

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Gail Elizabeth Aiken entitled "This Accidental World: The Philosophy and Fiction of Iris Murdoch." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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THIS ACCIDENTAL WORLD:
THE PHILOSOPHY AND FICTION OF IRIS MURDOCH

A Dissertation
Presented for the
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Degree
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Gail Elizabeth Aiken

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ABSTRACT

Iris Murdoch's fiction and philosophy treat basic human concerns. In her philosophicalaesthetic treatises, notably the three collected essays in The Sovereignty of Good (1970), she isolates, among others, four elements that affect all human beings: language, love, art, and death. Not only does everyone experience these ideas unconsciously as part of everyday reality, but everyone must also confront each and accept or reject them. Her philosophical system of attentive, loving observation of one's surroundings and acquaintances suggests a way of incorporating each element into the major goal of progress toward the Good. Her nineteen novels display, with increasing complexity to date, how difficult it is to effect the system of loving attention in daily life.

This study devotes one chapter to each of the four concerns specified above. Each chapter is divided into three parts: Part I places the topic in her philosophical system; Part II surveys its function as a theme in Murdoch's novels since her first, Under the Net (1954); and Part III identifies a novel of the present decade as a particularly appropriate inquiry into topic under consideration. Accordingly, the chapter on language treats A Word Child (1975); the chapter on love discusses A Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974); the chapter on art examines The Black Prince (1973); and the chapter on death considers Henry and Cato (1976).

In Chapter 1 (Language: "Word pie") Murdoch illustrates her conviction that attentive love can be shown most literally in the words and conversations we create in order to communicate with others. The

more tailored the vocabulary, the more closely we can interpret another's inner life. In A Word Child, protagonist Hilary Burde has created a language-game for each day of the week, to fit the regular schedule of visits and meals that he has concocted for himself. Instead of bringing him closer to the people whom he visits, however, the banter isolates him from everyone. In Hilary, Murdoch has created the failure of her philosophical assertion. Such satirical reversal at her own expense is typical of Murdoch's fiction. Chapter II (Love: "Through the lookingglass") investigates the center of her philosophy of approach to the Good in its consideration of "good love" and "bad love," the first being selfless and other-directed and the second being selfish and possessive. Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974) considers both juxtaposed as Blaise Gavender's seven-year-long illegitimate household is brought to the attention of his wife and son. Murdoch shows clearly how a "good love" can become "bad" simply by introducing the typical selfish possessiveness that is human nature. Chapter III (Art: "We blink our eyes") examines Murdoch's analogy of attention to great art and attention to human beings. Her contention that close consideration of an acknowledgedly great work of art brings the "exercise in really looking" that should characterize our human relations is effectively questioned in its complexity in The Black Prince (1973). The novel is itself a work of art, and its numerous Forewords, Afterwords, and Postscripts attest to the varied perceptions of fact that each character endures. The final chapter (Death: "Without consolation") isolates the decisive element around which all other concerns arrange themselves. Its irrevocable advent brings into perspective seemingly monumental

egoistic neuroses and societal preoccupations, so that selfless kindness are all that obtain. Henry and Cato (1976), however, traces the decisive summer of two old friends, Henry Marshalsen and Cato Forbes, during which each confronts death through accident and through deliberate murder. Henry's lifelong rebellion against his origins subsides into relieved acquiescence, and Cato's gentle affair with God and humanity transforms him into a bitter recluse.

Iris Murdoch is her own severest critic. Her philosophical system, which she characterizes as "a footnote to logical positivism," is developed articulately and completely in her philosophical essays only to be questioned to the point of absolute contradiction in her novels. Her method, then, is to maintain the constant balance between the abstract Platonic ideal and Kantian daily realities.

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INTRODUCTION

Iris Murdoch is the author of nineteen novels, three books of philosophy, and several critical essays, both philosophical and literary, which she has produced at a minimum rate of one book per year for twenty years. She has had many vocations in her life besides that of writer, including some years in the foreign service and a successful marriage to literary critic John Bayley. She is best known, however, as the don in philosophy at St. Anne's, Oxford, who is the prolific novelist. Despite her dual intellectual activities, she manages to avoid writing "philosophical novels" in the manner of Sartre or Kafka in which fictional artistry is made subservient to presentation of a favorite philosophical theory. Rather, her novels are intensely busy, densely populated fictional worlds which share a similarity of structure and technique while remaining self-contained entities, and her philosophical essays remain concise, separate, individual statements of her personal beliefs.

A typical Murdoch novel uses dramatic coincidence to join a main plot to several subplots in which characters and situations remain unique. After nineteen novels, however, some similarities in "atmosphere" become apparent, if only because they share the same author. Certain major ideas recur, four of which are identified in this study and form its structure. These four recurring major themes also appear in her philosophical work where they are explained and defined theoretically, principally in the three collected essays in The Sovereignty of Good (1970) and the recent monograph, The Fire and the Sun (1977).

In Murdoch's novels, philosophy and novel-writing complement each other so that instead of writing a philosophical novel in which characters, plot and theme act together to prove the viability of a certain philosophical point of view (e.g., Walker Percy's The Movie-goer; Alexander Solzenetzyn's Cancer Ward). Murdoch's novels illustrate the impossibility of any single controlling philosophical system. Rather, in the manner of Henry James, she shows multiplicity without fragmentation. In her philosophical essays, Murdoch presents the ideal system of progress toward "Good" but then shows in her novels, against a multi-figured backdrop of many philosophies including nihilism, how no system works day to day, just as no individual is without contradiction and flaw. Her overall novelistic "message," then, if she has one, is not that nothing matters, but that everything does. Everyone is right; the most that we can do daily is try to understand the inconsistent motivations behind people's actions and accept constant change.

Her novelistic view encompasses many philosophies rather than indoctrinates with a single system. If one learns anything from her long and intricately woven plots, it is that the tolerant, patient "long view" is the one that obtains, not the narrowly frenetic one. Accordingly, the major motifs that reappear in her works are fundamental to human existence: language, love, art, and death. These four topics are treated in detail in Murdoch's philosophical system, the sovereignty of Good; together they form the basis for an examination of her novels. Certain novels lend themselves more readily to one theme than to another, though all four ideas are present in every novel in some form, since they are all basic human concerns.

Language, for example, is inescapable. Whether in speech, in writing, or in looks and gestures, human beings communicate. How well and with whom is one of Murdoch's major philosophical concerns. Her system of progress toward Good (complete selflessness and acceptance) through loving attention to others takes its form in language through her concern with finding the proper vocabulary and expression for each person that one wishes to know. Ideally, self is forgotten in concentration on establishing a mutual language that will lead to the center of the person in question. A Word Child (1975) is Murdoch's major novelistic investigation of various language systems through Hilary Burde, the first-person narrator who knows a great many languages but can speak none. Metaphorically, Hilary "knows" a great many people but reveals himself to none. In A Word Child Murdoch uses language as plot material, controlling metaphor, and philosophical statement. Language appears as a minor theme in various earlier novels, such as Under the Net (1954), Flight from the Enchanter (1956), The Bell (1958), The Italian Girl (1964), and The Nice and the Good (1968) in terms of characters who have knowledge of foreign languages, hieroglyphics that figure decisively in plot, and various minor or understated developments of communication through the creation of a peculiar language as an act of loving attention. The later work incorporates Wittgensteinian language philosophy and a much more sophisticated and integrated structure based on language consciousness than do the earlier novels.

The second theme, love, is at the heart of Murdoch's philosophy. She defines the ideal love as selfless attention of one person toward

other things and people, the vehicle that can eventually lead one to perception of "the Good" (the Sun). Possessive, jealous, romantic/erotic love is self serving and limiting, food for the "fat ego." This type of love is the more common, the one found in most lasting relationships, or "marriages". Murdoch reiterates the difficulty of overcoming the human, selfish love with the ideal and other-directed love, but stresses that such an effort is the only way to be fair to a loved one, to try to know the person completely. The major work in which the theme of love is examined from the selfish and possessive point of view as well as from the ideal, other-directed vantage point is Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974). This novel treats two households which have the same "father," one legal and the other illegitimate. Blaise Gavender's seven-year-long support of his mistress and their son, unknown to his own wife and son, is revealed in the course of Love Machine, thus affording ample opportunity for exploration of many concurrent love relationships, including mother and son and father and son. Because of Murdoch's concentration on marriage in her novels and because of the superabundance of love relationships in daily life, love figures in almost every other Murdoch novel as well. It is particularly significant in earlier works such as The Sandcastle (1957), which is structured around an adulterous affair, in Time of the Angels (1966), structured around incestuous love, and in A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970), which brings four established couples together and then divides them. Her treatment of love and marriage becomes increasingly thoughtful and contemplative in later works.

A third major concern in Murdoch's work is art. In her philosophical essays, art appears as an analogy for the object of loving attention, an illustration of what the process of selfless loving entails. Just as one returns to a "great" painting and each time discovers more about it, just as each additional piece of information about the painting increases one's appreciation of it, and just as one cannot know everything about the artist, the process of painting, and the socio-historical context, so one must approach the person one wishes to know: learn as much as possible, realizing that there is an area in each individual which must remain inviolate where his freedom resides. The Black Prince (1973) is the novel which treats art as its principal concern. It is a self-conscious novel within a novel written by a former tax investigator, Bradley Pearson, who considers himself a sensitive novelist obliged to include numerous digressions on aesthetic theory. A Foreword and several Postscripts then attest to the impossibility of discovering the "truth" of the facts on which Pearson has based his novel and reveal that Pearson's "novelistic intent" is to vindicate his actions and prove himself innocent of a murder charge. Again, her earlier novels treat art in various ways and always more simplistically. The Sandcastle (1957) is a useful example of Murdoch's portrait of an artist, herself a portrait painter, and the process of her creation of a portrait. An Unofficial Rose (1962) uses as a major symbol of moral ethics a finished painting, a Tintoretto cherished by its owner and eventually sacrificed to his foolish son. Excellent paintings and tapestries function elsewhere as moral reference points, such as in Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974) and in Henry and Cato

(1976). Appreciation or ignorance of them by various characters becomes an index of their moral vision, much as the efficacy of language indicates the perception of its creator.

Death, the final concern in Murdoch, becomes the moral touchstone for the other three considerations. The presence and possibility of death is a locus around which the priorities of other issues are established and which brings "the Good" into clearest focus. Relating to death without allowing suffering to become an end in itself, either for the dying or for the beholder, becomes the final "letting go" of the ego and with this act makes death the natural end of life as we know it. Henry and Cato (1976) is Murdoch's most intense statement on death since Bruno's Dream (1969). In this recent novel she treats the subject consciously and completely. Cato Forbes, a doubting priest, violently murders a boy with whom he had fallen in love, and his childhood friend Henry Marshalsan tries to murder his past after his brother's sudden death. Cato and Henry are both transformed by their exposure to the finality of death and their capacity for violence. The earlier novel, Bruno's Dream, centers on an eighty-year-old philatelist and arachnologist, Bruno Greensleave, who is bed-ridden and dying of a grotesque disease. The symbolic arrangement of characters around his sickbed becomes a metaphor for the arrangement of worldly concerns around the inevitability of death. Other novels, such as The Nice and the Good (1968), incorporate a singularly tragic experience, in this case a suicide and a near-death by drowning, to bring characters into the sudden awareness that realigns their sensibilities.

The following study is structured in four parts around these four major novelistic and philosophic concerns: language ("Word pie"); love ("Through the looking-glass"); art ("We blink our eyes"); and death ("Without consolation"). Each of the four parts is subdivided into three sections. Section I summarizes Murdoch's philosophical explanation of the idea in her essays, principally those in The Sovereignty of Good. Section II presents an overview of the theme's operation in selected early novels, and Section III examines each theme in light of a single recent novel which embodies the theme in its structure, character, plot, and subject matter, i.e., her most lengthy and sophisticated consideration of the topic to date.

CHAPTER I

LANGUAGE: "WORD PIE"

I

Language is Murdoch's basic fictional instrument. In her writing, however, language becomes a philosophical and thematic vehicle as well. First and most commonly, Murdoch's novels are black print on a white page. Which letters and words appear determine the form and intent of the fictional world she will create. Within that world, words become the vehicle of illusion: characters hide in words so that, deliberately or innocently, they are not what they seem. "Public" dialogues and "private" monologues are alike deceptive to other characters and ultimately to the reader. Finally, the subject of language and words per se intrigues Murdoch as writer and philosopher. This preoccupation takes form quite literally in the substance of the plot as well as in various cryptograms and puzzles that appear scattered throughout her work. References to language and words--their tedium, their unreliability, their necessity--are in some cases quite sketchily suggested; they form only a muted subplot to emphasize rather than introduce major themes.

The use of language as a theme in Iris Murdoch's novels is strengthened by her awareness of its past and present philosophical ramifications, both in the work of others and in her own personal statements which are most cogently expressed in her collection of three essays entitled The Sovereignty of Good (1970). To say, therefore, that

language serves Murdoch as a central matrix of illusion is to say that her work embodies a double illusion: the work itself and the means by which the work is made. The work itself implies an artificially ordered world, despite her insistence philosophically on its accident. The means with which she creates that world of language, the crude and treacherous method of putting ideas onto paper, implies articulate accuracy, despite repeated examples of its deception. Murdoch is simultaneously aware of the fantasies she creates, the paradoxical necessity of using words to tell a story, and the gap between word and idea. She embodies these three assumptions in the very construction of her novels, most successfully in those in which she uses a first-person narrator.

The philosophical bases of these assumptions about Murdoch's fiction are clearly stated in "The Idea of Perfection," the first essay in The Sovereignty of Good. She says,

Words are the most subtle symbols which we possess and our human fabric depends on them. The living and radical nature of language is something we forget at our peril.¹

Language is by its nature an integral part of everyone's life. Next to looks and gestures, the most powerful and primitive communicants that can convey a thousand ambiguous meanings or none, one's innermost feelings or a convincing disguise of them, language is the sole means by which we negotiate, organize, teach, love, tell our histories. Language is, however, by its nature inaccurate. First, because it is a system, really several systems, by which we interpret the world, its very

¹Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 34.

mechanical structure of external phenomena dooms it to failure. Second, it is a system of symbols which represent ideas; in the gap between the idea and the symbol lies silence and ambiguity. Murdoch is conscious of the power and delicacy of the instrument she uses in the act of writing as well as of its inherent inaccuracy and dynamism.

These paradoxes implicit in recording ideas in words on paper are not newly discovered ones. The "triple remove" of a poem's words from their source, a human mind, presents the same inherent problem in Abraham Cowley's "To the Royal Society" (Abraham, 1968) as occurs in Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (Baylor and Stokes, 1971). The growth in consciousness of language that began in the nineteenth century has become a major philosophical-literary preoccupation in the present century and is reflected in a deep distrust of words in many writers who find language an unsuitable mode for the twentieth century.

Hitherto the inefficiency of language was a recognized fact that was dealt with constructively and on its own terms. Conscious effort made man's voice a precise indicator of what was in his head, sometimes by using outrageous conceits or word combinations intended to match the jarring discoveries being made about the physical world--an attitude not entirely dead today, but growing rather feeble. Instead, with innovative theories for saving human work time, increasing leisure, expanding mental limits, and pursuing galaxies, came a corresponding disillusion with man and his environments, particularly Western society. Man is insatiably inquisitive about himself, but the more he knows about himself and his surroundings, the less satisfied he becomes. When

his manner of existence is called into question, so, correspondingly, is his mode of expression; words no longer match his perceptions. Words are repeatedly misused; they lose their "meaning" and their potency as their original frame of reference dissolves. Etymology becomes startling revelation.

With this separation of word from denotation comes a corresponding separation of man from man. Professional vocations become so highly specialized that the jargon of the computer programmer is gibberish to the account executive whom he serves; the psychologist cannot converse with the sociologist without endless redefinition. Dialectal differences no longer vary from region to region within the nation, but from block to block in major cities. As geographical separation is reduced, verbal separation increases. Small wonder, then, that poets and writers begin looking for alternative modes of communication in this "crisis of poetic means" that George Steiner describes in his Language and Silence. He traces the roots of the crisis to the nineteenth century:

It arose from awareness of the gap between the new sense of psychological reality and the old modes of rhetorical and poetic statement. In order to articulate the wealth of consciousness opened to modern sensibility, a number of poets sought to break out of the traditional confines of syntax and definition. Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and Mallarmé strove to restore to language a fluid, provisional character; they hoped to give back to the world the power of incantation--of conjuring up the unprecedented--which it possesses when it is still a form of magic. They realized that traditional syntax organizes our perception into linear and monistic patterns. Such patterns distort or stifle the play of subconscious energies, the multitudinous life of the interior of the mind, as it was revealed by Blake, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Freud.²

²George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Borzoi Books, 1967), p. 62.

The work of Rimbaud and Mallarmé can be regarded as representative of two alternatives to conventional language. In opposite ways, both tried to capture the essence of "Being" and transcend ordinary reality (Greene, 1970). Rimbaud, through expressing "l'inexprimable des silences, des nuits" (Greene, 1970) and Mallarmé, through using words for their sound rather than for their conventional denotation, ended with the incomprehensible poem on a blank page. This duality is mirrored in contemporary philosophy also by Heidegger and Wittgenstein, of whom Erich Heller comments:

. . .there is a historical sense in which the two extremes of contemporary philosophizing--Heidegger's tortuous metaphysical probings into language and Wittgenstein's absorption in language-games. . . can be seen as two aspects of the same intention: to track down to their source in language and there to correct the absurdities of human endeavor to speak the truth.³

The works of contemporary writers and playwrights--Beckett, Pinter, Albee, Genet, Ionesco--embody this duality as well, so that the results are silence in Beckett, babble in Ionesco, mutually exclusive conversation in Pinter. In Pinter's The Caretaker Davies' trip to Sidcup for his "papers," a fictional trip to which he clings for his stability and identity, becomes a meaningless euphemism in the company of two brothers, Aston and Nick, each in his own mutually exclusive paragraph (Pinter, 1964). In Silence the same fragments of conversation are uttered out of context over and over until a single phrase can evoke an entire episode (as happens in the brain), and there is no need for words (Pinter, 1964). Silence then becomes eloquence; nonsense words fall on deaf ears.

³Erich Heller, "Ludwig Wittgenstein," Encounter 13 (September 1959), p. 46.

It is not surprising, in light of the intellectual focus of two centuries, that Murdoch finds language a central concern in her fiction and philosophy. Her implicit optimism and her faith in the resourcefulness and diversity of all human beings allows her to take note of these divergences from common communication and make her own peace with the controversy. Her answer, like Wittgenstein's, is on the side of language, but she adds a human element to her theory as well. She suggests that a person try to enter the mind of one person at a time and find the particular vocabulary that will "open" that person so that he may be fully understood. One must tailor one's vocabulary, tone, and mood to fit one's audience. Discovering which expressions and word patterns work exclusively with what person is a function of the loving attention Murdoch deems so necessary to fair, just decisions about others, which then determine one's conduct toward that person. She writes:

Human beings are obscure to each other, in certain respects which are particularly relevant to morality, unless they are mutual objects of attention, since this affects the degree of elaboration of a common vocabulary.⁴

Instead of throwing down her pen in disgust, or staring silent at a hostile world, or writing in a Joycean clustered vocabulary, Murdoch insists, in philosophical treatises and by example in her novels, that if one cares to find the right words, one can communicate with another person.

⁴The Sovereignty of Good, p. 33.

This approach to human relations, which becomes Murdoch's artistic technique, depends solely upon the individual who holds full responsibility for seeing the "true" nature of another on the basis of as many "facts" gathered about the individual as possible, knowing that it is impossible to know all--about oneself, much less another. It is therefore consistent with the search for a particularized, unique mutual vocabulary for each person that Murdoch chooses a first-person point of view, an engaged narrator who becomes the focus of the novel, for both of her narratives that deal principally with language, Under the Net (1954) and A Word Child (1974).

Using language as the controlling metaphor for human relations makes choice of a fictional narrator a crucial decision in novels in which language is a primary function. The first-person engaged narrator is clearly the most appropriate mode. If one cannot state or even think one's ideas accurately in words, then someone telling someone else's story would only compound the problem. First-person narration at least takes the reader to the source of the idea, assuming his truthfulness and sincerity (Byatt, 1965); the reader can then do what he will with the reports. Jake Donaghue of Under the Net and Hilary Burde of A Word Child are not Murdoch's only first-person narrators. Furthermore, discussion of them and the narrative technique they represent does not imply that all Murdoch's first-person narratives (A Severed Head, The Unicorn, The Black Prince) deal primarily with language and its seductive powers.

The first-person account is an admittedly biased one; just how much to allow for that bias is an unanswered and unanswerable question. Much of the "narration" that Jake and especially Hilary do is a mental

consideration of each problem shortly after it develops. Each novel has sections that are closer to interior monologue than to active story-telling, but considering the narrators in that context causes certain misconceptions and ambiguities as well. Charles Glicksberg, in his study The Self in Modern Literature, discusses the monologue as it appears in contemporary novels:

In its attempted resolution of the opposition between We and I, society and the self, the monologue reveals itself to be, like all literature, like language itself, an intersubjective medium. There are, strictly speaking, no monologues. The monologues that make up the contents of the work by Gottfried Benn and Samuel Beckett, the muted echo of a consciousness that struggles in vain to achieve a sense of identity, is nevertheless reaching out toward authentic dialogue. . . . The imaginative writer of our time is no solipsist, either; his soliloquies are actually dialogues conducted with himself. However much he is alone, a universe in himself, his solitary cry is addressed to other men. The paradox at the heart of the monologue is that in its struggle with the lack of communication, it rises to the level of dialogue.⁵

According to Glicksberg, the first-person narrator in modern fiction is talking to himself and answering as well, a point that becomes more noticeable in regard to Hilary than to Jake.

Hilary splits himself into many people, each with a special language, much as one would divide a pie, but, once divided, he cannot reassemble himself into a functioning synthesis. Jake, on the other hand, seems more solid at his center, perhaps because he is more protective of himself. We are told that he has recently suffered a nervous breakdown; he is therefore less likely to give himself away than is Hilary, whose initial shattering experience occurred twenty years

⁵Charles Glicksberg, The Self in Modern Literature (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), p. 58.

before he tells his story. Jake seems much less vulnerable and less prone to self-destructive violence than is Hilary. Hilary is the long shot; Jake is the sure thing. Both nonetheless survive.

The two men have marked similarities apart from the capacity for mere survival. Murdoch has chosen as main characters two men whose minds are limited. Neither is brilliant nor brilliantly successful, though both would like to be so on their own terms. Both are introspective, Hilary much more so than Jake, partly because Hilary is forty-one and Jake is in his twenties. Both like to view themselves as the "center of the universe" that Glicksberg describes above. Each makes deductions and orders his life around those assumptions, which lead to confusion and blatant error.

Neither has a home to speak of, though both would like one with a mother image in it to nestle by. At the beginning of Under the Net Jake is evicted by his former girlfriend, visits friends, and has trouble locating himself permanently elsewhere. Hilary's apartment is a disaster most of the time, with extra furniture littering the sitting room so that any entertaining must take place in the bedroom and/or small kitchen. Both depend on friends and acquaintances for stability, Jake on his best friend, the Anglo-Irish Finn, Hugo Belfounder, on Madge, Anna, and Mrs. Tinckham, the bookstore owner and mother to stray cats and humans. Similarly, Hilary depends on regular weekly visits to associates from his office who give him nightly meals and a few hours of diversion; and on his sister, his only admitted link with his well-hidden though not completely repressed tragic past. Both Jake and Hilary do what they think they "must" do, as seen from their limited

central perspectives. They are, in a way, psychological cripples, charming at first meeting, but limited by their excessive introspection which evokes only measured responses and the desire to manipulate the feelings and actions of others. In essence, then, they are like a hundred people one has met; they are easily credible to the reader, especially because of their reluctance to deal directly and honestly with anyone. Murdoch, in *Jake and Hilary*, presents the neighbor next door, or the ambitious boy in school who never spoke to anyone; their shortcomings are rather daily and common ones than huge tragic flaws.

Both Hilary Burde and Iris Murdoch maintain that tragedy exists in art, not in life ("Against Dryness," 16-20; A Word Child, 26). The ordered world of art can constrict its view in order to exaggerate the importance of particular events so that they appear monumentally important and therefore potentially tragic. Focusing on one particular accident or unfortunate event, to the exclusion of other events related sequentially, can cause the central event to assume tragic proportions. In the same way, focusing on a particular person's life can endow it with tragic potential, if interrelationships with other equally important lives are underplayed. The everyday sequence of events, however, the constant replacement of one tragedy almost immediately with another, makes impossible the myopic focus on one event or person in particular. This larger, all-encompassing view, the chronologic rather than the existential history, is the "comic" mode as opposed to the "tragic." It is this "comic" mode which Murdoch incorporates into her fiction through multiple points of view and in Hilary Burde through his involvement with a different group of people on each day of the week.

The muddled and muddling thoughts, apprehensions, and second-guesses of two such mundane souls as Jake and Hilary, however, can only amaze the reader when they are given cosmic importance. Murdoch thus has it both ways: she keeps man in the larger perspective as member of the human race, each member having similarly monumental problems, but she also allows the reader to see how very disconcerting and potentially tragic an individual life can be. The larger "comic" mode, however, overwhelms the narrower "tragic" one. Murdoch tells us not that the protagonist and narrator is an anti-hero in the disguise of the man on the street, but that he is the man on the street.

Both narrators also reflect language philosophy of the now legendary Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose work Murdoch reviewed as it was published. Wittgenstein's two major works are the Tractatus logico-philosophicus (finished in 1918, published in 1921) and Philosophical Investigations (finished in 1949, published posthumously in 1953). These works represent the principles underlying still active philosophical battles. Wittgenstein's genius remains undisputed, and his later work, Philosophical Investigations, contradicts his position regarding the nature of language as stated in his earlier Tractatus.

To summarize briefly, the earlier work presents language as a single system of words, each with a single discernible denotative meaning. This system communicates by positing the common referent, "Reality," for everyone; all language as one massive system must be linked to this one metaphysical awareness (Hartnack, 1968). The basis of Investigations is, on the contrary, a conception of not one system of language, but of several "language-games," each viable within itself,

entirely separated from the world of fact ("Reality") (Hartnack, 1968). This assumption has proven troublesome to certain critics, e.g., Bertrand Russell, who unreservedly sanctioned the Tractatus when it appeared. Wittgenstein claims in the Investigations that the function of the word within its particular language-game determines its "true" function. Placing the word into its appropriate context resolves all ambiguity. It should perhaps be noted that Wittgenstein's tersely aphoristic style does not encourage sure, unambiguous interpretation. As Erich Heller kindly puts it, one must bring imagination to fill in between the lines of Wittgenstein's theories (Heller, 1959). Though certain philosophers meet this stylistic density with unqualified alacrity, the irony implicit in this style in light of the present study is evident.

Parallels between Wittgenstein's early and late philosophical conceptions and Murdoch's philosophical and fictional ones are readily apparent. Murdoch, of course, was aware of both works of Wittgenstein when she was writing Under the Net ("Metaphysics and Ethics," 1957) though the Investigations was newly published. One may therefore consider Under the Net a huge "e.g." of the failure of the Tractatus theory in order to prove by implication the validity of the Philosophical Investigations.

In the Tractatus, language is seen as a picture of reality that is necessary to one's making sense of the world (Hartnack, 1968). If language is misused, i.e., does not represent facts as they are, or if one mistakes the language structure for the facts themselves, then the

picture of reality rendered by the language is in some way exaggerated, distorted, erroneous (Swinden, 1973). A. S. Byatt, in her study of Under the Net, links the title image with a passage from the Tractatus in which Wittgenstein instances Newtonian mechanics to show how the net image can be used to "bring the description of the universe to a unified form." Byatt records the following specific passage:

Let us imagine a white surface with irregular black spots. We now say: whatever kind of picture these make I can always get as near as I like to its description, if I cover the surface with a sufficiently fine square network and now say of every square that it is white or black. In this way I shall have brought the description of the surface to a unified form. This form is arbitrary, because I could have applied with equal success a net with a triangular or hexagonal mesh. It can happen that the descriptions would have been simpler with the aid of a triangular mesh; that is to say we might have described the surface more accurately with a triangular, and coarser, than with the finer square mesh, or vice versa, and so on.⁶

Murdoch has stated that she was thinking of this image when she conceived Under the Net. She mentions in her interview with Frank Kermode that the novel "plays with a philosophical idea. The problem which is mentioned in the title is the problem of how far conceptualising and theorising, which are from one point of view absolutely essential, in fact divide you from the thing that is the object of theoretical attention" (Kermode, 1967). Wittgenstein uses the same image briefly in the Tractatus, when he says that "laws, like the law of causation, etc., treat of the network and not of what the network describes" (Byatt, 1965).

⁶A. S. Byatt, Degrees of Freedom: The Novels of Iris Murdoch (London: Chatto and Windus, Ltd., 1965), p. 112.

Jake Donaghue, the first-person narrator, learns in the course of the novel to survive under the net of language, an all-encompassing system that necessarily redefines all the people and beliefs that are under it. He also learns most obviously through working with his book The Silencer, that his writing the book undercuts the lesson of the eloquence of silence that Hugo Belfounder and Anna's theatre represent. Jake finds that in neither Hugo nor Anna, nor the political theories of Lefty Todd to whom Belfounder yields, lies a complete perception about the world. At the end of Under the Net Jake plans to write the novel he has previously put aside in favor of translating Pierre Breteuil's "bad, best-selling stuff"; at the end of the novel he plans to write something "worthwhile." After turning down a lucrative offer from Madge's film company to produce the sensational material, Jake says, "'I saw at last . . . the real shape of that which had before so obscurely compelled me,'" as if to say that he has seen, finally, the way the world works. He knows how he works in it and considers his decisions--to write the "good" book, to buy the dog Mr. Mars--to be inevitable; they feel "right." Like his insights into Belfounder's theory, however, this insight is but a temporary lucidity for Jake.

Murdoch says that "It is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place" ("Against Dryness," 1961). This statement suggests that the process of moral growth is a never-ending one, since at no time does one possess all the facts. Jake is made to see that he is fallible; his speech and written word lie as all others' do. He is made more conscious, through his insights, of exactly where his values lie, how he has avoided putting into action certain ideas he

knows to be true. His chances of repeating past errors, however, because of the human failure to retain perception once gained, are great.

Patrick Swinden, in his Unofficial Selves, summarizes this point in relation again to the image of the net:

The net of language is being confused with the reality it is the business of the net to describe. . . . Reality is the one that got away. The more the net fails to catch it, the more the motions of the net tend to hypnotize and fascinate. This occurs at greater and greater expense to our understanding of what should be beneath it--beneath, that is to say, the false interpretations of the narrator's first-person account.⁷

No one ever knows the "truth"; imagination and intellect delimit the basic capacity for perception. The reader's position, once removed from Jake, allows for more insight than Jake has as participator in his life. Our decisions of necessity are erroneous, then, because all the facts cannot be gathered simultaneously in a coherent order, and because proximity to a situation is usually blinding. Murdoch says in her "Against Dryness" (1961):

Reality is not a given whole. An understanding of this, a respect for the contingent, is essential to imagination as opposed to fantasy.⁸

Imagination must fill in the gaps in our perceptions, a statement that recalls Heller's on interpreting Wittgenstein which was quoted

⁷Patrick Swinden, Unofficial Selves: Character in the Novel from Dickens to the Present Day (London: Macmillan and Co., Lt., 1973), p. 90.

⁸Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch, "Encounter 16 (January 1961), p. 18.

earlier. A statement from the Philosophical Investigations is apropos Jake's (and everyone's) predicament as well:

The aspect of things that are most important, for us, are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something--because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him. --And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful.⁹

This statement is particularly useful in light of a discussion of the first-person narrator, the filter through which all the facts of the novel are cast, and in this way the later Wittgenstein is reflected in Jake Donaghue as well as Hilary Burde of A Word Child, who imputes motivation and relationships as wrongly as does Jake in Under the Net, and ultimately in the reader himself who must finally decipher all the filtered and reconsidered information.

Hilary, like Jake, "hates solitude but is afraid of intimacy," although he lives that principle rather than describes it, as Jake does. Hilary structures his life around various groups of people, to whom he assigns a certain day in the week for a regular visit and meal. At each of these meetings he shows a different aspect of his personality, never entirely revealing himself and never telling the whole truth. He goes so far as to play games consciously within a given conversation in order to mask his "true" self. In this act of fragmenting or sectioning himself into component parts, Hilary's life and his conduct of it is testimony to Wittgenstein's hypothesis of the Philosophical Investigations: there is not one language that is a picture of reality,

⁹Cecil Brown, Wittgensteinian Linguists (The Hague, 1974), p. 88.

but instead there are "so many language-games" in which each person indulges for various purposes. He says

. . . that language can serve many different purposes--describing, commanding, asking, appointing, etc., as well as naming, and that the meaning of a word is governed by the language-game in which it figures, . . . that philosophical questions are rooted in misunderstandings of the type of language-game in which a particular word occurs ¹⁰

Hilary is a living example of these language-games as long as he remains in control of his life, the meticulous structure of which is stimulated by an earlier tragedy. Once the structure begins to break down, however, the particular language-games disintegrate with it. Whether at the end of the novel Hilary will create a new series of structures to hide his second tragedy, whether he will simply take shelter in Thomasina Uhlmeister's loving arms, even whether he is profoundly changed by the events described in the novel remain open to question. For as minutely as Hilary considers and reconsiders the tiniest aspects of his life, he misses the larger patterns in the meantime. As much as the reader is privy to his endless ratiocinations, he remains elusive, mysterious, "opaque" in the true Murdoch sense. Hilary Burde's character is discussed further in Section III of this chapter, which focuses on A Word Child.

¹⁰Julius Hartnack, Ludwig Wittgenstein (London, 1968), p. 30.

In certain Murdoch novels, especially in Under the Net (1954) and A Word Child (1974), the theme of language takes precedence over all others. Instead of basic plot background or minor character development, the idea of language is used for character identification and plot motivation as well as for the total vision Murdoch offers in the novels taken as a whole.

In her first novel, Under the Net (1968), Murdoch devotes much of the plot's machinery and the characters' primary concerns to language, words, and the lack of them, silence. Jake Donaghue, the first-person narrator, manages to survive under the net of language. He learns that words are symbols that more often blur and distort meaning and intention than illuminate it. He draws outrageously mistaken conclusions from evidence ("facts") presented to him. He also becomes aware of the potency of silence through the extraordinary Hugo Belfounder; the gap in perception between Belfounder's theatre of silence and Jake's rendition of Hugo's and his discussion in The Silencer (a book that Jake writes) shocks Jake into a semblance of awareness of the powerful ambiguity of nonverbal communication. Jake concludes his narrative with the conviction that he must give up translating the French pot-boilers, his primary means of support, in favor of more "worthwhile" writing, possibly Under the Net itself. Jake begins and ends with words.

In later novels, e.g., Flight from the Enchanter (1956) and The Bell (1958), language is a minor but integral plot element. In Peter Saward (Flight) a brilliant scholar and historian, gives up his

promising research to take on an acknowledgedly hopeless code-breaking task: deciphering ancient hieroglyphics whose secret remains entirely a mystery. Yet, Seward, recognizing the futility of his experiments, perseveres until the discovery (by someone else) of a bilingual stone decisively invalidates his work, as he suspected all along that it would. Seward is also a character to whom others gravitate for advice and guidance in their private affairs. Even the novel's central enchanter, Mischa Fox, visits Seward regularly for a ritualistic inspection of photographs from his past which reveal a vulnerable and child-like Fox to Seward, who remains far-sighted and wise through all the machinations of the plot.

Particularly significant therefore is that his attitude toward his work should be the proverbial "Why not?" in response to others' indications of his pointless study of the ancient symbols. Since all people must do something, Seward thinks, why not do this? Implicit here is the externality of profession, of daily pursuit. What matters is that one does something, even frustrating, nonsensical, trial-and-error experiments. As if to emphasize this inherent futility, Murdoch makes the hieroglyphs Mongolian in origin, whereas Seward had thought them Indo-European. His work, then, had proceeded in entirely the wrong direction. None of his experiments is of any use. Seward's comments on his work are ample indication of his character:

"Well, what can one do?" . . . "One reads the signs as best one can, and one may be totally misled. But it's never certain that the evidence will turn up that makes everything plain. It was worth trying. Now I can go back to my other work in peace. There's nothing to be sad about."¹¹

¹¹Iris Murdoch, Flight from the Enchanter (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955), p. 220.

The reader is made to "like" and even "admire" Saward for his thoughtful foresight and capability, as well as for his practical and considerate manner.

