thought about in the wrong way. (p. 75)

This lengthy passage could have been broken into several sentences, each with an easily accessible structure and meaning. If Murdoch intends to show the complexity of Ducane's thought, she has clearly failed. The sentence quoted is too cumbersome to portray his state of mind to the reader. Although credited to Ducane, the sentence reflects more Murdoch's own pattern of thinking than Ducane's. However, Murdoch's detailed analysis of Ducane's internal conflicts finds an enthusiastic admirer in A. S. Byatt who persuasively argues:

> Ducane's attempts at moral self-control and self-analysis, the *degree* to which he is confused by his own sexual mechanism, and the *degree* to which he can control it, are excellently, realistically, patiently written. If he is never real as a sensual presence, and his sexual struggles seem a little like purely abstract case-histories, he is very real indeed as a moral consciousness; his struggle to be just and charitable and useful in public when he is confused and feels morally incapacitated by his failures of sympathy in private are beautifully described.[20]

The detailed account of the central character's mind represents, moreover, a marked departure from the manner in which Mischa, Hannah and Carel are presented. With these three power figures, we face a difficulty regarding the motivation behind their actions, since we are denied access to their minds. Hence, our understanding and judgement of their motives and their handling of the power they wield over other characters are solely of a speculative nature based on their actions and statements and the response of the other characters towards them, as well as the implied hints of the narration. Therefore, the reader's response to Ducane's actions is easier and more predictable. Murdoch's penetration into Ducane's mind is due to her feeling at ease when presenting a character aspiring to be good and constantly checking himself as he is on the verge of giving in to temptations; on the other hand, Mischa, Hannah, Gerald and Carel are, partially or entirely, either implicated with or involved in evil. I am making this assumption about Ducane in spite of Frank Baldanza's report that in a conversation, Murdoch remarked that "despite the title, there may really be no one in the novel who is truly good."[21] The repeated projection of the narrative into Ducane's mind thus reveals his reaction to the power situation of which he finds himself in control. This projection dramatizes Ducane's constant self-questioning, and the reader is consequently bound to be in close sympathy with him. The reader's identification with Ducane's aspirations and ethical earnestness represents a sharp contrast to his lack of sympathy towards Murdoch's other power figures; as we have seen in the three novels dealt with earlier, Murdoch, in order to distance us emotionally from the scheming and destructive power figures, denies us access to their minds.

Compared to Murdoch's other works discussed thus far, I find The Nice and the Good the most lucid work thematically. Her conceptual emphasis on the rejection of power as a sign of moral excellence is given dramatic focus. The novel's thematic lucidity is, furthermore, enriched by the subtle distinction that the title delineates between niceness and goodness. As Rubin Rabinovitz observes, niceness in this novel means conforming "to the 'ordinary morality' of the linguistic analysts," and that the set of relaxed characters seems "benignly unaware that beyond . . . niceness is an ethical level more perfect and more painfully achieved."[22] Bernard Bergonzi too comments on the title and maintains that it

> points to the portentous moral division we are supposed to see in the book; John Ducane, in his moral sensitivity and earnestness, is Good; whereas Kate Gray, basking in the love of her husband while splashing about in shallow emotional waters with John, is Nice, which isn't necessarily good. This is the kind of tension characteristic of the long tradition of liberal fiction, from George Eliot to Angus Wilson, which tends to give the word "moral" a bad name.[23]

Murdoch's plumbing the ethical and thematic subtleties is meritoriously achieved in this novel through the relatively large cast of varied and entertaining characters, and through the resourceful use of imagery that helps create an atmosphere of openness and optimism. In spite of Baldanza's claim that the novel is "crammed with little gems, that sometimes shine forth as thoroughly delightful in themselves as in Dickens but have little relevance to an overall pattern,"[24] I find that the cumulative function of colour, light, sun, space, and sea imagery evolves into a comprehensive pattern that considerably extends and enriches the meaning of the novel. Moreover, the thematic clarity and the gripping plot make this novel an appealing and significant illustration of Murdoch's concern with the issues of power and love. Even those who are annoyed at the novel's "soppy" conclusion find it "oddly undismissable" because "it still sufficiently exhibits those rare enough qualities which sustain all her novels: an imaginative invention, and a serious, generous and indefatigable attention to the problems of the moral life."[25] The Nice and the Good thus represents one of Murdoch's most significant works as a positive theoretical statement and as an earnest attempt to embody her basic position that "all power is sin." In the following novel, A Fairly Honourable Defeat, Murdoch veers, following a curious zigzag pattern, into the familiar territory of her "closed" novels where power reigns and where the malice and triumph of the central character, Julius King, creates a depressing effect that sharply contrasts with the positive, illuminating ethos of The Nice and the Good.

CHAPTER FIVE

A FAIRLY HONOURABLE DEFEAT

When Murdoch's thirteenth novel, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, was published in 1970, a *National Review* commentator wrote comparing it with *The Nice and the Good*:

> Iris Murdoch's next to last novel, *The Nice and the Good*, was about a family and its friends and they all slid toward a disaster that would have crushed them all. But they never got there. Common sense, compassion, love and understanding rescued them. Everyone remarked how unlike Iris Murdoch to have written such a novel. And now she has rewritten that novel, well disguised, of course, and this time the outcome is the very opposite. The same very nice people with the same civilized grasp of the art of living tumble to their annihilation.[1]

The above statement fails to spell out the causes, nature and moral implications of the disaster with which *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* concludes. While *The Nice and the Good* dramatizes how love prevails over the temptations of power, its successor embodies a world in which power, incarnated in the figure of Julius King, dominates. With the "honourable defeat" of Julius's main opponent, Rupert, the novel reveals the weakness and vulnerability of middle-class ethics in the face of cynical rationalism. The triumph of the power figure has significant symbolic consequences that go beyond the specific context and take on wider philosophical dimensions, representing the culmination of Murdoch's treatment of the power figure that epitomizes evil. While the power figures in the novels preceding *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* regard their victims as slaves, Julius King treats his victims as puppets: Julius refuses to take Morgan, Rupert's sister-in-law who is infatuated with him, as a slave; when she offers herself, he disdainfully replies, "I don't want a slave."[2] The slave is seen by the master as a beast to be tamed and possessed; the puppet is a mere device manipulated to sustain a game or to win an argument such as Julius's satanic contention about the frailty of human relationship. The power figures in the earlier novels may show some feeling or empathy to their enslaved victims; Julius, cold and ruthless reveals, on the other hand, no emotions whatsoever.

The novel's action is thus focused on a single, highly sophisticated power game that affects the life of the major characters, leading to the collapse of the successful marriage of two urbane middle-class people, Hilda and Rupert Foster, and the latter's tragic death. The cruel game is coldly and deliberately masterminded by Julius King, a specialist in chemical warfare. Julius has already developed for himself a confirmed set of ideas that propound the futility and absurdity of human existence. His motto is "the top of the structure is *completely* empty" (p. 199), implying the vacuity of human values and the pointlessness of man's efforts and passions. This cynical approach to life, Murdoch strongly suggests, allows trespassing on other people's identity. Thus, Julius, who is aware of himself as a power figure, regards people as mere puppets. By tampering destructively with the lives of others, he embodies all that Murdoch objects to.

The several references to puppetry and the prominence given to it illustrate its centrality and relevance to the core of Julius's thinking. In one of the long arguments with Julius about the nature of good and evil, Rupert charges, "You make human beings sound like puppets." Julius's emphatic reply reveals his deep and confirmed belief in the absurdity of human behaviour:

> 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 captivate you. (p. 200)

If people are puppets, then power, according to this theory, becomes the driving force that primes them into action: "We all know what moves people," Julius declares. "Fear, passions of all kinds. The desire for power, for instance. 'Few questions are more important than: who is the boss?" (p. 200). Later, when Julius coaxes Simon into watching Rupert's and Morgan's first rendezvous, Julius tells him, "I promised you a puppet show. You will be immensely diverted" (p. 232). However, after realizing that Julius has flagitiously plotted the whole shenanigan, Simon protests, "You cannot play with people like that" (p. 237). Simon's reaction here reflects Murdoch's position that legitimately rejects violating the sanctity of others' lives. Julius's final reference to puppetry comes towards the end of the novel as he reveals the entire scheme to Tallis, Morgan's husband:

> I must say, they have behaved predictably to an extent which is quite staggering. Indeed if any of them had been less than predictable the whole enterprise would have collapsed at an early stage. They really are puppets, puppets. (p. 366)

The essence of Julius's iniquitous scheme is to manipulate his victims into enacting the drama that he has carefully planned and ingeniously controls. He subsequently derives satisfaction not only from his view of himself as a "magician" (p. 372) and an "artist" (p. 386), but also from the power he exerts on others as he sees them perform the roles he has fashioned for them; Julius thus excels in fulfilling and culminating the ambition of all Murdoch's power figures to "interpret and enact the role of 'God'."[3] According to Patrick Swinden, Julius's clever designs have no observable motives: "like Iago, he appears to be a 'motiveless malignity'."[4] The fanciful comparison of the novel with Othello is not congruent with the dramatization of Julius and with Murdoch's philosophical vision. Though hidden and subtle, the motive is nevertheless there. Murdoch presents Julius as a god-like puppeteer who assigns to himself the role of benign superior power that sets things in order: he asserts that he is "an instrument of justice" (p. 387). Owing to the extent of the damage incurred through Julius's schemes and to our own understanding of Murdoch's condemnation of people who impose their designs and judgements on others, we cannot accept his claim at face value. On the other hand, Rubin Rabinovitz, in his review of the novel, suggests the following interpretation of Julius's motivation:

> The omission of conventional motivation for Julius's action is balanced against a crucial fact only revealed toward the end of the book: Julius is a survivor of Belsen. His evil acts are improbable, inexplicable, and even melodramatic--but no more so, Miss Murdoch is suggesting, than the evil Julius himself suffered during his imprisonment. A telephone which breaks when it is most needed is not so improbable as the idea of human beings confining their fellows in concentration camps, not so absurd as the idea of evil itself.[5]

The limitation of this statement is that it may, in the last sentence, imply that Murdoch condones Julius's acts as part of an absurdist vision, a clear contradiction of her humanist liberal-democratic ideology. The analogy that Rabinovitz makes between the remark on Belsen and Murdoch's profound cosmic vision is strained. Since Murdoch does not dwell fully on Julius's background experience at Belsen with the same degree of emphasis as with Willy Kost's concentration camp experiences in The Nice and the Good, or the Lusiewiczes' village background in The Flight from the Enchanter, it is difficult to extract anything beyond the clue to Julius's motives. Towards the end of his review, however, Rabinovitz identifies Julius with Satan, Beelzebub and Mephistopheles as an embodiment of evil. Within this context, he makes a reference to Simone Weil's concept of the transfer of suffering:

> Evil in Simone Weil's thought spreads and flourishes in the world as it is passed on from victim to victim in the form of suffering. A victim of evil finds relief from his own suffering most easily by causing suffering in others; in this manner a single evil act may pass from person to person in an endless chain. Julius is the prime example of one who transmits evil in this manner: after he has made his friends suffer he feels relief, not remorse.[6]

This extrapolation of the reference to Belsen is quite relevant to understanding Julius; it can, furthermore, be corroborated by Julius's claim to Hilda: "I am a lonely and deprived man, without family ties. . . . I am a homeless man" (pp. 308-309). Recalling the brutality of the Lusiewicz brothers in The Flight from the Enchanter, Julius's behaviour can thus be adequately explained in the light of Simone Weil's twin concepts of uprootedness and the transfer of suffering. Victimized and uprooted, Julius does not show the Christ-like quality, expounded by Max Lejour in The Unicorn (p. 116), to interrupt the cycle of destruction caused by power; instead, he perpetuates and aggravates the syndrome. Similar to the villainy of the Lusiewiczes and the nefariousness of Elsa Levkin in The Italian Girl, Julius's schemes represent, therefore, yet another instance of the displaced refugee who transfers his suffering by uprooting others through enslavement and manipulation.

Within this context of power and the transfer of suffering, we can understand Julius's involvement with research on nerve gas and anthrax. Noam Chomsky, whose linguistic theories are a topic of one of Morgan's essays (p. 113), had written, a few years prior to the publication of this novel, an illuminating article entitled "Knowledge and Power: Intellectuals and the Welfare/Warfare State," in which he dwells on the choices available for modern-day intellectuals:

> The intellectual has, traditionally, been caught between the conflicting demands of truth and power. He would like to see himself as the man who seeks to discern the truth, to tell the truth as he sees it, to act--collectively where he can, alone where he must--to oppose injustice and oppression, to help bring a better social order into being. If he chooses this path he can expect to be a lonely creature, disregarded or reviled. If, on the other hand, he brings his talents to the service of power, he can achieve prestige and affluence.[7]

Evidently, Julius opts for the latter alternative; as a warfare scientist, he belongs to that group of "the technical intelligentsia" involved in "the nightmare they are helping to create"[8] to satisfy "the demands of the military-industrial-academic complex."[9] Given his mental framework and philosophical stance, Julius is shown to be a person with no qualms about putting his talents in the service of the war machine. Rupert's tragic death, therefore, is but a link in the chain of destruction that also involves the production of anthrax, his life at Belsen, and even more deeply his family roots as a Kahn (a name that is bound to recall in the reader's memory associations of tyranny and destruction) who becomes King.

Although Julius's destructive presence dominates the novel and instigates most of the action, Murdoch does not leave him unopposed. She puts forward both Tallis and Rupert as his opponents. Tallis represents

Murdoch's vision of the good man who is free from selfish concerns; by dramatizing his altruistic acts, Murdoch presents him as Julius's foil. Unlike many other characters in the novel, he neither indulges in sophisticated arguments, nor is absorbed neurotically with his many personal worries. The emphasis is, on two important occasions, on his action, when he behaves simply and directly. He rescues a Jamaican from attack by thugs, while Julius, Simon and his lover, Axel, are either helpless or indifferent. Furthermore, as soon as he realizes the extent of the damage caused by Julius's schemings, Tallis leads him to the telephone booth and forces him to make a confession to Hilda about the whole episode. As Frank Baldanza describes him, Tallis is the "visionary liberal do-gooder . . . who, despite the fact that he lives in a nauseating squalor hardly matched anywhere in Dickens, qualifies as a saint figure to counterbalance the satanic artistry of Julius."[10] Similarly, to Elizabeth Dipple, Tallis represents

> an image of quiet, undemanding love directed towards whoever needs it. In the puppet image which dominates A Fairly Honourable Defeat, Tallis steadily pulls the pliable golden cord . . . .[11]

Murdoch thus presents, plausibly and successfully, Tallis as an appealing character who comes very close to her definition of "the good man" who "nothing himself, lets other things be through him."[12] While Tallis represents the antidote to Julius's actions, Rupert articulates the theoretic challenge to Julius's misanthropic ideas. Rupert, an amateur philosopher and a believer in the innate goodness of humanity, is fashioned after Marcus, who resists Carel's demonic schemes in The Time of the Angels. While Julius rejects, in a Nietzschean manner, Christianity as "one of the most gorgeous and glittering sources of illusion the human race has invented," Rupert sees it as "in its own way, a vehicle of spirit" (p. 198). Both Rupert and Marcus try to spell out their opposition in the form of a book propounding a marriage between Christian-based virtues and Platonic idealism. Although *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* does not create as oppressive and claustrophobic an impact on the reader as *The Time of the Angels*, the vision that it reveals is more depressing than that of the earlier work. While Carel commits suicide, Julius, after causing the death of his opponent, Rupert, survives unscathed and triumphant. Though not finished, Marcus's book remains in progress, whereas Rupert's manuscript is torn to pieces. The extent of Julius's power is thus shown to be superior to that of Carel and of greater moral and dramatic impact.

Julius's total control of events is, moreover, illustrated by the ineffectuality of the two characters who are supposed to foil his schemes, one by action, and the other by argument. Tallis and Rupert fall miserably short of representing a viable and serious counter-force to match Julius's clever and dynamic manoeuvrings. Tallis wastes his energies in such a way that he becomes depressingly unable to cope even with the messiness and squalor of his own situation. As Richard Todd observes, "Tallis's vigour affects others . . . . But he does not have the kind of vigour to alleviate affairs in his own life."[13] Rupert, on the other hand, is liable to the temptation of the illusory structure of thought springing from a well-sheltered life that makes one prone to be divorced from the solidity and simplicity of reality. Tallis's and Rupert's inability to abort Julius's trickery and machinations allows the latter a free hand to dominate the other characters by sheer energy and deception. As Elizabeth Dipple persuasively argues, both *The Time of the*

Angels and A Fairly Honourable Defeat

> are dedicated to allegorical proofs of the existence of evil, which Murdoch urges contemporary man to remember, to reintroduce into the permissive anti-evil consciousness of present western society.[14]

Julius's victory is, moreover, shown to be due to a strongly pragmatic sense of life, which his opponents and victims lack, as well as to his admiration of the potency of evil and his alliance and identification with it: he claims, "Evil . . . is exciting and fascinating and alive. It is also very much more mysterious than good. Good can be seen through. Evil is opaque" (pp. 215-16). This element of mystery and opacity applies aptly to Julius himself in the very way he engineers his plots--in fact, it applies to all the impenetrable power figures of Murdoch's novels, who embody Canetti's concept that secrecy is a source of power; Rupert thus perceptively observes: "Julius never reveals himself" (p. 309). Through secrecy and conspiracy, then, Julius cleverly exploits vulnerable spots in his victims as a means of coercion or manipulation, as he does with Hilda, Rupert and Morgan. "All human beings," Julius asserts unequivocally, "have staggeringly great faults which can easily be exploited by a clever observer" (p. 208).

With the exception of Honor Klein in A Severed Head, Julius, when compared with other active power figures in Murdoch's novels, is the only one whose knowledge and intelligence play a decisive role as a source of his power. In each of Murdoch's power figures, we can observe that a dominant characteristic constitutes the major factor in his or her power: with Mischa in The Flight from the Enchanter, it is his wealth; with Hannah in The Unicorn, her sexual and spiritual charisma, whereas with Gerald, his physical force; with Carel in The Time of the Angels, his family and priestly position; and with Ducane in The Nice and the Good, his authority as a bureaucrat. The emphasis laid on a specific dominant quality in the power figure explains how the victims, overwhelmed, enchanted or mystified, submit to domination. The source of Julius's charisma, his intelligence, represents the most abstract quality as compared with that of the others--a quality which gives him a unique and prominent position in the gallery of power figures in Murdoch's novels. While all the other power figures aim at making their victims relate to them as their slaves, Julius alone aims at making his victims relate to each other in the roles and fashions he has so single-mindedly and elaborately designed for them. His grand designs that launch several schemes involving a simultaneous control of a number of characters require greater mental alertness and sophistication. Julius's Mephistophelian cunning and dynamism, scope of ambition and dominant presence throughout the novel make him an infinitely superior character to all Murdoch's power figures preceding him.

Once Julius's cleverness and fascination with mischief are established in Part One of the book, the major operation of power that he skilfully masterminds is introduced and developed in Part Two. He manipulates two highly-educated persons in a love-intrigue so fantastic that it makes the reader incredulous. "Like all classic corrupters and con men," one reviewer comments on his tactics, "Julius uses his victims' own vanity to trap them."[15] His means of controlling the lives of others, Julius's cleverness formulates, moreover, formidable theoretical and moral justifications to sanction his acts. As A. S. Byatt suggests, Julius is "Nietzschean in his compelling vision of life as a formless joke."[16] What follows from such a nihilistic attitude is that all becomes permissible and nothing remains prohibited. The suggestion here is that when the power figure smugly declares that "the human race is ~~incurably~~ stupid" (p. 203), he allows himself to play havoc with the destiny of his victims, violating in the process the sanctity of their identity and freedom; he further pronounces:

> I have no general respect for the human race. They are a loathsome crew and don't deserve to survive. But they are destroying themselves quite fast enough without my assistance. (p. 194)

The incalculable damage resulting from Julius's dangerous games and abysmal assumptions represents yet another instance of Murdoch's increasingly confirmed belief that any operation of power leads, in one way or another, to disaster. Echoing Carel's cynicism, Julius's claim that "human beings cannot live without power any more than they can live without water" (p. 263) expresses the opposite of what Murdoch constantly propounds throughout her novels and philosophical writings: that love, not power, should be the basic foundation for human relationship.

Although Julius's charisma and power dominate almost all the characters in the novel, the homosexual couple, Axel and Simon, escape largely unscathed the damage that befalls others. This, according to A. S. Byatt, occurs because Axel and Simon embody Murdoch's idea (borrowed from Simone Weil) of *attention* as the source and manifestation of love:

> The reason why this novel is in many ways my favourite of Miss Murdoch's later works is because I think, in it, both reader and characters are drawn through the experience of *attention* to the being of others which Miss Murdoch sees as the heart of morality. Julius destroys Rupert. He does not destroy the homosexual marriage of Simon and Axel because, as we are shown, as we experience, they know each other too well. They love each other, talk to each other, consider each other, and reach

> a breaking-point when they automatically discuss Julius's lies and manipulation for what they are.[17]

Nevertheless, if we closely examine the relationship between Axel and Simon, we will find that it is far from Murdoch's (and essentially Weil's) idea of love because it is not based on equality and reciprocity. It is another instance of a relationship centered on power, though on a smaller scale, in which Axel dominates Simon sexually. A symptom of this domination is Simon's developing slave mentality: he tells Axel, "You are Apollo and I'm Marsyas. You'll end by flaying me" (p. 31). The following conversation between Axel and Simon reveals the commanding tone of Axel and the insults he hurls at Simon, who submissively puts up with them:

> [Simon] 'I've been nervous for days, actually.'
> [Axel] 'Why didn't you tell me, you little ass!'
> 'I know, I should have done. Somehow the idea of Julius is a bit frightening . . . .'
> 'Yes, I must confess, I was a little nervous too.'
> 'Why didn't you tell me?'
> 'I have my dignity to keep up.'
> 'Have I no dignity?'
> 'None. Come here. On your knees. No, I'm not going to beat you, even though you did ignore my signal, I just want to put my arms round your neck.' (p. 74)

Thus, whereas Julius covets collecting and controlling several puppets, Axel seems content with adopting a single slave.

As Jany Wartin observes, for Simon "love means power, and this is why he also connects it with fear, pain and suffering."[18] Similar to Nina's submission to Mischa in The Flight from the Enchanter, Jamesie's surrender to Gerald in The Unicorn and Pattie's infatuation with Carel in The Time of the Angels, Simon develops the slave mentality that Simone Weil has already defined for us, by which the victim of power substitutes sexual adoration for the humiliation of submission. Simon's capitulation to Julius's conspiratorial summons to his flat reveals, on the other hand, fascination with Julius's sexual power to the precipitous point of falling within Julius's sphere of influence:

> He was about to share a secret with Julius. What sort of secret would it turn out to be? Simon felt guilt, alarm, excitement. It occurred to him for the first time that he found Julius physically attractive. At any rate, the idea of now confronting him was producing certain sorts of familiar tremors and symptoms. But then, thought Simon, I have never been able to distinguish between fear and sexual desire. His nervousness increased. (p. 141)

Julius's treatment of Simon reflects the behaviour of the mischievous puppeteer who enjoys manipulating and setting roles for the people whom he disdains. Recalling Mischa's tactics of sexual teasing and then holding back in The Flight from the Enchanter, Julius demonstrates a similar sexual prowess "to charm and churn the imagination"[19] of his victims, but never to satisfy. Asexual as they appear, both Mischa and Julius nevertheless deploy sex as part of their strategy for power. By the same token, Julius dazzles and enslaves the "clever snob" Morgan because, as Hilda puts it, "cleverness can be a sexual power" (p. 16). Although Julius ingeniously takes advantage of Simon's vulnerability towards Axel and manages to manipulate him, he does not, however, succeed completely, partly because he never really bothers to break Simon's ties with Axel but, most important, because it takes another power figure, Axel, to act as a counter-force to check Julius's infiltration into his domain. Interestingly enough, the novel shows lucidly the differences in style between each power figure. Julius uses his intelligence to manipulate and influence characters of considerable strength and education; Axel, on the other hand, resorts to coercion and sulkiness to control Simon, who, compared with Julius's victims, is a much easier fish to catch. Julius's intentions and strategies are, therefore, subtler and more complex than the self-serving intentions and open means of Axel. Axel thus comes across as a minor power figure.

Apart from A. S. Byatt, other critics have already observed how Murdoch has emphatically and discreetly handled the issue of homosexuality. Louis Martz calls Murdoch's portrayal of the affair a "bold attempt" and "a success unprecedented in English fiction."[20] Rubin Rabinovitz observes that Murdoch does not take advantage of Simon's befuddled behaviour in the farcical scene at Julius's apartment, in which he is locked naked while Morgan runs off wearing his clothes, to make easy jokes about homosexuality. "Indeed," Rabinovitz says, "Simon and Axel are presented as a stable and loving couple; Miss Murdoch describes their relationship with insight, and they are among the most convincing characters in the novel."[21] On the other hand, Frank Baldanza detects a touch of irony in Murdoch's treatment of the homosexual affair:

> It is one of the more obvious ironies of this novel that the only menage to remain intact, even in the face of Julius's expert conniving, is the homosexual liaison between Axel and Simon. In her first full-scale portraiture of such a relationship, aside from Michael's reminiscences in The Bell, [22] Miss Murdoch shows the same sure command of the unique details of individual experience that she demonstrates in her handling of more normative relationships, at the same time that she practices an ironical detachment that could only be attained after a deeply empathetic identification with her characters.[23]

Murdoch's tolerance of homosexuality in general should not, however, be construed as an indication that she approves of the relationship between Axel and Simon; nor do they represent an embodiment of love or attention. Since Murdoch recurrently dwells on Simon's fears and frustrations, and on Axel's domination, portrayed as tyrannical though in the guise of love, it is inconceivable that she should regard the ménage as entirely healthy. We can particularly infer this attitude on Murdoch's part in the way she shapes the reaction of Axel and Simon toward the end of the novel when they decide, out of fear of Julius's power, to keep quiet about his destructive scheming, though it becomes clear to them that a catastrophe is forthcoming in Rupert's marriage. In fact, one of the most illuminating comments on Julius's trickery and puppeteering is uttered by Axel when he confirms to Simon that Julius does "mystify people and make them act parts" (p. 356). However, both Axel and Simon are shown as so insecurely absorbed within the shell of themselves that they do not dare to interfere when their action could have averted disaster.