The same idea is stated earlier by Calvin Blick, Mischa Fox's right-hand man and minister of "evil" (amorality). Blick explains Fox's and his peculiar torture of Rosa to her:

. . . "You will never know the truth, and you will read the signs in accordance with your deepest wishes. That is what we humans always have to do. Reality is a cipher with many solutions, all of them right ones."¹²

Not only is the image of hieroglyphics recalled here, as "signs" or "ciphers," but the same idea is stated by a character of a radically different morality from Saward's to show that any actions are capable of being rationalized. Certain external facts remain constant; Mongolian hieroglyphs cannot be made into Indo-European ones. Interpretation of human action in regard to these facts, whether generous "moral" actions or selfish "amoral" actions, can be justified or rationalized to any purpose. If seen in the "proper" light, any action may be "explained" away. Once again words become deceptively treacherous.

In The Bell, Paul Greenfield, art historian with the Courtauld Institute and specialist in fourteenth-century manuscripts, is fascinated by the hieroglyphics on the bell that fell into the lake at an Anglican lay community where his wife Dora goes for respite. Greenfield evokes less sympathy from the reader than does Saward in Flight; he is devoted to his work for its own sake and oblivious to his wife Dora, hence her need for spiritual rest. His concentration on his task parallels

¹²Flight from the Enchanter, pp. 304-305.

Saward's, but his narrow concentration repels people, whereas Saward's larger consciousness and fuller perspective attracts them.

Murdoch has made Greenfield a Casaubon-like scholar whose work is made to seem especially claustrophobic when viewed in dramatic contrast with Dora's undisciplined, impulsive, sometimes wrong-headed enthusiasm and with the "natural," agriculturally oriented community itself. In fact, the many worlds of the novel--Greenfield's research world, the lay community, the neighboring convent, Noel's press reports, and his public, judgmental journalistic world--contrast with Dora's fluid unpredictability in any context. Each world, then, counterpoints another; each has a semblance of integrity, and none holds all the answers. By the end of the novel, all the worlds have disintegrated except the amoral journalistic one.

As a kind of stay against the confusion of eroding values and surprising revelations, Murdoch has Dora sound the bell that she and Toby have recovered from the lake. The new subject of her husband's research sounds the hitherto mute note of "truth"--the clear, undeniable tone that realigns the lives and deaths of most of the characters.

Paul Greenfield, however, remains concerned with appearances, deciphering the strange figures on the bell itself. His joy is solely for the recovery of the research object; he remains unaware of what the bell represents. The bell's toll embodies the principle of balance that underlies Murdoch's Platonically oriented philosophy. What swings up must swing back down of its own momentum. The bell, then, speaks, as words and symbols cannot, for a regular revivification of human energy

(The Bell, 196), requiring only that a dedicated truth-teller, however arbitrary and impulsive the person may seem, set it in motion.

In The Nice and the Good (1968), John Ducane sets about solving the mystery of Joseph Radeechy's suicide in their office at Whitehall. The course of his investigation leads Ducane to the sub-basement of the office building, a former air-raid shelter. Led by an unreliable cohort of Radeechy's who can never resist an opportunity for blackmail, Ducane is introduced to the various trappings of the black magical rituals that Radeechy conducted, complete with table, black mattress, live pigeons, candelabra, and young women. While he is examining the various equipment, Ducane notices some interesting inscriptions on the wall, which prove to be an elaborate cryptogrammatic justification of Radeechy's existence:

. . . Suddenly Ducane saw what it was. The central part of the square consisted of the Latin words of the ancient Christian cryptogram.

R O T A S
O P E R A
T E N E T
A R E P O
S A T O R¹³

¹³Iris Murdoch, The Nice and the Good (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), p. 329.

On closer scrutiny, however, Ducane comes to the startling revelation that the scrawl on the wall is nothing but graphic testimony of Radeechy's egoism:

```

      A
      P
      A
      T
      E
      R
A P A T E R N O S T E R O
      O
      S
      T
      E
      R
      O

```

Who had invented, to scrawl mysteriously upon what darkened wall, that curious charm to conjure, by its ingenious form and its secret content, what powers surely more sinister and probably more real than the Christian god? And what had Radeechy done to it, to divert its power and make its talismanic value his own? Ducane studied the letters round the edge of the square. A and O again twice, only reversed. The other letters then simply read RADEECHY PATER DOMINUS.¹⁴

Once again Murdoch's fascination with word-games and puzzles is woven into the text of her narrative in order to make a statement about a particular personality's curious manner of expression.

The theme of language is not always so explicit as its embodiment in particular character's vocations, lives given to studying symbols that represent ideas. In Bruno's Dream (1969), for example, aside from Miles Greensleave's neurotic concern with the accuracy of expression, dying Bruno is fascinated by spiders, their webs, their habits, their peculiarities, and delights in naming and repeating their Latinate classifications as a source of security and pride in still knowing what

¹⁴The Nice and the Good, p. 330.

he has taught himself.

Because Bruno is a published arachnologist, an integral part of his perception is determined by his immediate recognition of types of spiders by their Latinate classifications. His environment takes on meaning through this automatic reference:

. . . And what was that noise, an intermittent buzzing noise, like an engine. Listening, Bruno could not decide whether it was a sound far away or a little sound near. Then he recognized it. It was the sound of a fly struggling in a spider's web. It was probably in the web of a large tenegaria atrica of whose friendly presence high up in the corner of the ceiling Bruno had for some time been conscious. The desperate bursts of buzzing continued, became briefer, stopped.¹⁵

Bruno's sensitivity to the habits of the tiny creatures who inhabit the room becomes a metaphor for his situation. He is waiting to die of a disease which causes gross distortion of the skull (hydrocephalitis). He is therefore bed-ridden and painfully introspective. The attention that he gives to the spiders is indicative of the attention that he craves, trapped as he is in the center of his littered, self-created web.

Murdoch extends the metaphor to Bruno himself, who uses references to spiders in his characteristic manner to describe his illness:

. . . It was not just the smell, it was the look. He knew that he had become a monster, animal-headed, bull-headed, a captive Minotaur. He had a face now like one of his spiders, Xysticus perhaps, or Osyptila, that have narrow faces like toads. Below the huge emergent head the narrow body stretched away, the contingent improbably human form, strengthless, emaciated, elongated, smelly. He lived in a tube now, like Atypus, he had become a tube. Soma sema. His body was indeed a tomb, a grotesque tomb without beauty.¹⁶

¹⁵Iris Murdoch, Bruno's Dream (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 89.

¹⁶Bruno's Dream, p. 78.

Eventually the metaphor extends to Bruno's questioning the existence of living creatures, including himself, and God's intention in creating them to live such strange existences. His constant reference to spiders, however, defines his mode of expression as it does his attitude toward existence.

In both A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970) and An Accidental Man (1971), novels figure literally in the plot and are either begun, lost, written, and published in the course of the narrative; they act as principal props. In The Black Prince (1973) the entire narrative is being written in diary fashion as we read it. Murdoch closes the gap between creation and product, making Bradley Pearson the author of "her" novel, adding several appendices from major characters who in turn pass judgment on "his" achievement, or debacle. This previous sensitivity to language as such makes logical the fact that A Word Child (1975) focuses primarily on the elusive modes of communication that human beings employ. Murdoch mutes her own narrative voice in favor of Hilary Burde's first-person narration and makes him an even more introspective, self-doubting, styleless personality than is Bradley Pearson, who at least has the egoism to record his thoughts as a book. Burde's expression is intended to be verbally oriented, an oral narrative highlighted by his knowledge and renunciation of many languages besides English, so that the inevitable gap between human intent and interpretation is made self-consciously explicit.

III

It has been demonstrated that language and the lack of it--silence, nonsense--is a central twentieth century preoccupation for creative writers as well as for philosophers. It is also apparent that Iris Murdoch's awareness of these concerns makes them major elements of plot and theme in Under the Net and A Word Child, two novels in which her concern with language becomes embodied in the first-person narrators. Though the subject is clearly present in Under the Net (1954), however, her treatment of language twenty years later in A Word Child (1974) shows infinitely greater complexity and richness, as if Jake Donaghue has grown up into Hilary Burde, or the Ludwig Wittgenstein of the Tractatus has undergone the revelations that bring him to the Philosophical Investigations. Language, literally, figuratively, and philosophically, dominates A Word Child.

The protagonist, Hilary Burde, through whose consciousness the weeks unfold, defines himself with words, giving voice to his meandering thoughts to make painfully clear the peculiar process that has brought him, by the end of the novel, to the brink of marriage with the much-maligned, much-put-off, but nonetheless much-determined Thomasina ("Tommy") Uhlmeister. Burying himself in a lowly government position, Hilary is haunted by the memory of having killed Anne Jopling the wife of Gunnar Jopling, his Oxford mentor in a car accident. Anne, with whom Hilary was having an adulterous affair, was pregnant with Hilary's child but determined to return to Gunnar, who had found them out. Hilary

impetuously drives the car into another over a median at 100 mph, destroying Anne, their child, and Gunnar's friendship. Hilary tries to repress these memories by renouncing all Oxford associations and creating a new life for himself. He arranges the seven days of his week into a strict routine spent with various groups of people. Only his sister Crystal and Clifford Larr know about the Oxford incident; they are his only links with the past, which is rarely discussed. But Crystal does not know that Anne was pregnant when she died, even as Hilary does not know that on the night that Anne died in the hospital, Gunnar Jopling slept with Crystal, so that she is not the modest, patient, homely virgin that Hilary thinks her to be. In a peculiarly Murdochian twist of plot, Gunnar Jopling becomes Hilary's new boss; Lady Kitty Jopling, Gunnar's second wife, becomes instrumental in Gunnar's and Hilary's intended reconciliation. But Hilary is apparently condemned to repeat past errors because he not only falls in love with Gunnar's second wife, but is at least partly responsible for her death. Only Tommy, Hilary's fiancée, remains ignorant of Hilary's entire past, is thoroughly in love with him, and therefore might be his salvation, if he allows it.

Hilary's childhood is unfortunate. His and Crystal's mother was a "tart" who died when Hilary was seven and Crystal was two; their fathers never knew of their existence. Consequently, Crystal spent her childhood with their "Aunt Bill" in a caravan, while Hilary was sent to an orphanage and, as penalty for his bullying meanness, was eventually denied the right to see his sister, a circumstance Hilary remembers with much pain. Crystal has all her life patiently, meekly, and gladly done

menial jobs, while Hilary's considerable temper and spiteful violence were in his earlier years given free rein. He and Crystal, however, remain united by these childhood horrors. Hilary is saved from potential delinquency by Neville Osmand, who found a way into Hilary's brain and woke it up through teaching him the discipline of foreign languages. Hilary was, in his own words, a "bad boy," "utterly ship-wrecked" until Mr. Osmand, his other "savior" with Crystal, leads him to dry land where he illuminates the corners of his hitherto darkened mind with French verbs. Hilary describes at length the experience of literally being "turned on" by languages:

Floods of light came in. I began to learn. . . . I learnt French. I started on Latin. Mr. Osmand promised me Greek. An ability to write fluent correct Latin prose began to offer me an escape from (perhaps literally) the prison house, began in time to show me vistas headier and more glorious than any I had ever before known how to dream of. In the beginning was the word. Amo, amas, amat was my open sesame. . . . I also learnt. . . my own language, hitherto something of a foreign tongue. . . . I was not . . . a love child. I was a word child.¹⁷

Though Hilary had long ago lost touch with Osmand, his former teacher reappears in a rather tragic cameo in A Word Child, first in Hilary's apartment and then by report, having taken his own life with sleeping pills. Hilary remains infatuated with words, however. His introspective and self-demeaning personality, smacking now and then of paranoia, lends itself perfectly to Prufrockian "vision and revision," with the full sentiment of times and opportunities lost and not well-lost, approaching middle age (Hilary is forty-one.), and inflexible egoism.

¹⁷Iris Murdoch, A Word Child (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), p. 21.

Languages prove Hilary's escape not only from the "prison house" of the orphanage, but from the confines of his mean origins and from his own innately violent, defensive personality. Hilary's approach to languages is really an approach to foreign words. His skills lie in reading and writing the languages rather than in speaking them; he admits feeling uncomfortable as a tourist in France and Italy, reluctant even to try for verbal facility. These purely intellectual and highly systematized accomplishments become the ladder on which he climbs to the pinnacle, in his estimation, of winning a brilliant "first" in languages at Oxford and a (short-lived) fellowship there. On the strength of this success, his dogged pursuit of prizes, his fierce desire to be first at everything, the public schoolboy makes good in a highly select atmosphere and plans to take his pure and devoted sister, his Crystal Burde, with him.

Hilary's knowledge of languages ("I never wanted to be a writer. I loved words, but I was not a word-user, rather a word-watcher, in the way that some people are bird-watchers" A Word Child, 28) is that of an appreciative spectator, lacking involvement with the humane or cultural aspect of word systems. Here again is suggested the later Wittgenstein, who divorced the function of words from "Reality" and considered them purely in terms of the language-game in which they work. Ironically, Hilary himself is concerned quite intimately with justifying his existence and his place in the solar system, for all his protestations contra metaphysics. So complete is Hilary's apparent disregard for "meaning" at Oxford that a fellow student accuses him of "ignoring the poetry for the grammar." Hilary explains the accuracy of the remark:

Art meant little to me, I carried a few odd pieces of literature like lucky charms.... Religion, and indeed art too, I conceived of as human activities, but not for me. Art must invent new beauty, not play with what has been already made, religion must invent God and never rest. Only I was not inventive. . . . I early saw that the nature of words and their relationship to reality made metaphysical systems impossible. History was a slaughterhouse, human life was a slaughterhouse. Mortality itself was my philosophical robe. Even the stars are not ageless, and our breaths are numbered.¹⁸

Hilary admittedly has no interest in Noam Chomsky's "metaphysical" aspects of language, since metaphysics yields no comforting answers. He therefore tries to reside in the present moment; explanations that admit of ambiguity are a threat for him. Consistently, then, this "brilliant plodder with an aptitude for grammar" finds an image of goodness, encouraged by Mr. Osmand, in looking up words in the dictionary. He learns to respect grammatical structures because "they do not yield" as everyone in his early days had yielded to his bullying. Hilary attests that "the endless endless task of looking up words was for me an image of life" (A Word Child, 29). In fact, Murdoch states in her Sovereignty of Good that learning a foreign language is an act of "goodness" in its other-directed, selfless concentration on an unfamiliar manner of expression. Learning the new words, phrases, and modes of thinking are for her another act of attentive love, a recognition of the individualities of others, a forgetting of self (Sovereignty of Good, 89). Mr. Osmand, then, becomes a character in whom "good" resides (along with Crystal and Arthur Fisch) by virtue of his attention to languages and to Hilary Burde.

¹⁸A Word Child, p. 28.

Hilary finds security in discovering how words work, without ever having to pronounce them or tell how they change. He takes similar comfort in his "days" that appropriately, since A Word Child is Hilary's story, make up the basic structure of the novel. Hilary's day-by-day schedule prescribes his social and psychological life; his routine office job involves paper rather than people (case histories, no personal interviews) so that, aside from the office gossips, he leaves little to chance in his working day. Eventually of course even the sanctity of this routine is encroached on by Gunnar's arrival as his new boss and by Arthur's desperation to marry Crystal. Each day, each evening is planned at the outset of Hilary's story; the pattern of visits repeats, week after week. Hilary has thus tried to work his life into a methodical grammatical structure, to which he clings desperately in traumatic times, but to no avail. Structural ambiguities (people will be people) reassert their dominion; Hilary's schedule is shot.

His story, then, is a diary that is also a kind of grammar. Diaries and grammars both depend on words, but the daily accidents a diary records are much less rigorously fit together than the accidents that contribute to traditional grammars. Hilary tries and fails to work his life into an arbitrarily structured system; more importantly, perhaps, he gradually recognizes that all systems, even his, fail. Whether he will rise to create a new one in yet another life is nonetheless debatable.

A Word Child's diary structure uses days of the week as chapter titles, except for the concluding two chapters, "Christmas Eve" and

"Christmas Day." Each day usually begins with the morning, follows Hilary to work, and ends with an evening meal followed by conversation or other late-night visits. The first chapter is "Thursday," when Hilary regularly visits the Impiatts, Freddie and Laura. Freddie is part of the same bureaucracy as Hilary; Laura, a fluttering mother bird with no babies, adopts Hilary for one evening a week, feeds, flatters, and cajoles him into good humor. The second chapter is "Friday," when he sees, or rather spars with, Tommy Uhlmeister, the woman who, with increasing intensity, wants a baby or marriage but preferably both from Hilary, and Hilary demurs. "Saturday," the third chapter, is Crystal's, and a meal that Hilary looks forward to because its ritual brings back the best moments of their childhood, few as they were; Hilary can relax with Crystal who lives, he thinks, quite peacefully content in his protection. With no work on Saturday, however, Hilary usually panics at the free time and tries his best to waste the day until dinnertime. Then Murdoch skips abruptly to "Monday" and Clifford Larr, a man who also works at Hilary's office and who sometimes joins him at the Impiatts' on Thursday. At the office, however, Clifford has forbidden Hilary to let on that they know one another. "Tuesday" is spent with Arthur Fisch, the simple-minded office drudge who loves Crystal and wants to marry her. "Wednesday" is a kind of grab-bag free-for-all. By the sixth chapter, Murdoch begins to propel the established situation into the chaos that eventually destroys Hilary's carefully worked out system along with some of his friends. Hilary's story takes about five weeks to tell.

Sundays are omitted as chapters from the first half of the book, customarily dismissed in a sentence or two at the end of Saturday or the beginning of Monday. Hilary comments, "It looks as if nothing ever happens on Sundays, but just wait awhile" (A Word Child, 137). Sundays begin to gain importance for Hilary, i.e., they are given separate chapters, when Hilary falls in love with Lady Kitty and his spiritual or "inner" life begins to unfold. Until Kitty Jopling weaves her spell about Hilary, he is a creature who clings to routine as to a life raft, using people and schedules to keep him afloat--not happy, just alive. When he falls in love, he begins to gain a certain respect for himself, as well as for his power to act, he thinks, selflessly for once.

At first glance it might appear that the addition of the Sundays during the Advent season and the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day concluding chapters are meant to underline the Christian symbolism that is evident throughout the novel. According to Foster Hirsch in his review of A Word Child:

Hilary talks compulsively about sin and redemption and salvation, and the relentless Christian echoes are too weighty for the trim, acid comedy of manners that is the real heart of the material.¹⁹

In fact, the obvious religious overtones act as an ironic reinforcement for Hilary's post-Christian point of view, at best an impotent fist raised apathetically at the heavens. Hilary says toward the end of the novel, "There is a religious teaching which says that God is the author of all actions. What, I wonder, is its secular

¹⁹Foster Hirsch, "A Word Child," Saturday Review (24 September 1976), p. 25.

equivalent?" (A Word Child, 382). Hilary here is in church, overcome by the deaths of Lady Kitty, his beloved; Mr. Osmand, the teacher who taught him to conjugate the Latin verb to love; and Clifford Larr, his source of critical perspective. He contemplates the "accidence" of the world's working that has taken these people from him so suddenly. Until now, Hilary himself has been God of his own universe. The introduction of Sundays into the novel's diary displaces Hilary from his controlling center and sets him adrift in a futile attempt to discover a rationale that will explain the startling turns of events. The coming of Christ, the Christmas season in which the book is set, Christopher Cather with the blond flowing hair and clear blue eyes serve only as ironic counterpoint to Hilary's despair, so that his unanswered questions echo more loudly in the emptiness.

Hilary's daily schedule bears mentioning also in regard to Murdoch's earlier quoted remarks on the necessity for mutually tailored vocabularies in effective human communication. Once again Murdoch turns an important part of her personal philosophy to an ironic comment on its impracticality in the world (Sovereignty of Good, 33). As Hilary designates his weekly visits, he falls into a specialized manner of expression with each person or group on each night, but his contributions to the conversation are designed to evade clear statement and straight answers rather than to facilitate them. Hilary believes that his clever way of 1) avoiding his "slum-like" apartment every night; 2) being well fed; 3) avoiding Christopher Cather, his musical lodger; 4) having many homes instead of one that completely suits; and 5) losing himself in other people effectively hides the "real"

Hilary--the frightened and confused one--from everybody while he remains central in many lives. Hilary is a dedicated, accomplished, and admitted liar (if we can believe his statement); his carefully tailored "days" and elaborately constructed tales of his origins eventually fool no one.

Murdoch departs in A Word Child from her usual meticulous concern with physical architecture as a reflection of the psychological makeup of her characters, except in a most general way to set scenes and provide symbolic London geography (Gindin, 1961). Instead, food replaces rooms in detailing character. Hilary must always know the menu even if he misses a meal, and bring his customary bottle of wine, different each evening, as if what goes into his stomach--he is more often than not hungry--is more real to him than what surrounds him visually. Knowing whether the meal will be Clifford's soufflé or Crystal's fish sticks helps Hilary to strike the precise mood and tone that will effectively disguise him each day. He becomes what he has conditioned each person to expect him to be. Hilary's gustatory concern also reflects his desire to dwell constantly in the present, a preoccupation that makes any creature comforts beyond warmth or coldness in a room inconsequential. He consistently notes room temperature in relation to his physical condition--usually fully clothed and dripping wet (Watrin, 1972).²⁰ Paradoxically, food, clothing, and shelter are more important to the "word child" than are his former stock-in-trade: words.

²⁰Water--ponds, lakes, lagoons, rivers, both outside and before the hearth--flows through A Word Child as centrally as in her previous novels.

Conversation is dangerous to Hilary because it might lead him to reveal an aspect of his past or personality in some unaccustomed way. He becomes adept at various brands of verbal evasion. Most of Murdoch's dialogue seems frivolous; her juxtaposition of apparent non sequitors (especially in crowded cocktail party scenes) has the effect of 1) recording various points of view simultaneously; 2) showing how perceptions of the same event change from person to person, often right on the spot; 3) revealing personality; 4) illustrating how important conversations are at the moment and how unimportant when viewed as a spectator (Hilary's favorite position); and 5) lightly interweaving major themes through a scene, showing their endless potential ambiguities. Hilary is rightly cautious.

Freddie and Laura Impiatt ("How offensive it can be, the natural instinctive showing off of decent happy people.") comment on Hilary's bachelor routine:

"How is Christopher?" said Laura. She took a maternal interest in young people.

"Much the same. Harmless. Picturesque. Useless."

"Have you given Christopher a day?" The reference was to my having regular days of the week for seeing my friends.

"No one under thirty is allowed to have a day."

"Is that a rule? I think you've just invented it!"

"Hilary lives by rules," said Freddie. "He separates everything from everything."

"And everyone from everyone!" said Laura.

"Separation is the essence of a bachelor's existence," I said.

"He likes to live in other people's worlds and have none of his own."

"Hilary is all things to all men."²¹

²¹A Word Child, p. 105.

Hilary, then, in the course of a week, throws words into conversations as one throws bits of meat and vegetables into a pie. He sections himself into seven wedges; he does all but eat his words. He unavoidably identifies his two primary concerns, language and food. He mentions on several occasions that "Wittgenstein would have liked . . ." the repetition of mashed potatoes or tinned tongue or days with the same people. He says, "I sympathize with Wittgenstein who said he didn't mind what he ate as long as it was always the same." A central twentieth century language philosopher is reduced by Hilary, who loves the facetious superficiality of the tossed-off line, to a man with an appetite, and an undiscerning one at that.

Later that same Thursday at Queen's Gate Terrace with the Impiatts, he makes "word pie" of his past in another attempt to demean and vanquish it to oblivion with its attendant trauma by sheer force of nonsense:

"The Esperanto for 'mother' is patrino."

"Down with Esperanto!" said Laura.

"You are quite right that God knew his business," I said to Clifford . . . "But one needn't take it too cynically. Nothing humbles human pride more than inability to understand a language. It's a perfect image of spiritual limitation. The cleverest man looks a fool if he can't speak a language properly." [Hilary at once belittles himself and implies the mastery he lacks.]

"That's why you want to know all languages, Hilary?" said Laura.

"Naturally."

"God wanted us to see how limited we were?" said Freddie.

"He wanted us to see that goodness is a foreign language." [Hilary's--and Murdoch's--sincerity now masked by previous cynicism.]

"It's one of Hilary's metaphysical evenings," said Freddie.

"I can't think how the words of all those languages don't get all mixed up in your head," said Laura. "They would in mine." [Truth; everything does.]

"Word pie." [Hilary's final inscrutable judgment.]²²

Hilary assumes for the Impiatts his untended-potential-genius-gone-awry role, made possible by Laura's suffocatingly eager but deceptive flirting and mothering. Hilary says, "I always acted the goat with the Impiatts, they seemed to expect it. Sometimes there was not a pin to choose between me and Reggie Farbottom, the office comic" (A Word Child, 7). Laura Impiatt is the last person Hilary would want to know anything about him because the next moment the world would know it all as well. Laura talks and, with the alacrity born only in a forty-ish woman who has few "official" duties other than supervising fish almandine for six, she seizes on projects, such as the office pantomime chosen by her husband, and throws her full energies into its casting, costuming, and music, until she admits to the reader and simultaneously to her husband that she has been using Hilary and the "panto" as excuses to come to Christopher Cather's room in Hilary's apartment to pursue their affair. Freddie Impiatt, rather stiff and cynical and much Hilary's senior, tolerates Hilary's visit to humor his wife, venting his pent-up irritation on the rare occasion of Laura's confession, and informs Hilary of his presumptuous monopoly of their Thursdays with no reciprocation.

Alone with Clifford Larr ("Monday"), Hilary becomes a potential lover. An unspoken tenderness exists between the two men, physically evident only in Clifford's occasional "darlings" and the hand-holding across an intimate supper table in Clifford's apartment. Hilary knew

²²A Word Child, p. 9.

Clifford "slightly" at Oxford; Clifford knows Hilary's misfortune with the Joplings but has kept complete confidence. Their behavior could be that of lovers, but this unfulfilled possibility creates an undercurrent of tension between the two. Hilary describes their relationship in this way:

There was an inhibition of tenderness, a check of curiosity, a sheer silence which, by making me play, under his direction, a slightly unnatural role, provided him perhaps with a weird substitute for the sexual connection we did not have. . . . When my friendship, if that was what it was, with Clifford Larr began, I imagined it would, even if not very dramatic, be a moderately dynamic business with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Basically I suppose I had no confidence in my ability not to bore a man as cultivated as Larr. He was an âme damnée and he was a refined and highly self-wrought one. I could not believe that, given I manifestly did not share his preferences, he would go on wanting to see me. He did, however, and that without seeming to want things to develop beyond a certain point which he fixed.²³

Hilary admires in Clifford a dignity, a refined sensibility, a capability (which finally kills Larr) to see the heart of most human matters and call things by their own names. Hilary mentions, "It was an education to visit him, or would have been if I had been willing to be taught anything." Clifford the tasteful collector of "tiny fancy bookcases and little rugs and Chinese vases and bronzes and . . . Italian drawings, Indian miniatures," Clifford the master of chess, music, gourmet cooking is excelled by Hilary only in Hilary's knowledge of more languages. Clifford's contempt of complacency (particularly the Impiatts') seems also to exclude Hilary. In this favor Hilary basks. His own sensibilities are keenly aroused by regular visits to Larr's domain. When conversing with Larr, Hilary assumes an inferior position,

²³A Word Child, p. 75.

recognizing Clifford's larger perspective and keener insight as inherently instructive:

"So why couldn't it take place?" I said. [Crystal's marriage to Arthur] Because of me, I suppose."

"Why do you imagine you are the centre of everything?"

"I don't. I just imagine I am the centre of this."

"He is such a nothing. Credit her with some taste."

"You underestimate Arthur. He has many good points."

"Mention one."

"He is good-natured."

"He is weak. Come, come, my dear, it is too late to start building Arthur up for my benefit."

"Marriage may transform him."

"Transformation belongs to passionate pursuit, Applo seizing Daphne. There is none of that here. . . . You must admit you never hitherto had a good word to say for him."

"You mock him. You mock everybody. I just went along. I shouldn't have. I respect Arthur."

"Nothing is more important than that everybody mocks everybody."²⁴

Clifford speaks in judgments that mock and frequently deliberately mislead (Larr--liar). For Hilary, for anyone, these judgments are difficult to argue, but Clifford's longer view, for which Hilary makes himself receptive as he walks into Larr's apartment, helps Hilary see through his problems to certain inevitable solutions, e.g., meeting the second Mrs. Jopling for the last time. These Hilary takes to heart, but sometimes with fatal lack of timing.

Clifford can even criticize Hilary. He delivers a devastatingly precise evaluation of Hilary to his face, but manages at the same time to keep their pseudo-love intact:

"Oh, how tedious you are . . . You are nothing but a lout who has been taught a few tricks. You are the sort of lower class product who never grows out of his grammar school. Always the little prize boy who was top in the exam. Always envious.

²⁴A Word Child, p. 79.

Always anxious. You exist by excelling, by knowing just that little more than the others and understanding nothing. You haven't even got a sense of humour. When there are no more exams and you can't excel you cease to exist. . . You conceal your inferiority from yourself, though not from anyone else, by cramming your head with foreign words which you can't pronounce and will never use--"²⁵

Clifford can be bitchily brutal; he can also be kind and insightful and sensitive to the tiniest suggestion. He is, above all, honest, though he may not always appear so, and he evokes these qualities vicariously in Hilary. Hilary gravitates to Clifford's mastery instinctively as to a lodestar, to be set back on the "right" course of action. He lives through Clifford's verbalization of the state of everyone's affairs.

Clifford's one blind spot is Crystal. He images her romantically as one of a vanishing species, a virgin in a corrupt world. Finding that she is not so precipitates his death. His one pristine oasis proves yet another mirage, so he takes his own life, as he has regularly threatened. Hilary, by contrast, absorbs the shock and eventually lives with its reality as he witnesses Crystal's transformation from Burde to Fisch.

Tuesday's evening meal is scheduled at Arthur Fisch's, whose name suggests the weakness and lack of distinction Clifford has indicated earlier as well as the Christian symbol of unity and love. Hilary's introduction to Arthur, characteristically in terms of food, provides insight into both men:

²⁵A Word Child, p. 79.

On Tuesdays chez Arthur supper was always the same winter and summer. (Wittgenstein would have liked that.) It consisted of tinned tongue with instant mashed potatoes and peas, followed by biscuits and cheese and bananas. I brought the wine.²⁶

Arthur lives in a two-room flat over a baker's shop, furnished with "relics left by the (now defunct) person Arthur referred to as his 'mummy'" which include such garish items as a "greenish glass firescreen engraved with a representation of the Empire State Building, an armchair with an embroidery of rather dated airplanes, and a diamond-shaped orange rug which fought hard with the carpet" (a pattern of wavy triangles). Arthur's diet and his apartment are modestly packaged, prepared food and furniture that fill a stomach or a flat, with no consciousness of quality; they are styleless, garish, and purely functional. This legacy is what Hilary and Clifford foresee for Crystal, and of course they want something finer for her because she vaguely "deserves it." But that something does not materialize, and Crystal marries Arthur.

Arthur and Crystal are inevitably paired. Both represent the attentive, loving "good"--interest in others more than self--that is Murdoch's personal belief. Characteristically, however, she ironically undercuts this belief (because it is hers) by making the people who act the way she would have everyone act less than admirable. She thus demonstrates the failure of any philosophy in "real life." Both Crystal and Arthur are gentle, smiling, and approachable, and both are easy, pliable people over whom gaining an advantage is not even a challenge.

²⁶A Word Child, p. 86.

They are eminently manipulable, often victimized; they have inconsequential jobs and would constantly evoke pity were they not so doggedly satisfied with their lot.

Hilary believes himself intellectually superior to Fisch, who works in a small office off of Hilary's, a position which has led Hilary to designate Arthur's as a "cupboard" mentality. Hilary details the office hierarchy in this way:

. . . I was, if one omits typists and clerks, near to the bottom. I worked to a man called Duncan, now briefly seconded to the Home Office, who worked to a Mrs. Frederickson, now on maternity leave, who worked to Freddie Impiatt, who worked to Clifford Larr, who worked to someone too exalted to be in question here, who worked to the head of the department Sir Brian Templar-Spence, who was now about to retire. Arthur Fisch worked to me. Nobody worked to Arthur.²⁷

Hilary's description of his less than prestigious position makes clear how far the "little prize boy" has fallen in society's esteem, how most of his friends neatly fit into a categorical scheme, and how Arthur Fisch is one of few people in his life to whom he can legitimately and completely feel superior.

Nonetheless, Arthur seems basically harmless, so one Tuesday night when both are quite drunk, Hilary relates the long sad story of Oxford and Gunnar Jopling. Arthur then encourages Hilary to dispel the ghosts of the past, meet Gunnar, and let old sins be forgiven. Though Arthur apparently cannot conceive the depths of Gunnar's resentment, forgiveness miraculously seems possible until Hilary falls in love with Gunnar's second wife, another possibility beyond Arthur's ken. Arthur tries to convince Hilary to see Gunnar out of the purest of motives, to make Gunnar feel better, which "me-first" Hilary finds ludicrous:

²⁷A Word Child, p. 6.

"... I think you could have written to him. I would have done."

"My dear Gunnar, I really must apologize--"

"Just in order to continue the connection, to make some sorting out or reconciling or something--possible."

"Use your imagination, for Christ's sake! 'Continuing the connection' was just what was absolutely out of the question! One must have some decency and sense."

"And now, I think you should go to him--"

"Go to him?"

"And say--here I am, after all these years, and I'd like you to know how sorry I am--or something like that--"

"'Here I am after all these years'--he'd be pleased, wouldn't he!"

"Well, he might be," said Arthur. "After all you aren't the only person who exists. He's been thinking about it too for twenty years. He might be glad to let you know--that he forgave you--!"

"Your vocabulary is killing me. But suppose he hasn't forgiven me, suppose he wants to kill me?"

"It might do him good to find out he didn't after all."

"You make me want to throw up."

"Sorry. I'm not explaining this very well. It's just that the only thing really worth doing here is something rather extreme, and it isn't just a thing between you and him, as if it were a fight, there's a background to it, I don't mean God or anything, but just our general sort of human thing, our sort of place--"

"So eloquent, so clear."

"I mean sort of possibilities of reconciliation, general ones, like it's better to forgive than to hate. Even a few words between you could make a lot of difference--"

"Do stop drivelling, dear Arthur. Look, it's time I went home."²⁸

Arthur is right about Hilary's selfishness; his ideas parallel Clifford's, if not his vocabulary. In the abstract the child-like simplicity of the stated plan for reconciling a man with his wife's murderer is, on one hand, as ridiculously naive as Hilary makes it seem, and, on the other, is quite engaging. The missing element is added when

²⁸A Word Child, pp. 152-153.

Lady Kitty proposes the same plan to Hilary. She is a more informed source as well as a more attractive one than Arthur Fisch, and the promise of her love supplies Hilary with the hope that he lacks to carry out the plan.

Hilary's Saturday evening meal is prepared by Crystal and is therefore very special to him. Sometimes Tommy is allowed to be present for a few minutes with the two Burdes after Hilary arrives, but Crystal is clearly the focus on that night. Hilary assumes complete domination over the two women; he is the puppeteer pulling the strings. His possessiveness is clear in the way he describes the order of events:

Saturday was my day for Crystal. I usually went there fairly early, about six-thirty. Once a month, Tommy, arriving separately (she was not allowed to arrive with me) came in for a brief drink, disappearing at my nod about ten past seven. So as not to miss any minutes of my valuable presence she invariably arrived first. She and Crystal were not designed by nature to understand or like each other, but they were good girls and they loved me so they had to get on. They were both possessive about me of course, but with deep tact they had sorted out their spheres of influence so that there was almost no conflict. The tact was mostly on Tommy's part in fact. She occupied the junior position and she had the intelligence to appreciate the absolute nature of my relation to Crystal. Tommy knew that a foot wrong in that respect and she would be finished. She never put a foot wrong. I should say that I had told Tommy a little about my childhood but only in vague general terms and, so far as it was possible, without emotional colour. Of course Crystal and Tommy never had confidential chats. They would both have been far too frightened to do so. But as I say, they were good girls and they were kind to each other.²⁹

Tommy disappears from Crystal's apartment in the same way that Arthur disappears--at a prearranged and subtle sign from Hilary. Hilary likes to "condition those around him"; he must have Crystal all to him-

²⁹A Word Child, p. 57.

self. Crystal is thirty-five, has seen Hilary through his violently unhappy childhood, his triumphs with Mr. Osmand and at Oxford, hopeful when Hilary was hopeful, comforting when Hilary was in despair. She worked for a year at a chocolate factory while Hilary could not keep a job, the year following the Jopling accident. Hilary had hoped to educate and support Crystal in a respectable home, with a comfortable job and income, until the accident dashed both their hopes. Now Crystal works as a seamstress, spends little, and lives alone in a squalid, one-room apartment:

. . . a small shabby terrace house. Her bed-sitter, with tiny kitchen annexe, occupied the upper floor. There was a bath in the kitchen. The lavatory was on the ground floor, where there was also a dentist's surgery and waiting-room. The basement was intermittently occupied by a motorcycle repairer and . . . receiver of stolen goods in a small way The inhabitants were mostly "protected tenants" at low rents (Crystal was such a one) for whom the landlords found it not worth their while to do repairs.³⁰

Hilary supports Crystal partially, and she brings in some income from her sewing and alteration. Her only guests are Hilary, Arthur, and Tommy (though Clifford and Gunnar make sudden appearances at this time), with Hilary clearly monopolizing her time and attention. She is not invited out with her brother because she is deemed "too ignorant to be presented in public" with him, though his friends regularly inquire after her. Hers is a conscripted, unassuming, simple existence, yet she is consistently calm, receptive, and openly loving to everyone. Hilary's description of her and his relation to her is characteristically straightforward:

³⁰A Word Child, p. 13.