In the dynamics of their relationship with each other or with the novel's central figure, Axel and Simon thus give an added dimension to Murdoch's treatment of power. Similarly, Rupert's son, Peter, enriches the novel's dramatization of power. Like the pair of male lovers, Peter, as a rebellious adolescent, represents a new introduction into the gallery of Murdoch's characters. Although he is essentially a flat character, Peter appears relatively more rounded than half a dozen or so adolescent characters that we meet in the novels preceding A Fairly Honourable Defeat, characters such as Felicity and Donald Mor in The Sandcastle, Penn and Miranda in An Unofficial Rose, and Flora in The Italian Girl; only Annette in The Flight from the Enchanter serves as an exception. Peter's dramatic significance stems from his raising, awkwardly but aggressively, an issue that no other Murdoch character has ever done, since the radical Lefty in Under the Net: the values and morality of life under capitalism. Not only does he reject his parents' complacent life style, but also he violates their canons of ethics by acts such as shop-lifting and desertion of school and family. Peter highlights the weakness of the seemingly solid marriage of his self-indulgent parents and helps prepare us for its imminent collapse. Regardless of their preachings about love, they both fail to show their son genuine affection. His rebellion represents, Murdoch suggests, a rejection of their authority over him as well as the bourgeois values to which they subscribe. Peter sees those values epitomized in the struggle for power: he declares, "No. Power is just what I don't want, mother. That's another false God. Gain Power so that you can do good! That's another way to waste your life" (p. 60). What instigates Peter's rebellion is the condescending attitude of his parents. Although shown to be charitable and friendly, they nevertheless patronizingly assign to themselves an authority to oversee the affairs of others. In this respect their attitudes are similar to those of Kate and Octavian Gray in The Nice and the Good, notwithstanding Rupert and Hilda's greater sexual restraint. Hilda's caring and "busybodying" about others is, like Kate's, possessive; her opposition to Morgan's marriage to Tallis undermines it by aggravating Morgan's disenchantment with it (p. 134). It appears, therefore, doubly ironic that Peter should reside in Tallis's house: Tallis, in whose marriage the Fosters meddle, spares, in his usual selfless manner, the suave couple the embarrassment and inconvenience of Peter's belligerence by sheltering and befriending him. Furthermore, if the seemingly rational and pluralist parents cannot put up with their own son's iconoclasm, how, Murdoch suggests, would they tolerate others? Similar to Hilda's "busybodying," Rupert's preaching about virtue and morality can be viewed as a covering of an unconscious drive for power. Jany Wartin thus argues that

> . . . Rupert is mainly concerned with organising other people's lives, with imposing his patterns of ideas upon others . . . . he associates love with authority and power. Love, for him, implies interfering with other people's lives and bullying them.[24]

Peter's destruction of his father's book on morality (of which Murdoch is, incidentally, critical) not only represents a symbolic death ritual for his parents' values spelled out in it, but also an act of desperation and protest, that recalls Don Mor's hazardous attempt to climb the school tower in The Sandcastle.

Regardless of the relative emphasis given to Peter's crudely formulated pronouncements in the novel, it is evident that they contradict Murdoch's liberal ideas. Murdoch's liberalism disagrees with Peter's ideology which rejects society *in toto*. She prefers that much-needed reforms should emanate from the traditional institutions already established within the structure of the Welfare State.[25] The tone of the radical and quasi-anarchist ideas as propounded by an immature adolescent makes one feel that Murdoch does not take them seriously. Furthermore, the fact that he and Julius, the novel's urbane villain, act together to destroy Rupert's life-time project, his book on morality in a godless world, implies that Murdoch sees Peter's anarchism, despite his harmless intentions, leading to the same kind of disaster as Julius's absurdist cynicism.

As in the other Murdoch novels discussed thus far, A Fairly Honourable Defeat presents a single power figure dominating, influencing and interfering, in various degrees and shapes, with the lives of other characters. Julius develops the influence he has by penetrating others' lives through their most vulnerable spots, such as Rupert's vanity, Hilda's marital insecurity, Morgan's sexual and emotional cravings. Murdoch thus creates a set-up in which these characters fall, in the final analysis, victims to the schemes of Julius's designing mind. As a result, a gloomy mood prevails and the world of the novel becomes depressingly bleak. In her other novels, Murdoch emphatically posits and presents love as a viable counter-balance to power; even in The Time of the Angels, with all the nihilism and dark vision that dominate it, there are a few signposts pointing toward happier dimensions and alternative worlds to Carel's rectory. In the present novel, gloom is created not only by the tragedy with which the novel concludes but also by the marked absence of characters who are free from crisis, characters who impart a glimmer of hope; power thus without facing any open challenge or serious combat dominates. We are consequently left with no consolation about the nightmarish demise of innocence and normalcy which the power figure prophesies and to which he contributes, or as Elizabeth Dipple maintains "the devastation has been so great that the reader justifiably questions any hope for mankind in a world where the golden cord [Tallis] is so humble and powerless."[26]

What reinforces the gloomy tone of the novel is the depiction of the animals that populate the novel's canvas. To start with, there are few animals in this novel, especially when compared with The Unicorn or The Nice and the Good; in this respect, A Fairly Honourable Defeat is very similar to The Time of the Angels. The role of the animals is usually to create an air of relief from the intensity caused by struggle, pursuit and enslavement. With the exception of the furious dogs in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, we seldom see dangerous or aggressive animals in Murdoch's novels. Their harmlessness and liberation from human worries allow them to inhabit a world of their own as if they were out of the reach of the power figures. Like the characters with whom we associate them, the few animals that we find in this novel are clearly in death or near-death situations. As in her other works, Murdoch intends here to show symbolically the affinity that exists between the characters and the animals, as when Hannah in The Unicorn compares the fishes' struggle in rough and rocky rivers to reach their mating place to that of souls approaching God--a reflection of her own aspiration to embody both sexual and spiritual power. Although Murdoch usually portrays animals as innocent life energies free from the schemings of human beings, A Fairly Honourable Defeat reveals them as victims of man's callous and superior power. Portrayed as sharing with the oppressed humans their fate of suffering and entrapment, the animals thus enrich the tone of the novel and contribute to its cohesiveness.

The three most obvious instances of the portrayal of animals involve a fly, a hedgehog and a stray bird. Tallis rescues a fly which has fallen into his glass (p. 159). This seemingly insignificant incident shows Tallis, as in his rescue of the Jamaican in the restaurant and his protection of his immigrant tenants from police harrassment, as a figure of love, who cares for people and beings beyond himself. Similarly, Tallis's father, Leonard, biting and cynical as he is about the futility of human endeavour, passes his time feeding pigeons. The hedgehog that we meet early in the novel is found dead in the pool. Significantly enough, Hilda discovers its death at the moment when her suspicion of her husband's infidelity peaks; it foreshadows, accordingly, the imminent collapse of her erstwhile happy marriage. Her suspicion and desertion of her husband drive him towards his death in the same pool; the hedgehog's death thus portends that of Rupert.

The novel's most significant depiction of animals relates to Morgan's experience in the underground tube station where she observes a stray pigeon trapped. As Frank Baldanza comments, the incident represents a "major example of the author's poetic skill; out of the most shabby urban milieu grows a transcendent experience of unreality, which never quite cancels the ordinariness of the context."[27] The episode brings, furthermore, several issues into focus at once. A panicking pigeon trapped in "a warm dusty-electric-lighted underground place" (p. 291) is an apt reflection of Morgan's own loss of her sense of direction as she finds herself almost simultaneously entangled in relationships with four men, all of which lead nowhere. Neither Morgan nor the pigeon finds an avenue of hope out of their respective predicaments. The incident also shows Morgan's potential to transcend her neurotic concerns and to sympathize lovingly, although ineffectually, with the suffering of the bird; the situation that "filled her heart with pity and horror" (p. 291) indicates, like Dora Greenfield's rescue of a butterfly during her train trip in The Bell, her love for innocent beings beyond herself. Throughout the novel Morgan is revealed as an apathetically neurotic character who, like an absolute slave, addresses her master as "god" and prostrates herself at Julius's feet, begging for his love. Although Morgan's portrayal here is drastically different from Murdoch's sympathetic dramatization of Dora's progress toward maturity and independence, Morgan's loss of her handbag in her worry about the pigeon recalls Dora's loss of her luggage in her preoccupation with the butterfly. While Dora succeeds both in protecting the butterfly and, eventually, in retrieving her luggage, Morgan neither saves the bird nor finds her handbag--a symbolic indication that Dora will manage to overcome her marital difficulties, whereas with Morgan, the incident serves as an apt foreshadowing of her inability to solve her personal and emotional problems. Morgan's experience in the pigeon episode assumes, moreover, a poetic quality. Reminiscent of Dante's description of his imaginary descent into hell in The Inferno and Eliot's depiction in The Waste Land of dehumanized civil servants flowing over London Bridge on a foggy day, Murdoch portrays a tortured soul in a senseless, indifferent world where "tired thoughtless people" are mere "shadows with anxious vague eyes" (p. 292).

The main function of the animals in this novel, as we have witnessed, is to operate as symbols reflecting the characters' state of mind. The novel, moreover, contains several other symbols working toward the same purpose. The tie that Simon gives to Axel as a birthday gift indicates the fairly stable attachment between the two. On the other hand, the strings of Morgan's amber necklace that Tallis sentimentally wears underneath his shirt break when Morgan and Tallis are on the verge of making a sexual contact; the strings are never mended as it becomes evident that Morgan's marriage to Tallis has irreparably broken down. Recalling Carel's priestly cassock in The Time of the Angels, the "black" or "rather somber" (p. 401) suits that Julius usually wears make him look "immaculate and clerical" (p. 270); the suits here reflect the dark abyss of his self. (In a way which recalls Carel's identification with dark places, Julius often surprises his victims by appearing suddenly "standing in the gloom" [p. 83] or "materializing" in "half light" [p. 193].) Moreover, the handbag containing Morgan's identification and credit cards lost at the tube station symbolizes her self lost in the midst of her emotional imbroglio and her neurotic possessiveness, momentarily transcended as, in a process of sublimation, she becomes concerned about something outside herself.

Like Morgan's handbag, Hilda and Rupert's swimming pool symbolizes the materialism of their comfortable upper middle-class life; they take pride in having people fussily gather around it. The same pool, however, kills Rupert--an indication that the Fosters' vanity, complacency and possessiveness leads to the demise of their marriage and the death of Rupert. In a slightly different interpretation, Jany Wartin sees the pool as part of the water imagery that pervades other novels by Murdoch, such as the rain in *The Sandcastle* and *The Red and the Green*, the sea in *The Unicorn* and *The Nice and the Good*, the Thames in *Under the Net*, *Bruno's Dream* and *A Word Child*, and the lake in *The Bell*. "Water," Wartin observes, "is a symbol for unpredictable life, for contingent reality: in some places, at some moments, the water is quiet, clear and reassuring; in other places, at other moments, it is troubled, dark and menacing."[28] The pool thus has a deceptive nature: it is "part of the dream-world in which most of the characters live, and its apparent beauty and tranquillity make them unaware of its potential danger." Furthermore, the rain that prevents Hilda from reaching Rupert in time to avoid his death in the pool is part of contingent reality. Water, accordingly, appears generally colluding with the power figure and complementing his schemes. Elizabeth Dipple makes, however, a significant and valid observation:

> It is clear that the ability to handle the potential destructiveness of water and to see this element as life-giving is major, and in a way reflects Joseph Conrad's use of the same image. It is important that the satanic Julius cannot swim, and when Simon . . . in a frenzy of trapped rage pushes him into the pool, his monumental panic presents the only picture of his broken facade in the novel.[29]

The symbols, whether animals or natural objects, that we find in A Fairly Honourable Defeat thus enrich and enhance the novel's major concern with power. Moreover, they do not function as mere local ornaments or contrived embellishments but as an integral part of the novel's texture: the swimming pool is, for instance, almost a permanent part of the scenery. As Jany Wartin observes, Murdoch's effective use of symbols indicates her success in blending naturalism (meaning, as Murdoch understands it, realism) and formalism:

> The symbols are not planted artificially into the narrative, they really act as narrative devices, i.e., they give another dimension to the characters and to their experience without destroying their contingency.[30]

Like her treatment of symbols, Murdoch's control of point of view relates to the novel's major concern with power. As in her other novels, the authorial voice remains the main source of information, with occasional projection into the minds of a select number of characters. Most important, Julius's point of view is not given; this represents yet another example of denying the reader access to the mind of the power figure. There is, however, one exception in the brief last chapter, where the narrator gives us, six times, indirect quotations from Julius's thoughts. On a sunny autumn day in Paris, Julius, relaxed and indulgent, thinks about painting and music, his satisfaction with being "not closely involved with human beings" (p. 402), his stay in Paris, his apéritif and his digestion, his choice of a restaurant; the passage concludes with a general statement that life has been good to him. Most important, we witness no signs of repentance or regret concerning the serious consequences to which his interference in the lives of others has led. Nor is there any mention of or concern about anyone other than himself, as if all those with whom he has been involved are so insignificant that they disappear altogether from his mind. The shift in point of view, therefore, may seem inconsistent with the method followed in the novel up to the last chapter. The reason for this change, however, may be that Murdoch aims at dramatizing Julius's callousness and his inability to feel remorse. Murdoch may have anticipated a danger of the reader being taken in by Julius's eloquent argument throughout the novel as well as his superficial concern toward Tallis three chapters earlier. Her projection into Julius's mind serves, accordingly, as an indirect commentary on Julius's practices of power; the moral commentary must be so significant at the novel's final stage that Murdoch provides it at the expense of consistency.

The novel's concluding sentence, "life was good," represents, as already suggested, Julius's and not Murdoch's point of view. We as readers know that life has been a tragedy for a number of characters, and i[illegible]s been so mainly through Julius's manipulation. Therefore, the sentence imparts irony. This relates to several other instances of ironic statements and incidents involving Julius. Hilda, while Julius is undermining her marriage, calls him "very kind" (p. 308), unaware that his "kindness" will lead to her husband's death. Similarly, Julius's name for himself, "an instrument of justice," is an ironic misnomer, for nothing comes out of this "justice" but misery. In another instance of irony, Julius mends Tallis's wound and cleans and tidies his kitchen while he is the one who has caused Tallis an incurable wound and precipitated all the messiness in his life by having an affair with his wife, Morgan. Elizabeth Dipple argues, however, that

> the interfering Julius is surprised not only at Tallis's unimpressive demeanour, but at his embarrassed courtesy towards him, his humility and his messiness, and the result of this surprise is a new version of the Christ-Satan conflict which alters the traditional allegory completely. Christ declines to fight or judge, so Satan has to go to him with his confession, whereas in the old tale, the two mighty forces were in combat. Murdoch, who denies expectations of many sorts in this novel, alters both the Christ figure and the Satan, and it is questionable whether the reader can follow her entirely in either case.[32]

Missing the ironic impact of Julius's behaviour, Dipple's conclusion suggests rather unnecessarily and unconvincingly Murdoch's failure in handling this aspect of the action. As part of the novel's texture, irony functions as the author's signal to the reader regarding the subtlety and hypocrisy of the power game that Julius plays with his victims. Quite aptly, Murdoch achieves her aim, in that these instances of irony are at once plausible and integral parts of the narrative. Although the instances of irony in this novel are not as well-developed and hilarious as, for example, Annette's suicide attempt in The Flight from the Enchanter, the various twists and hints of irony here help, nevertheless, to lessen the novel's depressing mood and contribute to its appeal to the reader.