Let me try to describe Crystal. She cannot be said to be beautiful. She was short and dumpy, she had no perceptible waist. She had pretty small well-worn capable hands which moved a lot, like a pair of little birds. She was round-faced and rather pallid or even pasty. She rarely took any exercise. Her hair was orange-brown and fuzzy and fell in a thick heavy mat almost to her shoulders. She had a large mouth with a prominent moist lower lip, very mobile. Rather bad teeth. A wide and distinctly upturned nose. Her eyes were hazel, of the kind which are pure golden without a hint of green, but they were usually hidden behind thick round spectacles which made them look like gleaming stones. None of this really describes Crystal however. How is it possible to describe someone to whom you are oned in love? Crystal often appeared stupid. She was like a sweet gentle patient good animal.³¹

The golden eyes that Hilary describes match the golden atmosphere he often finds in her presence, picked up by sherry in a glass, or warm lamplight at the halo of Crystal's hair. Their magical half-wordless communication (for much goes without saying between brother and sister, even of different fathers) makes the room glow with the amber half-light of their love. The golden imagery is a recurrent motif in Murdoch for a situation in which there is full accord and well-being (Watrin, 1972). Crystal, quite simply, wants to please Hilary to make them both happy. For this reason, she declines Arthur's offer of marriage. Either Hilary marries Tommy as well, or they go on as before, depending on each other. Hilary, on the other hand, abhors the process of her decision to marry or not marry. With typical impracticality, he would rather she be instantly a matron on a country estate with three children and six dogs so that he could simply adjust to the situation. In the end, of course, Hilary witnesses their wedding as a bachelor with tearful Tommy at his

³¹A Word Child, p. 14.

elbow. The importance of ritual in Crystal's and Hilary's relationship further complicates her decision:

"No, no, it's not that at all. I just--it's in my own self-- I can't get married, it's too late--I'm an old maid already--I'm a happy old maid--" Now tears were everywhere, soaking her cheeks.

I pushed my chair up against hers and got her into my arms. "Oh my Crystal baby, my love." She laid her head on my shoulder and I stroked her funny frizzy hair.

"You always said we were babes in a wood."

"Oh, Christ, yes." How lost, in what a wood. "Oh, Crystal, I do so much want you to be happy, I do so blame myself, I've wrecked your life, I know I have--"

"No, you haven't, I love you, and if I can help you and be with you sometimes then I'm perfectly happy."

"Over and over like a mighty sea comes the love of Crystal rolling over me."

Later on we calmed down and ate the sausages and mash and I let myself feel profound disgraceful relief at Crystal's decision. . . . We talked a lot about the old days, about the caraven and Aunt Bill and about Christmas times when we were children. And I promised to take Crystal to see the decorations in Regent Street.

. . . She had become quite calm and almost, in her curious way, radiant.³²

Hilary congratulates himself that Crystal has given Arthur up out of love for him, out of appreciation for the perfect unity he has created of their two lives. Finally, Crystal admits that she has always been in love with none other than Gunnar Jopling since their intimacy on the night Ann Jopling died. This fact, beyond all others, dislocates Hilary from his stable center. He comments:

She had changed the past. . . . The picture of her stay in Gunnar's house had added a new dimension of horror, a great room, a great space, to my memory of that awful time. Gunnar coming in and saying, "Anne is dead." Crystal getting into her nightdress. I would have to live with these images forever and I could not forgive Crystal for imparting them to me.³³

³²A Word Child, p. 182.

³³A Word Child, p. 258.

Hilary's utter selfishness is evident here. For once, he is forced to see a situation through the eyes of another, one whom he professes to care for above all others. The facts he must add to past history make the very incantation obsolete that he uses to create his golden placidity.

Instead of appreciating Crystal's long-felt confusion, however, Hilary can think only of himself. His past is ruined; his image of her is shattered; and he deeply resents the change. With characteristic myopia Hilary passes the information on to Clifford, and finds, to his amazement, that Clifford, more than never forgiving Crystal, can literally not live with the idea. Words are infinite; once spoken, they last forever. Clifford's is the only escape from the unhappy truth that no one escapes corruption in a corrupt world. Hilary stewes with resentment; Crystal is a living, breathing woman instead of his childhood-sister-baby-love.

On Friday Hilary customarily sees Crystal's only competition, Thomasina ("Tommy") Uhlmeister nee Forbes (Uhlmeister was an "interloper" who married her at eighteen and left her at twenty). She is Scottish, addicted to the theatre, has "perfect legs" and grey eyes "transparent as the hue of a clear sky, . . . a colour sample straight from God." Tommy is a "clever" girl who has, according to Hilary, wasted her life as a "failed dancer, failed minor actress, failed deputy stage-manager, failed assistant scene-painter, failed unpaid typist, failed extra and Green Room dogsbody." Now at thirty-four, "she earned a pittance by teaching 'drama' two days a week at a teacher's training college somewhere near King's Lynn" (A Word Child, 34).

Appropriately, language conscious Hilary was first attracted to her name as it was listed as stage-manager in a theatre programme. He met her at a party after the play, and Tommy began immediate pursuit. Tommy is totally, doggedly, and determinedly in love with Hilary and wants a child by him. At the beginning of A Word Child, Hilary is trying to leave Tommy, but cannot, because he discovers in the act of parting that he is more attached to her than he thought. He is still rather susceptible to her verbal persuasive tactics:

She was gallant and intelligent, she tried to coerce me with her words, not with her tears. We did indeed understand each other and this was rare and now we have given up the sex act I still enjoyed the word act with her, simply the unusual experience of communicating.³⁴

Tommy has succeeded in an important way with Hilary. She has found a way to talk with him, argue with him, spar with him verbally, and thus delight him with her mind more than with her perfect legs and her small, boyish body. Hilary admits that "she argued quite well, she remembered things, one had to keep one's wits sharp, there was even a pleasure in arguing with her about leaving her. . . .After I had despaired of communication this soft-voiced clever little Scot had managed to get through." Importantly, Tommy not only is clever with words and with keeping Hilary's attention, but she's also shrewd enough to see that verbal facility is what keeps Hilary close to her; what's more, she tells him so:

³⁴A Word Child, p. 43.

And yet: just tonight and because I was so tired I could not say that I was not coming next Friday. The achievement was beyond me.

"I'll come."

"There you are! You see! You just like a skirmish!" she pronounced it "skairmish."

"No I don't. Think about what I said, will you. We've got to end this, Tommy. And it's no good talking about just being friends either. So long as we meet you'll go on loving me, and that's what's so hopeless, especially if you want a child. It's unfair to you."

"You say that to pretend altruism!"

"What the hell does it matter what it is. We're finished. Now I'm going home."

"You can't go, it's not ten yet."

"If I stay I'll get angry and smash things. And you've got a cold."³⁵

Tommy's power over Hilary is limited, however. As he gets increasingly involved in Lady Kitty Jopling's plan for reconciliation and family-building (Lady Kitty wants Hilary to give her a child because her husband wants to replace the one that died in the accident), Tommy is pushed more and more into the background, a situation she does her best to fight. Hilary places her as he muses,

. . . I thought about Tommy, but as if she were a historical problem separated from me by aeons of time and matrices of theory and research. It's not so easy to find a true lover, you may search everywhere and not find another. Possibly, but now I was dedicated to higher concerns. Perhaps "love" had always been for me an ignis fatuus. I felt limp and wearied out. I crawled into bed without undressing. It was still raining. I slept and dreamt that Tommy, or was it some other woman, in the guise of a waterbird with beautiful eyes was battering battering battering on the glass trying to get in.³⁶

³⁵A Word Child, p. 43.

³⁶A Word Child, p. 213.

Hilary holds himself apart even from the seductively voiced, eclectically dressed, long-legged, grey-eyed beauty who loves him completely and wants only that he come to terms with her knowledge of him, and thereby with himself. Even at the chiming of the Christmas Day bells, after Tommy has confessed her "wicked" act (She does not know how wicked.) of writing to Gunnar to tell him that Hilary loved Lady Kitty, unknowingly bringing about "the encounter which killed Kitty and married Crystal and brought intensified eternal damnation into Hilary's life and Gunnar's," Hilary remains aloof:

"Can you forgive me?" Tommy repeated.

"I expect so. As I said, time will show."

"You sound very cold about it. Perhaps you don't care much what I do."

"Perhaps not. That's your way home, this is mine."

"I'm coming with you."

"I hope you'll invite me to your wedding with Mr. Spranger. I'm getting used to weddings, I rather enjoy them."

"I'm not going to marry him, I'm going to marry you."

We were standing at the corner of Kensington Church Street. It was beginning to snow quite fast now. The bells of St. Mary Abbots were ringing Christmas in with wild cascades of joy. Other churches nearby had taken up the chime. The Christ child, at any rate, had managed to get himself born.

"Happy Christmas, Tommy."

"I'm going to marry you, Hilary."

"Are you, Thomas?"

"Yes, I'm going to marry you."

"Are you, Thomasina?"³⁷

Tommy is master of the Yule (Uhlmeister--Yule master), the lady of the hour, so she thinks, now that Hilary is free of both Lady Kitty and of Crystal. Hilary's "lifelong secret" has been compounded, however, and "She must never know." Whether Tommy can get through double-reinforced glass to the retreated soul within is dubious; Hilary, however, in these early hours of Christmas Day, has no one else.

³⁷A Word Child, p. 365.

No one knows Hilary's full, true history, not even Crystal. Hilary thinks his withheld information about Lady Kitty's death created a gap between them that Crystal felt but could not bridge, so she escaped to Arthur. No one is likely to know the whole story. Hilary's system of "days" disintegrates as the personalities that have peopled his weeks suddenly come into focus as individuals. His neat world of verbal side-stepping and facetious time-wasting has become the messy and confusing world of reality. He at least is left with someone--Tommy--who, though innocent of much of Hilary's past and present, cares for him completely. Perhaps she can care because she doesn't know, and this concern is the child of the new year.

Hilary's egocentricity also imposes an individual pattern on his environment. He sets up a wordless communication with various locations in and around London, so that the presence or even the mention of these places comes to represent particular moods and ideas for Hilary. For example, Big Ben becomes a giant yellow moon that stares over his shoulder at the office; Hilary makes Alexandra Bissett ("Biscuit"), Lady Kitty's maid, swear on Big Ben that she will return. The hazy yellowish clock face becomes a constant reminder of passed, wasted time, the reminder that Hilary tolerates but structures his life against. The Post Office Tower looms high, as it does in The Black Prince, when he has not slept with Tommy in some days. The Round Pond in Kensington Gardens becomes the "omphalos" of the universe; Hilary returns there to contemplate his affairs and finds it a source of strength. His meanderings along the Serpentine make physically evident his tortuous thought as he tries to decide on a course of action, often as well a

sexual decision. These associations are silent and private. Hilary's consciousness reinterprets the city of London as Wallace Stevens' placing a jar reinterprets Tennessee.

A central image in Hilary's consciousness is that of the London Underground, the tube. The methodical, routine "days" during which Hilary dodges reality and himself fail to save him from sinking periodically into a moral void, often the time between "office" and "meal with _____." These moments must somehow be endured, as do Saturday and Sunday, notoriously unstructured and therefore frightening "holidays." The Underground, particularly the Inner Circle, is for Hilary a place to "waste consciousness" while literally moving, spending fivepence to ride interminably. Hilary describes his submission to the circular interim:

I preferred the dark. . . . Emergence was like a worm pulled from its hole. I loved the Inner Circle best. Twenty-seven stations for fivepence. Indeed, for fivepence as many stations as you cared to achieve. Sometimes I rode the whole Inner Circle (just under an hour) before deciding whether to have my evening drink at Liverpool Street or Sloane Square. I was not the only Circle rider. There were others, people on drugs, people in despair. We recognized each other. It was a fit place for me, I was indeed an Undergrounder. (I thought of calling this story The Memoirs of an Underground Man or just simply The Inner Circle.)³⁸

This clear link with Dostoevsky's Underground Man in Notes from the Underground is only one of many associations in A Word Child with Russian language and literature. Apropos Hilary's image, however, Charles Glicksberg, in his study The Self in Modern Literature (1963),

³⁸A Word Child, p. 38.

has adopted the Underground Man as the image of twentieth century man. His comments apply to Hilary's moral condition most pertinently:

All that he can be sure of, this descendant of Dostoevski's underground man, is that he is alienated, bound to the wheel of time, headed for the destiny of death. He cleaves to his negations; he can embrace no certitudes, no existential faith born of subjective immediacy. He is an absence, a self stripped of ontological truth. He cannot say "I" with any conviction. . . The grammatical fiction "I" persists, but is only a semantic phantom. The self as doer is as ghostlike as the self as subject. It is a detached, introverted self, at best a spectator of the phenomenal world.³⁹

Hilary's Underground, where he maintains silent communion with the other lost souls of the city who ride secure among the flashing station, presences sitting next to and across the aisle, its interminable circular pattern, is his image for life (or "anti-life" as Laura points out). This wordless companionship he finds with other lost creatures, each addicted to something--drugs, drink, despair--makes dramatically vivid the addictive falsity of his word-structures and his highly conversational, nonsensical lives above the ground. This "word child's" need for solidity, security, and structure is satisfied by the regular stops, the varying architecture, the constant gazing out, safe behind glass, at a busy, confusing, and Hilary-less world. He calls it "the train of consciousness, the present moment, the little lighted tube moving in the dark tunnel." This vaguely phallic, safely constant escape is more "real" than "real life."

Two other major images arise from Hilary's private interpretation of London and its physical and psychological associations, which gradually become thematic elements that, in turn, reflect Hilary's

³⁹Glicksberg, p. 35

consciousness as he tells his story. Both images depend on words; one is a drama and the other a popular song in their most obvious form. The drama Peter Pan and the song "Waterbird" are both introduced early in A Word Child. Each loses significance as Hilary becomes increasingly drawn into the Jopling circle. By the end of Hilary's story, both have entirely disappeared. Each acts, then, as a means of interpretation of various aspects of Hilary's perception as he moves into and begins to be thoroughly confused by his five-week ordeal, gaining highest intensity when his senses are most acutely aroused, when he is most conscious of every aspect of his environment (not necessarily with the aid of drugs, but usually with alcohol). Suddenly his neatly ordered world becomes terrifically complex; each person is full of surprises; actions are unpredictable; the falling of the tiniest leaf gains significance and must be interpreted as an integral phenomenon.

Peter Pan begins innocently as an idea of Freddie Impiatt's for an office pantomime that his wife Laura seizes on with the same alacrity she displays for her lectures on sociology or her intellectual women's page article on "the young." When the idea is first introduced, both Hilary and Clifford Larr are present at the Impiatts' for dinner. Laura has just asked Hilary why Hilary never leaves London, thereby reminding the reader of the fact. Moreover, he never leaves the perimeter of the royal parks, and he used to jog around Hyde Park regularly. Hilary's favorite place to bring various women, the reader learns later, is to the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. The link between Hyde Park and Peter Pan is accomplished early and deliberately. The discussion of Freddie's incipient "panto" is also worth noting:

"Hilary, has Freddie told you about the office pantomine?"
 "No, I haven't told him, It's to be Peter Pan."
 "Oh no!"
 "Don't you like Peter Pan, Hilary?"
 "It's my favorite play."
 "Hilary thinks Freddie will desecrate it."
 "No need to ask who will play Hook and Mr. Darling."
 "The director always bags the star part."
 "Freddie is an actor manqué."
 "A great ambiguous work of art," said Clifford Larr.
 "Will you favour a Freudian interpretation?"
 "No, I think a Marxist one."
 "Ugh."
 "Don't be so negative, Hilary."
 "Why not a Christian interpretation, Peter as the Christ Child?"
 "Hilary says why not a Christian interpretation!"
 "Reggie Farbottom will play Smee."
 "Aaargh."⁴⁰

In terms of the play itself, the idea of ambiguity is introduced; Peter Pan is open to many different interpretations, among which are the Freudian, the Marxist, and the Christian, which are in turn linked with other major themes in A Word Child. We are also reminded that the principal parts are, aside from Peter himself, Captain Hook, Mr. Darling, and Smee, Peter's chief adversaries who fail to challenge him successfully. Casting will thus be significant, and, indeed, a good bit of Laura's recorded energies are devoted to finding the "perfect" Peter. Imaginatively, she chooses Tommy, who is fond of dressing in boyish trousers, vests, and caps, an eclectic style absorbed from her many years backstage and her continuing fondness for the theatre. As she well knows, the theatre is only life writ small; the Never Land she lives in is the theatre itself. On the other hand, the Never Land to

⁴⁰A Word Child, pp. 10-11.

which she is tempting Hilary is that of marriage, and Hilary's recurrent slurs regarding marital life make it surely a Never Land for him.

Hilary's fondness for the Peter Pan statue, however, links him with the title role, though he will have no part of the pantomime except to sneer at the energy wasted on its production. The statue, set on the banks of a small lake, is a romantic setting that seems to hold a kind of magic for him. There he takes Tommy in his most sentimental moods; there he meets Biscuit and Lady Kitty. The character of Peter Pan in Barrie's story is as removed from "real life" as is Hilary in A Word Child. That Hilary has created a Never Land in which to reside, protected by friends against his one enemy, Captain Hook (Gunnar Jopling) is evident. Wendy Darling (Tommy/Crystal/Lady Kitty) visits him, mothers him and his friends, but gradually grows further apart from him, until at last they cannot understand each other at all. His drinking, his tube rides, his visits to the park, and his relations with women build his Never Land around him. Hilary remarks early in the novel that "The park was the great divide between myself and a happier land into which I once thought that I was destined to enter" (A Word Child, 5). Hilary sees himself as "unfit for ordinary life," and he uses his linguistic skill to escape in multiple ways so that he rarely deals with reality at all.

Hilary and Arthur discuss the pantomime, and their argument over interpretation intensifies the connection of various characters with Peter Pan:

"I mean one's mind is just an accidental jumble of stuff. There's nothing behind ordinary life. There isn't anything complete. Life isn't a play. It isn't even a pantomime."

"No Never-Never Land."

"Certainly no Never-Never Land," said Arthur. "That's the point."

"So you don't see Peter Pan as reality breaking in?"

"No," said Arthur. "On the contrary. What is real is the Darlings' home life. Hook is just a fantasy of Mr. Darling."

"What is Peter then?"

"Peter is--Peter is--Oh I don't know--spirit gone wrong, just turning up as an unnerving visitor who can't really help and can't get in either."

"That's rather fanciful."

"I mean the spiritual urge is mad unless it's embodied in some ordinary way of life. It's destructive, it's just a crazy sprite."⁴¹

Indeed, the unreality of Hilary's relation with Lady Kitty and their mad plot to create a family for Gunnar proves destructive not only for Lady Kitty and Gunnar, but also for Crystal and Clifford Larr. Their discussion continues:

"I think Smee is the real hero. Hook envies Smee. So Hook can be saved."

"Only in the novel."

"Novels explain. Plays don't."

"It's better not to explain," said Arthur. "Poetry is best of all. Who wouldn't rather be a poet than anything else. Poetry is where words end."

"Poetry is where words begin."

"I think Nana is the hero."

"Nana is the most conventional character in the whole think. Now Smee--"

"You must remember that Smee serves Hook."

"You must remember that Nana is only a dog."

"Exactly," said Arthur. "There's nothing bogus about Nana. Nana doesn't talk. Even Mr. Darling fails, he wants to be Hook."

⁴¹A Word Child, pp. 87-88.

"What about Wendy, does she fail?"

"Yes. Wendy is the human soul seeking the truth. She ends up with a compromise."

"Living half an unreal world?"

"Yes, like most of us do. It's a defeat but a fairly honourable one. That's the best we can hope for, I suppose. Now Nana. She's the truth of the Darling home, its best its reality. Nana fears Peter, she's the only one who really recognizes Peter."

"I can't think why you idolize the Darling home life. It seems to me to be pretty dreary."

"Oh no--what could be better--a home with--children and--"

"I think we're drunk," I said. "At any rate I must be. I thought for two minutes that you were saying something interesting."⁴²

Arthur's conventional interpretation of the story is undercut by Hilary's superiorly sarcastic remarks and by his lapse into inarticulateness. But important ideas are underlined here: the importance, eloquence, and truth of silence, as indicated by Nana's sensing Peter's presence when no one else does, and the necessity for living half in an unreal world, not completely, as Hilary does. Juxtaposed with these essentially serious ideas, however, is the ludicrous one of a dog as hero. Exploited to the limits of credibility, the Peter Pan pantomime dies, as do Kitty and Clifford. Hilary is jarred awake; his Never Land crumbles around him; he must restructure depending on Tommy as he had for so long on Crystal.

The second image introduced early in A Word Child as a popular song and developed later into a minor commentary on certain characters is the "Waterbird" song and proposed singing group. Central to this particular cluster of associations, as singer of the song and proposed leader of the nonexistent group, is Christopher Cather, Hilary's improbable

⁴²A Word Child, p. 88.

"lodger." Christopher, who moves like a lynx or a leopard, looks like a waterbird, slender, graceful, delicately colored (long blonde hair, blue eyes, bright clothes), and deceptively straightforward, "of another feather" than Hilary altogether. Christopher's loving and mostly stoned friends (the only one of whom Hilary can tolerate is Jimbo Davis because he is a ballet dancer, i.e., is capable of making an independent living, and also because Jimbo is spontaneously kind to Hilary), flow in and out of Hilary's apartment, in and out of Christopher's cushioned, furniture-less room. Christopher's bedroom furniture is piled in the living room as Christopher's life style apparently requires a low center of gravity. These boys finally disperse altogether, with the Waterbirds group idea chucked, an era ended. Christopher marries Biscuit (Alexandra Bissett), Lady Kitty's former maid, and tries to launch her as a model. The lyrics to the "Waterbird" song are artfully laced through Hilary's first three weeks, growing most intense as Christopher's secret affair with Laura Impiatt is in full swing, and then pales into obscurity as Hilary's life gains momentum.

Hilary introduces Christopher early in the novel in conjunction with the song:

The glorious past amounted to this, that at the age of eighteen Christopher created and led a pop group called the Treason of the Clerks which had a brief but considerable success. The success took place mainly on a tour of Australia, but one of the Treason's songs made the "top ten" in this country. It was called Waterbird and may still be remembered by connoisseurs. It was a song about somebody leaving somebody and the chorus ran Think again, waterbird, do do do, waterbird, waterbird, boo boo boo or something of the sort. The group made a lot of money (which vanished leaving only debts to the Income Tax) and then broke up. One stayed in Sydney, one went to Mexico, another (the

composer of Waterbird) took heroin and died. Christopher returned to London and for a while earned a precarious living as an organizer of "happenings." (His father paid the Income Tax.) Then he underwent a conversion to Buddhism and dedicated himself to overcoming duality and passing beyond the bounds of conceptual thought.⁴³

Hilary's attitude toward Christopher's early success and most recent awakening is at best a tolerant tongue-in-cheek skepticism which would have been somewhat dissipated had Christopher been more regular in paying the rent. Hilary's description of the song, its lyrics, the group, and its young members stress one idea most strongly: brevity. Popular songs, aside from all sounding the same, rarely enjoy decades of popularity. One week on the "top ten" charts is success. Singing groups divide and multiply with the facility of amoebas, and with about as much individuality. All the members were young, and youth dies fast. Hilary remarks later, "I felt sorry for him [Christopher]. There is nothing like early promiscuous sex for dispelling life's bright mysterious expectations." Implicit here as well are youthful irresponsibility, rapid and radical shifts in interest with constant high intensity.

Hilary's dismissal of the song, his parody of its lyrics, his refusal to allow Christopher to have a hi fi in his room and to confine his tabla playing ("a dreary little Oriental drum") to a minimum underline the dramatic contrast in the lives of these two men. A recurring theme in Murdoch's fiction is a distrust of music because of

⁴³A Word Child, pp. 2-3.

its basic emotionality, its appeal to the irrational in a person.⁴⁴ Like Bradley Pearson in The Black Prince, Hilary is not a lover of music of any kind. Moreover, since little popular fare has more substance than three or four phrases repeated on two or three notes, its ability to anaesthetize the mind is complete. Nonetheless, "Waterbird" lyrics find their way, in more and more liberal sprinkling, into Hilary's narrative, as Christopher wanders into the kitchen in a flowing robe singing ("or rather droning") the repetitious but insidious lyrics in what Hilary calls "the slipshod semi-audible sub-American manner of the modern pop singer" (A Word Child, 209). Christopher's "caterwauling" occurs when Hilary is most nettled: when he is visited at the apartment by a woman, usually Tommy or Laura, the "birds" that Hilary assumes are pursuing him. The placement of the lyrics in these particular scenes adds another element to the image cluster: the feminine principle, which is immediately suggested by "bird," a slang term for a young female, and by water, which suggests a sexual interest in that female, especially if the song is sung by a male, even a male as subtly draped as Christopher.

Hilary's complex intellectualizing, his decision that little in life is valuable, that a surprise occurrence usually foreshadows doom rather than indicates hopeful promise, is offset by Christopher's almost complete immersion in the senses. He plays his tabla; he can barely articulate the "insights" he has into the Zen he practices ("It's like mind is everything"); he croons the same lyrics ad infinitum, he sails along on pot, his friends, and his affair with Laura Impiatt. His

⁴⁴Music in Murdoch is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, Section III.

marriage to "Biscuit" places them both, finally, with an identity (Mr. and Mrs. Cather) and promises that the Jopling's meekly beautiful, exotically obedient servant Alexandra Bissett has a chance for a career in her own right, appropriately as a model.

As much as Hilary would like to shut the song and Christopher's sensuality out of his life, however, "Waterbird's" insidious lyrics work their way into a central situation, when people and occurrences are converging, and tension is high at Hilary's apartment. Laura watches Hilary prepare his toast and beans while Christopher sings, "How can we part, dear, how can yer go away, I search my heart, dear, for somethin ter say ter make yer stay, and so I pray, waterbird. . ." in the background:

"...The Joplings were there."

"They seem to spend all their time at cocktail parties."

"They are special people, oh special, I love them both."

"How nice."

"When my dear waterbird flew flew flew, left me without a bird, blue blue blue." [Reintroducing the memory of Ann Jopling]

"Have you met her yet?"

"No."

"She's marvelous. But liste, Hilary, I've come here from Tommy."

"From Tommy."

"Little bird, waterbird, you, you, you."

"Yes I rang her and she cried and cried and told me every-thing and I said I'd come and see you." [Laura's iron-clad alibi]

"How kind."

"Hilary I do think you should think again."

"Like . . . the waterbird."

"Actually, I never really saw you married to Tommy."

"You're a fine ambassador."

"It's not so easy, dear, ter find a true lover, yer may search everywhere and not find another." [Hilary's exact words at the end of this day.]

"Perhaps you really are one of nature's bachelors."

"Isn't it time you went home and put out the fish knives?"

"They're out. . . ."

"You're drunk."

"Our love was demented, our love was a feud, are yer contented ter call it a mood, jus' an interlude" [Hilary to Tommy/Christopher to Laura]

"Hilary, listen, I need a friend now. I need help. I need you. I need you as a dear close secret man. I must have one. Don't be afraid. There's something I want to ask you. There's something urgent that I want to tell you, only I can't tell you now--"

"Wait a bit, waterbird, do do do, Let's not be, little bird, through through through." [Christopher's veiled plea to Laura]⁴⁵

That Christopher speaks in repetitions, rhythmic lyrics suit his image of light wafting in and out of rooms, his gentle commentary on events, his non-violent, graceful, but amorphous unformed opinions. Christopher is a beautifully detailed backdrop for scenes; he lacks depth, age, and insight and so is appropriately not an active participant. His presence is, rather, felt and heard. The multiple applications of lyrics to people as suggested in the exchange above also make explicit how wrong decisions can be when made on the basis of the information one is allowed. In short, life's decisions, the basis for human action, are made on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Murdoch's plea for gathering as much information about people, as individuals, as possible, is implied by her repeated examples of erroneous conclusions.

"Waterbird," then, works on a number of levels at the height of its popularity in A Word Child. It represents the brief floating moments of romantic love, like Christopher's affair with Laura. It represents a

⁴⁵A Word Child, pp. 210-211.

person, Christopher, in its repeated words; only he can or would sing them. It acts as an example of the multiple possibilities of interpretation that any human situation affords. In addition, however, Hilary's attitude so clearly stated toward popular music must be considered as well. "Waterbird" is representative of the great mass of insipid and redundant vocalized emotion, watered-down "pap" on which under-twenty-five-year-olds cruise the days mindlessly. Suddenly, however, instead of a droning in the ear, it becomes, as in the scene above, an articulation in many ways significant of what is going on all around, so significant that the lyrics and image are incorporated into Hilary's last words before sleep that night. Lives either descend to the level of the popular song, i.e., are demeaned, or the popular song is like a stereotype (in every stereotype there is a grain of truth), here using the delicate waterbird image to reflect the fluidity and fleeting nature of a romantic love relation, and the introduction of emotion (flux) into Hilary's rigidly scheduled life.

Human relations are, in fact, melodrama, soap opera, popular song, unless one takes the time to note precisely the individual features thereof, so as to make the person and the relation unique. Seen from the outside, as Hilary sees (hears) the song for half his story, the words are semi-audible droning. Seen from the inside, heard distinctly as punctuation in a conversation, the words apply, but ambiguously. The italicized refrain of "Waterbird," then, acts as yet another mirror, or, to recall the language metaphor, another articulation of a point of view toward human relations.

CHAPTER II

LOVE: "THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS"

I

Love is the central concept in the philosophy of Iris Murdoch, and the subject she explores from various angles in her novels. In defense of her preoccupation, Murdoch claims that love has been omitted from twentieth century philosophical systems and that this phenomenon is both deplorable and basically illogical. If philosophy in the abstract is concerned with discovering a way to live one's life, then virtue must be accounted for in one way or another. Virtue and love are not mutually exclusive concepts, as is usually assumed by philosophers. In fact, the one (love) is a process by which one arrives at the other (virtue). In this way Murdoch seeks to put a consciousness of morality back into the way people live their lives. In her first essay in The Sovereignty of Good, "The Idea of Perfection," she says that

. . . Instances of the facts, . . . which interest me and which seem to have been forgotten or "theorized away" are the fact that an unexamined life can be virtuous and the fact that love is a central concept in morals. Contemporary philosophers frequently connect consciousness with virtue, and although they constantly talk of freedom they rarely talk of love. But there must be some relation between these latter concepts, and it must be possible to do justice to both Socrates and the virtuous peasant.¹

Furthermore, she sees the necessity for a well-defined theory of action: "We would like to know what, as moral agents, we have got to do because

¹Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 1-2.

of logic, what we have got to do because of human nature, and what we choose to do" (Sovereignty of Good, 2). Her idea is simple enough to state, but difficult to effect.

The concept of "good" as a function of will, as G. E. Moore conceived it and Hampshire has expanded it, opened the door to behaviorist, existentialist, and utilitarian interpretations. She explains the neo-Kantian behaviorist in the connection between meaning and being of action and what is publicly observable, the existentialist in the elimination of substantial self and its emphasis on the solitary omnipotent will, and the utilitarian in the assumption that morality is and can only be concerned with public acts (Sovereignty of Good, 9). Good then becomes an "empty action word" roughly equivalent to the outcome of an act of isolated will.

Murdoch cites the example of a visit to a shop to clarify this idea:

I enter the shop in a condition of totally responsible freedom, I objectively estimate the features of the goods, and I choose. The greater my objectivity and discrimination, the larger the number of products from which I can select. . . . Both as act and reason, shopping is public. Will does not bear on reason, so the "inner life" is not to be thought of as a moral sphere.²

Murdoch's theory, however, is concerned most centrally with the inner life, noting that, while even Wittgenstein claims that no sense can be made of inner data or "inner object," his statement was not intended to deny the existence of an inner life. According to the belief that good

²The Sovereignty of Good, p. 8.

is a function of will, all action must be overt and checkable (demonstrable). What happens, though, inside? Murdoch asks. "Surely there are private decisions?" (Sovereignty of Good, 13). The stress on morality as action, stated in terms of metaphors of movement, not vision, conceives a salvation by works as a conceptual necessity:

What I am "objectively" is not under my control; logic and observers decide that. What I am "subjectively" is a foot-loose, solitary, substanceless will. Personality dwindles to a point of pure will.³

In essence, then, to follow Moore and Hampshire is to conclude that what a person is can be accurately indicated in a one page résumé of his life's activities.

To prove her point that not only is there an inner life that is active but also that this inner life does not necessarily affect one's outward appearances and actions, Murdoch develops at length her example of a mother (M) who feels hostility toward her daughter-in-law (D), whom she assesses as "quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement" (Sovereignty of Good, 17). While she feels ultimately that her son has married beneath him, she keeps this hostility hidden and is gracious and hospitable to the girl throughout. To emphasize that these are purely internal ideas, Murdoch hypothesizes that the girl either dies or the couple emigrates, and that M, basically an intelligent and well-intentioned woman, eventually tells herself: "'I am old-fashioned

³The Sovereignty of Good, p. 16.

and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.'" Note that Murdoch here incorporates the metaphor of vision as opposed to that of action as the appropriate way to describe this process of self-critical assessment:

Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. If we take D to be now absent or dead this can make it clear that the change is not in D's behavior but in M's mind. D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, . . . And . . . M's outward behavior, beautiful from the start, in no way alters.⁴

M's motives for this change in opinion Murdoch chooses to term "love" or "justice," two terms which become synonymous in her philosophy, rather than as a deliberate delusion in the interest of family relations. M has been active, engaged in a process worthwhile in itself, and not outwardly visible.

Murdoch conceives M's moral action as an ongoing process, "infinitely perfectible. M is engaged in an endless task" (Sovereignty of Good, 23). M's decisions, not externally apparent yet in active flux, become the kernel of Murdoch's philosophy of attentive love which is designed to bring about fair and just decisions about a carefully and patiently observed subject.

This process of observation is not as simply achieved in reality as it is on paper, in isolated illustration. Murdoch stresses that this

⁴The Sovereignty of Good, p. 15.

kind of loving observation will not happen naturally; one must consciously work at it:

The love which brings the answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really looking. The difficulty is to keep the attention fixed on the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolations of self-pity, resentment, fantasy, and despair. The refusal to attend may even induce a fictitious sense of freedom: I may as well toss a coin. . . . It is a task to come to see the world as it is.⁵

To illustrate the difficulty involved in actually pursuing the process, Murdoch develops an example of a person observing himself rather than another person. He is searching his soul to discover if what he feels is really repentance. Because he is literally a different person from one year to the next, constantly changing during the process of his self-questioning, not only he will change but also the very concept of repentance must necessarily take on different meanings at different times:

The active "reassessing" and "redefining" which is the main characteristic of live personality often suggests and demands a checking procedure which is a function of an individual history. Repentance may mean something different to an individual at different times in his life, and what it fully means is a part of this life and cannot be understood except in context.⁶

The relativity of definition, its variability depending upon the individual's particular condition at a particular time in his life, makes clear the difficulty of arriving at an absolute decision. Within

⁵The Sovereignty of Good, p. 91.

⁶The Sovereignty of Good, p. 26.

this context of constant redefinition, Murdoch's earlier example of M and D takes on added significance: should D by chance return, M's first reassessment of D would no longer be accurate. M would have to make a new and similarly private reassessment of her daughter-in-law on the basis of the new information observed.

Murdoch's stress upon the inherent dynamism of the human personality and its consequent inviolability is the key to her conception of individual freedom. One is free only if one is allowed to act and move in accordance with one's desires; the observer, then, has the responsibility not to judge another finally. Respect for the constant biological and psychological change a human body undergoes makes all value judgments regarding an individual necessarily relative.

To forget this constant change, to yield to the temptation to reduce a human being to the sum of his descriptive adjectives, denies the individual the breath of life. It is for these reasons that Murdoch objects most strenuously to the "pseudo-science" of psychoanalysis. Her aversion rests upon the fact that the "ideal analysis" which is the goal of every analyst is the ultimate reduction of an individual to his life history, which makes the eye of the analyst akin to the eye of God. Her question "But why should some unspecified psychoanalyst be the measure of things?" (Sovereignty of Good, 26) takes to task Freudianism particularly for at once inflating the individual ego and reducing the human personality to a case history. The inviolability of human personality, its ultimate "opacity," is the quality that, if respected, insures individual freedom. When a person appoints himself an "expert" on the neuroses of others in order to "cure" the other, he encroaches on the other's freedom in his presumption.

Continual focus of loving attention along with consistent willingness to amend one's judgment free the individual to be whatever he wishes. As Murdoch has shown, however, one's self-judgment may be just as difficult (if not more so) than one's judgment of others. Clear moral vision into oneself or into others may be blocked either by one's concern with societal responsibilities and judgments or by one's own peculiarities. These two enemies of personal freedom, which Murdoch calls "social convention" and "neurosis," can blind a person to his own failings or potentialities as well as to those of others. These elements can thus prevent the selfless attention necessary for fair observation because they put society and/or self respectively before individual mystery. Social convention dictates actions and prescribes judgments according to arbitrary rules. Neurosis ("the fat relentless ego") makes individual idiosyncracies the measure of others. Murdoch explains these at length;

The enemies of art and morals, the enemies that is of love, are . . . social convention and neurosis. One may fail to see the individual because of Hegel's totality, because we are ourselves sunk into a social whole which we allow uncritically to determine our reactions or because we see each other exclusively so determined. Or we may fail to see the individual because we are completely enclosed in a fantasy world of our own into which we try to draw things from outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream subjects of our own.⁷

These two essential sources of human weakness that prevent objective vision become necessary counterparts to Murdoch's ideal pursuit of "the

⁷Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," Chicago Review 13 (Autumn 1959), p. 45.

Good." By identifying societal and personal preconceptions, Murdoch simultaneously emphasizes the difficulty in pursuing objective vision and its inherent impossibility in the human sphere.

Murdoch's philosophical pursuit of the Good posits, first, the necessity of selfless attention to the life of the human personality. She feels that this particular kind of love is the only key to human relationships and human freedom in a fragmented and frightened world. She recognizes simultaneously the impossibility of such love among human beings because of our innate selfish propensity for personal fantasy, for evaluating the world on our own terms, and our muddling concern about what "society" expects and thinks. This recognition of mortal and moral limitation is given extended fictional treatment in Murdoch's many novels.

In theory, Murdoch tests her ideal philosophical system repeatedly against the selfish and partially sighted decisions made by her characters as they struggle in their fictional worlds. Murdoch's double vision, at once suggesting an ideal in philosophical treatise and witnessing its fictional operation in novels, makes Murdoch her own severest critic. Ironically, her well balanced world view is the source of critical division regarding her work. Her critics, if they are aware of her philosophical and critical essays as well as her novels, either damn her for not living up to her stated beliefs as to what a novel should or should not do (Wasson, 1970), or they come to opposite conclusions as to the final "statement" of any of her novels. The novels may indicate that all individual views are legitimate and none

supercedes another (Wolfe, 1965; Dick, 1966), or they may show that we are all part of an immense pattern too large for any one person to conceive fully to accept (Fraser, 1959).

The last opinion is closest to accuracy. Since Murdoch assumes a contingent universe, she suggests that "Good" (the Good that proceeds from accurate perception) should replace God in a basically unitary scheme, and that Good can only be achieved through patient and detailed observation of others and through self-criticism. This action is for Murdoch the key to individual freedom. Quite literally, if one knows oneself and can extend his sphere of observation to include others as they are, and can maintain that process of discovering, each person's freedom remains inviolable.

A complete and sustained view of the universe is godly; the best that human beings can do is to concentrate on increasing their individual perceptions carefully and consistently so that they can see as much as is possible to them as mortal human beings. In Murdoch's scheme the individual forgets himself in his approach to godly understanding; how far short he falls is the measure of his humanity. Contemplation of the self is end-stopped and defeatist; Murdoch urges a move away from the fat ego as the more worthwhile pursuit in a seemingly directionless world. As one moves away from himself and toward others, one becomes aware that what had seemed an endless array of choices has dwindled to few, if any. Increased moral vision reduces choices and increases individual freedom thereby. Murdoch explains this idea at length:

If I attend properly I will have no choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at. This is in a way the reverse of Hampshire's picture, where our efforts are supposed to be directed to increasing our freedom by conceptualizing as many different possibilities of action as possible: having as many goods as possible in the shop. The ideal situation, on the contrary, is rather to be represented as a kind of "necessity." This is something of which saints speak and which any artist will readily understand. The idea of a patient, loving regard, directed upon a person, a thing, a situation, presents the will not as unimpeded movement but as something very much more like "obedience."⁸

Just as an artist is compelled by an inner vision which he seeks to render physically as he has conceived it imaginatively (an acknowledgedly impossible task), so the individual must conceive an ideal regarding human understanding and seek to achieve it. Thus, Murdoch introduces the idea of perfection into secular life. Murdoch's novels simply indicate that human beings will always fall short of perfection, if they can or will conceive it.

Her philosophical vision finds expression in her novelistic achievement in a number of ways. First, Murdoch's writing shows that she personally will not yield to the defeatism and fatalism that proceeds from the knowledge that no system succeeds in ordering external reality. She is thus a living and practicing example of her own philosophy. Her conviction of how the world should work and her yearly rendering of various aspects of how it does work testify to her personal freedom, her acting according to the single choice left open to her.

⁸The Sovereignty of Good, p. 40.

Next, the novels can be seen as "objective" proving grounds for philosophical principles. Murdoch has proven for twenty consecutive years that her system fails and that she is conscious of its failure in various sensibilities and sectors of society, e.g., the church, the home, the school, the organization, the countryside. Her vision can be amended and reapplied by the many individuals whose consciousnesses she reproduces in her fiction. Their diversity is seemingly infinite.

Third, Murdoch chooses certain characters to embody her philosophy and others to counterpoint its attempted practice. These basic "types" recur in novel after novel, with minor differences. Their failures to make the love philosophy work for them in a particular context, however, can ultimately be traced to one of the two "enemies of art and morals" that Murdoch presents. For example, the alternative of social convention is juxtaposed with that of neurosis in the two sermons of James and Michael on the bell after it is recovered from the lake (The Bell, 1958). James reveals that his interpretation of behavior is dictated by societal rules: "The chief requirement of the good life is to live without any image of oneself. . . . We should consider not what delights us or what disgusts us, morally speaking, but what is enjoined and forbidden" (The Bell, 132-133). On the other hand, Michael's fantasy world prevents him from loving either Nick or Toby properly, thus preventing his and their freedom. In his sermon on the bell, Michael reveals that he conceives the world entirely in terms of self. "The chief requirement of the good life is that one should have some conception of one's capacities. One must know oneself sufficiently to

know what is the next thing" (The Bell, 201). These two alternative interpretations are developed in clear parallel by Murdoch in this early novel that has received much critical attention because of its remarkably lucid conception. Murdoch creates two parallel societies within the larger reality of London and its environs so that her allowances for individual interpretation become almost mechanically delivered.

Not all of Murdoch's alternatives are outlined and paralleled so straightforwardly. In The Italian Girl (1964), for example, Murdoch uses Maggie, the "Italian girl" housekeeper, really several housekeepers of the same nationality in succession, to indicate the unconscious class prejudice existent in one household. The Narraway family calls her by her first name, Maggie, which may be hers of that or a previous "girl." They talk through and around her, making her an invisible presence in family arguments. She attains humanity--"interest, depth, the reservoir of answers"--only after she has become sole inheritor of the family fortune by virtue of her close and loyal friendship with the family's late mother. Maggie of course possesses the clearest moral vision in the novel because she has closely observed those whom she has served for many years. In the course of those years she has been dehumanized by those who regard her as a capable servant. She becomes visible to the family only when she dresses as they do for the reading of the will.

Murdoch thus applies her theory of those "sunk into a social whole" quite literally in the class distinctions she draws markedly between her characters. Other example of the type, the gypsy in The Sandcastle

(1957) and the Indian "Biscuit" in A Word Child (1975), hold implicit value as the "virtuous peasant"--mysterious, observant, largely silent and undemanding but challenging in their implicit knowledge and insight.⁹ Murdoch uses social convention figuratively and literally as one central cause of failures of vision which deny individual identity.

Neuroses affect every individual, in that no one is exempt from the temptation and partial fulfillment of a fantasy world composed of one's favorite illusions about everything from nutrition to the essence of the universe. Identifying neurosis as one cause of poor moral perception, then, is to point the accusing finger at one's own humanity. Murdoch thus identifies as many particular neuroses as she creates characters. Certain characters, however, seem to represent similar neuroses; these types are readily identifiable and traceable from early simple versions to later complex ones. Further, particular character types are repeatedly concerned with love to the extent that this concentration ironically seems the source of their neuroses. The weaknesses and peculiar limitations of vision that typify those most closely and consciously concerned with love are easily identified.

First, Murdoch deliberately undercuts her ideal of "intensive looking" by creating as less than admirable characters those who most directly espouse her philosophy. The characters whose lives are centrally

⁹With typical Murdochian irony, Alexandra ("Biscuit") Bissett is eventually revealed as a farce with a curious history of her own whose future holds marriage to a flighty former rock star and a career as a mannequin. Murdoch thus turns the idea of judging by social class back on itself and indicates that the person in question is not a "type" at all. She holds no answers, but proves merely human in grasping at two forms of emptiness in her first free choice.

affected by the practice or the theory of "attention" are 1) pseudo-mystics whose dilettantism has led them to the flowers and gentleness of popularized Buddhism (e.g., Nigel in Bruno's Dream; Matthew in The Nice and the Good; Christopher Cather in A Word Child), or 2) insipid, apologetic, doleful bumlbers, often alcoholics and someone's sloppy friend or brother (e.g., Edward Demarnay in Sacred and Profane Love Machine; Francis Marloe in The Black Prince; Arthur Fisch in A Word Child; Oscar Narraway in The Italian Girl), or 3) smothering, love-starved mothers who are childless or have been discarded by their children (e.g., Isabel Narraway in The Italian Girl; Rachel Baffin in The Black Prince; Harriet Gavender in Sacred and Profane Love Machine; Laura Impiatt in A Word Child), or 4) the much-admired, distant, tasteful "esthete,"¹⁰ who, because of impeccable collections of chinoiserie or Sheraton desks, is accorded the wisdom to counsel others on the necessity of loving observation with the justness that he cannot bring to his own life (Clifford Larr in A Word Child; Montague Small in Sacred and Profane Love Machine; Bradley Pearson in The Black Prince; John Ducane in The Nice and the Good).

Murdoch does more than manipulate these types within larger plots, however. One by one, each type becomes a central character in her or his own novel: 1) Cato Forbes, whose soul was happiest when it was closest to God, rejects the priesthood and descends to despair in Henry and Cato; 2) Hilary Burde, a variation on the sloppy alcoholic brother, becomes the self-centered focus of A Word Child; 3) Harriet Gavender,

¹⁰"Esthete" as character type is discussed at length in Chapter 3, Section III.

the mother overflowing with love, becomes the subject of Sacred and Profane Love Machine as her marriage disintegrates before her eyes; 4) Bradley Pearson, the "esthete" whose creation of the book The Black Prince is that novel's central concern. Murdoch thus is constantly in the process of rejecting possible stereotypes which have arisen from her particular way of describing reality. She examines each "type" in its intricate and infinite personal mystery.

In each of these four types of characters who counsel and act to varying degrees according to Murdoch's philosophy of attentive love, the limiting principle is again either social convention and/or personal neurosis. Each of the four types is illustrative of either over-sentimentalising a situation (the second and the fourth categories), or of judging according to the ideal of selfless love from a position of impossible objectivity (the first and the third). The sentimentalizers who insist blindly that "love is the bridge" between people and nations do not possess the dignity or essential understanding that accompany such a concept. These types do, however, show concern for their fellow man, though this concern eventually becomes ridiculous. The first and third types display their cold objectivity and seem therefore rather mercilessly untouchable than infinitely understanding. They dole out their advice with the concurrent knowledge that their solution too will fail, because their intelligence leads them to recognize their own inner contradictions and therefore those of others.

A second kind of neurosis that is common in Murdoch's fiction is that of romantic/sexual love. Because she has formulated her ideal philosophy around a particular kind of selfless love, the "everyday

love," selfish and possessive, must be clearly delineated and separated for fear of confusion. Her recognition of the prevalence of romantic love, however, attests to her acceptance of the irrational, not only the propensity for but the seeking after this peculiar kind of self-serving illusion that is addictive and mind-stopping. Therefore, falling out of love is not easy:

Consider too the attempt to check being in love, and the need in such a case of another object to attend to. Where strong emotions of sexual love, or of hatred, resentment, or jealousy are concerned, "pure will" can usually achieve little. It is small use telling oneself "Stop being in love, stop feeling resentment, be just." What is needed is a reorientation of a different kind, from a different source. Notice the metaphors of orientation and of looking. . . . Human beings are naturally "attached" and when an attachment seems painful or bad it is most readily displaced by another attachment which an attempt at attention can encourage.¹¹

According to Murdoch, romantic love is far more prevalent in human beings than the selfless kind, given its "profoundly possessive and 'mechanical' nature" (Sovereignty of Good, 75). This type of love exists in the mind of the lover on seeing his beloved, because it is a chance for escape from the world into an entrancing never-land of illusion which supports the two blessed creatures alone, raised by their perception of the other to the status of gods. Though love is traditionally recognized through the eyes, Murdoch states that this type of daily love is "rarely a place of vision." Where the ego is inflated so hopelessly by the perception of a mirror image, it can see nothing beyond itself; moral vision is thus impossible.

¹¹The Sovereignty of Good, pp. 55-56.

Romantic/sexual attraction is therefore an important ingredient in every Murdoch plot, at once testifying to its presence in daily life and its distance from the "good" that is the goal of selfless attentive love. As the world continues to function around the lovers, however, the reader is unavoidably reminded of the centrality of the attraction in the minds of the two affected persons alone. Murdoch provides the perspective of an everyday milieu for the romance, revealing the self-oriented and possessive fixation that inflates the two egos and excludes external reality, also finally rendering the lovers ridiculous in their serious concentrations.

Murdoch in fact seems to delight in the contradictory natures of her characters, allowing even the most judicial and objective to fall victim to the world-spinning malady, giving rise to a subtle humor. For instance, Montague Small, the successful writer of detective fiction and main counsel of the Gavenders in Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1972), is made to succumb finally and dizzily to the onslaught of Kiki St. Loy, a dazzlingly irresponsible eighteen-year-old. In the same way, Bradley Pearson's attraction for Julian Baffin becomes the donnée of The Black Prince. The romances that in her earlier novels were enjoyed by people of roughly equivalent ages are replaced in recent ones by the perverse attractions of middle-aged, respected, dignified males for young females who idolize them for a time.

Murdoch centers on the male consciousness in these relations; her humor arises from the objective distance she maintains. One is made to see this attractively aging, wisely routinous man literally writhing on a bed of flames:

There were no tears now. I lay in bed in an electric storm of physical desire. I tossed and panted and groaned as if I were wrestling with a palpable demon. The fact that I had actually touched her, kissed her, grew (I am sorry about these metaphors) into a sort of mountain which kept falling on top of me. I felt her flesh upon my lips. Phantoms were bred from this touch. I felt like a grotesque condemned excluded monster. How could it be that I had actually kissed her cheek without enveloping her, without becoming her? How could I at that moment have refrained from kneeling at her feet and howling?¹²

One point that her treatment of the many romantic relations in her novels makes clear is that the affliction may occur at any time, day or night, young or old, that it will be intense and overwhelming, and that its very intensity and selectivity make it ridiculous in the end.

Yet another sort of neurosis of which two kinds of false love are the cause are described by George Whiteside as "Platonic love" and "courtly love" (Whiteside, 1964). The first he describes as the love of a child for a parent and the second as the love of a parent for a child. Both are "illusory idealizations, because the loved one is not your parent or your child, does not have the personality, fit the role you have endowed him or her with" (Whiteside, 1964). In both cases, as with the romantic/sexual variety above, one person again becomes the center of the universe. In The Unicorn (1963), for example, Effingham mentions of Hannah that:

¹²Iris Murdoch, The Black Prince (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), p. 208.

When he was absent from her he felt almost perfectly serene about their relationship. Only when he approached her again, the real, breathing existing Hannah, did he realize how large a part of the fabric was contributed by his own imagination.¹³

Effingham thus reveals the dream world that creates "his own" Hannah rather than one that really exists. "Courtly love," or this propensity in Murdoch's male characters to create their own dream women with little regard to reality, has been identified by Gary Goshgarian as the syndrome of the "Murdoch man" (Goshgarian, 1974) who reveals his dependency and weakness as well as the subjugation of women not by belittling them but by placing them above him as idols, unrealizable and ultimately unreal. Notably, the distinction between male and female characters is isolated by male critics.

As an example of Platonic love, Whiteside cites Antonia Lynch-Gibbon in A Severed Head (1961) whose "sharp appetite for personal relations" is soon revealed in a passion for her American psychiatrist. She attests repeatedly to "a spiritual interlocking where nothing is withheld and nothing is hidden" (A Severed Head, 18). She has a passion for everyone whose names begin with A and wishes to hold people suspended in her "loving net," thus transforming them into her children. Antonia turns everyone into herself and thereby objectifies them and denies their individual identities. She demands that all be revealed, nothing hidden, thus denying their mystery. She ultimately wants full

¹³Iris Murdoch, The Unicorn (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 88.

possession of them, thus denying their freedom. In her own way, Antonia transgresses against the inviolability of the human personality in as serious a way as does her psychiatrist-lover. Both desire to play God, to know others completely, to be in control of everyone else's worlds on their own terms.

Murdoch's collection of these various negative examples that illustrate the failure of her philosophic ideal is what misleads her critics. Their misinterpretations stem from a basically untenable hypothesis, the same one that invited the centuries old misinterpretation of Aristotle's Poetics, simply mistaking description for prescription. Murdoch herself defines the novel as a literary form by virtue of its descriptive nature:

The novelist has his eye fixed on what we do, not what we ought to do, or must be presumed to do. . . . He has always been . . . a describer rather than an explainer. . . .¹⁴

Her philosophy is admittedly a prescription of specific "shoulds" and "oughts" for the conduct of human relations. Her novels, on the other hand, describe the failure of her prescription along with any systems when they are tested in the unpredictable and irrational field of human action. This failure of all systems that her novels repeatedly prove is, rather than an anti-philosophy, a back-handed avowal of the innate mysteriousness and irrationality of the human personality. Her novels glory in the the diversity which explodes her philosophical system.

¹⁴Iris Murdoch, Sartre: Romantic Rationalist (Cambridge, England. Bowes and Bowes Publishers, Ltd., 1953), p. x.

Iris Murdoch's concept of loving, which implies attention and understanding, lies at the heart of her fiction as well as her philosophy. Stressing the metaphor of vision, she insists on a growth of moral perception, much as Henry James does, since perfect perception is humanly impossible. Reading Murdoch's fiction thus becomes a process of discovery. Her novels are correspondingly created around the limitations of human beings in their various efforts or refusals to "see" each other. Each novel thus contains at least one tightly organized specific world in which the characters move into different positions vis-à-vis each other, which allows them and the reader different angles of vision. Each new angle is designed to upset previous notions of the nature of the characters. This discovery process continues beyond the end of the novel. In a typically ironic description of the nature of love in the world, Murdoch simultaneously provides a satiric view of her fiction in which her characters move in their elaborate gavotte:

. . . the worthless can love the good, the good the worthless, the worthless the worthless and the good the good. Hey presto: and the great light flashes on revealing perhaps reality or perhaps illusion. And alas how very often . . . does one love alone, in solipsism, in vain encapsulation It is not a matter of convention. Love knows no conventions. Anything can happen, so that in a way, in a terrible, terrible way, there are no impossibilities.¹⁵

Substitute Nigel's "can" with Murdoch's "will" and her pattern emerges.

¹⁵Iris Murdoch, Bruno's Dream (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 208.

By means of the many romantic/sexual love relationships that pervade her fictional worlds, Murdoch reveals at once the unpredictability of these relations and their capacity for making the beloved really "see" the lover. In this way, Murdoch joins her ideal attentive love with the everyday sexual variety. The latter supposedly becomes a means to the former, but ego intervenes to block moral vision.

Murdoch is consistently aware of the frailty of the human condition, despite one's best efforts toward perfection. In fact, she is not concerned with "best" efforts either, except as they occur incidentally in the "real" world. Rather, her scope of action includes the "ordinary," the "normal," as isolated by G. S. Fraser in his essay "The Solidity of the Normal" (Fraser, 1959), not because she recommends mediocrity but because this is where human relations form and affect each other. In this essay Fraser applies Bosanquet's phrase "the concrete unity of life" to Murdoch's early novels. He cites the following passage from Bosanquet whose description matches the ambiance in Murdoch's fiction:

And so with "the art of living together." To have been accustomed to it from day to day, and to the constant discussion and consideration of its failures and its successes and their respective reasons, is a reading which, "when the principle comes," as Plato says, introduces you to a world of problems, intricate and arduous enough in all conscience, but one of which the secret is after all in the main an open secret--the concrete unity of life as it is lived, overriding abstractions like bare pleasure for duty, for example, or like the meaningless opposition of mere egoism and altruism.¹⁶

¹⁶George Fraser, "Iris Murdoch: The Solidity of the Normal," International Literary Annual 2 (1959), p. 48.

The imitation of this "concrete unity" is what defines Murdoch's fiction. When judged against the backdrop of her philosophical principles, her novels act as repeated tests of her moral system.

Since that moral system integrally concerns love, the most logical proving ground for the phenomenon in all its involuted complexity is the phenomenon of marriage, or, to adopt Bosanquet's phrase, "the art of living together." Her novels have been grouped by various critics on the bases of chronology, imagery, location, and mythic significance. The basic "stuff" that remains common to all, however, is their progress through the cliché of love and marriage toward an accurate moral vision. A closer look will reveal, first, just how Murdoch defines "marriage" in her works; second, who is involved in this love and how it affects them; and finally how her novels arrange themselves on the basis of their variations from their common concern.

Murdoch says in her third novel The Sandcastle (1957) that "a married couple is a dangerous machine." Her sixteenth novel, Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974), joins the word "machine" with the concept "love." Murdoch's conception of the state of marriage remains unchanged; it has only been more fully stated. In the recent novel she devotes her attention to the psychological complexities involved in maintaining two households, an intensive look at the sustained sexual dependencies of three adults, whereas in the earlier novel she treats the effects of a short-lived affair on an established couple. In joining the words "marriage" and "machine" consistently in her novels and her philosophy, Murdoch implies that whatever the reasons for entering into

the state of matrimony, however problem-ridden the couple, marriage will always carry the connotation of a "love" relationship. It is a socially sanctioned vehicle of romantic/sexual and attentive love, the "proper" culmination of any serious love affair. Nonetheless, she warns that marriage can and often does become an engine of its own and others' destruction. Her statement, made through the crochety character Demoyte in The Sandcastle, suggests that in practice the culmination of "any serious love affair" is not only free from total pleasure for those involved, but that its internal frustrations make it a potential location for fake and empty love, and thus it can be harmful to others. In short, it is never what it appears.

As has been indicated, the only "sin" in the Murdoch universe is that of selfish injustice to another human being; moral perception is impaired either by social convention or neurosis, allowing societal norms or one's own idiosyncracies to obscure moral vision. Therefore, a marriage can fail in only one way: when the two or more individuals involved fail to see each other justly, when first impressions and the dynamic structure of the initial partnership blinds one to the true dynamic nature of the other as a separate and independently functioning human being.

The only successful marriages, according to this line of reasoning, are those in which the lines of vision and therefore of communication have been left open. In Murdoch's fiction, as in the real world, these marriages are rare. William Mor's description of his and Nan's relationship in The Sandcastle is a description of the Murdoch norm for marriage:

He [Mor] suffered deeply from the discovery that his wife was the stronger. He told himself that her strength sprang only from obstinate and merciless unreason: but to think this did not save him either from suffering coercion or from feeling resentment. He could not now make his knowledge of her into love, he could not even make it into indifference. In the heart of him he was deeply compelled. He was forced. And he was continually offended.¹⁷

Mor's rigid conception of Nan feeds his neurosis and reduces both parties to stone images that coldly follow each other with their eyes but will not see or comprehend. Whatever the external sources for a marriage's weaknesses, whether a dominant and "overly" ambitious wife or husband, Murdoch's last analysis of the marriage's failure is based on its fixed and structured impressions of each other that the involved people hold.

In the much later novel Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974), Murdoch describes Blaise Gavender's conception of the complicated double arrangement he has made in which he maintains his two households, one 'legal' and one illegitimate. The same fixity emerges in Blaise's description of "his" two women, his wife Harriet and his mistress Emily:

. . . So in leading Emily to think that Harriet was unattractive and ageing (he even exaggerated her age for Emily's benefit) and that his relations with Harriet had become empty, in letting Emily picture Harriet as a stupid fat cow and a snob, he had again something which was true in him, though not exactly true of Harriet. In any case, were these in any sense lies? There is a level (not necessarily the deepest one) in any marriage where love fails. Emily was a chemical which showed up what had been previously concealed, not making the rest false, but completing the picture.¹⁸

¹⁷Iris Murdoch, The Sandcastle (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), pp. 10-11.

¹⁸Iris Murdoch, Sacred and Profane Love Machine (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), p. 77.

The seven year history of this classic triangle at once etches one's picture of another more deeply by Blaise's devoted hand and multiplies the moral implications of the situation.

It is important to emphasize that the stark, unchanging impressions offered here are clearly from Mor's and Blaise's points of view, which is to say the male point of view, implying that men are more prone to fixing images than are women, a point that will be considered at length later. In Murdoch, everyone's moral vision is limited, however. She repeats in example after example that the limitations of any relationship lie within the person who puts society or himself before the needs and gifts of another person.

As the example from Sacred and Profane Love Machine indicates, "marriage" in Murdoch becomes an inclusive term which applies to all kinds of couples who attempt "the art of living together" and who mistake the "art" for "artifice" and are locked into a set conception of each other (the "machine"), as do William and Nan Mor and Blaise and Harriet Gavender. Murdoch's fiction thus includes not only failed but failing marriages, but also the "marriage of true minds," the couples living together or affairing together more frequently without societal sanction than with it. Rosalind Miles comments in her book The Fiction of Sex on these more loosely defined "marriages":

Clearly in this view of life, any structured relationship, not only marriage, can be an engine of unforeseen danger and destruction. Murdoch's interest in sinister siblings is so well known as to need no further comment here. Love, understood as the selfless concern for another's welfare above one's own, is more frequently expressed in Murdoch's fiction through unhallowed relationships that those we are all familiar with; it is as if

the extra trials involved in keeping up a feeling which occurs across the barricades of class, age, or sex will themselves define and continually test the genuineness of it.¹⁹

These less than proper but nonetheless common relationships include brother and sister, brother and brother, father and daughter, male and male in the same bed. Adulterous, incestuous, homosexual pairs are juxtaposed in Murdoch's novels with the conventionally legal heterosexual couple to yield the same fruit: frustration. Murdoch's implicit statement is, then, that once one professes to "love" another person in the sexual and romantic sense, loving one another in the ideal sense that Murdoch encourages becomes infinitely more difficult. She indicates that such love should be possible, however, given the interest and commitment of both parties.

Murdoch's most dramatic example of a variety of comparable is A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970), which begins with the twentieth wedding anniversary of the central couple, Hilda and Rupert Foster. Against this established, conventional, and, to all appearances, successful example of heterosexual love, Murdoch places two other couples: the separated couple, Morgan and Tallis Browne, (Hilda's sister and brother-in-law) and the homosexual couple, Simon Foster and Axel Nilsson (Rupert's brother and Rupert's companion of three years). As Murdoch develops these relationships, each becomes an inevitable comment on the other, and the problems of the homosexual pair become interchangeable with those of any two people who have lived together for three years.

¹⁹Rosalind Miles, The Fiction of Sex: Themes and Functions of Sex Difference in the Modern Novel (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 102.

From the outside, however, there are still predictable presuppositions: "Those queer friendships are so unstable." "All queers do like trouble. I've never met one who didn't" (A Fairly Honourable Defeat, 17). These are effectively countered with a view from the inside of the relationship:

At the beginning of their association Axel had given Simon a lecture about jealousy. "We must trust each other and not be jealous." Simon had nodded his head, but he could no more control such feelings by acts of will than he could control the peristaltic movement of his gut. Whenever another man came close to Axel, Simon ached with jealousy. In fact Axel was by nature a very jealous man himself, which perhaps accounted for the seriousness of the lecture.²⁰

The problems of a homosexual couple are seen to be precisely those of the heterosexual couple; one forms an ironic comment on the other because the worlds are assumed to operate according to a completely different set of rules.

This similarity makes the homosexual liaison at least as delicate and vulnerable as the the plot of A Fairly Honorable Defeat. Julius King's wager, that he can "divide anybody from anybody," extends to all existing couples and provides motivation for most of the action in the novel, with surprising and tragic results. With jealousy as his tool, King plays a multiple Iago figure, centering on the vulnerability of one person's love for another, and then ruthlessly and insidiously undermining it. His perversely destructive bent operates in the novel to reveal, ironically, the humanity of each couple he affects.

²⁰Iris Murdoch, A Fairly Honourable Defeat (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), p. 28.

As has been indicated, almost anyone can be related to Murdoch's conception of marriage as a machine. The concept of mechanism extends to other types of relationships as well, notably that between father and son ("There is not the mechanism for forgiveness," Blaise says about his son David.) Communication is stifled for lack of one or the other participant's refusal or inability to see the other. There has never been a necessity for Donald to forgive his father until now. The "mechanism," the words that express such forgiveness, therefore do not exist, and forgiveness seems beyond the imagination until they are deliberately created.

Despite the demonstrated centrality of the concept of love and its attendant liaisons in all of Murdoch's fiction, as in daily life, some delineation of the concept is necessary in order to determine which novels are principally "about" love. All of Murdoch's novels involve love relationships. However, certain novels can be considered Murdoch's "domestic novels,"²¹ those which center on family relationships and include at least one marriage in a relatively closed and concentrated world. In these conditions that foster love in a social setting. Murdoch details various examples of its two enemies: social convention and neurosis. The novels which examine love as their central concern are The Sandcastle, An Unofficial Rose, A Severed Head, The Nice and the Good, The Bell, The Italian Girl, A Fairly Honourable Defeat, and Sacred and Profane Love Machine.

²¹Gerstenberger names and defines a different selection of novels with this useful delineation.

A most literal example of the dangers of social convention regarding human relations is The Bell, in which Murdoch creates two smaller communities, one an Anglican lay community under Michael Meade and the other a community of nuns under the Abbess, both set within the larger context of urban society. When Dora enters the Anglican community from the outside as a frustrated wife of a specialist in fourteenth century manuscripts, her fresh responses to Meade's directorship and his network of covert relationships reveals the shallowness of the experiment which, in the end, fails. The Abbess' community persists in its select ideality. The Abbess rescues Catherine from suicide in a singular attempt that allows the outside world to enter the cloistered, high-walled society. The bell itself that Dora rescues from the lake remains an ironic indication of how varied the interpretations of its simple message can be, "Amor vincit omnia."

A more figurative application of the evils of social convention dominates The Italian Girl, a novel that most critics find less than successful, but which is strangely compelling. It treats one family whose custom is to employ an Italian maid. On the death of the mother, one of the sons, Edmund Narraway, returns and reenters his Oedipal past as he steps across the threshold of his family home. Edmund discovers a network of adulterous activity among his brother Otto, Otto's wife Isabel, their daughter Flora, Otto's apprentice David Levkin, and David's sister. In the process of his discovery, he becomes aware of their family servant Maggie, the "Italian girl," for the first time because her long service to his mother has made her an heiress.

When he first returns, Narraway's insight is minimal; "Uncle Edmund" is an almost ridiculously narrow, repressed, and naive personality, as deflowered Flora heatedly informs him. The growth of his moral vision allows him to see the error of his hitherto unexamined preconceptions about Flora's purity, Otto's and Isabel's marital joys, Maggie's subservient and dehumanizing position as servant. His discoveries intersect filial, fraternal, and class lines.

Neurosis permeates the vision of most of the characters. The earlier examples in this section of neurotic assessments of marriage made from the male point of view seem to indicate a certain density in the masculine mind. Among others, William Hall constructs an entire theory on the sexual distinction that vision and lack of vision indicates in Murdoch's novels: females possess moral vision to some degree; most males do not (Hall, 1969).

Hall identifies two patterns into which he groups a number of novels. His assertion rests on Murdoch's delineations of form and contingency. Interaction between these two conditions give rise to the two patterns he identifies. Hall says:

And while the world of form, convention, in practically all her novels is largely male, that of contingency is ruled by women, so that the interaction within and between these two patterns is in a very real sense the pattern and interaction between individual characters, between different kinds of society, between the sexes, and between different forces (conscious and unconscious) within the individual.²²

²²William Hall, "Bruno's Dream: Technique and Meaning in the Novels of Iris Murdoch" Modern Fiction Studies 15 (Autumn 1969), p. 432.

Women then become the unpredictable mystery, the retainers of "answers" for naïf men. The first of the two large patterns he discovers in the novels is that in which a character moves out of the world of form and convention into one of contingency, a male into relation with females, as seen in Martin Lynch-Gibbon in A Severed Head (1961), in Edmund in The Italian Girl (1964), in Jake in Under the Net (1954), in Marcus Fisher in The Time of the Angels (1966), in John Ducane in The Nice and the Good (1968), in Randall Peronett in An Unofficial Rose (1962), and in Pat Dumay in The Red and the Green (1965).

The second pattern Hall identifies is central to Flight from the Enchanter (1956), The Bell (1958), The Sandcastle (1957), The Unicorn (1963), The Time of the Angels (1966), and The Nice and the Good (1968). The pattern that these novels hold in common is one in which a female enters a formal, conventional situation with fixed rules and codes of action. For example, in The Bell Dora enters the Anglican lay community at Imber Court. This community, in turn, contrasts with the neighboring community of nuns under the Abbess' governorship. The female enters this formal world and completely disrupts it with her contingency. The reader is then allowed a candid assessment of a fixed set of values, usually a negative assessment that ends with the alien female's exit, and, as in The Bell, with the dissolution of the fixed community.

In The Sandcastle, Mor's and Nan's marriage is threatened by Rain Carter's quite innocent appeal to Mor. The marriage, however, remains intact. In The Unicorn, Marian upsets the tightly knit household of the mysterious recluse Hannah Crean-Smith. Whether the fixed worlds disintegrate after they are presented by the "contingent" element or not, they are never the same as they were originally.

While the distinctions between form and contingency are legitimate ones that originate with Murdoch's philosophy, the two plot patterns that Hall identifies are best suited to the early, more allegoric or mythic treatments and will not describe the later novels, those following The Nice and the Good, and even some of the earlier ones that Hall includes in his list. For instance, Under the Net yields more readily to a picaresque structure in which Jake Donague is the picaro who endures a series of initiations or revelations, rather than, as Hall suggests, to a characterization of the novel in terms of Jake's one initiation into a female world. Even including The Nice and the Good in the second pattern reduces a book of considerably greater complexity in terms of its many "worlds" to a simple formula. Hall's two sets of patterns, then, are limitedly useful for the novels he names, but fail to describe adequately Murdoch's writing from 1968 to the present.

The male/female distinction that Hall uses to delineate the formal and contingent modes of perception is also facile. Gary Goshgarian, however, develops this dichotomy and identifies what he calls the "Murdoch man" in a series of early novels (Goshgarian, 1974). His objective is to define "feminist values" in Murdoch's fiction, and his is the only study to date that attempts to do so. Goshgarian never defines the slippery term "feminist," however, despite his allusions to Beauvoir's "Other." The reader must therefore deduce that Goshgarian intends some sort of complimentary study of Murdoch's females and chose a popularized and misused term to characterize it. Disregarding the associations that the term "feminist" connotes, Goshgarian's study is

valuable for his description of the "typical" Murdoch male as a man who defines the female of his choice in more or less external terms. He is constantly surprised by his wife, mistress, or maiden-contemplated-from-afar, because of his peculiarly male blindness, his fundamental inability or subconscious refusal to see a woman as a person with desires, needs, and a full-blown personality of her own, but rather the fulfillment of his own neurotic prescriptions.

Goshgarian describes the "Murdoch male" as a man who

. . . manifests a seemingly abnormal craving for neatness. He abhors the accidental, and he fears the eccentricities of the single self. Consequently, his moral lapse resides in his failures to recognize and accept the fact that the female Other has a vital inner life, a whole and independent sphere of subjective spirit, unique and particular. In his reluctance, he consoles himself with private myths of her being, or seizes upon some available ones, thereby transforming the living entity into a palimpsest of images that provide him with his desired place in the world.²³

Goshgarian mentions in detail Effingham's conception of Hannah Crean-Smith in The Unicorn, his worship of her, and his repeated astonishment whenever he confronts her in reality. While Goshgarian identifies yet another Murdochian male character type, he too oversimplifies the characterization because of the basic sexual distinction that underlies his thesis. Both Goshgarian and Hall have theses that are useful only to a limited extent because they are seemingly more interested in tracing recurrent patterns than in any sort of in-depth analysis.