One other element that makes A Fairly Honourable Defeat appealing is the symbolic impact and the precision of the description of the various settings in London. Recalling Mischa's cellars in his palatial London house where people are coaxed and coerced, Julius's cold apartment where the naked Morgan and Simon are locked in serves as a jail to trap and incarcerate his victims. Moreover, the specificity of the locale and the first hand knowledge that Murdoch shows about the areas in which the events take place indicate the author's mastery of her power of description. In fact, Murdoch's readers become aware of her consummate skill in this respect from her very first novel, Under the Net, where we have references to different landmarks in and around London such as pubs, theatres, churches, streets and the Thames. The same holds true in most of her subsequent novels. Louis Martz sees Murdoch, in her successful achievement in the description of the London settings in her novels, as "the most important heir to the Dickens tradition."[33] He further comments that the novel's "admirably functional" settings are polarized around two areas. The "elegance and sophistication" of the Boltons, where the Fosters live comfortably and Julius contemplates acquiring a house, is pitted against the shabbiness of Notting Hill: "against the atmosphere of the Boltons is placed the decaying (and Dickensian) atmosphere of Tallis's house in Notting Hill, a step down from Danby's moldy house on Stadium Street."[34]

Although Murdoch concentrates on the characters living in the Boltons, perhaps because such an area is familiar territory to her, she does give us glimpses of what life is like at Notting Hill. While she depicts the Bolton characters as showing extreme civility towards each other in their ceremonious but superficial drinking, talking and eating rituals, she portrays sympathetically the way the Notting Hill characters are genuinely interested in and concerned about each other. The following passage expresses, in a moving way and with a quietly sad tone, the affinity between Tallis and his neighbours:

> Tallis went down the stairs and knocked. The Sikh, asked to turn down his transistor, turned it off altogether. He inquired kindly about Leonard. . . . Tallis was offered tea but refused. He looked with gratitude into the gentle dark sympathetic eyes of the man from so far away. He had heard the story of the Sikh's life. It was not a happy one. . . . He

> thought for a moment of the Sikh and the Pakistanis upstairs, who had come, no doubt with hopes, for who can prevent the human heart from hoping, from their own troubled lands into this alien milieu of poverty and racial tension and petty crime. (p. 396)

The last sentence of the passage clearly spells out forms of power struggles, social and political, that Murdoch, regardless of a profound commitment to her liberal-democratic ideology, has never elaborated on beyond mere occasional hints. Like the Boltons', Notting Hill's characters are also involved in a power struggle, but this time of a social rather than an interpersonal nature. The Pakistani tenants living upstairs in Tallis's house, the reader is told, are harassed by the police, and a Sikh tenant living downstairs has won one battle to keep his turban while on the job and is now involved in another, whereby, ironically, he is "happily united with his fellow males in an attempt to sabotage a campaign for women bus-drivers" (p. 396). Moreover, the characters in Notting Hill are involved in these power struggles not out of their own free choice, but as something imposed on them, usually as victims; to them it is a matter of sheer survival. On the other hand, Julius's tactics of power are, as Murdoch repeatedly suggests, either mere games played to overcome boredom, or practical expressions of absurdist and cynical views of life. In fact, all the power figures in Murdoch's novels seem to resort to manoeuvrings of power out of sheer mischief, or the drive to enslave others, but never out of necessity. This observation refutes Julius's contention that "few questions are more important than 'who is the boss?'" (p. 200). Human relationship can, Murdoch suggests, dispense with power and let love illuminate the way people relate to each other. Murdoch's earnest and effective embodiment of this simple but essential concept represents, within the given context, a genuine contribution to contemporary British fiction.

With A Fairly Honourable Defeat, Murdoch complements and develops the themes of The Time of the Angels. The subtle but significant shift in the portrayal of the power figure in this novel renders the complaint about the lack of anything fresh in Murdoch's successive novels irrelevant; a frustrated critic claims, for instance, in his comments on this novel that Murdoch's "determination annually to rewrite the same novel has the effect of compelling the reluctant reviewer to rewrite his earlier review."[35] Unlike his predecessors who treat their victims as slaves, the cool, urbane and rational power figure of this novel severs the tie of humanity with his victims and relates to them only as puppets --a change in attitude that entails grave moral consequences. The cosmic doom that Julius King so articulately portends for humanity is reflected in the nightmarish atmosphere of the novel. The skilful treatment of animals, water imagery, settings and symbols enhances the permeating gloom with Julius's playful games of evil. As an allegory of power and a dramatization of evil, A Fairly Honourable Defeat culminates then Murdoch's penetration into the abyss of power. In the following novels, a new stage of Murdoch's career begins with the emergence of a new brand of power figures.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SEA, THE SEA

Between the publication of A Fairly Honourable Defeat in 1970 and that of The Sea, The Sea in 1978, Iris Murdoch has published five novels at an incredible rate of almost a novel a year. The distinctive feature that clearly emerges from the study of these novels is the dwindling role of the god-like figure in the overall plot. The power figure, though not disappearing entirely, is no longer the instrumental driving force that influences and shapes events. Several qualitative changes are, furthermore, revealed in his behaviour--changes that point to a significant shift in Murdoch's treatment of the power figure.

In An Accidental Man (1971), Matthew Gibson Grey, a successful career diplomat, tries, often vainly, to help his friends and relatives, especially his delinquent brother, Austin. Matthew's help, however, entails, intentionally or otherwise, interference with the lives of others. His nephew Garth describes him as "a false prophet," "an entangler," and "a fat charmer, charming his way to paradise."[1] Moreover, the belligerent Austin openly challenges him:

> You set up in business as a sort of sage. All right, you probably don't do it on purpose, it's an instinct. But all it means is that you're prepared to muddle about with people you feel connected with, where the connection is amusing or flattering. It's a sort of sexual drive, really. You want power where it's interesting. Where you could use it to some decent purpose, but the interest's lacking, you put on the other act, frankness and simplicity and not saying more than you really feel and so on.[2]

Not only is the power figure ridiculed and challenged openly (a phenomenon occurring here for the first time in a Murdoch novel) but also, more importantly, the power figure himself feels remorse and pain. Regretting his implication in the accidental death of Dorina, Austin's wife, Matthew admits, "I am left with the tangled end of good intentions that went wrong. I shall never know the extent of my responsibility."[3] After he realizes that he is neither needed nor wanted, Matthew abandons not only the people he tried to influence but the country itself.

The central characters of the following two novels, Bradley Pearson of The Black Prince (1973) and Blaise Cavender of The Sacred and the Profane Love Machine (1974) indulge in muddled sexual schemes by means of which they inadvertently bring disaster to others and disgrace upon themselves. Pearson's erotic attachment to Julian, three decades his junior and the daughter of Arnold Baffin, Pearson's intellectual protégé, leads to his elopement with her. Arnold subsequently catches up with him in his secret hideout and leaves with Julian. In this intensely dramatic episode, Murdoch shows how the protégé can efficiently battle with his "spiritual father,"[4] out-manoeuvre him, and eventually force him to realize that he has been "quite sufficiently defeated."[5] The novel highlights Pearson's tragedy by ending with his death in prison after his conviction for murdering Arnold. Similarly entangled in a ruinous sexual affair, Blaise, a husband and father, develops a long and clandestine relationship with another woman, Emily, the mother of his second son. Blaise's control over his two women, however, ceases when Emily revolts, forcing him to acknowledge her to Harriet, his shocked yet benign wife. The ensuing complications lead to Harriet's accidental death; as if in an act of poetic justice, Blaise is attacked and maimed by her ferocious dogs. The vulnerabilities that these two central characters reveal thus highlight the novels' thematic emphasis on the futility of the pursuit of power--an exercise in which both the victim and the victimizer lose.

A Word Child (1975), similar in its almost picaresque quality to Murdoch's first novel, Under the Net, concludes, like the two preceding novels, tragically. The novel's protagonist-narrator, Hilary Burde, is involved with the accidental deaths of both the first and second wives of his Oxford mentor and later superior, Gunnar Jopling. The dénouement reveals the characters as if they were controlled by an omnipotent power that forces them to re-live the agonies of the past. The power figure is here absent, unless Hilary's ability to attract attention from the characters around him is a form of power in disguise.

In Murdoch's next novel, Henry and Cato (1978), the titular heroes exercise various forms of power over others. Henry, a second-rate lecturer at a community college, inherits a large sum of money--money that he associates with unhappy childhood memories and therefore wants to get rid of. Alternatively, Henry's sexual control over Stephanie, the charwoman of his deceased brother's apartment, satisfies his craving for the sense of self-assurance which makes him feel as if "the world has surrendered to his will."[6] He sees Stephanie as "the prisoner of his will, and in her humble little way she both has exhibited and rejoiced in her captive state."[7] Cato, on the other hand, exercises both sexual and spiritual power over "Beautiful Joe." This power wanes, however, in the face of Joe's resort to kidnapping, extortion and violence, leading to his eventual death at the hands of his former mentor. The priestly figure of Cato, with his fascination with the "power of the authoritative teacher, the power of the wise confessor"[8] and his doubts about the credibility and value of faith, can be seen as a re-working of the spiritual cynicism of Carel Fisher in The Time of the Angels. Reminiscent of the bombed-out setting that surrounds Carel's rectory, Cato's abode is located in a dismantled area of London. Both novels dramatize the interplay of power with organized religion, sex and violence, faith and skepticism. Unlike Carel, however, Cato consistently and agonizingly questions his motives and shows a capacity for remorse over wrong actions.

The present study does not pause to explore in depth these five novels, but rather focuses on the manner in which Murdoch handles the role of the power figure in the novels following A Fairly Honourable Defeat. These five works bring to light a subtle shift in Murdoch's treatment of the power figure--a shift that in turn reflects a progressively solidified philosophical stand within the liberal tradition. As implied in the opening remark of this chapter, none of these novels presents a striking power figure of the calibre and magnitude of Mischa Fox or Julius King; the ubiquitous, the god-like, the master "puppeteer" who, by the sheer exercise of will, dominates the lives of other characters is no more present. Instead, we witness characters who enjoy a relative degree of influence over others; this influence appears, however, either ineffectual, as with Matthew in An Accidental Man, or takes a mediocre turn as with Henry in Henry and Cato. The successive pattern that emerges highlights the shrinking in the role of the power figure. Such a pattern concomitantly reflects certain predictable, albeit not radical, changes in the technique of the novel.

Since A Fairly Honourable Defeat, Murdoch has stopped numbering her chapters and presents the whole novel as one mass of material punctuated by blank spaces.[9] This division into unnumbered sections rather than definite chapters provides greater flexibility. The novel is transformed into a densely intertwined network of dialogue, actions and events, This "loosened up" outward shape reflects, furthermore, the absence of the domineering figure who usually functions in the dual role of the organizing force in the lives of the other characters, and the novel's focus.

Apart from this structural change, Murdoch's treatment of point of view allows the reader, for the first time, access to the mind of her power figures. We have already been given glimpses of Julius King's mind in the last chapter of A Fairly Honourable Defeat. In a gradual and progressive manner, Murdoch continues this practice in the subsequent novels. In An Accidental Man, for instance, we observe Matthew trying to justify morally and emotionally his interference in his brother's life (although the power figure in the earlier novels commonly practises interference, he does not seek to probe his own actions):

> I came to set him free, thought Matthew. I came to change magic into spirit. It was all to be brought about by me. Now when it appears that somehow or other, by means which I do not even understand, he has got out, I ought to be glad. Did I really want to be his mentor and to set up as his judge? No. He has his desolation as I have mine, and let him be free of it. I wanted that bond to be cut, but I did not want to cut it myself. And now I am sad as if I lost a beloved.[10]

This passage reveals Matthew contemplating the failure of his attempt to modify and improve his relationship with his brother; as is characteristic of any wielder of power, Matthew wants to redress things on his own terms and to his own convenience.

Murdoch's erstwhile reluctance to present the point of view of the power figure is primarily based on moral grounds, that is, on her disapproval of power practices as essentially or potentially evil. The projection, therefore, into the minds of the "power figures" of the later novels suggests a degree of closeness or empathy toward them on Murdoch's part. This modification in the narrative practice, however, should not necessarily mean that she subscribes to their justifications or shares their stands. The emergence in Murdoch's later novels of power figures that are closer to the ordinary person signifies, I suggest, a readiness for tolerance and understanding on her part; this readiness in turn points to a shift that progresses towards the embodiment of her liberal humanist ideals of love, freedom and pluralism. The change in authorial sympathy implies, significantly enough, richness and sophistication of vision that reveal themselves in the analytical depth of character presentation that the later novels demonstrate. The central characters gain in both density and complexity as they reveal conflicting motives and various shades of moral colouring. At the same time, the manoeuverings of the power figures fall short of their goals. The failure of Matthew's endeavours, for instance, is typically representative of the later phase in that his schemings for power are either curtailed or thwarted. Such failure in the later novels often occurs when the other characters regard the power figure as their equal; by extension, the aura of intrigue and enchantment which is concomitant with the power figure in the earlier novels has all but disappeared. Curtailment and thwarting of his designs take several forms, ranging from ridicule (as when Hilary's office colleagues mock him) to open defiance (Emily's revolt against Blaise Cavender) to violence (Joe's kidnapping of Cato).

Whatever form it may take, this opposition to the power figure is not present to a tangible or emphatic degree in Murdoch's earlier novels; as already suggested, the domination of the power figure is so overwhelmingly oppressive that the victims deem it useless to challenge him in open combat. It would indeed be inconceivable to expect any character in The Flight from the Enchanter, for instance, to try to defy Mischa's power. Consequently, a pattern of escape mechanism develops in the behaviour of the victims, ranging from flight (Dora's escape from Paul's tyranny in The Bell) to the transformation of slavery into a one-sided love relationship (Isabel's enchantment with David Levkin in The Italian Girl).

Murdoch's later novels point to a change in the role of the power figure from the previous god-like position to that of an almost ordinary figure with common human vulnerabilities. As a corollary, the outcome of the exercises of power is not as extreme as in the earlier novels, although the underpinnings of these exercises may be almost as morally objectionable. We witness no tragic or violent events that parallel the various murders and suicides in a novel like The Unicorn. We still, notwithstanding, find instances of killing, neither of which is directly related to a conscious exercise of power, nor is within the control of the power figure. The killings are mostly accidental, as in Harriet's incredibly timed death in a terrorist shooting in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, and in Kitty's drowning in A Word Child. The emergence in Murdoch's later novels of power figures that are closer to the ordinary person indicates a subtle, but noteworthy, shift in her literary career--a shift whose various thematic and technical features are amply embodied in The Sea, The Sea (1978).

The Sea, The Sea deals with the experiences of its hero, Charles Arrowby, as he starts a life of semi-secluded retirement in a village by the cliffs of an often turbulent sea. It dramatizes Arrowby's inability to recognize the reality of his new situation now that the power of his youth and his position as a theatre director is gone. The work focuses on the illusions of an erstwhile power figure. In a departure from all the previous novels, The Sea, The Sea thus reveals the mind of a character who has seen days of prestige and power. Murdoch has used first-person narration in several of her novels, starting with Under the Net, and in five others: A Severed Head, The Italian Girl, The Black Prince, A Word Child, and The Sea, The Sea. This novel is significant in that here Murdoch lets the power figure exclusively dominate the narrative, becoming, to quote Henry James in his preface to The Ambassadors, "at once hero and historian, endowed . . . with the romantic privilege of the first person."[11] By resorting to first-person narration, she exposes the inner motives and justifications of the central character. The technique proves its effectiveness by underscoring the contrast between the narrator's claims and the reality of the situation; the narrator thus becomes a subject of authorial irony. Murdoch's intention is to expose the illusions of Charles Arrowby as he undergoes a process of trying not only to retain his grip over his closer friends but also to revive an already obsolete relationship with a woman he once loved many years earlier and who suddenly resurfaces in his life.

Early in the novel, the narrator presents the text of a letter written by one of his devoted and subservient mistresses, Lizzie, pleading with him to stop interfering in her present relationship with Gilbert. The letter conveys a pointed and pervasive fear of Arrowby's power, spelled out in the following passage:

> He [Gilbert] is frightened of you still, and so am I. The habit of obeying you is strong in both of us! Don't use your power to hurt us. You could put the most terrible pressure on us, only don't do it. Be generous, dear heart. You could drive us both mad.[12]

This excerpt demonstrates Charles Arrowby's remarkable influence over some of his close friends who, in turn, feel justifiably uneasy. Murdoch aims first to establish Arrowby as a power figure of sorts; once this aspect is confirmed in the reader's mind, the actions of the novel can proceed further. To this end, the early pages of the novel abound with references to Arrowby's power. The narrator tells us that he "has been described in the popular press as a 'tyrant', a 'tartar', and . . . a 'power-crazed monster'" (p. 3). He does not object to this domineering image; in fact, it pleases him: "I liked that hard picture of myself as a 'tartar'" (p. 7).

Arrowby's power stems from his position [illegible] theatre director who has "always worked (worked others) like a d[illegible] 34). The profession of directing others is automatical[illegible]ified in Arrowby's mind with leading others, even ruthlessly if need be:

> If absolute power corrupts absolutely then I must be the most corrupt of men. A theatre director is a dictator. (If he is not, he is not doing his job.) I fostered my reputation for ruthlessness, it was extremely useful. Actors expected tears and nervous prostration when I was around. (p. 37)

This almost sadistic conception of the function of a theatre director must be anathema to Murdoch; the faultiness of Arrowby's stance is poignantly imparted by the negative words and phrases: "corrupt," "dictator," "ruthlessness," and "tears and nervous prostration."[13] Equally significant to observe is the way Arrowby regards the theatre as a place where the audience is carried away towards a dream world: "I am in favour of illusion not alienation . . . . Drama must create a factitious spell-binding present and imprison the spectator in it" (pp. 35-36). The tone of these two sentences, as emphasized through certain key words such as "illusion," "spell-binding," and "imprison," reveals an attitude contrary to the tenor of Murdoch's aesthetics, which propounds direct handling of issues of immediate relevance to our moral and social reality.[14] Arrowby's opinions, furthermore, reflect a hostile and manipulative attitude toward audiences: "The theatre is an attack on mankind carried on by magic: to victimize an audience every night, to make them laugh and cry and suffer and miss their trains. Of course actors regard audiences as enemies, to be deceived, drugged, incarcerated, stupefied" (p. 33). Stripped of its rhetoric and melodrama, the statement implies that the actors, who are, according to Arrowby's theory, victims of their dire[illegible]-dictator, should transfer their suffering to their audiences, a situation similar to what Max Lejour describes in The Unicorn when he refers to the Greek concept of Atê.

One can accordingly summarize Arrowby's ideas about the theatre as an arena for power struggle in which the director, actors and the audiences are all involved. Once we become aware that the narrator's views about the theatre and his basic attitude towards people in general are diametrically opposed to Murdoch's vision of love, reality and truth, we become suspicious of any claim he makes, for his vision of the theatre reflects a mind not of an artist but of an egocentric figure perennially obsessed with wielding power in every detail of his life. The large number of references to power with which the narrator fills his memoirs gives a further indication of a conscious preoccupation with manipulative tactics. Thus, the trajectory of the narrative is to highlight the distance between authorial attitude and the candid voice of the narrator's persona. Arrowby's candid admission of his involvement with power games is a phenomenon encountered here for the first time in a Murdoch novel. Up to The Sea, The Sea the Murdoch reader has been left to guess the motives of the power figure through his actions and the outcome of these actions. With Charles Arrowby's early confirmation of his penchant for power, the reader is alerted so as not to take his statements at their face value. As the narrative develops, the need for separating fact from fiction becomes paramount, since it becomes progressively evident that the narrator's claims are often coloured by his personal illusions and biases.

The major illusion that afflicts the narrator is his belief that he can indefinitely sustain his power over others, or that at least he still has the right to exercise it over the people in close contact with him. Arrowby does not realize that, as a retired man, his power--which had primarily stemmed from his previous vocation as a director--is on the wane and any attempt to tighten his grip will lead to disappointment and suffering. Peregrine, a theatre associate whose marriage with Rosina has been shattered by Arrowby's meddling, angrily confronts him with the truth: "You are an exploded myth. And you still think you're Genghis Khan!" (p. 399). Arrowby's illusion comes further into focus when he accidentally meets Hartley, a woman with whom he was in love in his youth and who, foreseeing his lust after power, decided to leave him (p. 498). Unable to accept the reality of Hartley's settled marriage to Ben Fitch, Arrowby embarks on a desperate attempt to rekindle the old flame of his love. (It is symbolically meaningful that Ben at one time sold fire extinguishers.) As if assuming that she has been waiting for him all these years, he immediately starts showering her with a flow of sentiment, ignoring her lack of reciprocal interest. His behaviour with Hartley as well as with the other characters manifests that he sees the world revolving only around himself. In a manner typical of Murdoch's jealous and possessive characters, Arrowby does not see others as separate from the illusory fabrications of his mind. This concept of seeing, which Murdoch derives from Simone Weil's idea of loving attention to the independent identity of others, is reintroduced in this novel through Lizzie's description of Arrowby: "You don't respect people as people, you don't see them, you're not really a teacher, you're a sort of rapacious magician" (p. 45). Indeed, he does arrogate to himself the role of mentor: "It was my task and my privilege to teach her [Hartley] the desire to live, and I would yet do so. I, and I only, could revive her; I was the destined prince" (p. 356).

This inflated image of himself is projected clearly for the greater part of his memoirs; the memoirs also show that magnifying the self is often accompanied by a tendency to disregard others. Reflecting such a frame of mind, the hero embraces any convenient assumption with minimum scrutiny or self-criticism. This insensitive and selfish attitude is revealed in the off-hand manner with which he dismisses Lizzie's plea to leave her and Gilbert alone:

> Of course it is a silly inconsistent woman's letter, half saying the opposite of what it is trying to do. . . . Of course Gilbert is nothing, he is a man of twigs, I could crush him with one hand and take Lizzie with the other. (pp. 47-48)

The tone of the excerpt demonstrates callousness and contempt; the use of words such as "silly," "inconsistent," "nothing," and "a man of twigs," conveys unsubstantiated value judgements about his friends. The repetition of "of course" indicates, moreover, a clear tendency towards an unquestioning faith in his beliefs. We have, indeed, several other instances of his uncritical espousal of any convenient assumption. He claims, for instance, that Ben has tried to kill him, without submitting the evidence: "My assailant was *of course* Ben, *there could be no doubt* of that" (p. 372). When Ben and Hartley decide to leave for Australia, he unjustifiably asserts that

> it was *plain* that Hartley did not want to go to Australia, that was Ben's plan . . . . Anyway, Hartley would not go. She would jump, at the last moment, into the rescue boat. (p. 426)

He furthermore develops for himself a hasty and subjective argument proving that Hartley still loves him:

> I reviewed the evidence and I had *very little doubt* about what it pointed to. Hartley loved me and had long regretted losing me. How could she not? She could not love her husband. How could she? (p. 158)

The comical repetition here of the question formula belies a line of argument that suits her fancy. (All italics in this paragraph are mine.)

In order to prove that several of Arrowby's claims are erroneous, Murdoch undercuts them by means of letters and the actions and statements of the other characters. Reminiscent of Dickens's treatment of Pip in *Great Expectations*, Murdoch's handling of Arrowby skilfully dramatizes the ironic reversal of his erroneous assumptions and inflated expectations.

Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* gives a description of the fallible or unreliable narrator that fits Arrowby's example: a narrator becomes unreliable, Booth tells us, when he does not speak or act "in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms). . . ."[15] The norms of The Sea, The Sea reveal several faulty assumptions entertained by its unreliable narrator. The reader discovers, for instance, that Lizzie, despite the image of a slave that the narrator paints for her, can settle with Gilbert in a viable relationship that asserts her freedom from Arrowby's domination. The reader also discovers that Arrowby's assailant is not Ben, but the jealous Peregrine, who has tried to avenge himself on Arrowby for wrecking his marriage. And Hartley, contrary to all Arrowby's predictions, does go to Australia and, as her postcard indicates, is excited about being there.

This deliberate and systematic undercutting of Arrowby's credibility serves to distance the reader from whatever claims he, as the novel's sole narrator, makes. The result is that the reader, instead of identifying with the central character, both pities and despises him for his lack of perception and sensitivity. Although by the end of the novel Arrowby shows signs of self-criticism and achieves a renewed awareness of reality, the observant reader has already been one step ahead of him and reached his own conclusions about the significance and meaning of the action. Elizabeth Dipple argues that Arrowby's first-person narration interferes with our apprehension of events:

> Manically self-interested and untrustworthy, Charles Arrowby's first-person, diary-entry narration functions as a steady interference in our apprehension of both present and past events; his is a surface buzzing which tries to keep the real sound from being heard.[16]

This "steady interference" should, however, be seen as an integral part of [illegible] novel's moral and aesthetic function. It is meant to demonstrate the narrator's limitation of vision as revealed in his biased commentary on events which, subsequently, leads to the reader's dissociation from Arrowby's judgements. Murdoch, furthermore, makes the effect of the interference minimal so as to prevent unnecessary confusion. The observant reader can, for instance, tell that Arrowby's emphatic assertion that Hartley's marriage is a failure (an assumption fabricated primarily to sanction his power tactics) is not true, even though no direct access to Hartley's life exists beyond what Arrowby himself claims; Titus, Hartley's adopted son, and James, Arrowby's cousin, as well as Hartley herself challenge this unsubstantiated assertion.

Murdoch accordingly makes the reader privy to the circumstances surrounding the central character's life, in spite of his faulty interpretations of characters and events. Wayne Booth comments perceptively on the "secret communion" between author and reader:

> Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least part of their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded. In the irony with which we are concerned, the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting.[17]

The tacit understanding or collusion that develops as modus operandi between author and reader through and beyond the narrator serves to make the narrator's situation basically ironic. The irony essentially resides in the discrepancy between how he perceives events and people around him and how they really are. Murdoch thus deliberately makes Arrowby the target of her irony, to the effect that the reader derives aesthetic pleasure out of such a situation in the novel:

> Our pleasure is compounded of pride in our own knowledge, ridicule of the ignorant narrator, and a sense of collusion with the silent author who, also knowing the facts, has created the trap for his narrator and for those readers who will not catch the illusion. These three ingredients may be combined in many different ways, but they are all three present whenever we see a narrator revealing his faults in his own words, without guidance from a superior mind.[18]

Instead of condemnation, Arrowby thus deserves "ridicule"; instead of the omniscience that the demons of Murdoch's earlier novels demonstrate, Arrowby reveals "ignorance"--ignorance of the futility of his actions and the reality of those surrounding him.