²³Gary Goshgarian, "Feminist Values in the Novels of Iris Murdoch," Révue des Langues Vivantes 40 (1974), p. 521.

In the light of Murdoch's philosophy, Hall and Goshgarian incorporate the two cardinal "sins" of social convention and personal neurosis which limit moral perception. These two failings are for the most part laid at the feet of the male in question, with the females drawn as all seeing. Perhaps this rather simplistic differentiation is a result of both critics' being male, and thus anxious to draw definite anxious lines and form definite categories. As attractive as their simplicity is, however, such a wholesale division of the sexes is not only overkind to the females Murdoch creates, but also contrary to the main tenet of her belief: the inviolability of the human personality. If the males, poor blind souls, are given vision by the perceptive females, then the females in their turn must increase their perceptions, often in a surprising way, by their growing insight into the males.

If Murdoch shows anything more and more clearly in the later novels, it is that no relationship is predictable. Either partner can execute a 180-degree reversal that leaves the other's head spinning. What Antonia does to Martin in A Severed Head, Blaise does to Harriet in Sacred and Profane Love Machine, and each of the "surprised" victims show an amazingly similar pattern of recovery, first a generous understanding that soon gives way to selfish petulance. This in turn becomes outright suffering that Harriet does not survive, though Martin does. Such a comparison is not meant to imply that Harriet and Martin are similar personalities; they most decidedly are not. The comparison indicates only that human personalities are infinitely full of unpredictable possibilities.

Drawing distinctions on the basis of patterns of behavior is categorization according to superficial similarities. Hall's and Goshgarian's theories outlined here, both based on sexual distinctions, fundamentally contradict Murdoch's insistence upon the ultimate mystery of the human personality, that human beings are unpredictable and ultimately unfathomable. The most that can be said for the two theories is that certain males can be grouped by certain particular and recurring traits. Male types in Murdoch are readily identifiable and in some cases stunningly accurate. Also, a large proportion of these types lack insight if not introspection to the degree that they are almost caricatures. Often these are unmarried male protagonist narrators (e.g., Jake Donaghue in Under the Net, Edmund Narraway in The Italian Girl, Bradley Pearson in The Black Prince, Hilary Burde in A Word Child) in whom any growth of perception appears monumental. Women, however, grow morally in Murdoch as well. None in the end is endowed with perfect perception.

Marriage in its literal as well as its figurative sense in Murdoch remains the vehicle of moral vision, the site of spiritual myopia as well as increased perception. Males and females find moral insight through mutually revealing love relationships. Married men and women usually stay married, if not to their original spouse then to another. Unmarried women and men remain unmarried, a decision made by virtue of their contact with various fixed relationships.

In some cases the contact with fixed relationships occurs rather abruptly. Murdoch often uses a shock effect in suddenly revealing what

another person has become while those close to him have assumed him static. Her method of revealing the dangerous unpredictability of the "marriage machine" has been termed the "surprise event" which provides the main character (naive and imperceptive, whether male or female) with instant perception. The insight that is gained realigns not only other people of his acquaintance in light of sexual activities he may hitherto have only imagined, but also his entire way of looking at the world. Of the surprise event, Jean Kennard comments in her book, Number and Nightmare:

These scenes come as a surprise to characters and readers alike and are, of course, not mere sentimentalism. They are an attempt to suggest that reality, what actually happens, is other and more amazing than our expectations. Paradoxical as it may sound, the extraordinary events are a form of supra-realism. They always transcend expectations, yet have the quality of appearing to reveal to us what we half-suspected, that darker and more mysterious world which our sexual fantasies long since taught us was there. They do not bring us to nothingness by undermining our expectations, but substitute for our expectations a nightmare world in which everyone is there at once.²⁴

Kennard points out that often these scenes of revelation occur in a bedroom. A third person witnesses the sexual activities of another unlikely pair, and her/his impression of reality thus alters drastically. The two forms of love in Murdoch, selfless attention and selfish romance, thus join in the dark and mysterious act of sex, the ultimate "knowing" of one person by another. A third person's introduction to the knowledge shared by these two people, in a scene that would

²⁴Jean Kennard, Number and Nightmare (Hamden, Connecticut: Anchor Books, 1975), p. 230.

rarely happen per se in life, is what places that relation into perspective and "opens the eyes" of the unobserved observer. The witness, with the reader's complicity, makes both into spiritual voyeurs. The scene secretly viewed evokes not erotic titillation, however, so much as deeper insight into the nature of the involved characters.

Perhaps the most memorable revelation scene is that in A Severed Head in which Martin Lynch-Gibbon, the narrator, has just realized his love for Honor Klein, the sister of the psychiatrist Palmer Anderson, with whom Martin's wife Antonia has fallen in love. Martin pursues Honor to Cambridge in order to impart his revelation, and finds another much more telling revelation upon his arrival:

I saw opposite me a large double divan bed. The room was brightly lit. Sitting up in this bed and staring straight at me was Honor. She was sitting sideways with the sheet over her legs. Upwards she was as tawny and as naked as a ship's figurehead. I took in her pointed breasts, her black shaggy head of hair, her face stiff and expressionless as carved wood. She was not alone. Beside the bed a naked man was hastily engaged in pulling on a dressing gown. It was immediately and indubitably apparent that I had interrupted a scene of lovers. The man was Palmer.²⁵

The imagery of the wooden figurehead that Murdoch employs in describing Honor in bed retains her dignity and her starkly mythic posture as the center of "truth" in the novel. It is Honor who makes Palmer, Antonia, and Martin realize their superficialities in the triangular relationship that has begun with Antonia's affinity for anyone whose name begins with

²⁵Iris Murdoch, A Severed Head (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 155.

"A." Her insistence on the moral honesty of everyone involved makes logical this stunningly fundamental relationship with her brother. She favors Martin in the end only after she has in violent and shocking confrontation made him regard the truth unflinchingly with his own eyes.

The revelation scene in The Time of the Angels (1966) is similarly primitive and incestuous. This time the curious observer is a woman, however, who is shocked into the realization that her crippled sister Elizabeth shares her bed with their father:

She twitched herself awake, trying to recompose the fragile image, which was quivering now like water disturbed. She concentrated her vision at last into a small circle of perfect clarity. She saw the end of the chaise longue close up against its mirror double. Beyond it in the mirror she saw the heaped and tousled bed. She began to see Elizabeth, who was on the bed. She saw, clear and yet unlocated like an apparition, Elizabeth's bare shoulder. Then there were other movements, other forms, an entwining suddenly of too many arms. And she saw, rising from the embrace, beyond the closed eyes and the streaming hair, white and dreadful, the head and naked torso of her father.²⁶

These scenes communicate instant insight to the third-person observer and simultaneously to the reader. They function almost as a dream vision does, pulling human relationships together into a truthful pattern that the conscious mind often denies.

Murdoch grows more subtle in her revelation scenes, so that the observer, with the reader, moves out of the bedroom and into the everyday routine of the living room to witness nightmarish human

²⁶Iris Murdoch, The Time of the Angels (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 170.

complications. In Sacred and Profane Love Machine Harriet Gavender is made to discover her husband with his mistress of seven years in a much more damaging, convincing, and hurtful context than in flagrante delicto:

"... You're like a fat cat, you're glowing all over with satisfaction at being forgiven. You've fallen in love with her again now that she's forgiven you. You're happy! Oh Christ, you're happy!" Emily, who had been holding a glass of sherry in a trembling hand, hurled the glass down violently into the fireplace. A quick storm of tears blurred her eyes and she turned abruptly away. When she turned back Harriet was standing in the doorway.

Years later Emily McHugh still remembered this moment with the greatest clarity. It was a moment of revelation, when deep feelings, which have seemed leaden and unmovable, suddenly begin to skip like the mountains of the psalmist, and intellect, like a flash of lightning, reveals an entirely new configuration. Briefly put, Emily realized that she could not hate Harriet. At any rate, she realized that the "hated wife" was now over and done with and some quite different problem had come into being. . . . She felt, before Harriet, the legitimate spouse, guilty and ashamed.²⁷

To the sound of glass shattering on stone, Murdoch brings about the revelation to Harriet, the unobserved observer, that the affair is in fact a reality and that Emily is a most disturbed and frustrated person as a result. She has here expanded the revelation, however, to the actors. Harriet's presence in the doorway forces Emily to see in dramatic reality the existence of Blaise's wife whom she had consciously denied for seven years, Blaise's dishonesty in describing her, and her own inevitable position as intruder into a marriage of long standing.

²⁷Iris Murdoch, Sacred and Profane Love Machine (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), p. 223.

Blaise witnesses all dumbly, and passively, as is his wont, for "his" women to settle "his" life for him, until Emily orders him from the room.

The use of the same dramatic device, creation of a scene in which the placement of characters reveals their psychological relationships, becomes multiply useful in Murdoch's later novels. Just as she gradually investigates any characters who might be classified as types and makes them central to reveal their mystery, so her fictional devices gain sophistication to accommodate the complex characters and situations.

Love as a central theme in Murdoch's novel, then, affects all the novels to some degree, but especially the "domestic" novels, in which marriages of all types and concerns are essential to plot and character. Romantic love is presented in these novels as the way to disinterested, selfless attention, Murdoch's formula for personal freedom. No human being is successful in this pursuit, just as no human being is absolutely free. In "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts," the final essay in The Sovereignty of Good, Murdoch states that

Freedom . . . is not an inconsequential chucking of one's weight about, it is the disciplined overcoming of self. Humility is not a peculiar habit of self-effacement, rather like having an inaudible voice, it is selfless respect for reality and one of the most difficult and central of all virtues.²⁸

²⁸The Sovereignty of Good, p. 95.

Personal defeats in Murdoch's fiction take the form of those who refuse or cannot develop moral vision. They are so concerned with society and/or themselves that clear vision is lost, and with it, attention, love, and freedom. Murdoch says that ". . . there is . . . similarity between the honesty required to tear up one's theory and the honesty required to perceive the real state of one's marriage, though doubtless the latter is more difficult" (The Sovereignty of Good, 96). In concentrating on marriage in her domestic novels, Murdoch chooses to display the infinite difficulties of the peculiar institution in which society vies with self-interest to obliterate any hope for moral vision in a situation which should be most conducive to it.

A final quotation from this last essay will summarize Murdoch's recognition of the difficulty of attaining moral vision, the difficulty that she seeks to illustrate in her fiction:

There are perhaps in the case of every human being insuperable psychological barriers to goodness. The self is a divided thing and the whole of it cannot be redeemed any more than it can be known. And if we look outside the self what we see are scattered intimations of Good. There are few places where virtue plainly shines: great art, humble people who serve others. And can we, without improving ourselves, really see these things clearly?²⁹

In Sacred and Profane Love Machine, the subject of extended analysis in the next section, Murdoch creates the impossible situation of a man with two wives who wants both. The triangular stalemate has for seven years prevented moral vision of any sort. Revelation of Blaise Gavender's habitual duplicity to his wife, however creates the impossible moral predicament that Murdoch can resolve only in tragedy.

²⁹The Sovereignty of Good, p. 99.

Iris Murdoch's sixteenth novel, Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974), focuses exclusively on the subject of love in a conjugal setting, which distinctly places it among her "domestic" novels. For these reasons as well as several that follow, Love Machine will be examined here as the most concentrated treatment of Murdoch's love philosophy because it incorporates love as subject matter, as vehicle for character portrayal, and as the novel's underlying philosophical unity. Not only does the novel concern a family whose father has supported another household for seven years, but it also presents a situation in which the moral vision of all concerned are tested, found wanting, and expanded, as well as indicating the infinite limits of forgiveness and understanding, based on this moral insight, that the situation holds as potential.

Each character in Love Machine is deeply committed to a serious, long-term love relationship, and each is profoundly changed by the interdependencies the relationship fosters. Murdoch here suggests the tragic implications of the peculiar process of changing partners without losing friendships whose comic possibilities she explored earlier in A Severed Head (1963). Again the central character is a male psychoanalyst, and again he succeeds in directing the lives of others better than he directs his own. In fact, a large part of the tragedy resides in his indecisiveness. Murdoch's approach in Love Machine is to move into the two households run by the same male and to stay within

both as they become gradually and painfully aware of each other. She examines each of the five characters in turn, assessing external and internal changes in each. In this way, she incorporates her belief in the inherent mystery of the human personality: each person has his own point of view of the situation. Everyone is right. Such is her ^{multiplicity} fictional method, designed to reproduce everyday reality. Against the backdrop of her philosophical theory, however, the inherent absurdity is undercut by her belief in the pursuit of "the Good" through selfless attentive love. Murdoch thus reveals through example the implicit capability of any situation to become productive, however tragic its potential, rather than absurdly meaningless. The figures in the novel thus become points on a scale measuring moral vision and the ability to forget the demands of society and self in the interests of others.

Murdoch proves in this specific illustration of love in everyday life that no one escapes the "love machine," whether sacred or profane. No individual mortal is capable of loving another "sacredly," i.e., purely, selflessly, freely, because the two ever-present enemies of selfless love, social convention and personal neurosis, join forces in the institution of marriage and thus compound the difficulty of overcoming them. Murdoch insists, however, that one keep trying to move in the direction of "goodness" and that the quality of love one uses to reach that goal must necessarily change in nature. She explains her view in the essay "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts," the third essay in The Sovereignty of Good:

Of course Good is sovereign over Love, as it is sovereign over other concepts, because Love can name something bad. But is there not nevertheless something about the conception of a

refined love which is practically identical with goodness? . . . However I think that Good and Love should not be identified, and not only because human love is usually self-assertive. The concepts, even when the idea of love is purified, still play different roles. We are dealing here with very difficult metaphors. Good is the magnetic centre towards which love naturally moves. False love moves to false good. False love embraces false death. When true good is loved, even impurely or by accident, the quality of the love is automatically refined, and when the soul is turned towards Good the highest part of the soul is enlivened. Love is the tension between the imperfect and the magnetic perfection which is conceived of as lying beyond it.³⁰

Contemplating "the Good" is like contemplating the sun; it is much more pleasant to view what is lighted than the light source itself. An intuition of this energy, however, orders the individual life and puts into perspective the impossible issues of death and chance by indicating that the virtuous life (the humble life) accepts these and with them the distance between suffering and death.

In plain terms, this belief fosters renewed interest and observation in others (true love) rather than jealous, selfish possession (false love). This belief makes impossible the translation of people into commodities and curbs the acquisitive appetite. Instead of reinforcing the lines of demarcation in an already fragmented, specialized, and alienated world, her philosophy has the capability of bringing people together:

We are all capable of criticizing, modifying, and extending the area of strict obligation which we have inherited. Good is non-representable and indefinable. We are all mortal and equally at the mercy of necessity and chance. These are the true aspects in which all men are brothers.³¹

³⁰The Sovereignty of Good, pp. 102-103.

³¹The Sovereignty of Good, p. 74.

Her belief binds us, humbles us, and obligates us to treat others as fairly as we would ourselves be treated, with all the pain and sacrifice that such a practice entails.

With this sort of ideal system in mind, the actions of Blaise Gavender and his two "wives" are thrown into another perspective. Instead of asking blindly with Blaise, "Why not?" we see that the reason why not is that his two wives and his two sons are objectified into pawns that he moves about his mental chessboard in appeasement of his whimsical desires. Were it not for Murdoch's disinterested, quietly observant love for her characters (Bayley, 1960), however, Blaise's dilemma would not be so chillingly real. Her reproduction of his logic, as well as that of all others involved, makes clear how difficult moral vision is when one is immersed in one's self-created and self-serving daily anxieties.

Gradual erosion of Blaise Gavender's spiritual and sexual relations form the donnée for Love Machine. The reactions of other characters to Blaise, the advice, the friendship, the understanding, and the insults they offer him, along with the suffering, the pleasure, and the counsel he offers them in light of his curious domestic arrangements weave this particular tapestry. Murdoch tells Blaise's story from the third person point of view, with each character in turn a center of revelation. In this way, she attempts to reveal the intricacies of mind and manner that lead a person to maintain two entirely separate households, one at Hood House and one at Putney, with two "wives," one legal (Harriet Gavender) and one illegitimate (Emily McHugh), and two sons, David Gavender and

Luca McHugh, all the while feeling justified and fulfilled. The intimate acquaintance Murdoch affords with each character's peculiar logic makes clear how incapable Blaise is, of all the others, of seeing anyone's point of view but his own.

So straightforward is Blaise's arrangement of the two households, in fact, it seems as if the entire narrative is a fantastic dream variation somehow recorded in logical sequence, or that Murdoch is playing out the sexual fantasies of millions of people in concocting the two parallel ménages, one in light and one in shadow. She works through the fantasy as it attains nightmare proportions when both households become aware of each other. She brings them together in an incredible dénouement that restores at best a glooming peace. Fascinated and utterly seduced by his self-chosen admiring mirror images, legal and illegal, Blaise passes through the looking-glass into a never world that requires his full honesty and attention, and which pleases no one. The reconciliation that closes the novel points to, rather than an enlightened conjugality between Emily and Blaise, a continuation of the legal relationship that opened the novel. Blaise has not been cured of his fantasies; Emily has been introduced to a crop of new ones; both their children are beyond their reach. They are isolated as they maintain the pattern of prevailing conjugality, parents without children, lovers without illusion.

The title of the novel Sacred and Profane Love Machine suggests at least two forms of love, a "sacred" and a "profane." Immediately, as Murdoch draws us into the intimate corners of Blaise's, Harriet's, and

David's minds, the "sacred" love is associated with legality: home and family, hearth and kin. There are only minor ripples on the calm surface of Lake Placid (the household of "Mrs. Placid," Emily's contemptuous nickname for Harriet). Their family problems are real enough, though predictable and manageable. David Gavender is confronting adolescence, and with it loss of respect for his parents who disgust him with their sensuality and overindulgence. To David, their "beloved," they overeat, overdo affection for each other as well as for him. David's fastidiousness is a result of his growing awareness of puzzling changes in his body, which at once repel and fascinate him. A gentle and intelligent young man, David is now being exposed for the first time to his body's independent demands. His is a learning process so engrossing that it leaves little opportunity for him to reach out to anyone else.

His disgust for his parents turns to loathing when the complexities of his father's double life come to light. David is his father's harshest critic. Blaise himself, on the other hand, is dealing with fundamental questions regarding not only his emotional life, but also his profession. He is not a "real" doctor, so he contemplates a return to medical school. He is tired of his sham existence as a husband and as a psychoanalyst:

The torment which he tried to spare his patients he could not escape from himself: the pain of irrevocable decisions taken in the old-fashioned blind-folded irresponsible way. Perhaps he was just sick to death of the human mind, sick of himself, his habits and his doings, and as some men tire of the world and turn to God he was turning to science.³²

³²Iris Murdoch, Sacred and Profane Love Machine (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), p. 18.

Blaise's somewhat delayed existential crisis leads him to search for an organizing principle. His search tempts him to allocate certain positions for the important people in his life, who eventually rebel at the categorization.

Harriet Gavender encourages her husband's scheme for self-improvement. She is ready to support her husband even if his returning to school means cutting the budget. She is also supportive of David, in whom she feels turmoil, carefully allowing him the necessary privacy. At first glance, then, the Gavenders seem a cozy unit, their mutual trust and help a given; they will see each other through their problems as they always have, on the solid and secure foundation that sheltering Hood House affords. It is also clear at this point that, while Blaise's handsome income supports the family monetarily, Harriet's strength and insight form its spiritual center.

Murdoch's gradual revelation that Magnus Bowles is indeed fictional, that Blaise's Tuesdays are instead spent in the sordid apartment of his long-enduring though vociferous mistress Emily McHugh, their silent, mysterious son Luca, and the housekeeper-turned-lodger Constance Pinn, brings to light the "profane" love: illegal, clandestine, and violent. The judgment seems clear; Emily detests her position as mistress and unmarried mother, the odd-woman-out, with no future individually and an uncertain one with Blaise. A French scholar, she has given up teaching because of psychological pressures and neglects her child and herself even though she is constantly at home in the debilitating status of, in her words, the "every-other-Tuesday-wife."

A blossoming alcoholic who rarely even dresses for the day, Emily's only mainstay (and that severely weakened) is her recollection of Blaise's and their initial attraction. She actively relives that intensity, their mutual avowal that each had found in the other "the One," the person destined by unnamable forces to be the other's mate.

From their first encounter, Emily berated Blaise for not having waited, for settling for "second best," someone who would do as a wife, instead of remaining unattached and continuing his search, as she has done, until the other half of the Platonic whole, the concept Plato explores in his Symposium, appeared. They met at a Merleau-Ponty lecture and shared a bed the next night. Emily and Blaise fitted each other down to their wildest whim. From Blaise's point of view their attraction was instantaneous and total:

It was ecstatic, sudden, total. As total as Harriet's trust, its cataclysmic necessary counterpart. Sin was an awful private happiness blotting out all else; only it was not sin, it was glory, it was his good, his very own, manifested at last. This was the dark cupboard all right, only it was not dark, it was blazing with light and as large as the universe. Everything he had done before seemed feeble, shadowy, insincere. A combination of pure, free creation and pure causality now felicitously ruled his life. The dark forces had never been stronger or more clearly seen, but he was not their puppet. They rose in the bright air and carried him skyward with them. He had never fretted after, never even dreamed of, a woman who could so complement his own strangeness. This was not just intense sexual bliss, it was absolute metaphysical justification. The world in its detail was revealed at last to an indubitable insight. His whole being was engaged, he was identified with his real self, he fully inhabited his own nature for the first time in his life.³³

Aside from some rather explicit sado-masochistic implications, and aside from a narrowly "Christian" assessment of the Emily-Blaise affair,

³³Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 69.

Murdoch's tone of high romanticism has raised the couple to the level of gods in their conceptions of themselves and their holy affair.

One is then led to wonder which union is the sacred one, that at Hood House, or that at Putney? If Blaise and Emily were made for each other in word and deed, if they have found their real selves after long searching, conscious or unconscious, is not Blaise's continuation of his marriage the moral profanity, the sham, the empty convention? Such is Blaise's dilemma. Even in the end, after his marriage to Emily and his wife's death, he says, "Nor could he clarify in memory that transformation of his early affections which made him feel that Harriet was his sacred love and Emily his profane" (Sacred and Profane Love Machine, 349). His vacillation makes definition impossible. Only when death and chance intervene to shatter the stalemate can he reorder his emotional life. Murdoch imparts the sacred and profane implications through each consciousness in turn, first Harriet's, then David's, then Emily's, then Pinn's, then Monty's. Only Luca remains silent, and his wide-eyed gaze into his father's distraught face must be his judgment. His youth and his strange inarticulateness are functions of his estrangement from those to whom he looks for guidance, his mother and his father. Through sheer strength of gaze, Luca seems to be demanding that he be looked at, noticed, cared for, but Emily's and Blaise's distraction with their personal arrangement makes impossible their taking proper responsibility for their child.

In the light of the moral confusion that such a schizophrenic separation of one's affection and loyalty cause in Blaise, the possibilities for interpretation of "sacred" and "profane" become

apparent. In this sense also, the ambiguous allegory in the Titian painting that inspired the novel's title becomes significant.

Murdoch's choice of title, reinforced by the reproduction of the painting on the dustjacket for Sacred and Profane Love Machine, needs some comment at this point. Because the meaning of Titian's painting has never been satisfactorily determined, it becomes an appropriate complement to Murdoch's novel by emphasizing the central focus on sacred and profane love and also by supplementing by suggestion the strong function of paintings in the novel, particularly in regard to Harriet. Edith Abbot's detailed description of the painting is useful here:

Titian's first great picture on an idealistic theme is the so-called Sacred and Profane Love, a title never associated with it in the artist's day. The subject is not known, and the various attempts to explain it have not met with general acceptance. Within the low rectangle of the frame, two women are seated by the side of a marble fountain adorned with classic reliefs. An amorino busily stirs the water, and the suggestion of liquid sound creates a distinctly pleasurable element. Titian never more perfectly preserved the balance between physical loveliness and purely idealistic qualities than in the nude figure at the right. One curve starting from the bent head follows the line of the brow to the long simple sweep of the left side. The firm young body is brilliantly set off against the red of the mantle; the uplifted left arm is seen against the sky, patterned with grey-white filmy clouds. The sumptuously robed figure at the left forms a complete contrast. The folds of her dress gleam dazzlingly against the quiet grey of the weathered well-curb. A bronzed tree binds the two figures together and accentuates the feeling of coolness. At the right stretches a landscape of meadows, with a distant church; at the left a town on the heights is half hidden by the trees.³⁴

³⁴Edith Abbot, The Great Painters (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1927), p. 162.

Major elements of the painting complement the novel: the fact that two women are held enraptured by one male, that the tension between carnal and spiritual love is stressed by their costumes and their attitudes, and that the unity for the painting is achieved by the bronzed tree. As will be discussed later in conjunction with Harriet Gavender, the tree in her favorite Giorgione in the National Gallery as well as the acacia in her own garden hold the secret to unity in her life.

The question of the "love machine" persists, however. What is a "love machine"? Is it a "sacred love machine" and a "profane love machine"? Or is it a "sacred and profane love machine"? Some illumination of the implications of these phrases derives from Murdoch's use of the word "machine" and "mechanism" in her philosophy as well as in the novel itself.

As early as Sartre, Romantic Rationalist (1953), Murdoch mentions that "the myth of the ghost in the machine is so deep in our language that we inevitably think of the persona as composed of psychic forces" (Sarte, 85). She discusses here the adjectives with which one person labels another, thus reducing the other person to an object, tangible and fixed, the sum of his characteristics. Further, she says, "serious reflexion about one's own character will often induce a curious sense of emptiness; and if one knows another person well, one may sometimes intuit a similar void in him. (This is one of the privileges of friendship.)" (Sarte, 85). The "machine" here indicated is the human personality, the ghost being its peculiar essence which we seek to isolate in order to discover who the person "is." To Murdoch, this is

an immoral action because such a judgment, or summation, fixes the human personality in a way that, given its inherent dynamism, is absolutely unfair and inaccurate.

Murdoch says in her later essay "On God and Good" in The Sovereignty of Good that, in establishing the Kantian basis for much of modern existential thought:

Moral choice is often a mysterious matter. Kant thought so, and he pictured the mystery in terms of an indiscernable balance between a pure rational agent and an impersonal mechanism, neither of which represented what we normally think of a personality; . . . We have learned from Freud to picture "the mechanism" as something highly individual and personal, which is at the same time very powerful and not easily understood by its owner.³⁵

Here again the term "mechanism" is in some way a label for the essence of the personality. Being compared to a machine is to be judged by what prove to be one's most "characteristic" actions, i.e., most often repeated? most often displayed? most often observed? and by whom? when? where? how? Rather, Murdoch clarifies the point:

What we really are seems much more like an obscure system of energy out of which choices and visible acts of will emerge at intervals in ways which are often unclear and often dependent on the condition of the system in between the moments of choice.³⁶

Her term, "system of energy," implies not only a source, a reason for life, but also a certain conformation and order to an ongoing process of moving among and through events and thoughts. A deliberate antithesis

³⁵The Sovereignty of Good, p. 53.

³⁶The Sovereignty of Good, p. 54.

to "machine," it also imparts something of the mystery, the void, the intuited emptiness that puzzles humans in the midst of the process itself.

In a later essay Murdoch uses the term "machine" again in relation to human beings, saying that "We are largely mechanical creatures, the slaves of relentlessly strong selfish forces the nature of which we scarcely comprehend" (Sovereignty of Good, 99). Combined with her earlier statements about human personality, Murdoch is simply showing here that from the perspective of a vast plan, human beings' vision is limited in terms of what they choose to do, how they spend their time. We are largely creatures of routine because recognition of the mystery is too great and impossible a task.

Given this background, her application of the term "mechanism" to the concept of love becomes pertinent; she says, ". . . human love is normally too profoundly possessive and also too 'mechanical' to be a place of vision" (Sovereignty of Good, 75). To interpret this usage, one might best consider some of Murdoch's earlier remarks in Sartre on the springs of romantic/sexual love. The fixed quality becomes important once again as lover views beloved and the two are locked into each other's gaze:

Love is one of the forms under which we pursue stability of being. Stability derives here from the steady adoring gaze of the lover, caught in which the lover feels full, compact, and justified. "Love is essentially the urge to make oneself loved." But the love demands a similar returning gaze, and is free at any moment to withhold his own. If the beloved dominates the lover so as to fix and hold his admiration, this destroys the value of the regard which is prized only so far as it is freely given. If the beloved basks passively before the love, the latter remains

unsatisfied. Reciprocal love is therefore precarious, if not impossible, and readily moves toward the satisfactions of sadism or masochism (domination or basking).³⁷

What the lover sees in his beloved is precisely and only that which he wishes to see. In the same way, what he presents to his lover for adoration is the self that he wishes to have loved. These first impressions of the two lovers, however selective, are curiously tenacious, and if one is to build a strong and long relationship they must be revised to include the entire personality of the other. Otherwise, the initial myth will perpetuate itself into oblivion, and the two will suddenly look at one another one day as strangers.

This chemistry facilitated by the eyes is perhaps most telling in regard to "sacred and profane love machine." Blaise Gavender's two loves, regardless of which is which, form his life, his two-sided conception of himself. He is incapable of choosing between them; they are complementary (and complimentary) versions of his personality. While on one hand he feels that the needs of his personality are being fulfilled, he is nevertheless haunted by guilt for the unfair situation into which he places both families. He at once glories in his ability to sustain four such varied dependents and also wishes his life to be simple again:

³⁷Sartre, Romantic Rationalist, pp. 94-95.

But now his wife drew him with quiet power, rousing in him mixed intensities of reverence and desire. He had never felt any such emotion in his life before, and he regarded himself with awe. His "spy" life became, in a terrible deprived way, simpler, as a function of these changes which made his whole existence more precarious by supplying him with a new but equally baffling set of motives.³⁸

Blaise's state of mind vacillates ever more frenetically as he moves toward a choice of one or the other, in order to bring coherence to his emotional life. For example, after Emily plays upon his guilt and their memory of initial attraction to guerdon his long-promised resolve to request a divorce, he has only to step across Hood House threshold to be enmeshed in its security once again. He alternately falls in and out of love with Emily and Harriet. The more convinced he becomes to leave Harriet and David, the closer they come to fulfilling his wishes, the more he falls in love with them all over again. This vacillation between the separate "myths" of the two households, their individual rationales within him, is the "love machine," sacred and profane. He wished to give up neither; each is dear to him; only an act of pure chance resolves his dilemma. The entire mechanism depends upon the illusion from which each "love" has grown. In Murdoch's sense, then, there is no love as seen from Blaise's point of view. Each relationship has become for him an important cog in the wheel that drives him like a train between Hood House and Putney on a regular schedule of lying, deception, and delusion.

³⁸Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 81.

Resolution of plot and spirit comes only through a chance encounter with a machine-gunner in Hanover airport. In his wholesale slaughter of innocents, Harriet is included, as she shields Luca's body from the gunfire. Her convenient death makes the culmination clear: Emily moves into Hood House and begins to make it her own home, ecstatic for the first time in her relationship with Blaise because she is his publicly recognized mate as well as his spiritual one and because they now have an acknowledgedly "proper" home. Their son Luca, however, remains absent. Harriet has saved him from physical death, but the shock of the airport encounter has scarred him for life. He must be treated professionally, which again conveniently removes concern for him from the shoulders of his self-centered parents, while physically removing his disturbing gaze from their new home.

Harriet's sudden and shocking death is not a total surprise, however. Some critics have called it a cheap and easy way out of a net of such complexity that no escape short of "fated" violence was imaginable (Saturday Review, 1974). It is important to note that Murdoch does, however, foreshadow the shocking scene early in the novel in a scene in which Emily once again harangues Blaise. Murdoch thus ties the "surprise" resolution to a specific issue:

"Don't mention that name! I don't want to hear what happens in your other setup. . . . She's secure, she's got you, she doesn't have to worry about personal things, because they're all hunky-dory. She can think about the ruddy dinner service and whether she'll go to evensong. Oh, I'm the flesh and she's the spirit, don't tell me, I know! I'll write it all up for the Sunday papers one day. 'I was an every-other-Tuesday-wife.' God, sometimes I feel like people who go to the airport with a machine gun and just shoot everyone in sight. You simply have no idea how I suffer."³⁹

³⁹Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 92.

Indeed, what better way to escape a machine-like relationship locked into its own habits and myths than by destroying it with itself? If Emily is the figurative machine-gunner, for only she can identify with the desperation of the airport maniac, then it is she who has figuratively killed Harriet. They are linked undeniably in this shadowy assailant-victim complex. Emily is the intruder. Had she not accepted Blaise's protection for herself and their child, Blaise's first marriage might still be intact. But to place all the blame on Emily is to distort the matter also. She is in her position in the "mechanism" because Blaise's money, attention, and persuasion have made it possible. He is the engine that drives the machine that drives Emily to desperation, which eventually eliminates Harriet. Emily figuratively uses a machine to destroy another machine which threatens her sanity.

Emily and Blaise's habitual quarrels are also labeled by them as "mechanisms," as are they themselves:

"Oh, Em dear, don't be silly. Don't let's start up this sort of mechanical argument again. We had it last week, we'll have it again next week"

"We haven't had this-argument before. Remember, I've given up my job and I'm bloody well"

"Please. When you use that awful tone we both stop being human beings and become machines."

"We used to be two happy machines stimulating each other."

"Oh, go to sleep."⁴⁰

The word, as the dialogue above implies, is easily invoked, misused, and misunderstood. Its general implication, however, is of a repeated series of actions, a habitual train of thought or discussion, so overused as to become meaningless, but difficult to vary because variation

⁴⁰Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 87.

means rethinking the person or the situation completely. Bringing new eyes to an "old" situation or an "old" intimate is often painful and is therefore assiduously avoided by most.

Blaise begins the two relationships, so he becomes the active source of the two mechanisms that hold him in sway for seven years. His checkbook becomes the means by which the two households exist simultaneously. Blaise is passive, however, in that he refuses to destroy either "machine" on moral grounds. He literally becomes a train-like machine chugging along a track from Hood House to Putney and back again, caught in his habitual egoistic illusions of supporting two households, incapable of varying his pattern at all until the Putney element rises up in protest and destroys the system. As domesticity once again prevails however, Blaise has created, this time with Emily's acquiescence, yet another machine for their personal relations, a machine astonishingly similar to the one Emily has just destroyed. Restoration of the love machine proves at once how extraordinarily difficult the patterns are to avoid and how necessary they are to human relations. Murdoch seems to be saying that, for all its inhumanity and forced objectification, human beings cannot function without "mechanisms." To operate in any other way would mean constant vulnerability.

Murdoch has been accused of writing about "messy" people. Seemingly, the average human being is just that--incapable of dealing cleanly and openly with even those she/he professes to love for the sake of simple honesty. Murdoch indicates in Sacred and Profane Love Machine

that the "machine" of human relations, whether love-jealousy-self-pity-hate or forgiveness-suffering, freezes people with its established catch-words and reflex emotions so that the dynamics of personality are neglected. The easiest way then to weather whatever crisis is the "old" way: to close one's eyes and hope for the best. The image of the machine-gunner becomes the only possible image for the person who feels caught in the wheels of the "mechanism." The mystique of one's own imagination traps a person irrevocably. Murdoch, then, is not making a traditionally "moral" statement about loving two people simultaneously in Love Machine. She is simply demonstrating at length the damage that such a dual relationship can cause if it is allowed to descend to the habit, the reflex, the static judgment.

It is especially important to emphasize that this rather dim view of human relations and their capacity to elude control is Blaise Gavender's rather than Iris Murdoch's. His male conceptions of the females he "knows" so well that he can run them are the beliefs that lock him into his dilemma. Once introduced, neither Emily nor Harriet is capable of envisaging her position or any other one in a completely static way. Despite all her bitterness, Emily finds it impossible to call Harriet "Mrs. Placid" to her face after she has become acquainted with Harriet.

Once Harriet becomes a person for Emily instead of Blaise's slightly overweight, dense, sweet wife, Emily finds it most difficult to hurt her deliberately. In the revelation scene involving Emily, Blaise, and Harriet at the Putney apartment, Murdoch uses the metaphor of vision to describe Emily's change in her perception:

Years later Emily McHugh still remembered this moment with the greatest clarity. It was a moment of revelation, when deep feelings, which have seemed leaden and immovable, suddenly begin to skip like the mountains of the psalmist, and intellect, like a flash of lightning, reveals a completely new configuration. Briefly put, Emily realized she could not hate Harriet. At any rate, she realized that the "hated wife" was now over and done with and some quite different problem had come into being. She also felt, and was horrified at herself in the same second, both guilt and shame. She felt, before Harriet, the legitimate spouse, guilty and ashamed.⁴¹

That the "every-other-Tuesday-wife" should suddenly feel like the sinful mistress is to some extent predictable. For Emily, however, whose self-pity for a career abandoned, a mind partially developed, a "limited" child, and daily squalor had grown to obsession, seeing her situation suddenly from another perspective was a mighty shock. In the same way, she begins to "see" Blaise for the charlatan and the manipulator that he is. She had always been in possession of all the facts; she had simply refused to see the situation from any other viewpoint than her own. This objectivity lifts her out of her despair and frustration for a moment and gives her a clearer evaluation of her position.

Blaise continues, however, to enjoy almost euphorically his two women confronting each other, as one would delight in the reunion of a split personality. When they begin to change their positions out of self-interest, however, Blaise feels his loss of control although he never was in control of the situation. His static perceptions of the "places" of "his" two women allowed that delusion. In this way he shared some important characteristics with other males in Murdoch, whom

⁴¹Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 156.

Goshgarian has labeled "Murdoch men" (Goshgarian, 1974). These men idolize their women in the novels, and the women are usually gifted with clearer sight from the beginning. As quoted earlier, the Murdoch man is identified by Goshgarian in this way:

. . . he manifests a seemingly abnormal craving for neatness. He abhors the accidental, and he fears the eccentricities of the single self. Consequently, his moral lapse resides in his failure to recognize and accept the fact that the female Other has a vital inner life, a whole and independent sphere of subjective spirit, unique and particular. In his reluctance, he consoles himself with private myths of her being, or seizes upon some available ones, thereby transforming the living entity into a palimpsest of images that provide him with his desired place in the world.⁴²

Certain similarities with the type designated as the "esthete" discussed in Chapter 3 suggest themselves here, but in the case of Blaise Gavender, the sensuality overcomes any sort of "craving for neatness" except in the sense that he wishes to order his life without sacrifice. Gavender is also not particularly conscious of aesthetic concerns.

Blaise is identified early as a man who delights in sensual pleasures, down to the smell of asparagus in his urine. His sloppiness is criticized by his son David, but his craving for neatness manifests itself in his emotional life. Once neatly separated, his two worlds now converge, and he seeks a simple solution that will please everyone, but especially himself. His solutions fail because his women, in a most bothersome way, keep asserting themselves as people, as highly unpredictable, irrational people with wills independent of his. Blaise confides his dilemma to Montague Small, a detective writer with the fastidiousness that Goshgarian describes above, and who is also guilty

⁴²Goshgarian, p. 520.

of idolizing his wife, dead and alive, in the manner indicated. Like Porphyria's lover, he concludes that the only way to ensure her total and eternal fidelity is to render her immortal by strangling her.

Blaise discusses possible solutions with Small in a detached manner that resembles Small's when he is concocting another detective story. Blaise tries to manipulate the characters with their intricate interdependencies, allowing for no freedom of response, only wishing the situation to be magically solved somehow, and to his advantage. Emily's remark that "You can't go through the looking-glass without cutting yourself" (Sacred and Profane Love Machine, 128) indicates that even in her entrapment she can see farther than Blaise can. Vision becomes a painful experience. A single, semi-lucid view results from Edgar's hitting Blaise on the head, which significantly blackens one of his eyes. Getting to the world on the other side of the mirror is never easy, though Blaise would wish it so.

Blaise's "goodwife" Harriet receives a good deal of attention as well in her travel through the looking-glass. She is the wronged wife who is blind to her husband's deception until he admits all to her: she then finds her new uselessness most painful. Murdoch describes her as an attractive woman in her forties, whose main weaknesses are her love for chocolates, people, and animals. She has so much love to share, in fact, that she exudes maternal emotion. One of the first things the reader learns of Harriet is that she owns many black dogs, some with classical names, which give her a sense of security in their protection and a sense of importance in their wet and warm dependency. Blaise,

whom the dogs dislike, once remarked with exasperation, "Whenever you feel depressed, you go and buy a dog!" (Sacred and Profane Love Machine, 10). Harriet answers silently, "But it was so touching to go there and rescue some pathetic affectionate beautiful animal, it was a kind of creative action." Appropriately, her dog Ajax finally turns against Blaise as an intruder to Hood House. Ajax bites Blaise's Achilles tendon to prevent him from reentering the house.

Regarding her son David, Harriet knows that she must let him go to keep his love. He pulls away for independence, yet she realizes that he still needs her and Blaise's guidance. In her attempt to remain helpfully neutral, Harriet realizes the depth of her affection:

Of course it was simply natural change and not an ending, and of course her love could not end, could not in the faintest detail of its being diminish ever. The trouble was that she could not see at present how her love for David could change sufficiently for her now and henceforth forever to be in the position of concealing something which he would uneasily suspect. She leaned forward over her hands in sudden anguish. What was that quotation about love being "woman's whole existence"? It was certainly true in her case, and how terrifying it was.⁴³

Harriet is the only character whose descriptions and actions are dominated by visual imagery. She looks, she sees, she watches; she has insight into others. Her one blind spot is Blaise. Her ignorance of her husband's years-long deception is absolute, so confident is she in his daily presence and their mutual trust.

Murdoch indicates, in discussing Harriet's position, that she has been the mainstay of the marriage, foreshadowing Blaise's later revelation:

⁴³Sacred and Profane Love Machine, pp. 13-14.

Only Harriet's monumental trust (what Emily called her stupidity) kept the structure up. It never occurred to Harriet to doubt or in any way to check statements whose falsity would have been clear under the lightest scrutiny. Her poor husband was very, very busy, that was all. She and David, much absorbed with each other, endured his absences and extatically welcomed his returns. He always came back so tired, poor thing.⁴⁴

Since she has loving insight into most situations, however, which is to say she can minimize herself and make others prominent in an effort to understand them, she is the surprising element in Blaise's formula. He expects certain reactions of her that he does not get, not because she is being coy or sly, but because she takes the situation as it presents itself and then responds accordingly. Such sensitivity is beyond Blaise's ken.

Murdoch connects Harriet with the visual imagery from the beginning. In the opening scene she is looking out a window into the garden and sees Luca, the "alien growth" of Emily's and Blaise's liaison who fits nowhere and feels it. She ponders Luca's presence but doesn't mention it to Blaise for fear of his usual sexual interpretation. He claims that all her "dreams" are sexually inspired. His anticipated responses reveal the degree to which Blaise has put Harriet in a box; thinks he knows what to expect of her.

Only she really looks at their neighbor Montague Small and notices his haggard, lost appearance, outward testimony of the love-guilt he feels for his dead wife Sophie. Blaise passes this observation off with a shrug and a comment about how well-set Monty is from the proceeds from

⁴⁴Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 73.

his Milo Fane mysteries. To Blaise, Monty's problems can be written off because he has no apparent difficulties supporting himself; only Harriet grasps his spiritual hunger.

For entertainment, while Blaise works at the British Museum, Harriet visits the National Gallery, where she looks at familiar paintings, especially a Giorgione, to which she is repeatedly drawn. For Murdoch, such attention to great art is a metaphor for attention to people. Murdoch uses the analogy in order to make explicit her philosophy of attentive love, saying that we appreciate more from a truly fine piece of art as we learn as much as possible about it:

. . . great art teaches us how real things can be looked at and loved without being seized and used, without being appropriated into the greedy organism of the self. This exercise of detachment is difficult and valuable whether the thing contemplated is a human being or the root of a tree or the vibration of a colour or a sound. Unsentimental contemplation of nature exhibits the same quality of detachment: selfish concerns vanish, nothing exists except the things which are seen. Beauty is that which attracts this peculiar sort of unselfish attention.⁴⁵

Harriet's relationship with "her" always accessible paintings in the Gallery is characterized by Murdoch in a similar way. Harriet says, "What I feel with the pictures is . . . like being let out into a huge space and not being myself anymore" (Sacred and Profane Love Machine, 50-51). Harriet is the sole possessor of this sensibility in the novel.

Harriet is peculiarly bothered by the tree in Giorgione's painting of St. Anthony, St. George, and the dragon. She had seen the painting many times, but on looking again, found her attention taken as never before:

⁴⁵The Sovereignty of Good, p. 65.

There it was in the middle of clarity, in the middle of bright darkness, in the middle of limpid sultry yellow air, in the middle of nowhere at all with distant clouds creeping by behind it, linking the two saints yet also separating them and also being itself and nothing to do with them at all, a ridiculously frail, poetical vibrating motionless tree which was also a special particular tree on a special particular evening when the two saints happened (how odd) to be doing their respective things (ignoring each other) in a sort of murky yet brilliant glade (what on earth, however, was going on in the foreground?) beside a luscious glistening pool out of which two small and somehow domesticated demons were cautiously emerging for the benefit of St. Anthony, while behind them St. George, with a helmet like a pearl, was bullying an equally domesticated and inoffensive little dragon.⁴⁶

The sense that she receives from this painting she describes as a "garbled, unintelligible, urgent message." She tried to walk but cannot move, haunted by the mystery of the tree.

In this regard the bronzed tree in the Titian painting discussed earlier becomes significant. A tree appears in both the Giorgione in the novel and in Sacred and Profane Love Machine on the dustjacket. Because Harriet Gavender is the most perceptive individual in the novel, she senses the importance of the tree in the Giorgione long before she has an opportunity to grasp its significance intellectually. She intuits that the tree, or a tree, will somehow unify the scattered lives of her acquaintance, including her husbands. Choice of the two paintings is particularly appropriate, however, because Titian, who was Giorgione's student, shows in Sacred and Profane Love Machine a marked departure in style from that of his mentor. He balances Giorgione's "Praxitelean idealism" that is so captivating (Abbot, 163) with physical

⁴⁶Sacred and Profane Love Machine, pp. 49-50.

reality, unifying the two images with the spreading tree, as if to say that nature encompasses both and must be admitted to do so. This brief comparison makes clear Murdoch's balanced vision as opposed to Harriet's romantic idealism and also the extent to which the two paintings have been carefully molded into her narrative.

A literal tree, an acacia, in the garden of Hood House, is suggested here by the similarity of feeling, the curious sense of something unfinished, of excitement, of undirected and unsatisfied curiosity. Luca's figure in the shadowy garden early that morning, witnessed separately by David and Harriet, seemed to "merge into a dark trunk of the acacia," prefiguring his new home and Harriet's genuinely warm welcome. Luca "belongs" at Hood House by virtue of his paternity, but Harriet at the time cannot know why, nor can she know that after she has welcomed him, she will leave forever. Harriet's perceptions, as these two illustrations indicate, are acute. She is not afraid of losing herself in observation of another object, and thus deals intelligently with situations for as long as she can retain emotional control.

Harriet recognizes that her affection for the paintings and her affection for Monty Small are different "loves," however. She says,

. . . what I feel looking at Monty is so absolutely here and now and me, as if I were more absolutely my particular self than ever, as if I were just throbbing with selfhood. It's odd because I love the pictures and I love Monty, but it's so different.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p.50.

Her ability to differentiate consciously between an affection that takes her out of herself (contemplation of the "Good") and one that emphasizes self, as obvious as the distinction seems, is central to Murdoch and is recognized by no one but Harriet. She alone is gifted with this degree of perception regarding the authenticity and inviolability of individuals. Her apprehensions are therefore central.

Harriet's most serious shock comes when she realizes that Blaise's affections are completely involved elsewhere. They had married early, and her relations with men before their marriage in no way equipped her for the sense of disconnected uselessness that Blaise's absence causes:

She could support and forgive a penitent husband who needed her love and her strength. But when all that power seemed no longer necessary, when Blaise cut the channel through which, for so many years, he almost unconsciously made use of it, it had fed him, Harriet felt utterly deprived of her central certainties and no longer at all knew how to think about what she ought to do. Perhaps she had never known how to think about what she ought to do. What she had possessed were not principles but instincts, the warm possessive instincts of a happy wife and mother. For a situation where she was not needed she had no heroism.⁴⁸

Having enjoyed years of security and financial freedom, Harriet is suddenly set adrift; her statement becomes a startlingly clear analysis of the newly discovered female who tried not to lose her sensitivity while she gropes for answers in a situation that offers no consolation. Knowledge that one is no longer loved is quite simply destructive.

Harriet's encompassing affection for life of all sorts asserts itself in tentative approaches to Monty, which are rebuffed, in her full adoption of Luca, which is shortly terminated, and in a proposed trip to

⁴⁸Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 270.

Europe to her father and brother, also terminated. She has lost David through poor timing. She knows the break must come with his mother, and he is absurdly jealous of her love for Luca. He therefore refuses to accompany them and thus unwittingly spares himself the sight of his mother's death.

Just before her death, Harriet realizes the meaning of the Giorgione painting and how she will eventually cope with Blaise's marriage to Emily:

And I shall be alone. This kindness to him (Blaise), which is just weakness really, is my only and my last resource. I shall come to it, I am coming to it, I am thinking exactly what he wants me to think, and the only escape from this is a kind of violence of which I am not capable. There is no great calm space elsewhere, thought Harriet, where a tree stands between two saints and raises its pure significant head into a golden sky. What had seemed to be an intuition of freedom and virtue was for her simply a trivial enigma, an occasion for little meaningless emotions. She was caught in her own mind and condemned by her own being.⁴⁹

This sad recognition of her eventual forgiveness and Blaise's and Emily's inevitable ridicule of her weakness is her last rational thought before her murder defending Luca in the Hanover airport.

While most of Harriet's waking hours are spent looking at people and things and increasing her sensitivity to their positions, as reflected in Murdoch's indication of her with moral insight through use of the vision metaphor, Blaise is symbolically presented as morally myopic by his lack of ability to see those around him. Blaise suffers much physical torment besides the waning of his sexual powers. His wife's dogs turn on him in symbolic defense of the woman he has abandoned,

⁴⁹Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 240.

attacking him as an intruder to Hood House which he has left in favor of the Putney apartment. Because of Blaise's moral myopia, his overwhelming principal concern for himself, and his sensual appetites, the language of vision is notably absent from his conversation and from Murdoch's descriptions of him.

Blaise responds to rather than initiates conversation. His major concern is getting through a situation rather than taking control by improving his understanding of those involved. Blaise is a literal and practical man who deals with everyday realities in the easiest way that presents itself, to maximize personal pleasure. Monty says of Blaise:

In Blaise, truth would not be truth. Besides, Blaise believed in the dreary historical self, lived indeed by that belief, made his money out of that fiction.⁵⁰

Monty's comments indicate the ironic position Blaise occupies, of the psychoanalyst who neither "sees" people nor tries. When news of his marital difficulties becomes public, his patients are the first ones to indicate their lack of surprise. Blaise operates on preconceptions of people; he assumes them static entities, and when they begin to act independently, he is amazed, but never learns to look more closely.

Particularly notable is his reaction to Luca's forays to Hood House which Pinn has discussed with the boy. Luca first hides himself in his daddy's car to find out where he lived when he was not with Emily. Luca then returned to Hood House independently and brought food for the dogs. Blaise, predictably, is incredulous, though he masks his amazement in front of Pinn, his informer:

⁵⁰Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 122.

At the thought of Luca standing underneath the acacia tree he felt an emotion too confused and intense to be identified as either misery or fear. The inconceivable, the unimaginable, had happened, already it had entered his life, defeating logic, impossible, destructive. There, how could these two worlds meet? Their utter separateness was the guarantee itself of any intelligibility and order. Their separateness was the prerequisite of any thought, the presupposition of the world, it was what thought was about, what the world was about. Blaise had never feared mental breakdown. But at the idea of what Luca has had so simply done, passing through a steel barrier as if it were paperk passing through the looking-glass, he glimpsed for a second the terrible underlying chaos of his own mind. Luca had gazed at Hood House, had seen Harriet, had fed the dogs.⁵¹

So utterly sunk into himself is Blaise that his revelation here is, notably, the chaos of his own mind. His son's simple, honest act of curiosity bridged the two worlds he has kept separate for seven years and accomplished in one evening what Blaise has still refused to do. Blaise's main concern always is spare his feelings and his position from Emily's and Harriet's imagined vengeance. His guilt forms an impervious barrier between himself and perception of others.

As indication of the novel's permeation with the vision metaphor to indicate moral insight, Murdoch uses two groups of characters as backdrops and comments on the central action between the two households: observers and children. In this way, she creates an additional dimension to the situation, illustrating that such serious actions which inevitably involve people outside the couples themselves should be considered carefully, not chaotically and quickly as Blaise does. Murdoch also indicates that particular care should be taken where children are involved. The children in Love Machine remain emotional

⁵¹Sacred and Profane Love Machine, pp. 103-104.

orphans, the casualties of irresponsible parents who unaccountably survive.

Murdoch creates parallel observers at Hood House and at Putney, to create external comment on the affected people at each place. In each case, their observations are accurate but ultimately disinterested. This lack of real concern in the activities of the two households invites exploitation of the people involved, which extends as far as blackmail. Constance Pinn, Emily's housekeeper-turned-roommate, a poorly educated, socially mobile opportunist, is in Blaise's pay as informer on Emily. In earlier jealous years, Blaise had pressed pound notes into Pinn's hand in exchange for information regarding any young men who might be waiting for him to leave on Wednesday mornings. Of course the report was always negative, but Pinn maintained this intimate collaboration, recognizing it as a method of control. It is she who tells Blaise of Luca's visits to Hood House, and in terms that show Blaise specifically how lost Luca is to him. She makes clear that while Luca stares his silent, round-eyed stare at this father, perhaps encouraging his father to look at (Luca) him, he chatters freely to her whom he trusts. Pinn takes a perverse delight in any sort of secret entrusted to her, for as the disinterested observer it is merely peripheral stimulation. For the same reason, she tempts David Gavender with nude bathers, with herself, and with Kiki St. Loy. Her contact with people is superficial and irresponsible; she is impenetrable at the core.

Such an observer will coldly tell the facts as they occur and enjoy the shock that her information has on its recipient. She is without

true concern for others, so that her vision becomes a business, a lucrative endeavor rather than an impulse to assist the stricken pair.

Montague Small, on the other hand, is well cast as a writer of detective fiction. He too has known of Blaise's affair from the beginning, when Blaise came to him for advice. Small from the start encouraged Blaise's duplicity, even facilitating matters by inventing Blaise's excuse: the purely fictional patient who requires weekly house calls, Magnus Bowles. Small has lived next door to Hood House, at Lockett's, and has been keeper of the disputed orchard for many years. Both Harriet and Blaise have trusted him implicitly but, characteristically, neither knew whom he was trusting because Small does not reveal himself readily to close friends, or even to himself. His tape-recorded admission that he killed his wife Sophie, whom he rightly suspected of having had many affairs, is his first honest revelation in many years, made finally when the psychological pressure was too great to bear. Neither of the Gavenders, of course, suspect that their neighbor is a murderer, or that his private suffering is the result of this immense guilt. Despite Harriet's intuition of his emotional dearth, Small acts to them more or less as he always had, as the wise and cool advisor in difficult problems.

His advice, like Pinn's, is irresponsible. Small keeps abreast of the latest developments in Blaise's affair, maintains his friendship with Harriet, and allows David to magnify his wisdom into a kind of idolatry. Small's personal identification with the "tall, cold expressionless" hero of his detective fiction, Milo Fane, "ascetic

hedonist, discreet sadist, cynic" Sacred and Profane Love Machine, 123), the stoic in charge in all situations, violent if necessary, becomes stronger in the fiction as Small himself works out his justification of Sophie's murder, all the while trying to maintain a balance and a rationality for others who require his counsel.

Monty practices meditation, from which position of enlightenment he can dole the disinterested advice for which he is admired. He is much more intellectual and contemplative than Constance Pinn, yet meditation has failed to yield the necessary answers. He has nevertheless persisted in his routine, one that Sophie had ridiculed, but not without questions:

The whole thing was laughable rot, Oriental un-British rubbish. How Sophie had mocked. It might be perfectly true that there was no deep sense in things, that nothing and no one had real dignity and real deserving, that "the world" was just a jumble and a rubble and a dream, but was it not supreme cheating to make this senselessness seem to be the very essence of one's being? He might be a very shoddy artist, but he had the artist's capacity to cheat. . . . Yet Monty went on, and in the awful clarity of affliction after Sophie's death found this curiously unchanged, as if it had in spite of everything wedged its unconscious spearhead into a region beyond. Since the part of him which this hypothetical region concerned was infinitesimally tiny, he experienced no sort of alleviation or insight. But misery did not make him alter his routine, even guilt did not. This much at least, in its automatic way, "the machine" had done for him.⁵²

Like Blaise, Monty takes refuge in routine, in established pathways, and thus clings to sanity in this rather precarious way. Monty's observations of others are acute, his pronouncements accurate, but his knowledge

⁵²Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 124.

of his own inconsistency and imagined insufficiency makes him a dangerous source of vision.

When Blaise comes to him, distraught about Luca's appearance in the garden, Monty's wise advice is for Blaise to cast himself on Harriet's mercy and concentrate on her forgiveness. He says:

" . . . You're thinking about yourself again, you can't seem to stop. Anyway, if you tell, you won't be making yourself morally worse, you may even be making yourself morally better."⁵³

Small disavows any responsibility for Blaise's double life, when Blaise petulantly insists that Monty encouraged him to go on with it. Monty replies, "'I didn't encourage you to. You were determined to. I just listened.'" But Blaise insists, "'You encouraged me. It amused you. Anyway, what the hell, I wish I was dead'" And Monty replies, "'You can't go through the looking-glass without getting cut'" (Sacred and Profane Love Machine, 128). Small then writes the necessary letter to Harriet which further complicates an already complicated situation.

Monty analyzes himself accurately as a shoddy artist. He sees exactly what and how people should act toward one another, but is not above encouraging perverse experiments and then disavowing responsibility for his advice. Sunk as he is into his own negativism, furthermore, he fails to find reasons for love and mercy and so continues in his isolated and cynical way.

Neither observer takes responsibility for what he sees and the information and advice that she/he passes on. Self-interest on the part of each makes their vision coldly objective. They see a great deal, but

⁵³Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 128.

have no feeling for what they witness, and therefore do not promote human understanding.

The children involved in the "sacred and profane love machine" are credible products of their parents. Both Luca McHugh and David Gavender reflect the morality that has been bred into them by living in their parents' houses for their entire lives. Unfortunately, though their parents wish them always to be near, they take little responsibility for the effect of their actions on the children. Somehow Emily, Blaise, and Harriet feel that their concerns are outside the realm of the children and are amazed at the effect that they have. Even Harriet loses David through her forgiveness of Blaise. Instead, she gains Luca partly out of excess of emotion, partly out of guilt, and partly out of true concern. She still remains the only character who acts on her sincere concern for others, and she is killed.

Luca McHugh is described as "a force . . . not rational" and as an "alien growth" that profoundly disturbed Emily's and Blaise's relationship. Were it not for Luca's existence, his magnetic attraction, and his sly curiosity, he would never have appeared in Hood House garden, and the entire novel-long revelation would not have taken place.

Luca was quite simply putting together his own explanation of his father's puzzling absences, broken only by his bi-weekly visits that culminated in shouting matches. Luca is a strangely disturbed child from the beginning, which is understandable having been born of such parents under such circumstances. He sensed that he was unwanted from conception:

Luca had been an alien growth. Their love, so dense, so seamless, so complete, had not seemed framed with any space left for a child. They had not wished for, dreamt of, or anticipated children. That problem belonged to quite another world, to quite another set of arrangements. They did not even, though they might have done so, conceive of it as belonging to the time after Blaise should have "disposed of" Harriet. At least this was what Blaise felt, and he was fairly sure that was what Emily felt until she actually found herself pregnant. Blaise later accused Emily of concealing it. Emily retorted that she had no need for deceitful stratagems to entrap one who was so utterly bound to her in love and trust. However that might be, Luca arrived, and across his cradle Blaise and Emily looked at each other with eyes that sparkled with a new anguish.⁵⁴

Blaise's and Emily's highly romantic conception of themselves never included the practical consideration of a child, and from this point the basis of their union changed. Emily began to feel used and home-bound with the new child, and Blaise was fundamentally shaken by the decision that now pressed him, but which he still failed to make. Small wonder that Luca never spoke to either of his parents, learned the streets as a young child, and became responsible to no one, aside from his occasional chatter to Pinn.

His immense need for a mother and a place of quiet security drew him like a disembodied force to Hood House, allowed him to make friends with the dogs (which are later to tear his father almost to death) and to fall instantly and completely in love with the "magic lady" Harriet Gavender, who reciprocates in kind. Both fulfill a mutual need; Luca has doubtless found his "real" home. Harriet's violent death as she sheltered Luca with her body is a shock from which Luca cannot recover, however:

⁵⁴Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 72.

Since that appalling moment Luca had not spoken, had not uttered a word or a sound, looking mutely out at the world with terrified eyes which seemed bright with pain as if bright with tears. He recognized Blaise and his mother, but put them aside gently with helpless animal gestures when they tried to tend him. Emily wept long and long over him, but consented to have him taken away to a special institute for mentally disturbed children. The psychiatrist there did not regard his case as hopeless.⁵⁵

For her part, Emily accepts the idea of a future cure, but must not pursue the questions of when and how for her own daily sanity. Somehow the death of Harriet can be intellectualized and explained metaphorically, but the death of a child who had just found a secure way into the world that even included the promise of his own "Lucky" dog, cannot be justified. That Luca should be relegated to a mental hospital while his parents finally have jockeyed about so that they can care for him seems an ironically intolerable waste, emphasizing the horrible irresponsibility of those who follow blindly what the chemicals in their bodies dictate. Murdoch makes life's delightfully infinite diversity a murderous mob when a child is sacrificed for his parents' respectability.

David ("beloved") Gavender, however, is raised in Harriet's warm and loving care from birth and only in adolescence begins to resent the overbearing concern she pays him, though she tries to control her emotions. David is an intelligent, serious young man who has a successful academic career behind and before him, but who finds himself caught in the complex throes of adolescence, the only major irrational force he has had to confront in his short life. The changes that his

⁵⁵Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 344.

body undergoes are made vivid by his dreams, which his conscious mind vehemently denies with a rigid asceticism that extends to disgust at his sloppy and sensual parents.

Murdoch also parallels his dawning perceptions of the painful inevitability of change by making him solely aware of the highway being constructed through the fields he loved to roam. Periodically, he checks the progress of the bulldozers and the cement mixers, finally witnessing the ribbon of concrete that winds beyond his vision. The entire terrain has been transformed to a new reality before his eyes. His beloved fields and trees that were his innocent home have been metamorphosed into a major artery which will carry the world past Hood House. His body has been metamorphosed in the same way, in preparation for the adult world:

His sensitivity to these external changes in environment are of course believable as he strains to grasp intellectually the strange new uncontrollable demands of his body along with the even more irrational and (to him) unnecessary act of his parents' separation and divorce. They are both disgustingly polite to each other, he thinks, while his world is being uprooted with the air allowed to attack the warm tentacles. He becomes totally alienated from himself and his family, ripe for the perverse experiments of Constance Pinn, who wishes to engineer his first sexual encounter by choosing Kiki St. Loy for the purpose, and, happily, fails miserably in the effort.

David must learn quickly that nothing ever remains the same. In addition to physical and mental upset, he must also endure his mother's senseless death in the Hanover airport. He has, however, he believes,

figuratively caused her death by refusing to go with her to Germany. He believes that she will never return, and that he will be alone, parentless. His intuitions are unfortunately accurate:

David had intended simply to stay away from the house until after the train had left and then to return. He tried not to reflect upon whether he would then find his mother still there. He felt like someone who has gone out to avoid a death scene or the removal of a body. When he came back it would be done and the house, though terrible, would be clean. Oh, that awful uncleanliness, as he had felt it in the last days, his own dear precious home haunted, infested. The spectacle of his mother and Luca, whispering, laughing, petting Lucky, petting each other, his own title of son usurped and caricatured. His mother could not know what she was doing or she would not do it. He had intended simply to stay away, but now he realized that his ramblings had brought him fairly near to the railway station and he could actually watch the train depart.⁵⁶

With typical Murdochian irony, Constance Pinn offers David some physical comfort in the absence of his mother to tie together the psychological threads.

David's and Luca's fates are similar in that each remains parentless, suffering from the loss of the one truly loving person in the novel, Harriet Gavender, the sole possessor of moral vision. More than any other characters in the novel, David and Luca bear the unfortunate effects of the "sacred and profane love machine" out of control. The tension between the physical and the ideal cannot exist perpetually. Their bitter lessons mark them for life, so that they become grim reminders of their parents' seven-year-long irresponsible lark, rather than symbols of hope in the next generation. Murdoch leaves hardly any

⁵⁶Sacred and Profane Love Machine, p. 323.

room for doubt that the selfishness that sexual attraction encourages is destructive to innocent bystanders, that effort must be made to convert the "false love" to the "true love" which progress to the ideal of "the Good" encourages, if for no other reason than to save the psychological lives of those indirectly affected.

CHAPTER III

ART: "WE BLINK OUR EYES"

I

Art forms a central metaphor for love in Iris Murdoch's philosophy of the sovereignty of Good. Her concept of disinterested but attentive love, which she sees as the principal means to apprehension of "the Good," is explained in terms of art, that is, classically "great" art, as one might find in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, "La Jocanda" in the Louvre, or the faces of Rembrandt in the Rijksmuseum. In her essay "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts" (Sovereignty of Good, 77-104), Murdoch traces the philosophical and aesthetic bases for her theory of the sovereignty of Good. In so doing, she develops her analogy which compares contemplation of art and beauty to contemplation of "the Good" more explicitly and completely than in any other essay. For this reason, a rather complete summary of the essay's logical patterns seems useful here.

Beginning with its philosophical premises, Murdoch points out two fundamental assumptions of her argument: first, that human beings are naturally selfish and, second, that human life has no external point or focus (Sovereignty of Good, 78). Her description of human selfishness (or spiritual myopia) comes from modern psychology; the individual operates like a machine gratifying its desires within an ambiance of its own fabrications, illusions, and daydreams. The individual passes from day to day along a path of least resistance:

The psyche is a historically determined individual relentlessly looking after itself. In some ways it resembles a machine; in order to operate it needs sources of energy, and it is predisposed to certain patterns of activity. The area of its vaunted freedom of choice is not usually very great. One of its main pleasures is daydreaming. It is reluctant to face unpleasant realities. Its consciousness is not normally a transparent glass through which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect the psyche from pain. It constantly seeks consolation, either through imagined inflation of self or through fictions of a theological nature. Even its loving is more often than not an assertion of self. I think we can probably recognize ourselves in this rather depressing description.¹

Murdoch asserts her second assumption, that human life has no external focus ("We are simply here.") because to assert the opposite is as difficult to prove:

I can see no evidence to suggest that human life is not something self-contained. There are probably many patterns and purposes within life, but there is no general and as it were externally guaranteed pattern or purpose of the kind for which philosophers and theologians used to search. We are what we seem to be, transient mortal creatures subject to necessity and chance. This is to say that there is, in my view, no God in the traditional sense of that term Equally the various metaphysical substitutes for God--Reason, Science, History--are false deities. Our destiny can be examined but it cannot be justified or totally explained. We are simply here. And if there is any kind of sense or unity in human life, and the dream of this does not cease to haunt us, it is of some other kind and must be sought within a human experience which has nothing outside it.²

The conception of life as self-enclosed and purposeless harks back several centuries, but its clearest and strongest depiction is in the rational ideals of Kant in the nineteenth century. His philosophy

¹Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 78-79.

²The Sovereignty of Good, p. 79.

effectively abolished God and made man God in his stead. Murdoch reminds us of the beautifully portrayed character in Kant's Gründlegung who, confronted even with Christ, turns away to consider the judgment of his own conscience and hear the voice of his own reason. This free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave hero is still readily recognizable in the twentieth century philosophies of absurdism and existentialism. Murdoch describes the Kantian man further:

The raison d'être of this attractive but misleading creature is not far to seek. He is the offspring of the age of science, confidently rational and yet increasingly aware of his alienation from the material universe which his discoveries reveal; and since he is not a Hegelian . . . his alienation is without cause. He is the ideal citizen of the liberal state, a warning held up to tyrants. He has the virtue which the age requires, courage. It is not such a very long step from Kant to Nietzsche, and from Nietzsche to existentialism and the Anglo-Saxon ethical doctrines which in some ways closely resemble it. In fact, Kant's man had already received a glorious incantation nearly a century earlier in the works of Milton: his name is Lucifer.³

He is also found even earlier than Milton in Machiavelli's The Prince. Like Kant, Machiavelli presents a prototype, an individual whose freedom resides in the power of his will to determine his choices within a conscripted universe. This philosophy applied to politics leads to the simultaneous alienation and opportunism one observes in Machiavellian, Miltonian, and Kantian heroes. To consider morality here, however, seems out of place; amorality reigns. Nonetheless, Murdoch seeks to invest these assumptions with the moral viability that they lack.

³The Sovereignty of Good, p. 80.

In lieu of the heavens, God, and transcendent reality, Kant substitutes the human will, which leaves definition of "the Good" purely to individual choice. Courage is sovereign, in that it identifies freedom, will, and power. Investing this rather limited and self-sufficient view with moral consciousness seems almost impossible, but Murdoch makes the link through the "back door of the emotions, which Kant left open" and through which "the whole romantic movement has followed after" (Sovereignty of Good, 81). She pays particular attention to a footnoted reference in the Gründlegung to what Kant terms a respect for the moral law. Placed in a clearly subordinate position in Kantian philosophy, it is "an actual experience of freedom (akin to the existentialist Angst), the realization that although swayed by passions we are also capable of rational conduct" (Sovereignty of Good, 81), a concept closely related to the Sublime. Brought to an intense awareness of uncontrollable passion, human endeavor, or awesome natural phenomena, we return to ourselves as rational beings, retaining the consciousness of the wonderful and awe-inspiring contingency we have perceived:

How abject we are, and yet our consciousness is of an infinite value The emotions are allowed to return to the scene as a kind of allowable, rather painful, thrill which is a by-product of our status as dignified rational beings.⁴

When romanticism got hold of the Kantian footnote, his nod to the uncontrollable emotions under control, the element of sentimentalism in the romantics tended to "transform the idea of death (as Sublime) into the idea of suffering":

⁴The Sovereignty of Good, p. 82.

The idea of a rather exciting suffering freedom soon began to enliven the austerity of the puritan half of the Kantian picture, and with this went a taming and beautifying of the idea of death, a cult of pseudo-death and pseudo-transcendence. Death becomes Liebestod, painful and exhilarating, or at worst charming and sweetly tearful. I speak here, of course, not of the great romantic artists and thinkers at their best, but of the general beaten track which leads from Kant to the popular philosophies of the present day. When the neo-Kantian Lucifer gets a glimpse of real death and real chance he takes refuge in sublime emotions and veils with an image of tortured freedom that which has been rightly said to be the proper study of philosophers.⁵

Murdoch's criticism of Kant's rationale of moral law is based on her belief that he "followed a sound instinct" in searching for "something clean and pure outside the mess of the selfish empirical psyche," but that he looked in the wrong direction. His search turned back to the individual self, now become angelic, and he and his followers have accepted the image ever since. Murdoch, instead, looks out of the self for the cleanness and purity, and in the process of looking finds virtuous action implicit. She reasons:

I want now to return to the beginning and look at the powerful energy system of the self-defensive psyche in the light of the question, How can we make ourselves better? With such an opponent to deal with, one may doubt whether the idea of the proud, naked will be directed toward right actions is a realistic and sufficient formula.⁶

As substantiation she uses an analysis of the role of religion in the life of the "ordinary man," the belief in the "'not I, but Christ.'" Whether or not the help the individual believes is there in fact exists becomes secondary to the fact that prayer does direct one outside of

⁵The Sovereignty of Good, pp. 82-83.

⁶The Sovereignty of Good, p. 83.

oneself, thereby creating an energy for balanced, thoughtful ("Good") action as no other activity can (Sovereignty of Good, 83).

She points out that modern psychology supports this view in the sense that religion is a legitimate way to alter one's consciousness and stimulate moral energy:

Modern psychology here supports the ordinary person's, or ordinary believer's, instinctive sense of the importance of his states of mind and the availability of supplementary energy. Psychology might indeed prompt contemporary behaviouristic philosophers to re-examine their discarded concepts of "experience and consciousness." By opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us. We are anxiety-ridden animals.⁷

The crucial links in Murdoch's logical proof of her philosophical position reside in her convictions that 1) other influential philosophers, especially Kant, have grappled unsatisfactorily with the question of moral action; 2) psychology has constructed its system on the belief in man's instinctive concern with his own quality of consciousness; and, therefore, 3) a change in an individual's consciousness that directs him toward "right action" must necessarily be related to virtue. In her words,

Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying veil which partially conceals the world. Our states of consciousness differ in quality, our fantasies and reveries are not trivial and unimportant, they are profoundly connected with our energies and our ability to choose and act. And if quality of consciousness matters, then anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity, and realism is to be connected with virtue.⁸

⁷The Sovereignty of Good, pp. 83-84.