When we see that the narrator, who at the same time is the novel's power figure, becomes the exclusive target of irony, we can construe this ironic treatment as a shift in Murdoch's moral evaluation of him. It becomes progressively obvious that the power figures of the later novels are no more subject to the same degree of authorial moral condemnation as Carel Fisher or Julius King; instead, they become the butt of irony. The practices of the power figures in these novels do not lead directly to disastrous consequences of the magnitude that the earlier novels exhibit, and therefore the instigators of those practices do not deserve as harsh a judgement. We can generally identify irony with tolerance and understanding as well as distance. In essence, irony implies acceptance of things that we neither agree with nor totally approve of; it is probably the only sane way of living with things that we cannot combat physically or emotionally. Although Murdoch may still not sanction the practices of the power figures of her later novels, she shows empathy toward them. The tolerance with which Murdoch treats Arrowby is understandable both morally and aesthetically. Regardless of his resort to manipulation and power tactics, he is neither obnoxious nor awe-inspiring. He does not deliberately cause any serious damage to those he tries to influence; even when he contemplates violence it appears out of character.

Furthermore, our proximity to Arrowby, the narrator, helps to "decrease the emotional distance"[19] between him and ourselves, in spite of our awareness of his schemings and egocentricity. It enables us to understand and, at least partially, to excuse the excesses of his conduct, for

> even characters whose behaviour would be intolerable to us in real life can be made sympathetic by this paralogical proof that they are human beings like ourselves.[20]

By modulating the emotional distance between Arrowby as narrator and the reader, Murdoch thus succeeds in showing the complexity of Arrowby's character so that we do not grow hostile to him. Equally worth mentioning is the attention and care that Arrowby receives from the other characters. A character that is the focus of attention of several other characters, some of whom are sympathetic like James, becomes, as if by extension, a subject of our interest. We see his friends travel long distances to visit him, particularly his women friends, who are so eager to win him that Rosina (appropriately identified with Hedda Gabler and Calypso) does not hesitate to deploy terrorist tactics. Such a privileged character, the reader is bound to feel, must possess some saving grace that endears him to many people.

Arrowby's later awareness of his mistakes, furthermore, moves him closer to the reader. As he embarks on a process of self-criticism, the reader can witness signs of genuine humanity in his personality. Arrowby's probing into himself does not, however, occupy a significant portion of the novel, for it takes place only towards the very end; nevertheless, it is there as a manifestation of his development. Things do become lucidly clear to him and he sees the proper dimensions of his desperate attempts to recover the past; he finally becomes aware that it was his indulgence in power tactics that made Hartley leave him:

> Why did she go? Because I was in love and she was not; because she simply did not like me enough, because I was too selfish, too domineering, as she put it 'so sort of bossy.' I had deluded myself throughout by the idea of receiving a secret love which did not exist at all. (p. 498)

He thus bravely questions the root and nature of his blind infatuation: "I remember Rosina saying to me that her desire for me was made of jealousy, resentment, anger, not love. Was the same true of my desire for Hartley?" (p. 491). Arrowby, most importantly, feels responsible for Titus's accidental death: "He died because he trusted me. My vanity destroyed him. It is a matter of causality" (p. 459). In Murdoch's earlier novels we never see a power figure assume such a responsibility for his wrongdoings or show signs of remorse; some do not even bother to think about the suffering they cause to their victims—witness Julius King in the last chapter of A Fairly Honourable Defeat.

The distinction between Arrowby and the heroes of the novels preceding An Accidental Man is further developed by the recurrent emphasis on Arrowby's identification of power with magic. As part of the admission of his guilt he declares: "I was the dreamer, I the magician" (p. 45). The identification of his practices and schemings as magic is not unusual, for, as Richard Todd maintains, "the use of magic and the use of trickery could be thought of . . . as figurative of each other."[21] The wielders of power in Murdoch's novels, like magicians, enjoy the thrill of holding others spellbound; enthralling their victims appeases and reassures their ego. Projecting himself as a magician may in addition be one way for Arrowby to excuse, at least to himself, his power practices, since one would not normally take a magician's tricks seriously. Like Matthew in *An Accidental Man*, who claims that he intends to "change magic into spirit," Arrowby also contemplates:

> And I sit here and wonder at myself. Have I abjured that magic, drowned my book? Forgiven my enemies? The surrender of power, the final change of magic into spirit? Time will show. (p. 39)

Arrowby sees himself not only as a magician, but more specifically, as a Prospero figure. His reference to drowning the book and forgiving enemies relates to Prospero's symbolic act in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, whereby he signals the abandonment of power and the reconciliation with those who have wronged him. Arrowby's arrogation of the privilege to forgive others looks ironic since we do not see anyone doing him any harm. In two other references, he tells us that he has played Prospero on the stage, with Lizzie in the role of Ariel:

> A fly-by-night American director . . . let me play Prospero. It was the last substantial part I ever played. Lizzie was Ariel. She was the most spiritual, most curiously *accurate* Ariel I ever saw. Her love for me made her so, and in the midst of all that magic made me love her. Oddly I felt then, and the feeling remains with me, that I loved her as if she were my son. She often called herself my page. She had a pretty little singing voice and I can still hear the thin true tones of her *Full Fathom Five*. How now, after all these years, my tricksy spirit. (p. 50)

While the above passage suggests that Lizzie carries over her role as Arrowby's servant to the stage in the role of Ariel, the reader can tell that it is Arrowby who carries over his role as Prospero from the stage into life by taking Lizzie for granted and treating her as his slave.

These references to Prospero in the novel prove doubly useful for Murdoch's purposes. On the one hand, it is natural for a theatre director and actor to refer to Prospero; Arrowby and Prospero are, moreover, connected with the issue of power. On the other hand, Prospero's practices of magic as a form of power are never harmful; his is white magic, not black, and accordingly reflects upon Arrowby, in that his practices, although not as justifiable as Prospero's, are equally harmless in their intentions. As Richard Todd argues, "It could be maintained that in The Tempest Shakespeare flaunts the fallibility of power";[22] Murdoch's aim in this novel cannot be otherwise. The evocation of a Shakespearean power figure like Prospero represents, moreover, yet another example of what has already become a common practice for Murdoch; her recurrent allusions to Shakespearean characters and motifs enrich the texture and content of her novels.

As in The Tempest, the [illegible]ery in this novel is dominated by the sea. The title is but one indication of the sea's significance and omnipresence. Arrowby's house, where most of the action takes place, is situated by the seashore close to a precipitous cliff, and the sea becomes an integral part of the character's life. One difference, however, exists between the symbolic meaning and function of the sea in The Tempest and in the novel. The sea in the former seems to fall under the control of Prospero, who uses it for his advantage, as when he calls forth the storm that forces the King of Naples and his entourage to land on his island; the sea, in other words, assumes a subservient role to Prospero's schemes. In this novel, the sea, mysterious and awe-inspiring, represents a power superior to man and beyond his control; it is "detached, neutral and empty, a force which cannot be subdued by Charles's ropes and which indifferently kills Titus."[23] In this respect, the sea here is reminiscent of that in The Unicorn. In both novels, it is referred to as a "killer" (p. 404). The local clientele of the Black Lion (the name being an evocative reminder of the Blackport pub in The Unicorn) argue about the number of seconds it takes for a man to drown (pp. 66-67). The instrument of Peregrine's attempt to murder Arrowby, the sea's menacing quality is further enhanced:

> The sea, always an important symbol in Murdoch, is not a place of rest, peace and knowledge for Charles, nor does it provide spirit for his parched life; his development and gradual moral advancement take place not here but later in James's London flat.[24]

On certain occasions, however, usually those involving Hartley, the threatening quality of the sea disappears and a sense of beauty, tranquillity and grandeur prevails. On Arrowby's first visit to her house, the sea is "shining into the room like an enamelled mirror with its own especial clear light" (p. 124); shortly after, the sea becomes "a bluish purple, the colour of Hartley's eyes" (p. 129). Toward the end of the novel, when Arrowby is hopefully expecting a signal from her to elope, he writes, projecting his illusions:

> The sea had regained its bejewelled purplish look, inlaid with spotted lines of emerald. It glittered at me as it had done on the first day. There were a few clouds, big lazy chryselephantine clouds that loafed around over the water exuding light. I gazed at them and wondered at myself for being too obsessed to be able to admire the marvels that surrounded me. (p. 426)

The sea, therefore, represents threat and mystery on one layer of meaning, and beauty and tranquillity on another. The treatment of the sea in this novel gives credence to Jany Wartin's perceptive comment about water imagery in Murdoch's novels:

> Water is a symbol of unpredictable life, for contingent reality: in some places, at some moments, the water is quiet, clear and reassuring; in other places, at other moments, it is troubled, dark and menacing.[25]

ostile or calm, deadly or life-giving, the sea serves in this novel as an effective narrative device that reflects upon the central character's mood.

Significantly enough, the only character that the sea does not frighten is James. His training in oriental mysticism has endowed him with extraordinary power--powers derived from the human will to exercise control, not over people, but over one's body and one's physical surroundings. In this respect, James's mysticism may be similar to Prospero's magic. As Arrowby tells us, James saves him from drowning "by the sheer exercise of those powers which he had so casually spoken of as 'tricks'" (p. 469). James's control over the sea is such that Arrowby reports seeing him standing on water (p. 469). Unlike Prospero, however, James, along with other saint figures in Murdoch's canon, uses whatever spiritual power he possesses to achieve selfless goals. Echoing Max Lejour's major statement in The Unicorn about the good being non-powerful, and recalling Ducane's revelation after his brush with death in The Nice and the Good, James thus declares his mystical vision: "The last achievement," he instructs his cousin, "is the absolute surrender of magic itself . . . . Goodness is giving up power and acting upon the world negatively" (p. 445). James becomes here yet another embodiment of Murdoch's concept of love. As he "gradually emerges from the egotistical tangle of his cousin Charles's first-person narration,"[26] James serves, moreover, a significant dramatic role as the truthful voice of sanity and reality. Unlike the passive, awkward or ineffectual visionary saint figures of the earlier novels (such as Bledyard in The Sandcastle, Marcus in The Time of the Angels, Tallis in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, and Nigel in Bruno's Dream), James, active, impressive and disciplined, effectively challenges the power figure's convenient assumptions; for instance, he openly demands that Charles prove his elaborate claims about Hartley's marital crisis:

> Do you really know what her marriage is like? You say she's unhappy, most people are. A long marriage is very unifying, even if it's not ideal, and those old structures must be respected. You may not think much of her husband, but he may suit her, however impressed she is by meeting you again. Has she said she wants to be rescued? (p. 178)

James's sound observations and wise, selfless actions eventually influence his cousin and help correct his faulty vision; equally significant, they enable the reader to put things into perspective. As Elizabeth Dipple persuasively argues:

> The intelligence of James's remarks, their enormous cultural evocations which Charles so comically does not catch and his impassioned sense of the truth of situations are all geared to draw the experienced Murdoch reader's sympathy and attention. In the midst of Charles's sustained madness, James shines very brightly.[27]

The lucidity of vision and high plane of virtue that James represents accordingly explain the great emphasis the novel lays on him in the final part of the novel. Charles's move into James's apartment symbolizes, moreover, the transition toward adopting James's values that consider love, not power, as the central issue worthy of man's concern.

The journey of the central character through life thus takes its full course. The novel convincingly depicts Arrowby's transition from illusion and obsession with intrigue towards a greater awareness of reality and respect for others--a transition, that is, from a blind love for power to a mature belief in the power of love. The skilful control of the emotional distance between reader and narrator and the deployment of irony enable Murdoch to succeed in conveying her moral vision.

CONCLUSION

In her first book, Sartre: Romantic Rationalist, Iris Murdoch maintains that "the novel, the novel proper that is, is about people's treatment of each other, and it is about human values."[1] This context of human relationships and the values attached to them that her characters embody represents a central concern in Murdoch's fiction. Her novels often portray relationships controlled by a single dominating figure who exercises an uncanny influence over others to achieve certain often selfish goals. This charismatic power figure may play one or more of the following roles: enchanter, "god," demon or saint. For Murdoch the novel, as an art form, functions as the medium to reveal him and comment on his actions. Murdoch's marked interest in the portrayal of diverse types of power figures stems essentially from her concern with the liberal-democratic theory of personality and her attempt to re-define it. Murdoch's liberal vision is spelled out eloquently in her essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited." She maintains that the world contains "a plurality of persons, who are quite separate and different individuals and who have to get along together," and "that which has a right to exist, that which is deserving of tolerance and respect, is not the rational or good person, but the actual empirically existing person whatever he happens to be like." The individual may be "eccentric, unique, holy, pregnant with genius, but not alone."[2] The key word in this statement is "tolerance."

The moral failing of the power figures in Murdoch's novels is that they do not tolerate or respect the independence of other characters outside the rigid structure that they scheme for them. The common practice of the power figure is to impose his will on others, be it by coercion or manipulation.

Murdoch's interest in the portrayal of power figures relates, as well, to her general concern with ethical issues, particularly as they manifest themselves in concrete human situations. Criticizing modern literature, Murdoch comments, "It is curious that modern literature, which is so much concerned with violence, contains so few convincing pictures of evil."[3] The moral implications of the use and abuse of power are at the centre of her focus on the issue. Murdoch does not, moreover, identify automatically the power figure with evil; her vision and treatment of him is subtle, sophisticated and penetrating. As the study of the six representative novels examined has shown, Murdoch's treatment of the power figure goes through three definite stages.

In the first stage Murdoch portrays the power figure as being both good and evil: he can be at once kind and cruel, selfless and selfish, sharing and possessive, loving and enslaving. His actions are so dualistic in their motivation that they bear without strain either interpretation, and the reader is left free to form his own conclusions. Emma Sands, the power figure of Murdoch's sixth novel, An Unofficial Rose, illustrates this point clearly. Acting as "Prospero"[4] and as "an old matchmaker,"[5] Emma, the popular writer of detective thrillers, masterminds a destructive affair between her lesbian secretary (referred to as Ariel) Lindsay Rimmer and the neurotic Randall Peronett, the son of Emma's former lover, Hugh. Although Emma is identified with intrigue, mystery and darkness, the reader cannot condemn her as entirely evil: her self-perception, discipline and vitality make her, at least partially, sympathetic. As the enchanted Hugh sees her, she appears "enthroned in her wisdom, her witchery."[6] Reflecting her mysterious personality, Emma's final act of power, making Hugh's grandson, Penn, her heir, evokes different interpretations: the reader may regard it as an exercise of goodness and love directed towards the poor, innocent and alienated boy, or as a spiteful deed to deprive and enrage the people closest to her.