⁸The Sovereignty of Good, p. 84.

Thus having indicated the direction that consciousness must take in order to alter it toward balanced unselfishness, Murdoch goes on to assess the effect that the experience of beauty has as an occasion for moving an individual simultaneously in a direction that leads to moral energy and away from consciousness of self.

Murdoch's idea here was stimulated by a hint in Plato's Phaedrus (250): "Beauty is the only thing that we love by instinct." In this dialogue, Plato considers the contemplation of beauty a stimulus to "good" action of the will. For Murdoch, the experience of beauty has an effect on the individual that "recent philosophers" tend to neglect, but which she insists should not be overlooked.

Murdoch defines beauty as "the convenient and traditional name of something which art and nature share, and which gives a fairly clear sense to the idea of quality of experience and change of consciousness" (Sovereignty of Good, 84). Beginning with contemplation of beauty in nature, specifically the example of the kestrel, observation of which leads to self-forgetfulness, Murdoch opens her discussion of moral change at this point of accessibility. Virtue is implicit in selfless contemplation of animals, birds, and trees: "Not how the world is, but that it is, is the mystical "(Sovereignty of Good, 85)".

Consideration of beauty in art, however, immediately introduces additional subjectivity and vaguery to the assessment of art's effect on an individual. Murdoch's definition of art, for example, is highly selective:

"From now on I mean good art, not fantasy art, affords us pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent."⁹

Her definition not only calls into question the "pure delight" of the beholder, but also invites considerable speculation as to where "good art" leaves off and "fantasy art" begins. Some of this speculation is voiced by James Griffin in his review of The Sovereignty of Good, entitled "The Fat Ego" (Griffin, 1972).

Griffin strenuously objects to Murdoch's entire philosophy, which is to him based on self-evident "truisms." He specifically takes exception to her thesis that attention is the guide to "right conduct." He therefore disagrees with her analogy that beholding great art is a way to perceive the "reality" behind everyday inventions and illusions, but then suggests that literature, rather than representational art, might be a more accurate and useful analogy, though not without faults. Griffin's basic objection, that Murdoch interprets "truisms," is from one point of view unassailable: philosophy does in fact deal in truisms in that it considers fundamental aspects of human existence. One is unavoidably led to somewhat "obvious," though not necessarily disappointing, conclusions. His fundamental objection, however, that attention ("love") does not necessarily lead to forgetfulness of self, is one that is commonly voiced. Griffin reasons as follows:

Of course one may define "true vision of another" to mean "loving another," and define that in turn to mean something that would not allow behaving immorally towards the other. But then it is no longer clear at all that "successful attention" is the opposite of "inability to see reality." Because we may be able

⁹The Sovereignty of Good, p. 85.

to see the reality of some other person, in the usual sense of these words, and still not love them, in the sense Miss Murdoch would be attaching to the notion. Miss Murdoch may say that this is just her point: that any failure in love is just a failure in the perception of reality and just demonstrates the need to put oneself more in touch with the reality of the other person. But how would she show this? Certainly the truisms mentioned above do not lend support for this quite extreme position.¹⁰

Murdoch would counter with the ultimate example of monistic love of even Griffin's "unlovable" people, Christ's all-encompassing love, which could overcome all enemies and obstacles if loved in the "right" way. Without limiting her philosophy to organized religion, however, Murdoch's philosophy remains the implicitly romantic assertion of this inherent spiritual possibility in all people "made in God's image." This essentially loving point of view is Murdoch's conception of how a "great artist" sees the world and forms the center of the artist's desire to reproduce that conception for others to see.

Griffin correspondingly objects to Murdoch's assertion that "good art . . . is the difficult process of piercing the veil which the fat ego casts over the world" and cites three reasons for his objection: 1) the consideration of non-representational art (music, abstract expressionism); 2) whether "good art" is a successful struggle to pierce the veil; and 3) that literature might be a far superior example of the ability of art to render reality. Regarding the first point, Griffin asserts that "a Mark Rothko painting can command our attention in the way a kestrel can. I agree. But in this case the important comment to make . . . is that it is only a truism again" (Griffin, 80). He spends even more time attempting to vanquish Murdoch's description of

¹⁰James Griffin, "The Fat Ego," Essays in Criticism 22 (1972), p. 78.

the effort that great artists share in depicting reality. Griffin says,

I think, in contrast, . . . that there is much great art without a struggle to reach reality (it may involve other struggles but that is a different matter), that great art can consist in the presentation of a reality that is accessible Or when a painter, an impressionist say, captures all the glorious colours and textures of a woman's skin, hair, and dress, I do not think that he had inevitably first to cut through heavy draperies with which his ego had covered them. Of course, it usually involves a painter in immense labour to see exactly what it is about the fall of light on skin and hair and dress that gives them that appearance, and then to acquire the technique to depict them, but that, as I have said, is quite another matter. And it is not possible to reply to my doubt that art which represents accessible things is, ipso facto, not great art, that art becomes great only in the virtue of penetrating stubborn appearance to reach a hidden reality. Such a reply would involve an uninterestingly idiosyncratic notion of great art.¹¹

Murdoch's view of artistic realities is, perhaps, an "uninterestingly idiosyncratic notion," but it nonetheless encompasses artistic technique (the play of light on skin and hair and dress) as well as the struggle to see a truth (not necessarily the truth) in what the artist studies, and his effort to render it as closely as possible on canvas, or linoleum, or glass, or paper, doomed always to the knowledge and expectation of an imperfect rendition. Speaking of literature and painting, Murdoch states,

They (literature and painting) show us the absolute pointlessness of virtue while exhibiting its supreme importance; the enjoyment of art is a training in the love of virtue. The pointlessness of art is not the pointlessness of a game; it is the pointlessness of human life itself, and form in art is properly the simulation of the self-contained aimlessness of the universe. Good art reveals what we are usually too selfish and too timid to recognize, the minute and absolutely random detail of the world, and reveals it together with the sense of unity and form. This form often seems to us mysterious because it resists the easy patterns of the fantasy, whereas there is nothing mysterious about the forms of bad art since they are the recognizable and

¹¹Griffin, p. 81.

familiar rat-runs of selfish day-dream. Good art shows us how difficult it is to be objective by showing us how differently the world looks to an objective vision.¹²

Griffin's third criticism, that the example of literature is a more appropriate analogy than that of the visual arts, if they are to be defined so limitedly, is not made without its own kind of reservation. His comments simply delineate the limitations peculiar to this other mode of artistic expression:

Literature . . . may fit best of all, but we may fail to understand a Macbeth or a Hamlet because, as a scientist fails, we lack the necessary intellect to comprehend. . . . A Shakespeare may need a different kind of intellect from a scientist, but intellect he needs, and it may fail him. Sometimes the subject matter of literature is profound and perception is difficult. Our fat ego does not make it so; it just is. Reality is hidden for many reasons; our struggle toward reality has many enemies. As gross as the ego may be, Miss Murdoch has, I think, succumbed to a strange kind of egoism herself: she has made it too fat.¹³

Griffin concludes his observations about Murdoch's yielding to the "pull of mystical monism" and her tailoring of definitions of aesthetics to fit her conception of "right" moral behavior:

Oversimplifications can illuminate. And generalizations about art may be over-simple because they are normative; they may say, quite legitimately, not what art is but what good art is. But generalisations which do not do justice to the variety of good art are of little use. They might be made useful by restriction and qualification. And that is the treatment which, I think, Miss Murdoch's thesis about art needs.¹⁴

At the end of her intensive discussion of the analogy of art, Murdoch mentions Plato's reservations about art, his growing mistrust of

¹²The Sovereignty of Good, p. 86.

¹³Griffin, p. 82.

¹⁴Griffin, p. 85.

it, and his replacement in his ideal society with other more "reliable" sources of beauty:

Plato held that beauty could be a starting-point of the good life, but he came to mistrust art and we can see played out in that great spirit the peculiarly distressing struggle between the artist and the saint. Plato allowed to the beauty . . . of the lovely boy an awakening power which he denied to the beauty . . . of nature or of art. He seems to have come to believe that all art is bad art, a mere fiction and consolation which distorts reality. About nature he seems, in the context of the theory of forms, to have been at least once in doubt. Are there forms of mud, hair, dirt? If there are then nature is redeemed into the area of truthful vision. . . . when we use the nature of art as a clue, we may be able to learn more about the central area of morality if we examine what are essentially the same concepts more simply on display elsewhere.¹⁵

In her recent monograph, The Fire and the Sun (1977), Murdoch addresses this question of why Plato banished the artists from his ideal society. Her conclusions, after a detailed survey of his works, revolve basically around two issues: 1) that Plato, in formulating his system of morality, was forced to consider art first before denouncing it, and 2) that this initial consideration leaves a more telling imprint on his ideas than his later renunciation. In essence, Plato himself was an artist who is remembered for his artistic creations; his writings contain the images and characters that portray his ideas.

Murdoch uses the analogy of the cave from the Republic in order to substantiate the first point:

Art is about the pilgrimage from appearance to reality (the subject of every good play and novel) and exemplifies in spite of Plato what his philosophy teaches concerning the therapy of the soul. This is the "universal," the high concern which Tolstoy said was the proper province of the artist. The divine (intelligent) cause persuades the necessary cause so as to bring

¹⁵The Sovereignty of Good, pp. 88-89.

about the best possible. It is the task of mortals (as artists and as men) to understand the necessary hardness of the real properties of the world, the effects of the wandering causes, why good purposes are checked and where the mystery of the random has to be accepted. It is not easy to do justice to this hardness and this randomness without either smoothing them over with fantasy or exaggerating them into (cynical) absurdity. Indeed "the absurd" in art, often emerging as an attempt to defeat easy fantasy, may merely provide it with a sophisticated disguise. The great artist, while showing us what is not saved, implicitly shows us what salvation means.¹⁶

In this way Murdoch essentially answers Griffin's most strenuous objections to her belief in artistic insight, responsible and irresponsible. Her main assertion is that the true concepts are, perhaps, simple (or over-simple) by virtue of their truth, but that their truth can be actually perceived only by close investigation of all the contingencies surrounding it.

Hence, Plato's rejection of the artist is based on psychological and philosophical positions that Plato represented, significantly, by artistic means. Murdoch expands this last point in more detail:

Plato says (Phaedrus, Letter VIII) that no sensible man will commit his thought to words and that a man's thoughts are likely to be better than his writings. Without raising philosophical problems about what a man's thoughts are, one may reply that the discipline of committing oneself to clarified public form is proper and rewarding: the final and best discoveries are often made in the actual formulation of the statement. The careful responsible skillful use of words is our highest instrument of thought and one of our highest modes of being: an idea which might seem obvious but is not now by any means universally accepted. There may in theoretical studies, as in art, be so-called ultra-verbal insights at any level; but to call ultimate truth ineffable is to utter a quasi-religious principle which should not be turned round against the careful verbalization of humbler truths. Nor did Plato in practice do this. He

¹⁶Iris Murdoch, The Fire and the Sun (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977), p. 80.

wanted what he more than once mentions, immortality through art; he felt and indulged the artist's desire to produce unified, separable, formal, durable objects. He was also the master, indeed, the inventor, of a pure calm relaxed mode of philosophical exposition which is a high literary form and a model forever. Of course he used metaphor, but philosophy needs metaphor and metaphor is basic; how basic is the most basic philosophical question. Plato also had no doubt a strong personal motive which prompted him to write. . . . Art launches philosophy as it launches religion, and it was necessary for Plato, as it was for the evangelists, to write if the Word was not to be sterile and the issue of the Father was to be recognized as legitimate.¹⁷

Murdoch's position remains consistent: art (literature and painting) are potential means to transcend consciousness of self, if only by seeing the world through another pair of eyes, using possibly unfamiliar though illuminating symbols. Pursuing her line of reasoning in "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts," she maintains that art imposes on the selflessly reproduced random detail of the universe a pattern which reveals in new configurations the "truths" which are manifest in the everyday world:

We are presented with a truthful image of the human condition in a form which can be steadily contemplated; and indeed this is the only context in which many of us are capable of contemplating it at all.¹⁸

The artist renders the truth with "pity and justice," imposing a form on a world that otherwise seems fragmented and dangerous:

However, human life is chancy and incomplete. It is the role of tragedy, and also of comedy, and of painting to show us suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation. Or if there is

¹⁷The Fire and the Sun, pp. 87-88.

¹⁸The Sovereignty of Good, p. 87.

any consolation it is the austere consolation of a beauty which teaches that nothing in life is of any value except the attempt to be virtuous. Masochism is the artist's greatest and most subtle enemy.¹⁹

Following Plato's reasoning in excluding it from his ideal society, Murdoch then likens the metaphor of contemplation of great art to another intellectual discipline. She uses the example of his mathematics from the Republic to maintain that the same function is served by a "craft" from the "real world" as through the fabrications of an imagination. Learning the discipline and the varied symbols of mathematics, much like learning the alphabets and structures of a foreign language, impose a quite separate coherence upon the world as we know it, and thus performs the same function of the transfer of one's attention from the self to the learning of another way to interpret what surrounds one. In this way one develops a "judicious respectful sensibility" to another entity (body of knowledge) entirely apart from oneself.

Through art we come to see relationships from the real world with a greater clarity. Art strips us of our illusions and is an irreplaceably educational human activity therefore, "a place in which the nature of morality can be seen." We surrender ourselves to its authority with an unpossessive and unselfish love, recognizing as through a rent in the veil of our dreamlike consciousness, the true relationship of death and chance.

¹⁹The Sovereignty of Good, p. 87.

Clearly one can assume, given the lengthy discussion, that contemplation of the "great art" of classical Greece and Rome, along with that which was produced during the Italian and English Renaissances, is contemplation of the beautiful and understandably beneficial to the beholder. This now uncontestedly "great art," which has endured the weights of history and inflation, is her essential reference. The fact that her definition seems to omit the more experimental forms of visual art weakens her argument only to the extent that the impressionist and expressionist schools have generally recognizable artistic merit, the ability to allow a person to lose himself in their contemplation. Art of the last two centuries, but particularly of the twentieth, however, can lead the spectator back into himself rather than beyond by presenting views of "reality" on contemporary canvasses that are ever more conscripted and vulgarly distorted. As such they seem far from the "transcendent true picture of external reality" that Plato and Murdoch designate.

If all art possesses, however, the virtue of having been created by human beings and is therefore the more edifying because it is more directly "about" human affairs, it must be considered beneficial equally for the beholder to see an aesthetically "shocking" interpretation of reality as an aesthetically "pleasing" one. The assumption, then, that contemplation of art is contemplation of beauty is perhaps the essential misunderstanding among Murdoch's detractors. For Murdoch, beauty in the contemplation of great art, spoken, written, painted, or sculpted, must be that very "beauty" that is the act of leaving the self behind in

favor of adopting, for a minute or a lifetime, another person's view of the world. Abandonment of the deceptions and illusions of everyday life has implicit value, and is as far as most human beings can progress toward the sun.

Murdoch comments on twentieth century views of reality as represented in various forms of art in her final comments in The Fire and the Sun:

Plato feared the consolations of art. He did not offer a consoling theology. His psychological realism depicted God as subjecting mankind to a judgment as relentless as that of the old Zeus, although more just. A finely meshed moral causality determines the fate of the soul. That the movement of the saving of Eros is toward an impersonal pictureless void is one of the paradoxes of a complete religion. To present the idea of God at all, even as myth, is a consolation, since it is impossible to defend this image against the prettifying attentions of art. Art will mediate and adorn, and develop magical structures to conceal the absence of God or his distance. We live now amid the collapse of many such structures, and as religion and metaphysics in the West withdraw from the embraces of art, we are it might seem being forced to become mystics through the lack of any imagery which could satisfy the mind. Sophistry and magic break down at intervals, but they never go away and there is no end to their collusion with art and to the consolations which, perhaps fortunately for the human race, they can provide; and art, like writing and like Eros, goes on existing for better and for worse.²⁰

²⁰The Fire and the Sun, pp. 88-89.

Murdoch's concern with the artist and the favorable effect of artistic creation on the beholder is not simply a convenient analogy for explication of her philosophical concepts. As suggested by her concentration on Platonic thought, she, like Plato, is a writer as well as a philosopher. Murdoch, however, will be remembered for her fiction probably more than for her philosophy. While both forms of writing find their essences in expression of universal human truths, fictional accounts demand more conscious artistry, in the sense of artificiality and artifice, than do philosophical treatises. In fiction the reader is led to consider appearances with varying degrees of objectivity and to discover underlying truths, much as one must in living day to day. In philosophy, the truths are stated directly, only dramatized somewhat by simple metaphors (Sovereignty of Good, 53). In fiction we are made to watch the shadows on the cave wall; in philosophy we stare into the fire.

Having devoted her life to the expression of truth in two quite different though complementary written forms, Murdoch is personally as well as critically concerned with the essentials of the artistic process as a mode of truth-telling. The mechanics of formulating numerous characters within various fictional worlds for whatever purpose presents strategic questions that she confronts continually in the writing process. She frequently incorporates artists as characters into her novels, painters as well as writers, investing them with periods of

intense creativity, but more often plaguing them with psychological deterrents to productivity. She also uses artists, particularly painters, to make dramatically explicit the "artistic temperament," stereotypic reactions to it, and the self-criticism that is essential to the artistic product.

It is precisely this intense self-criticism that blocks the creativity in most of the writers she uses as characters. For example, Miles Greensleave in Bruno's Dream (1969) is a would-be writer who is experiencing an unproductive period because of his psychological losses. His minutely introspective examination of his situation, the loss of a beloved wife, lends insight into the writing process. Miles's situation dramatizes the necessity for divorcing the self from the final product in order to produce a viable piece of work. The writing that proceeds from his despair is heavily sentimental and romantic, turning her death into an unspeakably tragic experience instead of objectifying it and working toward acceptance. Rain Carter is presented in The Sandcastle (1957) as the "typical" artist. Through her the reader witnesses the artistic process as she creates, in the course of the novel, the portrait she has been commissioned to paint. Rain literally demonstrates the process while Miles reports it in detail. Murdoch's most intricate depiction of the blocked artist, however, is the central character of The Black Prince (1973), Bradley Pearson, who is discussed in detail in Section III of this chapter.

A second major function of "art" in Murdoch's novels is the incorporation of descriptions of actual paintings into the plot to the extent that they become important reflections or indexes of moral

judgment. The subject of the paintings--the scenes, figures, and colors used to create the tone of the artistic statement--all eventually bear a curious relevance to the particular plot of which they form a part. For example, the Tintoretto in An Unofficial Rose (1962) becomes a vehicle for character revelation, depending upon who has custody of it, who wishes to sell it, and exactly what it represents to each individual. Murdoch's most obvious use of an actual painting to dominate a novel is in Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974), which takes its title from Titian's painting and can be interpreted as a kind of moral allegory.²¹

Less encompassing pieces of art which nonetheless complement the plot and the philosophical ramifications of the novel in which they appear are, again, Rain Carter's actual portrait of Demoyte in The Sandcastle which affects Demoyte himself and those who view it, the Tintoretto in An Unofficial Rose, discussed later in this section, and the tapestry of Actaeon and Diana discussed in Chapter 4, Section III with the novel Henry and Cato (1976).

A third function of the art motif in Murdoch combines both the process and the literal artist to create a peculiarly Murdochian male character type classified by Schopenhauer as "the esthete," or the collector of beautiful art objects whose aesthetic sense is exceptionally highly developed for his milieu. He is largely misunderstood by his friends and lovers and is therefore quite isolated within the beautiful world he has created for himself. He is sometimes a dabbler

²¹A discussion of the painting accompanies explication of the novel in Chapter 2, Section III.

in creative writing, but only as an avocation and usually quite privately. He incorporates the character traits of the first category in his blocked creativity and the objets d'art of the second. He is always excessively introspective, and his life is usually made to take a tragic turn.

Strong examples of this type are Sir Matthew Gibson-Grey in An Accidental Man (1971), Clifford Laird in A Word Child (1975).²² These Murdochian males embody the character traits generally associated with females (Goshgarian, 1974): indecision, hypercriticism, hyperfastidiousness, hypersensitivity. These traits prevent constructive action in the male characters. They are turned in on themselves to the degree that simply getting from day to day becomes a major endeavor, an effort sometimes resolved in suicide.

It is clear, then, when one recalls Murdoch's philosophical ideal of selfless and transcendent observation, that she is once again employing the same motif--art--as analogy in her fiction as she has in her philosophy. While her philosophical explanation of the concept is not without its inconsistencies (Griffin 1972), she uses the art motif in dramatically different ways in her fiction. Art in Murdoch's novels exhibits simultaneously the inherent paradoxes within an artist's daily life, as well as Murdoch's particular ability to view a concept from dramatically different perspectives, endowing each with fictional life that convincingly mirrors the everyday.

²²See Chapter 1, Section III for discussion, and Simon Foster in A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970).

Each of these three applications of the art motif (the process, the object, and the esthete) finds specific fictional form. What follows here is a discussion of one principal example to illustrate the three treatments in order to provide further insight into her multiple uses of each. Rain Carter in The Sandcastle is the clearest example in Murdoch's canon of the stereotypical artist. She affords Murdoch the clearest opportunity for an explicit illustration of the artistic process. Rain is deliberately drawn in this way to reveal the limitations in others' perceptions of her artistic ability as well as her "artistic personality" in relation to other human beings. The "golden" woman of the Tintoretto in An Unofficial Rose has an unusual effect upon everyone she touches. The painting becomes a gauge of the moral principles held by those who behold it. The physical treatment of the painting by father and son (Hugh and Randall Peronett), whether the painting is retained or sold, becomes a metaphor for their diverging relationship and their degrees of ideality. Third, Murdoch's complex merger of the artist, the artistic process, and the object itself appears in the character of Bradley Pearson in The Black Prince, the subject of Section III of this chapter. The book itself is a statement on the relativity of the artistic process. Brad is an "esthete" in his fastidious maintenance of the "ideal" that he conceives regarding the process of fiction. And, as in typical Murdoch, multiple points of view are included to eliminate conclusive judgment short of the final location of the main characters.

The Sandcastle (1957) presents Murdoch's most explicit statement about the artist, people's attitudes toward the artist, and the artistic

process itself, by means of a straightforward plot that revolves around a married man's affair with an artist. Rain Carter, a young artist whose father was a recognized portrait painter, is commissioned five hundred guineas by St. Bride's Academy to paint a portrait of its just-retired headmaster, Mr. Demoyte. William Mor, a master at St. Bride's and a favorite of Demoyte's, has been husband to Nan and father to Felicity and Donald for twenty-five years, and the marriage is clearly a settled routine. Neither Nan nor William Mor is unused to the "soporific feeling of conjugal boredom" in its familiar superior-dependent pattern directed by Nan. Their marriage, like all marriages, is a "dangerous machine" (The Sandcastle, 21) in Demoyte's opinion. He continues, "Marriage is organized selfishness with the blessing of society. How hardly shall a married person enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Though Demoyte is quite fond of Mor, he resents Nan's overbearing manner. Nan, in turn, believes Demoyte to be an eccentric and all eccentricity to be affectation. Demoyte's almost misanthropic statement on marriage reflects not so much on marriage per se, but on the sort of smooth superficiality that threatens to emasculate Mor. Demoyte, therefore, strongly favors the affair between Mor and Rain. Without his pointed encouragement, in fact, the obvious attraction and limited flirtation would have remained in these initial stages.

In the simple structure of The Sandcastle, Murdoch isolates some basic elements of a human relationship that has descended to predictable pattern, and introduces a completely "foreign" element: the artist.

Since the systematization of marriage results from a machine-like interaction between human beings, it basically stems from the deliberate or habitual inability to "see" the other person for what he/she really is. The "foreign" element that is introduced is, predictably, another person's truth. Between two sets of perfectly coordinated lies steps the truth (or another truth), the artist whose presence causes only a limited furor.

Mor's and Nan's relationship is characterized early in the novel:

"Oh, for Christ's sake, Nan," said Mor, "do shut up! Do stop talking about money!" He got up. He ought to have gone into school long ago.

"When you speak to me like that, Bill," said Nan, "I really wonder why we go on. I really think it might be better to stop." Nan said this from time to time, always in the cool, unexcited voice in which she conducted her arguments with her husband. It was all part of the pattern. So was Mor's reply.

"Don't talk that nonsense, Nan. I'm sorry I spoke in that way." It all passed in a second.²³

The crucial question that the novel asks consistently, both literally in conversation and figuratively in the character of Rain Carter, is whether the marriage should continue. The question is never answered in or by the novel, though opinions are offered. The marriage simply continues. Rain Carter's presence throws this conjugal systematization into dramatic relief, much like the shadows on the cave wall.

Rain's truthfulness, i.e., her quiet resistance to social pressure, is revealed in her conduct at Demoyte's dinner with the Mors as they are

²³Iris Murdoch, The Sandcastle (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 16.

discussing the Reverend Giles Everard, Demoyte's successor as headmaster at St. Bride's Academy, whom Demoyte holds in contempt because their views of education are diametrically opposed. Demoyte is used to ruling his and everyone's roosts, so that Rain Carter's public response to him is notable:

"You'll get nothing to drink with Evvy," said Demoyte. "Better stoke up now. Have some more wine, Miss Carter. Can't I persuade you, Mrs. Mor? See, Miss Carter is drinking like a fish and is more sober than any of us." More noticed this too.

Miss Carter did not rise to this quip. She said rather solemnly, "I have only met Mr. Everard once. I look forward to seeing him again."

"Impossible!" said Demoyte. "What did you think of poor Evvy? Let's hear Evvy summed up!" He winked at Mor.

Miss Carter hesitated. She cast a quick suspicious look at Demoyte. "I think he has a fresh and gentle face," she said firmly. "He seems a man without any malice in him. That is both rare and good."

Demoyte seemed taken aback for a moment. Mor taunted him with his eyes. "Little puritan!" said Demoyte. "So you reprove us all! Let me fill your glass yet again."

"No, thank you, Mr. Demoyte," said Miss Carter. "Of course it takes a long time to know a man, and this is only an impression. What do you think, Mrs. Mor?"²⁴

Murdoch shows in Rain's measured responses not the inability to venture an opinion, but rather the determination to regard every human being as a separate entity, to withhold, infinitely if necessary, a final judgment such as Demoyte or Nan readily and authoritatively offers. Rain therefore suspends her judgment on Evvy until she has gathered more facts about him.

Though Rain can easily be viewed as an idealist, or as an extremely guillible young woman, the principle Murdoch presents in her is clear, and it is the principle of The Sovereignty of Good: each person deserves

²⁴The Sandcastle, pp. 30-31.

a fair hearing and on individual terms. Murdoch places the principle in the character of an artist because to her the artist is the one soul in society who will tell the truth in his own particular idiom or medium, regardless of what others believe. Exposure to such adamant truth-telling is seen by Murdoch as not only refreshing but uplifting, the source of "good energy," or energy directed out of the self and toward others.

It is for this reason also that she is given the name "Rain Carter." The simple surname recalls the artistic ability she is said to have inherited from her dead father, and her elemental name signifies her unity with nature along with the cleansing and renewing biblical associations (Wolfe, 1968; Watrin, 1972). Murdoch commonly associates simple honesty, guilelessness, justice, and reservation of judgment with sympathy for nature. Rain Carter is as refreshing and cleansing as her name sounds. She is most at home outside, as instanced by her and Mor's trip to the dark garden for roses, during which she embraces a sycamore because outside represents the absence of illusion, and inside its total presence. Natural beauty is what stimulates the beauty Rain embodies in her art. Her personal attractiveness is like that of the vessel which effects the transmutation of natural to artistic beauty.

This process of transmutation is a principal element of The Sandcastle. Among her and Mor's romantic adventures and the growth of their mutual attraction, Rain's painstaking process of painting Demoyte's portrait, deciding just which brushstrokes can create what illusion, she grows to realize that the portrait which will place

Demoyte in people's memory for generations is within her determination. She can create character with a nuance, a subtle stroke on a cheek; a glint in his eye can fix his personality in the minds of generations to come. Her task then becomes two fold. She must learn the man, which is why she has taken a room in Demoyte's Brayling's Close, and then she must transmit the knowledge exactly and fairly onto canvas.

In Rain Carter's dedication to profession Murdoch creates a particularized illustration of the principal concept of her philosophy. Mor finds her strong-mindedness somewhat shocking: "she had a sense of vocation like a steam hammer" (The Sandcastle, 44); Rain, however, insists somewhat pedantically on the exactness of her rendition of Mr. Demoyte:

"As you will realize, painting a portrait is not just a matter of sitting down and painting what you see. Where the human face is concerned, we interpret what we see more immediately and more profoundly than with any other object. A person looks different when we know him--he may even look different as soon as we know one particular thing about him. And in any case there are simpler problems. A choice must be made about the clothes which the person is to wear in the picture, the posture which he is to hold, the expression on his face, the background, the accessories. A consideration of all these things will then affect one's methods and one's techniques. It is impossible to be in a hurry."²⁵

Rain herself criticizes the didactic nature of her speech, as Mor has done silently, wondering whether he was hearing Rain Carter's words or her father's. Rain's self-criticism offers an insight into the artist's depth of honesty and reveals the accuracy of her assessment of Demoyte:

²⁵The Sandcastle, p. 45.

"Of course, what I said just now was pretentious nonsense, what Mr. Demoyte would call cant. At least I know him well enough to know one of his favorite words. I want to paint a really good likeness. We all think that there is something which is what a person is really like, and that this takes some time to learn. I think you know what Mr. Demoyte is really like, and I want to find out."²⁶

Her conversation with Mor, however, reveals that Demoyte was testing her in his amusedly perverse and mischievous way. Demoyte deliberately changed his costume, substituting suits and ties for his customary corduroys and sportscoat, and falsified his literary production in order to create a false impression of himself, to throw her off the trail of his true character. Ironically, the book that he claims to have written is a book of poems written by his successor for whom he feels nothing but scorn, the Reverend Giles Everard ("Poor Evvy"). Demoyte categorizes Evvy as a simple-minded fool, but he is the man in whom Murdoch invests an aspect of her philosophy of Good. He entirely agrees with Nan Mor in this one regard when she explicitly states about Evvy, "I think fundamentally Mr. Everard is a fool, and if someone is a fool, especially if he's in a position of authority, this spoils his other good qualities" (The Sandcastle, 31).

Demoyte had originally indicated Mor as his successor, but, because of Mor's failure to adopt the Anglican faith, a situation inexcusable in a headmaster, Everard was appointed, much to Demoyte's vocal chagrin. Demoyte and Everard are presented as philosophical opposites. As head-

²⁶The Sandcastle, p. 46.

masters, they organize the curricula at St. Bride's Academy around principles that, in Demoyte's case, place intellectualism supreme, with only a passing nod at morality: ". . . if a boy could look after his Latin prose his character would look after itself" (The Sandcastle, 20).

"Poor Evvy," on the other hand, regards character formation as the primary consideration.

His first innovation had been to alter the school prospectus, which had formerly reflected Demoyte's predilection for star pupils, in such a way as to suggest that now St. Bride's was concerned, not with selecting and cherishing the brilliant boy, but with welcoming and bringing to his humbler maturity, such as it was, the mediocre and even the dim-witted. Demoyte watched these changes with fury and scorn.²⁷

Everard has charge of St. Bride's, thus reversing the direction Demoyte indicated. Everard is a remarkable human being but is not appreciated as such.

With Rain Carter representing the artistic representation of Murdoch's philosophy and Everard the purely moral, Rain's withheld judgment of Everard becomes significant. She cannot draw conclusions about him until she knows him better but bears him no malice in the meantime. Mor ponders her remarks in quiet reflection on Everard:

In some sense of the word Evvy was undoubtedly a good man. He was well-intentioned and unselfish; indeed he seemed utterly to lack the conception of getting anything for himself. Evvy's life was not constructed, it seemed to Mor, in such a way as to leave any place in it where he could store things for himself. Most people's lives had a sort of bulge or recess in which they piled up their selfish acquisitions, their goods, their fame, their power. Evvy had no such private place. He lived in the open, with simplicity, seeming to lack altogether the concepts of vanity or

²⁷The Sandcastle, pp. 20-21.

ambition, weaknesses which he was equally incapable of harbouring within himself or of recognizing in others. If he hurt people it was through indecision or sheer obtuseness, and not through any preference for having things his own way, since his own way was something which he had never really developed.²⁸

As an administrator, Reverend Everard lacks a good deal; his utter goodness equips him to lead others in only a vaguely and softly moralistic manner. His goodness does not allow him to make judgments that would decisively affect the lives of others:

Doubtless such a character ought not to be in a position of power. All the same, it occurred to Mor more forcibly than ever before, there was something impressive about Mr. Everard. And he wondered too how it was that while Mr. Everard was so gentle and unselfish, and Mr. Demoyte so much the reverse, he felt deep love and tenderness for Demoyte and could hardly summon up any affection at all for poor Evvy.²⁹

Everard is presented as well intentioned but weak, which is Murdoch's typical approach to priests and pastors in her novels until her creation of Brendan Craddock in Henry and Cato; he is given a dignity and a strength to accompany his unwavering faith.

In The Sandcastle, however, Murdoch eventually brings Everard together with Rain Carter, Mor, and Mr. Bledyard, the art instructor at St. Bride's, for a dinner at Everard's. In this meeting Murdoch invests her characters with various interpretations of her philosophy. Their discussion unifies the preoccupation with the artistic process that dominates the novel.

²⁸The Sandcastle, p. 69.

²⁹The Sandcastle, p. 69.

Bledyard is another unusual character, presented as a foil for Rain as an artist with an equally independent outlook. His "hang-dog" appearance and his curiously idiosyncratic speech, a periodic but arbitrary repetition of words, makes him as "foreign" an element as Rain, even though he is employed by St. Bride's. Rain's French extraction and long residence on the Mediterranean give a curious lilt to her pronunciation of some words; her diminutive figure, her dark hair boyishly cut, and her ability to appear "like a young boy actor" makes her speech and appearance correspondingly exceptional. Rain respects Bledyard's opinions on art, though she maintains that it is difficult to share his company for any length of time. Bledyard is capable of sitting mute through polite conversation, but once he begins on a topic that interests him, he intones ponderously to the exclusion of others, though they offer polite rebuttal. He is allowed only one lecture per year at the academy, since his speech impediment and his endlessly sonorous tone make for a hopelessly hilarious event.

At Everard's dinner, Bledyard is struck by Rain's candid appraisal of her childhood, a time which others imagine to have been idyllic by virtue of her father's tutelage while living on the Mediterranean. Rain's truthful response takes everyone by surprise and simultaneously introduces the title image. Among other things, the sandcastle image characterizes not only her childhood but also the outcome of her affair with Mor:

"Yes," said Miss Carter, "but a melancholy sea, as I remember it. A tideless sea. I can recall, as a child, seeing pictures in English children's books of boys and girls playing on the sand

and making sandcastles--and I tried to play on my sand. But a Mediterranean beach is not a place for playing on. It is dirty, and very dry. The tides never wash the sand or make it firm. When I tried to make a sandcastle the sand would just run away between my fingers. It was too dry to hold together. And even if I poured sea water over it, the sun would dry it up at once."³⁰

Bledyard is touched by Rain's silent tears at the memory of her father and his recent death. He responds by saying, "'Miss Carter, . . . I am a great admirer admirer of your father's work,'" knowing that such a comment is of greater comfort to Rain than any he would make concerning her condition directly.

Then ensues their central discussion of art, its importance to the human imagination and its proper methodology. Bledyard begins the statement in response to Rain's description of how her father taught her to paint:

"In fact, you can't teach teach children to paint They already know how to paint. It is the only art that comes naturally to all human beings. . . . But they forget it later, . . . they lose their innocence. They have to learn all over again after that. What does that prove? Painting is man's most fundamental mode of apprehension. We are incarnate creatures, our mode of knowledge is sensible, and vision is sovereign over the other senses. Before man could speak he could draw."³¹

Bledyard becomes the spokesman for Murdoch's eloquent defense of her art analogy for developing moral vision, but she has again created an eccentric, this time with dark shaggy locks and rugged, coarse features, to speak on its behalf. Her embodiment of her philosophy in such a creature reinforces the rarity of its occurrence in daily life.

³⁰The Sandcastle, pp. 73-74.

³¹The Sandcastle, p. 75.

In this scene, which holds the novel's most didactic passages next to Evvy's sermons, Murdoch has also given voice to the mode of living and perception which characterizes Rain, so that Bledyard represents the theory and Rain its illustration. Rain questions Bledyard further, utterly fascinated by his simultaneous sensitivity, articulation, and gross disregard of others. She asks, "'You think we give significance to the world by representing it?'" and he responds:

"Representation is an ambiguous word. . . . To represent something something is a task which must be undertaken with humility. What is the first and most fundamental truth which an incarnate being must realize? That he is a thing, a material object in space and time, and that as such he will come to an end. What is the next truth next truth which he must realize? That he is related on the one hand to God, who is not a thing, and on the other hand to other things . . . are some of them things and other of them God-related things like himself.³²

Given such realizations, the artist develops the Murdochian humility toward the world in his statement of it.