Mystery, therefore, becomes, as Canetti confirms, concomitant with the exercise of power. Skilfully (and perhaps conveniently) the author shrouds motivation in secrecy by allowing the reader no access to the mind of the power figure. Moreover, authorial commentary or reporting of his motives is conspicuously absent and the reader accordingly has to reach his own conclusions about the good or evil intentions behind the manoeuvres of power.

Apart from authorial control of point of view, the type of imagery employed in the novels of this first stage further reflects the duality of Murdoch's presentation. The images associated with the power figures here tend to be either a juxtaposition or a synthesis of two conflicting elements, usually symbolizing good or evil: Mischa Fox's eyes, one blue and one brown, in The Flight from the Enchanter, serve as a ready illustration. Murdoch shows furthermore a penchant for using light imagery as a vehicle to convey moral meaning. In The Unicorn, for instance, recurrent and intense interplay of dark-light, day-night imagery is used to consort with the characterization of Hannah Crean-Smith as a Circe-Christ figure.

By contrast [illegible]ry associated with the power figure in the novels of the second [illegible]sided, tending not toward the dark-light duality, but towards predominant darkness. The most obvious example is Murdoch's portrayal of Carel Fisher as a "dark figure" in The Time of the Angels. Dressed in his priestly robes, Carel lives secluded in the unremitting gloom of a rectory that often experiences electricity failure. The shift towards darker imagery paints an unmistakably sinister power figure who consciously schemes to control and manipulate others into submission to his will. The power figure often achieves his goals by exploiting the sexual, psychological or moral vulnerability of other characters to his advantage. While the power figure in the novels of the first stage generally controls the destinies of his enchanted followers in the patronizing pretext of "believing in people,"[7] or "loving all creatures,"[8] the power figure in the novels of the second stage relates to his victims as slaves. The dehumanizing process of slavery (which, as Canetti has already argued, is rooted in the desire to turn men into animals) is culminated with Julius King's treatment of his victims as puppets in A Fairly Honourable Defeat. Thus, the progressive erosion of the power figure's ties with humanity is poignantly dramatized through this abysmal development from enchantment to enslavement to puppetry.

As with the power figures of the novels of the first stage, the motives of the power figures in the second stage are still shrouded in mystery, and the reader still does not have access to their point of view. The denial of point of view in the first and second stages serves to distance the reader emotionally from the power figure and to prevent complete sympathy or identification with him. From a moral perspective, Murdoch, I suggest, disapproves, partially or totally, of the behaviour of the power figure. The portrayal of the power figure as mysterious, however, affects the reader differently in each stage. In the novels of the first stage, the power figure represents a riddle to both the reader and the other characters. In the novels of the second stage, the power figure remains primarily a riddle to the characters around him, especially to his victims whom he continues to tantalize, intrigue, enchant or intimidate. As for the reader, these novels provide him with relatively better opportunities than hitherto to discern and evaluate his motive through his actions, often mischievous or destructive, or through his dubious or cynical statements that run counter to the norm of the novel. Thus, while the reader may partially sympathize, but not identify, with the power figure in the novels of the first stage, the same reader will condemn the power figure of the novels of the second stage as evil. We may be amused by Mischa Fox's ubiquity and ingenuity, but will certainly be shocked by the sudden revelation of Carel Fisher's incestuous exploitation of his invalid daughter in The Time of the Angels.

Not only are the power figures of the novels in the first stage closer than those in the second stage to the reader's sympathy, qualified as that sympathy may be, but their characterization, by way of comparison, gains more depth and sophistication. As the novels of the first stage progressively unfold the psychological condition of the power figures, the inner conflict within them is revealed: on the one hand, they show a yearning for spirituality, justice and innocence; on the other, they resort to manipulation or cruelty. In The Flight from the Enchanter Mischa Fox cries about the suffering of innocent little animals; yet, he does not hesitate to kill to spare them the suffering. By contrast, the power figures of the second stage novels lack the same degree of complexity and diversity and behave simply as villains. They tend to justify their manipulation of others by rationalization and erudition that has only the semblance of conviction and truth in it. The subtle arguments of Carel Fisher in The Time of the Angels and of Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat ring hollow in the reader's mind because of their cynicism and lack of warmth and sincerity. Murdoch's objection to their behaviour relates essentially to their treatment of their victims as a means to achieve selfish ends.[9]

The victims, for their part, display no viable resistance to the violation of their identity; this attitude is revealed in the novels of both the first and second stages. The victims tend generally to be enchanted by the manoeuvrings of the power figures. They usually overcome their sense of puzzlement concerning the mysterious schemings of the power figure and, instead, identify themselves with him as devotees or imagined lovers (as, for instance, Jamesie is sexually infatuated with the ruthless Scottow in The Unicorn). The victim's adoration of his oppressor represents to Murdoch a form of slavery; rather than asserting his identity, the victim develops escape mechanisms. Although some victims may bemoan or express unease about their persecution (as Calvin Blick does towards the end of The Flight from the Enchanter), none challenges or engages the power figure in open combat. In extreme instances, however, the victim resorts to violence, whether against the self in suicide (as Nina does in The Flight from the Enchanter) or against the power figure by murder (as Hannah Crean-Smith does with Gerald Scottow in The Unicorn).

The attitude of the victims of the power figures in the third stage of Murdoch's novels represents a marked change in comparison with that in the first and second stages. For the first time, we note that the characters around the "power figure" refuse to be enchanted or victimized, begin to challenge him openly and ridicule his domination attempts. This resistance signals a major shift in the role of the power figure in the third stage. Although he still retains a degree of his charismatic appeal, his erstwhile god-like influence has been considerably reduced.[10] No matter how hard he strains himself, his scheming neither fulfills his goals nor gains him satisfaction.

It is significant to observe here that when the power figure in the novels of the third stage fails in his endeavours, he neither harbours bitterness nor undergoes an apocalyptic vision, but rather regards the experience as cathartic. He does not, moreover, hesitate to show feelings of remorse over whatever difficulties he causes for others. The pathos he expresses gains him the reader's sympathy, particularly when his acts are not as damaging as those in the first and second stages; essentially he does not reveal destructive intentions.

Accordingly, it is only fair to conclude that Murdoch does show moral objections to the behaviour of the power figure of the third stage, revealing in the process that that behaviour is far from being ideal. The removal of the erstwhile formidable moral barrier between author and the often central character explains why the power figure of the third stage novels is granted for the first time the privilege of presenting his point of view; subsequently, emotional distance between the reader and the power figure is diminished.

By controlling point of view, Murdoch not only maintains a degree of the reader's sympathy for the power figure, but also makes him the subject of irony. Irony resides in the discrepancy between the revealed expectations of the power figure for his schemes and their tangible outcome. Irony relates as well to his manner of fabricating assumptions about other characters and about reality--assumptions that are convenient to his wishes--and then taking them for granted. In The Sea, The Sea, for instance, Charles Arrowby persists in his erroneous assumption that Hartley, after a separation of several decades, still is in love with him.

Murdoch's ironic treatment of the power figure at this latest stage of her career as a novelist represents a clear departure from her portrayal of him in the two earlier stages. She has gone a long way in rendering and exploring various aspects of the power figure. It needs to be emphasized, however, that in the latest novels, Murdoch's delineation of the power figure's limitations and failures renders him more ordinary than demonic, and more human than god-like; he can be tolerated as an eccentric rather than condemned as evil. This brings us once again to the significant concept of tolerance and its centrality to Murdoch's understanding of the liberal-democratic theory of personality. In "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," Iris Murdoch maintains:

> A great novelist is essentially tolerant, that is, displays a real apprehension of persons other than the author as having a right to exist and to have a separate mode of being which is important and interesting to themselves.[11]

While Murdoch's attitude towards the power figure can be characterized as morally ambivalent in the first stage and hostile in the second, it certainly demonstrates tolerance and understanding in the third stage. Her recurrent portrayal of several types of power in the first two stages and her fascination, if not obsession, with their schemings and shock tactics cast doubt upon her vision of reality--a vision that perennially sees her characters behaving in extremes, interlocked in savage power games. In such a situation, her power figures are given a free rein to act while her "good" characters are rendered ineffectual, to the point of merely making occasional abstract and naive statements. With the prominence of the power figure upon the canvas, little room has been left for her other characters to manoeuvre, and this situation contradicts Murdoch's celebrated pronouncement that "a novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in."[12] The discrepancy between authorial intentions and practice that we witness in the first and second stages may explain Murdoch's resentment towards her power figures who, as with Julius King in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, represent the incarnation of rational and cold-blooded evil.

This discrepancy, however, disappears in the third stage with the scaling down in the influence of the power figure; thus, the demon is metamorphosed into an ordinary person. If one follows Northrop Frye's elaborate diagram, whereby "fictions may . . . be classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less or roughly the same,"[13] one can say that Murdoch's treatment of the power figure develops from the high mimetic towards the low mimetic mode. According to Frye, the hero of the high mimetic mode "has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature," whereas the hero of the low mimetic mode "is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet [or the novelist] the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience."[14] Moreover, Murdoch herself acknowledges this transformation in the type of her heroes. She connects the shift towards the portrayal of ordinary characters and problems in her later novels with her progress and maturity as a writer:

> Young writers are often afraid of writing about ordinary things because they think that this would be rather dull and of course they are anxious to startle their friends by writing something rather odd, and also they imagine that it's more original to write about something rather odd. I think the artist that has worked for a long time in his craft is less concerned with any desire to shock or any desire to search for oddities. He can find plenty of oddities without looking for them. I've been endeavouring for a long time to write about ordinary life and ordinary problems.[15]

Contracting the power figure's role and restricting his domination over both the characters and the narrative result not only in focussing on ordinary life and problems but also in providing ample space to breathe and express themselves freely. Moral ambivalence or hostility toward the power figure thus finally disappears, signalling a clear and confident authorial vision enriched by a greater depth of analysis into the intimate feelings of the central character rendered sympathetically. It is interesting to note that while the "good" characters are passive in the first two stages, they begin to act in the later novels: James Arrowby in The Sea, The Sea dominates the narrative through his confident actions, and his vision finally prevails when Charles adopts it.

When Murdoch's "good" and "normal" characters (a loose and relative designation) act out their problems in the later novels, it becomes evident that her vision organically blends with her fictional material. Murdoch has eventually populated her canvas with characters to whom she can relate morally and psychologically, and to whom she can show sympathy and tolerance.

According to W. J. Harvey,

> We may fairly say that the novel is the distinct art form of liberalism . . . . Tolerance, scepticism, respect for the autonomy of others are its watch words; fanaticism and the monolithic creed its abhorrence.[16]

Similarly, Iris Murdoch argues that tolerance is a concept "which links nineteenth-century literature with Liberalism."[17] The novels of Tolstoy, George Eliot and Balzac depicted "a plurality of real persons more or less naturalistically presented in a large social scene, and representing mutually independent centres of significance which are those of real individuals."[18] A process thus develops in Murdoch's later novels towards embodying her liberal vision in a form that emulates the nineteenth-century model. Although her achievement so far falls short of the ideal, and Murdoch may be the first to admit this, change in the way she handles her material is nevertheless evident. Summarizing Murdoch's achievement, Elizabeth Dipple makes the following valid comment:

> Her zigzaging development through mixtures of ruminative novels, technically brilliant experiments and the quasi-gothic, to the full, mature style ushered in by The Nice and the Good, indicated how many styles she actually had at her disposal, and her particular expertise in these various styles showed that she had within her talent many possible directions.[19]

The linear, three-stage development that I perceive in Murdoch's career should not necessarily conflict with the "zigzaging development" mentioned in Dipple's remark. The zigzag pattern can indeed by observed, but only within the first two stages, where we find an alternation between "closed" and "open" novels, depending on the dramatic function of the power figure. Moreover, the description of the three-stage development can fully and lucidly illuminate Murdoch's handling of her thematic triumvirate of love, freedom and power. In the first and second stages, Murdoch treats her two central concepts, love and freedom, through portrayal of their polar opposite--the evil of power. In the novels of the third stage, she turns the issue around by showing how freedom and love can permeate human relationship in the absence of power—something very similar to what she has accomplished in The Nice and the Good. In other words, the vision that illuminates all Murdoch's novels is essentially the same; it has been summarized by James Arrowby in The Sea, The Sea: "Goodness is giving up power" (p. 445). As she maintains her own distinctive voice, the process of refining her material continues through the introduction of a new breed of characters, derived, most probably, from her bourgeois milieu, with the probable absence of the power figure. Murdoch has set for herself an ideal and the creative vitality of her mind continually tries to reach it. The model is none less than Shakespeare.

> The great novels are victims neither of convention nor of neurosis. The social scene is a life-giving framework and not a set of dead conventions or stereotyped settings inhabited by stock characters. And the individuals portrayed in the novels are free, independent of their author, and not merely puppets in the exteriorization of some closely locked psychological conflict of his own . . . The great novelist is not afraid of the contingent; yet his acceptance of the contingent does not land him in banality. In respect of this quality, and of others, the writer with whom we are most tempted to compare this novelist is Shakespeare.[20]

NOTES

Introduction

[1] A. S. Byatt, Degrees of Freedom: The Novels of Iris Murdoch (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 11.

[2] Zohera Twakuli Sullivan, "Enchantment and the Demonic in the Novels of Iris Murdoch," Diss. Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1970, pp. 9-10.

[3] Ibid., p. 11.

[4] (London: Vision, 1979), p. 98.

[5] Ibid., p. 98.

[6] (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), p. 5.

[7] Ibid., p. 5.

[8] Ibid., pp. 174-75.

[9] Frank Baldanza, Iris Murdoch (New York: Twayne, 1973), p. 19.

[10] The Sovereignty of Good (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 24.

[11] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p. 237.

[12] Chicago Review, 13 (Autumn, 1959), 51.

[13] "Against Dryness," Encounter, 16, No. 1 (1961), 18.

[14] According to Simone Weil, "belief in the existence of other human beings as such is love." See Gravity and Grace, trans. Emma Graufurd (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 56.

[15] Iris Murdoch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 17.

[16] Spectrum, C.B.C. T.V., Feb. 11, 1981.

[17] The Sovereignty of Good, p. 59.

[18] An Unofficial Rose (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), p. 73.

[19] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," Yale Review 49 (Dec. 1959), 270.

[20] Rabinovitz, p. 32.

[21] Ibid., p. 6.

[22] *The Nice and the Good* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p. 305.

[23] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," pp. 265-66.

[24] Ibid., p. 271.

[25] (London: Constable, 1960), pp. 7-8.

[26] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 262.

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[1] William Van O'Connor, *The New University Wits and the [illegible] of Modernism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1963), p. 62.

[2] G. S. Fraser, "Iris Murdoch: The Solidity of the Normal," *International Literary Annual* II, ed. John Wain (London: John Galder, 1959), p. 41.

[3] L. S. Keats, "Varieties of the Quest-Myth in the Early Novels of Iris Murdoch." Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1972, p. 129.

[4] Ibid., p. 106.

[5] Iris Murdoch, *The Flight from the Enchanter* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), p. 19. All subsequent quotations will be followed by the page number in this edition.

[6] "The Fiction and Philosophy of Iris Murdoch," Diss. Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1973, p. 109.

[7] Iris Murdoch, *A Severed Head* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 120.

[8] W. K. Rose, "Iris Murdoch, Informally," *London Magazine* 8 (June, 1968), 68.

[9] *The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and Her Novels* (Columbia: ~~Univ.~~ of Missouri Press, 1966), p. 70.

[10] Iris Murdoch, quoted in Byatt's *Degrees of Freedom*, p. 44.

[11] *The Need for Roots*, trans. A. F. Wills (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 45.

[12] Byatt, p. 46.

[13] *Gravity and Grace*, p. 142.

[14] Baldanza, p. 50.

[15] Ibid., p. 50.

[16] *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (London: Victor Gollancz, 1962), p. 290.

[17] Ibid., p. 292.

[18] "Mass, Might and Myth," *The Spectator* 209 (7 Sep. 1962), 338.

[19] Ibid., p. 338.

[20] Ibid., p. 337.

[21] Canetti, pp. 84-85.

[22] Ibid., pp. 80-81.

[23] James Gindin, *Post-War British Fiction: New Accents and Attitudes* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962), p. 180.

[24] Baldanza, p. 49.

[25] Gindin, p. 181.

[26] *Partisan Review* 26 (Winter 1959), 29.

[27] A. S. Byatt, *Iris Murdoch* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 17.

[28] Larry Jean Rockefeller, "Comedy and the Early Novels of Iris Murdoch," Diss. Bowling Green, 1968, p. 72.

Chapter Two

[1] Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), pp. 115-16). All subsequent quotations will be followed by the page number in this edition.

[2] *Critique* 7 (Spring 1964), 44-45.

[3] Baldanza, p. 97.

[4] Sullivan, p. 83.

[5] *Degrees of Freedom*, p. 152.

[6] Degrees of Freedom, p. 168.

[7] Ibid., p. 167.

[8] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 270.

[9] Degrees of Freedom, p. 166.

[10] Baldanza, pp. 113-14.

[11] Degrees of Freedom, p. 166.

[12] An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, ed. J. C. Cooper (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 183.

[13] Ibid., p. 183.

[14] Robert Scholes, The Fabulators (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, [illegible] 122.

[15] Sullivan, p. 68.

[16] Degrees of Freedom, p. 165.

[17] Ibid., p. 165.

[18] Scholes, p. 122.

[19] Scholes, p. 118.

[20] In one of her letters to me (undated, c. June, 1976), Iris Murdoch confirms that she is a Platonist.

[21] Degrees of Freedom, p. 159.

[22] Baldanza, p. 108.

[23] Scholes, p. 130.

[24] Scholes, p. 122.

[25] Canetti, p. 281.

[26] Ibid., p. 281.

[27] Scholes, p. 122.

[28] Modern Fiction Studies, 15 (Autumn 1969), 359.

[29] Degrees of Freedom, p. 148.

[30] The Italian Girl (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 86.

[31] Scholes, p. 117.

[32] Ibid., p. 126.

[33] Sullivan, p. 67.

[34] Baldanza, p. 116.

[35] Scholes, p. 131.

[36] Sullivan, p. 58.

[37] Baldanza, p. 106.

[38] Gilligan, p. 195.

Chapter Three

[1] W. K. Rose, "Iris Murdoch, Informally," London Magazine 8 (June 1968), 70.

[2] Ibid., 70.

[3] Sullivan, p. 91.

[illegible] Rose, 69.

[5] Ibid., 69.

[6] Iris Murdoch, The Time of the Angels (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 169. All subsequent quotations will be followed by the page number in this edition.

[7] Canetti, pp. 383-84.

[8] Walter Allen, The New York Times Book Review, 25 Sep. 1966, p. 62.

[9] See Danial Majdiak, "Romanticism in the Aesthetics of Iris Murdoch," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 14 (Summer 1972), 272.

[10] See Jack Biles, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch," Studies in the Literary Imagination, 11 (Fall 1978), p. 120.

[11] Baldanza, p. 132.

[12] Martin Neil Kaplan, "Iris Murdoch and the Gothic Tradition," Diss., Columbia Univ., 1969, p. 202.

[13] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 64.

[14] *Iris Murdoch*, p. 31.

[15] Biles, p. 120.

[16] *The Sovereignty of Good*, p. 2.

[17] Sullivan, pp. 114-15.

[18] *Degrees of Freedom*, p. 49.

[19] Rabinovitz, p. 42.

[20] Ibid., 42.

[21] Sullivan, p. 111.

[22] *The Sovereignty of Good*, p. 72.

[23] Sullivan, p. 96.

[24] Kaplan, p. 213.

[25] Majdiak, p. 371.

[26] Kaplan, p. 207.

[27] Sullivan, p. 101.

[28] Baldanza, p. 137.

[29] Dipple, pp. 76-77.

[30] Gilligan, p. 229.

Chapter Four

[1] W. K. Rose, p. 66.

[2] Ronald Bryden, "Talking to Iris Murdoch," *The Listener* (4 April 1968), 433.

[3] "The Nice and the Good," *Modern Fiction Studies* 15 (Autumn 1969), 417.

[4] A. S. Byatt, "Kiss and Make Up," *New Statesman* 75 (26 January 1968), 114.

[5] Rabinovitz, p. 43.

[6] Todd, p. 116.

[7] Iris Murdoch, The Nice and the Good (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p. 234. All subsequent quotations will be followed by the page number in this edition.

[8] Iris Murdoch, The Bell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p. 86.

[9] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

[10] TLS: Essays and Reviews from the Times Literary Supplement, Vol. 7 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 59.

[11] "Kiss and Make Up," pp. 113-14.

[12] Gilligan, p. 240.

[13] The Bell, pp. 319-20.

[14] Baldanza, p. 141.

[15] Gilligan, p. 247.

[16] Todd, p. 85.

[17] TLS, p. 52.

[18] Lorna Sage, "The Pursuit of Imperfection," Critical Quarterly 19 (Summer 1977), 65.

[19] Iris Murdoch, A Fairly Honourable Defeat (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 37.

[20] "Kiss and Make Up," p. 114.

[21] Baldanza, p. 143.

[22] Rabinovitz, p. 43.

[23] Bernard Bergonzi, "Nice but not Good," The New York Times Book Review, 11 April 1968, p. 36.

[24] Baldanza, p. 138.

[25] TLS, p. 61.

Chapter Five

[1] Guy Davenport, "Britannia in Negligée," National Review 22 (24 March 1970), 314.

[2] Iris Murdoch, A Fairly Honourable Defeat (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 125. All subsequent quotations will be followed by the page number in this edition.

[3] Dipple, p. 69.

[4] Unofficial Selves: Character in the Novels from Dickens to the Present Day (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 257.

[5] "Iris Murdoch's Thirteenth Novel about Evil: A Fairly Honourable Defeat," New York Times Book Review, 8 Feb. 1970, p. 1.

[6] Ibid., p. 28.

[7] Noam Chomsky, "Knowledge and Power: Intellectual and the Welfare/Warfare State," in The New Left: A Collection of Essays, ed. Priscilla Long (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1970), p. 175.

[8] Ibid., p. 187.

[9] Ibid., p. 190.

[10] Baldanza, p. 161.

[11] Dipple, p. 196.

[12] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 270.

[13] Todd, p. 104.

[14] Dipple, p. 104.

[15] Stanley Reynolds, "Artful Anarch," New Statesman 79 (30 Jan. 1970), 157.

[16] Iris Murdoch, p. 31.

[17] Ibid., p. 31.

[18] "Iris Murdoch's A Fairly Honourable Defeat," Revue des Langues Vivantes 38, No. 1 (1972), 54.

[19] Dipple, 193.

[20] "Iris Murdoch's London Novels," in Twentieth-Century Literature in Retrospect, ed. Reuben A. Brown (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 84.

[21] Rabinovitz, p. 28.

[22] There are, in fact, several other instances of homosexuality in the novels preceding A Fairly Honourable Defeat, such as Humphrey Finch's passes at Penn Graham in An Unofficial Rose, and Jamesie's relationship with Gerald in The Unicorn. These instances, however, are not as fully developed as the relationship between Axel and Simon.

[23] Baldanza, pp. 163-64.

[24] Jany Wartin, p. 55.

[25] Murdoch's political ideas are succinctly spelled out in her essay "The House of Theory," Partisan Review 26 (Winter 1959), 17-31.

[26] Dipple, p. 196.

[27] Baldanza, pp. 162-63.

[28] Jany Wartin, p. 62. Although A Word Child (1975) was published after Wartin's article appeared, it nevertheless employs water imagery and has therefore been included in the foregoing list of texts.

[29] Dipple, p. 190.

[30] Ibid., p. 63.

[31] We actually have another instance in which Murdoch allows us access to Julius's mind. This occurs when Julius is on the point of drowning after Simon has pushed him into the pool: "My next breath, he thought, my next breath, my next breath" (p. 334). This, however, is only a minor instance of mere physical description of no significant moral or emotional value.

[32] Dipple, pp. 184-85.

[33] Louis L. Martz, p. 66.

[34] Ibid., p. 82.

[35] Christopher Ricks, "Man Hunt," The New York Review of Books 14 (23 April 1970), 78.

Chapter Six

[1] Iris Murdoch, An Accidental Man (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), p. 89.

[2] Ibid., p. 325.

[3] Ibid., pp. 312-13.

[4] Iris Murdoch, The Black Prince (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), pp. 8-9.

[5] Ibid., p. 291.

[6] Iris Murdoch, Henry and Cato (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), p. 148.

[7] Ibid., p. 165.

[8] Ibid., p. 29.

[9] There are, however, two minor exceptions. In The Black Prince, where the three parts of Bradley Pearson's memoirs occupy the bulk of the novel, there are two forewords and six postscripts. A Word Child, taking the form of a diary, is understandably divided according to the various days of the week.

[10] An Accidental Man, p. 352.

[11] Henry James, The Art of the Novel (1934; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 320.

[12] Iris Murdoch, The Sea, The Sea (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), p. 47. All subsequent quotations will be followed by the page number in this edition.

[13] Moreover, Murdoch regards working for the theatre, like any other branch of human activity, as an opportunity for cooperation and exchange of experiences. See W. K. Rose, "Iris Murdoch, Informally," p. 60.

[14] Murdoch once even expressed the desire to write an anti-war play about Vietnam: ". . . I would like rather to write some propaganda plays, which are really pamphlets. People used to do that in the 1930's much more than they do now." See W. K. Rose, p. 59.

[15] Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961; rpt. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 19[illegible]), pp. 158-5[illegible]

[16] Dipple, p. 2[illegible]

[17] Booth, p. 304.

[18] Booth, pp. 304-305.

[19] Ibid., p. 274.

[20] Ibid., p. 278.

[21] Todd, p. 99.

[22] Ibid., p. [illegible]

[23] Dipple, p. [illegible]

[24] Ibid., p. [illegible]9.

[25] Jany Wartin, p. 62.

[26] Dipple, p. 274.

[27] Ibid., p. 292.

Conclusion

[1] Sartre: Romantic Rationalist (1953; rpt. London: Fontana/ Collins, 1976), p. 110.

[2] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," pp. 251-52.

[3] "Against Dryness," p. 20.

[4] An Unofficial Rose, p. 325.

[5] Ibid., p. 228.

[6] Ibid., p. 346.

[7] A Severed Head, p. 120.

[8] The Flight from the Enchanter, p. 145.

[9] Murdoch's stand here is fundamentally Kantian. One of Kant's commandments in Groundwork of Morals declares that the human being should be treated as an end in himself.

[10] In Murdoch's following novel, Nuns and Soldiers, the "power figure," Guy Openshaw, is portrayed as mortally vulnerable and dies prematurely.

[11] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 257.

[12] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 271.

[13] Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (1957; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 33.

[14] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[15] Iris Murdoch in Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch, ed. Jean-Louis Chevalier (Caen: Centre de Recherches de Littérature et Linguistique des Pays de Langue Anglaise, 1978), p. 89.

[16] Character and the Novel (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1965), p. 24.

[17] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 257.

[18] Ibid., p. 257.

[19] Dipple, pp. 315-16.

[20] "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," p. 257.

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