From these observations, a discussion of representational art develops. Rain and Bledyard debate the theory behind depicting human figures, how the early Church discouraged exact representation of the human face, especially that of Christ, but that the secularism of the Renaissance reversed the trend. Bledyard comments on the last point, "'However, when we are overtaken by the secular spirit of the Renaissance, we find a more exclusive interest in the human shape as such, conjoined, alas, with a total loss of that insight and that reverence'" (The Sandcastle, 77). Rain responds to the last comment:

³²The Sandcastle, p. 76.

"Are you suggesting . . . that we should treat the representation of the human figure in some way quite differently from the representation of other things?"

"As you know," said Bledyard, "we find it natural to make the distinction. Only we do not make it absolutely absolutely enough. When confronted with an object which is not a human being, we must of course treat it reverently. We must, if we paint it, attempt to show what it is like in itself, and not treat it as a symbol of our moods and wishes. The great painter the great painter is he who is humble enough in the presence of the object to attempt merely to show what the object is like. But this merely, in painting, is everything.

"How I agree with you!" said Miss Carter.

"But," said Bledyard, "when we are in the presence of another human being, we are not confronted simply by an object--We are confronted by God."³³

At this point, Rain interjects the pressing question, in light of her presence at Brayling's Close, "'Do you mean that we ought not to paint other beings?'"

Bledyard responds, "'Each must find out his own way. If it were possible, ah, if it were possible to treat a head as if it were a spherical material object!'" At this point Mor requests a clarification of the distinction that Bledyard has drawn, and Bledyard explains at some length:

"Who is worthy to understand another person?" He spoke with no more and no less intensity than he had at the start. He answered Mor's words, but his eyes were fixed on Miss Carter. "Upon an ordinary material thing we can look with reverence, wondering simply at its being. But when we look upon a human face we interpret it by what we are ourselves. And what are we? . . . It is a fact that we cannot really observe really observe our betters. Vices and peculiarities are easy to portray. But who

³³The Sandcastle, pp. 77-78.

can look reverently enough upon another human face? The true portait-painter should be a saint--and saints have other things to do than paint portraits. Religious painters often understand this obscurely. Representations representations of Our Lord are usually not presented as if they were pictures of an individual. Pictures of Our Lord usually affect us by the majesty of the conception, and not by any particular expression or gesture. Where the picture is individualized, as in Carravagio's rendering of Christ at Emmaus, we are shocked. We should be equally shocked at any representation of a human face."³⁴

Implicit in Bledyard's explanation are assumptions basic to Murdochian philosophy: first, that the human being is ultimately unknowable, and second, that he is therefore God-like and should be approached with as much dignity and wonder. Because each person is a fragment of the unknowable he should be treated accordingly.

Rain is more concerned with her job at hand than with Bledyard's philosophy. She must actually begin painting the portrait, so she asserts in the final comments of the evening:

"What you say is so very abstract, Mr. Bledyard. One might think beforehand that it is impossible to depict a human face with sufficient reverence--and perhaps, in some absolute sense, sufficient reverence there never is. But if we consider paintings by Rembrandt, by Goya, by Tintoretto, by--"³⁵

Her point is clear here. Rather than deliberate distortion of one's own impression of another person, one should try to discover and represent accurately that person's reality. It is precisely this conviction that leads Rain to the painstaking selection of background and costume for

³⁴The Sandcastle, pp. 78-79.

³⁵The Sandcastle, p. 79.

Demoyte's portrait, her choice of particular objects to include, and her choice of posture and expression. She seeks to paint "'your Demoyte, not my Demoyte.'"

Her decisions are true ones. She locates him in his exquisite sitting room amid the red and gold ambiance of his favorite Shiraz and Baluchistan carpets, his richly bound books, and his collected objets d'art. So beautifully does Rain fit herself into Demoyte's life for the purposes of observation, that on the evening of their first meeting she is taken by Mor for another luxurious object as she kneels on the floor inspecting a Shiraz. Demoyte's sitting room reflects his rich, classical intellect, his appreciation of beautiful objects, and his ability to bring myriad pieces together with no previous plan and watch them attain their own unity of impression:

. . . although the room was overcrowded and its contents extremely miscellaneous, all seemed to come together into a whirl of red and gold wherein each thing, though contributing to the whole, became more itself. A rich Feheran carpet covered the floor, almost entirely obscured by equally splendid rugs which lay edge to edge over its surface. Pieces of furniture stood about, their only obvious intention being to provide as many smooth surfaces as possible upon which might be placed cups, bowls, vases, boxes, together with a variety of smaller objects made of ivory, jade, jet, glass, and amber. Petit-point cushions crowded so thick upon most of the chairs that it was quite hard to find anywhere to sit down. The walls were papered in a gold and white pattern but were rarely visible between the most splendid of the rugs, which hung upon them, stretched at various angles between the floor and the ceiling and glowed there with silky vitality like the skins of fabulous animals.³⁶

In this room Demoyte is most comfortable; it is therefore the appropriate setting for his portrait. Rain dresses him in his sports

³⁶The Sandcastle, p. 26.

coat and corduroys, not without some harassment, and sets Demoyte at his ease. The chosen object is, appropriately, a gold-lettered calfskin volume, and his posture is described minutely as follows:

Demoyte had a way of holding a book with his fingers spread out across the two pages as if he were drawing the contents of it with his hand. The other hand was clenched upon the table and the arm straightened above it. It was the attitude of one who has been reading and who has now left the page to follow a thought of his own which the book had suggested. From the extremely decorative background Demoyte's head emerged with enormous force. The face was in repose, the curve of the lips expressing a sort of fastidious thoughtfulness rather than the sarcasm which was his more customary expression.³⁷

Rain's patient, open-minded, curious attitude has yielded effective decisions that depended on her insight into her subject. Demoyte's pose captures his scholarly bent, his classical tastes, and his independent habit of thought.

As a number of people view this striking portrait, their various approving nods and comments only serve to emphasize the major principle that Murdoch stresses: as each person deserves individual attention, so each who gives it will receive different impressions in his efforts to understand the person. The portrait of Demoyte is Rain's impression of the Demoyte of St. Bride's, but she necessarily must invest something of herself as well. As Mor views his long-respected and beloved mentor on canvas, he "felt that he was really seeing Demoyte for the first time; and with this a sudden compassion came over him. It was indeed the face of an old man" (The Sandcastle, 169). It is indicative of Mor's lack of insight and observation that he feels he has discovered his beloved

³⁷The Sandcastle, p. 169.

friend and mentor after having known him intimately for many years. The distance between Rain's and Mor's quality of perception is thereby explicitly illustrated.

At the same reception, however, after receiving Everard's congratulations, Rain smears an eyebrow on the portrait to indicate that her painting, which had appeared to be finished, was still in process. In fact, the portrait is always to be "in process" as the man and impressions change. Rain holds her breath for the authoritative pronouncement from Bledyard, however, and she is not disappointed:

"Miss Carter, this is an interesting picture, it is nearly a good picture. . . . But, . . . you have made your picture too beautiful It is a question of the head head, Miss Carter. You have chosen to present it as a series of definitions, well executed in themselves, I don't deny. But as it is, its strength its strength depends upon the power of these definitions to appeal to a conception of character in the observer. One result of this is that while your sitter looks old he does not look mortal. It is mass of the head that ought to impress us if the picture is to have the power of a masterpiece. The head should be seen as a coinherence coinherence of masses. The observation of character is very well. But this is a painting, Miss Carter."³⁸

As a result of this criticism, Rain determines to paint the head again, but as the day approaches, her resolve diminishes.

Her unconsummated affair with Mor has thrown them both into such a frenzy that he must struggle to do the minimum with his teaching duties and she has lost all inclination to paint. A London holiday for the "damned" pair relieves the tension for a time and allows a rapid tour of Rain's past by way of her and her father's portraits at an exclusive retrospective of Rain and Sidney Carter's work. It is at this exhibition

³⁸The Sandcastle, pp. 170-171.

that Mor realizes that Rain is indeed another, or several other, human beings besides the young, boyish "ragamuffin" he met at St. Bride's. She is, indeed, though still admittedly strongly imitative of her father's style, clearly an artist in her own right, independently wealthy, and capable of directing her own career. She has, however, fallen deeply in love with Mor and, from the distance and independent privacy that London affords, believes both can be happy. Once back to St. Bride's the gates of conscience again come crashing down.

It is significant that Bledyard's advice about art strongly impresses Rain and becomes a motive force for her proposed amendment of the portrait. Bledyard also is given an opportunity to reveal his beliefs on morality, particularly Mor's, in continuing an adulterous affair. Bledyard prevents a meeting between Rain and Mor on the tennis courts in order to encourage him to reconsider his actions. This conversation is overheard by Mor's son Donald and his friend, Jimmy Carde. Mor remains unimpressed and responds with simple anger.

Mor's lack of receptivity to Bledyard's unpleasantly severe but fair criticism marks a basic difference between Bill Mor and Rain Carter, or between the staid, moderate, routinous family person and the child-like, inquisitive, graceful, and receptive "artist." What Murdoch advocates for all people, and what underlies and makes credible Mor's attraction for Rain, is Rain's attitude, which is life-giving, productive, and contagious. Bledyard's didactic statements embody the same philosophy, though his large and ponderous body seems a contradiction. From the onset Rain seems to know that the affair was "wrong" and said so but nevertheless could not resist Mor's attentions.

Bledyard, however, the semi-objective artist-observer (All men in The Sandcastle fall partially or fully in love with Rain.) criticizes Mor with some telling logic; the artist takes the schoolmaster to task:

"You know what it [doing the 'right' thing] is, . . . You are deeply bound to your wife and to your children, and deeply rooted in your own life. Perhaps that life that life will hold you in spite of yourself. But if you break break these bonds you destroy a part of the world."

"Possibly," said Mor, "but I might then build another part." What he said sounded empty and trivial in his own ears. "And how can you, an outsider, assess the value of these bonds, as you call them, in terms of human happiness?"

"Happiness?" said Bledyard, making a face of non-comprehension. "What has happiness got to do with it? Do you imagine that you, or anyone, has some sort of right to happiness? That idea is a poor guide."

"It may be a poor guide," said Mor, "but it's the only one I've got!" He spoke with bitterness.

"That is not true, Mr. Mor," said Bledyard. He leaned forward, stooping over Mor, his long hair flapping. "There is such a thing as respect for reality. You are living on dreams now, dreams of happiness, dreams of freedom. But in all this you consider only yourself. You do not truly apprehend the distinct being of either your wife or Miss Carter. . . . You imagine . . . that to live in a state of extremity is necessarily to discover the truth about yourself. What you discover then is violence and emptiness. And of this you make a virtue. But look rather upon the others--and make yourself nothing in your awareness of them. . . . If you were to concern yourself truly with others and lay yourself open to any hurt that might come to you you would be enriched in a way of which you cannot now even conceive. The gifts of the spirit do not appeal to the imagination."³⁹

Bledyard's tirade follows close on the heels of "Revvy Evvy's" pabulum of the week, "Love knows," and despite the strength of both, Mor is determined to have his own way. Together they make a strong statement of Murdoch's philosophy that directly contradicts Demoyte's misanthropic comments on marriage as a machine that opens The Sandcastle. Because

³⁹The Sandcastle, pp. 213-214.

both are true, they must exist side by side, and the "love" which Murdoch defines as selfless attention is the bridge which joins the two. The machine of marriage must be overcome by the philosophy of knowledge of the other person who is infinitely mysterious. Bledyard's words, not Evvy's, ring in his ears days and weeks later. Because they are delivered by a colleague who rarely judges his peers, Mor cannot ultimately discount them, though he tries.

As a result of Nan's intervention, the affair between Mor and Rain, still unconsummated and heightened to fever pitch, is abruptly terminated. On the night the portrait is made public, still with its smeared eyebrow, Nan's desperately powerful move, to announce publicly Mor's hitherto abandoned ambition for a parliamentary seat, sets Rain in motion. She finishes the portrait in a few hours, tears flowing freely, packs, and leaves St. Bride's. Her "note" to Mor is a pastel sketch she made of him on their first meeting, withheld at the time because she thought her statement of love in it too plain. Her amendment of the portrait, however, bears additional attention:

Rain had changed the head a great deal. At first sight it seemed as if she had spoiled it. The fine, sensitive lines which had built up the quiet, musing expression which Mor had liked so much had been covered over with tiny patches of paint. The head stood out now, solider, uglier, the expression no longer conveyed by the fine details, but seeming to emerge from the deep structure of the face. Mor was not sure whether he liked it better. He turned away.⁴⁰

Both the pastel sketch and the first effort at the portrait are judged "too beautiful"; the second draft of the portrait is harsher, perhaps truer to character. All three creations bear graphic witness to

⁴⁰The Sandcastle, p. 311.

the influence of the artist's feelings on the product. While Demoyte is supportive of the affair, and she is falling in love with Mor, Rain's conception of both men is colored by her romantic affection which transforms the ordinary into the beautiful. Her second effort at Demoyte reveals in part a response to Bledyard's criticism but surely more strongly her anger and disappointment in having been encouraged to have an affair she could not justify morally which disintegrates in the face of respectability and decorum.

Rain had obviously incorporated Bledyard's comments on the massiveness of the head as the distinguishing feature of "great" portraits, but Murdoch's manipulation of the conditions under which the portrait was completed leave only questions. Because of Rain's reputation, the portrait will be visited at St. Bride's by Carter devotees; it is an "important" piece of work by virtue of its creator. Her extreme resentment of the situation and her place in it has influenced the final interpretation. Her frenzied last hours, however, can be interpreted as revelation gained, with the shock of losing her lover back to his wife, the "view of reality" to which Bledyard refers. On the other hand, Rain's last touches might have been overly influenced by Bledyard to the extent that she sacrificed her first, truer conception (her personal response) to his insistence on classic specifications. This final ambiguity appropriately characterizes the artistic process as well as the artist herself, as a mirror of the process of attention that Murdoch advocates and which she claims will bring us closer to the truth (the Sun).

The painting which is the symbolic center of An Unofficial Rose (1962), differs a great deal from the painting for which we have just witnessed the plan, the execution, and the amendments in The Sandcastle. Though Demoyte's portrait is recognizedly for posterity, and though it reveals the marked age of a personality who would defy it, Demoyte's death still seems distant. That is, Demoyte still seems immortal. The Tintoretto woman of An Unofficial Rose, however, is already a valuable collector's item and Hugh Peronett's post facto inheritance by means of his wife's death. It is therefore much more an appreciated, complete, and acknowledgedly beautiful object than is Demoyte's portrait, a recognized classic as opposed to a classic in the making. Once we are given a feeling of its power, the objectification allows two effects that the Demoyte portrait lacked. First, since Susannah of the Tintoretto is long dead and unknown, her identity and sexual attractiveness allow almost unlimited fantasy, an important element in the plot of that novel. Second, revelation of these fantasies by their purveyors allows an unusually accurate insight into their characters and an external reference for active and dynamic psychological phenomena.

As the rose in the title suggests, An Unofficial Rose begins with the death of a loved one. Hugh Peronett's beloved Fanny died of cancer after a long illness, and he is simultaneously suffering her loss, reviewing his life, and counting his assets. Chief among them is "the gem, the Tintoretto," which "perhaps indeed he had married her for, . . . as in a curious muddled way it had sometimes seemed to him in his dreams when his poor wife and the picture became strangely identified

with each other" (An Unofficial Rose, 5). He ponders their children and grandchildren, Randall and his wife Ann, and their children Miranda and Steve, the latter recently deceased. He also ponders his one supposedly secret love affair with Emma Sands, a woman who is to figure as importantly in his son's life as she has in Hugh's, in reality and in fantasy. Appropriately, she appears at the funeral; Hugh staggers at the recognition and neither speaks. Images of Emma, his wife, well and happy before her suffering blend with Susannah of the Tintoretto in a golden glow that lend him warmth and security at this cold time (Wolfe, 1966).

After the funeral, Hugh retires to Grayhallock, Randall and Ann's home and the location of their nursery. Randall had begun the rose nursery on the property some years before; but it, like most of the family responsibilities, has now fallen to Ann who is beginning to show the strain. Because of marital difficulties, which are aggravated by his curious affair with Lindsey Rimmer, Emma Sands's companion, and his equally curious conviction that he is a playwright, Randall spends increasing amounts of time in London, keeps a flat at Chelsea, and allows the full domestic and business responsibilities to fall to Ann. In this far from comforting atmosphere, Hugh spends a few upsetting days, during which the principal event is Randall's drunkenly violent confrontation with Ann, which is prefatory to his leaving permanently for London. Ann's public attitude is one of gentle and smiling patience, an "unwavering Christian piety, though doctrinally a little vague and . . . unreflective" (An Unofficial Rose, 17). Randall's violence, however,

aroused on the pretext of Ann's having given away their dead son's toys to Penn, his cousin who is visiting them, provokes Ann's ready rage.

Hugh, the hapless observer, is startled into seeing the true sordidness of his son's marriage and feels his own ineffectuality:

"I see--Penn's alive--and Steve is dead, so we don't have to bother about him any more."

"Oh, don't be so hideously cruel!" said Ann, her voice rising at last. "How can you use Steve like that, you're using him"

"You torture me, you torture me!" cried Randall, and he lifted up the end of the table and banged it savagely on the floor. "You take everything from me, you take even Steve from me!" Her voice rose to a scream.

"Randall, control yourself!" Hugh gripped his son's violently trembling arm.

Without a glance Randall shook him off. "I've a bloody good mind to clear off to London."

"Well, clear off!" cried Ann. "You expect me to wear myself out running the nursery singlehanded to earn money for you to spend in London"

"You've gone too far now!" roared Randall. As he moved halfway round the table Ann moved quickly behind her chair; but he paused, and with a whirl of his hand which made Hugh flinch back he swept the dominoes off onto the floor. They clattered loudly away through the kitchen in all directions. "You make me miserable and take everything away from me and then you have the insolence to taunt me about money! I'm not going to stay in this house another bloody minute! And you can have your precious Penny and your precious priestly all to yourself!"⁴¹

Randall is so driven by his passion for Lindsey Rimmer that he cannot endure another moment at Grayhallock and his wife's sweet patience. As he invents the pretext of their son's toys, he also alludes to the "priestly" Reverend Douglas Swann, an unattractive and ineffectual minister who is evidently attracted to Ann, but hardly a threat.

Such are the two portraits Murdoch provides of the "love" philosophy. Like Reverend Everard in The Sandcastle, unlimited

⁴¹Iris Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), pp. 57-59.

gentleness and understanding often accompany weakness and, in Ann's case, masochism. Whereas Nan fought strategically for her marriage to Mor, Ann blames herself for what is obviously her husband's ruse. After his violent show and exit,

Ann stood looking down at the table. Then she burst into violent sobbing. "Oh, I shouldn't have lost my temper. I shouldn't have said anything."⁴²

Hugh, miserable and ready to escape Grayhallock, comforts Ann, meanwhile gloomily reflecting that he would have to lengthen his stay until Randall leaves the house. Once in London, however, Hugh begins to relax in the atmosphere of his tastefully appointed Brompton Square apartment.

At her insistence, Hugh invites an old acquaintance for a visit who is married but quite fond of Hugh, and with whom he has shared one kiss. This "relationship" was interrupted by Hugh's adventure with Emma Sands, but Mildred Meecham Finch has not forgotten the solitary kiss and sees her opportunity in Hugh's present singleness. Hugh's flat is thus described by Mildred, who enjoys its atmosphere:

She felt delightfully at home in Hugh's drawing room, and reflecting on this she felt how few places there now were where she did feel warmly and positively at home. . . . She felt as if, already, she a little bit owned the place. As she looked round at the familiar objects they looked at her with new obedient faces: the walnut writing table, the oval card table with the alabaster vase, the pair of Kazak rugs, the green glass shell from Murano which Fanny would never allow to be used for flowers, the set of Wedgwood jugs, the dappled Chinese fauns . . . Some things must be moved: and those big ormolu vases must, she was almost certain, go.⁴³

⁴²An Unofficial Rose, p. 59.

⁴³An Unofficial Rose, p. 91.

Hugh, then, is something of a collector, though it is clear that Fanny's taste prevails.

His prize, however, the Tintoretto, which Fanny threatened to sell because of his intense appreciation for it, is, appropriately, the sole light source in the sitting room on the chilly and dark afternoon. The painting, too, is described in detail through Mildred's warmly appreciative eyes:

Most of all the Tintoretto glowed upon her with a jewelled beneficence. It was not a very large picture: a small sun. It was not a very large picture: it represented a naked woman and was almost certainly an earlier version of the figure of Susannah in the great "Susannah Bathing" in Vienna. Only it was no sketch, but a great picture in its own right and justly of some fame: a notable segment in the vast seemingly endless honeycomb of the master's genius; and well might a spectator think of honey, looking upon that plump, bent, delicious, golden form, one leg gliding the green water into which it was plunged. A heavy twining complication of golden hair crowned a face of radiant spiritual vagueness which could only have been imagined by Tintoretto. Golden bracelets composed her apparel, and a pearl whose watery whiteness both reflected and resisted the soft surrounding honeycoloured shades. It was a picture that might well enslave a man, a picture round which crimes might be committed. Mildred regarded it now as it glowed in the darkening room and recalled with indignation that Fanny had wanted to sell it. Small Fanny had feared it perhaps: Hugh's golden dream of another world.⁴⁴

To Hugh the valuable painting represents just that: the existence of a golden world which he hasn't the bravery to achieve but into which he escapes as a source of clandestine excitement and warmth.

The golden glow literally embodied in the honey tones of the figure forms an imagistic link with later scenes in Emma's sitting room involving both Hugh and Randall Peronett. When Randall is by himself with Lindsey, her broad, open face begins to glow; her head takes on a

⁴⁴An Unofficial Rose, pp. 92-93.

radiance that fills Randall with the inclination to take her for himself at the cost of wife and family (An Unofficial Rose, 115). The same pattern is indicated in The Sandcastle in a much more subtle way in the description of Demoyte's drawing room and in the scene in which Mor approaches Rain for the first time: her profile is marked in gold, and a radiant aura surrounds her. The golden imagery recurs in Murdoch's work, always with the same associations of calm, warmth, richness, receptiveness, and a new, favorable impression of another human being (Gindin, 1971). The feeling communicated is of a long preparation, witting or unwitting, that has come to fruition in an unexpectedly delightful manner.

Murdoch's gold is never brassy or cheaply gilt. The thick, honeyed warmth of Tintoretto's Susannah conveyed by Murdoch's description of the painting also reveals something of the character of its owner(s). Whereas Emma's possession of the painting was motivated by its price at an art auction, Hugh's is obviously much more personal. A few comments on Tintoretto's style seem appropriate here, not only as they document Murdoch's eye and phrase, but also as they reveal Peronett's character through his affection for the painting:

Turbulent and undisciplined as he was, the classic spirit is no longer the controlling spirit with Tintoretto. He is a Romanticist, and the spirit of his art is allied to that of the great French romanticists of the nineteenth century. His career opened at a period of transition in which adjustment was difficult and he seldom achieved a psychic distance which enabled him to see his work in true perspective.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Edith Abbot, The Great Painters (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1927), p. 173.

Taken literally, these last observations aptly describe Hugh Peronett. Mildred's realization of the depth of Peronett's density, or single-mindedness, amazes her. She thought that she and fate had finally manipulated poor, simple Hugh into the desired position for her conquest. The scene is an intimate one, in which Hugh takes Mildred's hand and begins speaking about the past. Their utterly disparate expectations of each other lend an ironic humor to the scene, as Hugh begins,

"There's something strangely timeless about one's affection for people."

"I know," said Mildred. She took his hand in a firm clasp and held it, stroking it a little with one of her fingers. "Dear Hugh," she said. She felt happy, surprised, excited, very moved.

"I hope I won't upset or annoy you by speaking frankly," he said. "I didn't mean, when you came, to talk to you like this. But I'm surely old and foolish now to be able to talk when I want to and dispense with the dignity of silence."

"Talk, my dear, talk," breathed Mildred.

"I must have your advice, Mildred. It's about Emma Sands."

Mildred let go of his hand abruptly. Hugh, who had apparently not noticed either her affectionate grip or its cessation, got up and began to pose about the room. His head passed and re-passed in front of the honey coloured Tintoretto.

"I don't know whether you knew," said Hugh, "but I was at one time very fond of Emma." He paused in the golden aura of the picture. "Well, I may as well be frank with you, Mildred. I was dreadfully in love with Emma."

"Quite," said Mildred. She had not meant to sound so dry.⁴⁶

The conjunction of expectations at complete cross purposes, Hugh's absolute obliviousness to Mildred's dashed hopes, and the reawakening of his long harbored emotion for Emma Sands compose the very fabric of the Tintoretto. For the rest of the novel, these are the associations that are used as a foundation for what becomes a classic father son confrontation.

⁴⁶An Unofficial Rose, p. 96.

The subject of their confrontation is, of course, the fate of the painting. In Randall Peronett, Murdoch joins something of Fanny Peronett's "catbird patience" and her appreciation of monetary value with Hugh Peronett's romanticism. Randall frequents Emma Sands's and Lindsey Rimmer's apartment with its highly romanticized, late Victorian mood, faded prints, dusky rose and green tones, and cigarette smoke hovering lazily. Murdoch describes the apartment in detail:

A golden afternoon sunlight, spread out now in a soft web upon the permanent mist of tobacco smoke, filled Emma's big drawing-room, which was crowded with slightly shabby, slightly dusty, beautiful things. It revealed the cleverly darned Turkey carpet and the cleverly mended porcelain and made its daily contribution to the further fading of the chintz curtains whose powdery haze of pink and blue birds was still just discernible against a threadbare tawny background. The room, which was on the ground floor, had windows on both sides, one looking through tall iron railings at the street, and the other looking onto a small lawn planted around with spherical bushes of veronica and laurestinus, whose dusty leaves and dry stems, dark and immobile in the cruel sunlight, made them seem now like grotesque indoor objects which had been temporarily put out of the room. It was a garden designed for winter, and in the summer it looked sleepy and sulky. It was however no concern of Emma's, being maintained by the management of the flats wherein she lived, a large red-brick Edwardian block amid the early Victorian facades of creamy stucco in that part of Notting Hill.

The two women sat with their backs to the sun, which gave them each a halo, Emma's a jagged haze about her frizzy dark grey mop, and Lindsay's a thin smooth semi-circle of brighter gold about the already bright gold of her neatly coiled hair. They were both doing petit-point embroidery on circular frames. Randall faced the light. He felt revealed, cornered, happy.⁴⁷

Here the two women entertain Randall, manipulating him subtly and masterfully away from Ann, family, and responsibility and into a commitment with Lindsey Rimmer. This commitment requires only cash, and his source is his father Hugh. Randall's plan becomes shockingly

⁴⁷An Unofficial Rose, p. 71.

violent: sell the Tintoretto so that he and Lindsey can escape together. Another notable observation needs be mentioned at this point about Tintoretto's style:

Tintoretto's type of beauty is singularly free of the sensuousness of Titian's mature period. His pagan figures have strong and firm, but full, bodies with no hint of the drowsy licentiousness that contemporary work often shows.⁴⁸

If Randall Peronett were to be described in two phrases, they are certainly "pagan sensuousness" and "drowsy licentiousness," the two phrases that are not descriptive of Tintoretto's work. Again Murdoch's construction of character becomes consonant with her principal symbols.

Hugh's description of his son, who claims to be a stifled artist, foreshadows his gross mistreatment of the painting:

Hugh contemplated his son. Randall was certainly good looking. He had a big imposing sensual face with a large nose and large brown eyes. His straight dry brown hair was copious and showed no traces of grey. His mouth pouted with sensitive and humorous hesitation as if he were perpetually suspending judgment about a funny story that was being told. Only a slight moistness at eyes and mouth, a slight pale plumpness of cheek, aged him a little and touched his vitality with a faint shadow of indulgence and excess.⁴⁹

This description, coupled with his already demonstrated capacity for violence even against his wife, prepares the reader, but unfortunately does not prepare Hugh, for the shock of Randall's carefully planned and casually delivered proposal to finance "his little romance," as his father terms it. In the crucial interview, Randall cleverly manipulates his father to a semi-sympathetic position by recalling their "shared"

⁴⁸Abbot, p. 180.

⁴⁹An Unofficial Rose, p. 18.

affection for Emma Sands. When Randall proposes his plan of escape, Hugh cannot condone his actions, but still does not suspect the enormity of Randall's demand:

"It's not a moment for moderation," said Randall. He rose and put his glass on the mantelpiece.

"It can hardly be a moment for anything else, since I haven't got the money you say you need."

"No. But you have assets."

"Assets?"

With a brief movement as of one perfunctorily acknowledging an altar, Randall turned for a moment towards the Tintoretto.

"Good God!" said Hugh.⁵⁰

When no rational objectives seem to carry any weight, Hugh begins on the morality of the situation, which again underscores, as occurs so many times in Murdoch, the relative weakness of a moral argument to a person to whom morality means nothing. Randall can calmly, coldly, and completely bankrupt his father financially and emotionally by trampling on his old memories of Emma and now by depriving him of his long cherished source of joy. Randall continues,

"I don't see the objections," said Randall, now speaking in a tired and casual sort of way, not looking at Hugh, and still ruffling his hair.

"If you don't see them you must be morally blind," said Hugh. Then he asked himself, what are the objections, exactly?

"I don't see quite how morality comes in," said Randall. "But I'm rather drunk, I think, and as morality seems to poke itself into most things I expect it's got in here too. I know you like the picture. But it isn't as if it would be a family heirloom. You know quite well I'd sell it before you were cold." . . . (Randall exits.)

Hugh sat down and covered his face. Without yet understanding entirely why he felt appalled, degraded, defeated. The freshened warm night air blew into the room and the night had cleared to reveal a star. Like a poised angel, the golden Tintoretto beamed down upon the scene.⁵¹

⁵⁰An Unofficial Rose, p. 179.

⁵¹An Unofficial Rose, p. 180.

The Tintoretto is subsequently sold to the National Gallery, where Hugh visits it and is reprimanded for touching it.

The enormity of Randall's demand is motivated from the same desperate need for fulfillment and escape that Bill Mor felt in pursuing Rain Carter in The Sandcastle. Lindsey Rimmer is far from the "quality prize" that Rain represented, however, and in Randall's success and their later erotic adventures in Italy is embodied the triumph of sensuality and insensitivity. In the two alternatives Murdoch's moral message clearly takes the form of the two paintings. In the novel in which we witness the process taking place from beginning to end is invested the delicacy, mutual sensitivity, and the necessary moral result. In the novel in which the painting is a ready-made symbol, it is subject to increasing degradation through the manipulation of its owners as it moves from a position of great personal appreciation to the National Gallery, where it becomes an untouchable object. In this process too is embodied the death of Hugh's hopes for a life with Emma, who takes another young female companion instead of him to replace Lindsey preliminary to his inevitable physical death.

In the third type of aesthetic manifestation in her novels, Murdoch joins the artist with the art object to create a particular male character type called the "aesthete," or the "collector." He is a bachelor who is initially identified by the tasteful interior of his home, the particular objects with which he surrounds himself, and an elusive personality. Though the particular personalities differ in each case, it is nonetheless difficult to maintain a close relationship with

him because of his reluctance to make himself vulnerable. He defines himself with objects and defends himself with them against what he considers a hostile world. His fastidious habits, his cynical view of life, and his peculiar tastes make him easily insulted and ultimately unreachable. The collector is revealed in the novels principally by his home furnishings and secondarily by his precise, highly critical, sometimes quite good humoured mode of expression. His concern for and appreciation of art indicate that he is a person who customarily looks below the surface of events, who is both cognizant and tolerant of alternate versions of reality, though the degree and extent of this tolerance vary.

Examples of the collector can be identified in almost every novel. Mr. Demoyte in The Sandcastle, the crochety and highly intellectual former headmaster whose sitting room creates a "red and gold glow" around him as he sits for his portrait, has gathered Oriental carpets and exquisite small pieces of furniture as an external expression of his appreciation. Hugh Peronett's sitting room, arranged around the Tintoretto, accurately reflects his tastes and his indulgence in fantasy. Matthew Gibson Grey's taste for chinoiserie dominates his scenes in An Accidental Man (1971). Two vases become special symbols of his crumbling influence in the family. A devotee of Eastern religion, he is approached "delicately" in conversations or required to act as a sort of guru, both of which roles soon become exhausting and exhausted. Mischa Fox in Flight from the Enchanter (1956) is the mysteriously powerful character who must "own" other people psychologically and

physically in order to achieve his identity. The many rooms of his fantastically decorated house reflect the rooms of his mind. Clifford Laird of A Word Child (1975) is a gourmet cook with a pronounced taste for gloomy cynicism and delicate Indian paintings and bronzes. Hilary Burde, the main character of the same novel, relies on him for advice, but the contact with reality that Burde affords eventually is unendurable to Laird; his eventual suicide is a logical extension of his idealistic and melancholy view of the world.

Bradley Pearson of The Black Prince (1973) is also an "aesthete," and Murdoch's purest and most extended example of the character type to date. Pearson is an artist and the central character of the novel, which is itself an art object, thus joining the three aesthetic considerations in Murdoch's work in this self proclaimed and self-proven writer who tells his own story. The concentration of these aesthetic concerns in a single character load him with the responsibility for Murdoch's definitive statement on art, a statement that defines the concept rather by exclusion than by direct statement.⁵² Pearson describes his unusual authorial position at length:

It is not my intention to accompany this book with a commentary upon it of equal length. The "story" shall never be long kept in abeyance. The luxury of addressing you directly is the fulfillment of a desire which is itself one of the subjects of the book. In our long discussions of the form of this work should take you confirmed the legitimacy of this "device," though what comes so from the heart deserves a warmer name: this indulgence, let us say, of an irrepressible lyricism, an involuntary expression of love. My book is about art. It is also, in its humble way, a work of art: an "art object" as the jargon has it; and may perhaps be permitted, now and then, to cast

⁵²This distinction is discussed later in Section III.

a look upon itself. Art . . . is the telling of truth, and is the only available method for the telling of certain truths.⁵³

This passage on Pearson's two favorite subjects, art and himself, conveys the painstaking (and painful) attention to detail, the romanticizing of his role as a writer and "conveyor of truth," his verbosity, his formality, and something of his self-centeredness. Murdoch's use of the main character as the center of revelation immediately colors any rendition of "the truth" with identifiable individual perception; the tints and shades that Pearson's personality contributes have a considerable effect on that truth. Like the other collectors, Pearson's lengthy description of his sitting room (almost a full page) conveys his sensitivity to design and detail, his appreciation for dating and fine-tuning of table legs, his exhaustive attention to quality and to texture. Implicit in this description, however, is his immense pride, the unstated assumption that whatever he writes will meet with unflagging and fascinated attention.

Pearson characterizes himself as an "amasser" rather than a collector; his sitting room furnishings are varied remains of eighteenth and nineteenth century decorum, with the small oils on the walls a gesture toward period consistency. Its marked impression is one of darkness and fussiness, the whims of a fifty-eight-year-old bachelor brought together in a room which discourages comfortable relaxation, in marked contrast to the golden richness of Demoyte's sitting room. Pearson carefully describes the room item by item:

⁵³Iris Murdoch, The Black Prince (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), p. 57.

. . . It was the following morning, and I was sitting at the little marquetry table in my sitting-room. I have not described this important room adequately yet. It had a powdery faded brooding inward quality, strongly smelling, perhaps literally, of the past. (Not dry rot so much as something like face powder.) It was also rather stubby, being truncated by the wall of my bedroom, which curtailed its former spread, so that the green panelling aforementioned clothed only three sides of the room. This false proportion sometimes made it feel, especially at night, as if it were part of a ship, or perhaps a first-class railway carriage of the sort one might have found upon the Trans-Siberian railway about 1910. The marquetry table stood in the centre. . . . Against the walls variously: a tiny velvet armchair with what Hartbourne, who was too stout to sit in it, called "frilly drawers"; two frail-legged lyre-back chairs (Victorian copies) with petit-point embroidery seats, various (one with a sailing swan, the other with tiger lilies); a tall but rather narrow mahogany bureau bookcase (most of my books live on simple shelves in the bedroom); a red, black, and gold lacquered display cabinet in the chinese style, Victorian; a mahogany night table with tray top, badly stained, possibly eighteenth century; a satinwood Pembroke table, also stained; a walnut hanging corner cupboard with curved doors. Then: drawn up against the table with me sitting on it, a curvaceous "conversation chair," with upholstered seat and greasy balding seat of red velvet. On the floor, a carpet with large amber roses on a black ground. Before the fireplace, a black woolly rug simulating a bear. Upon it a blowsy chintz armchair (Hartbourne size, usually known as "his" chair) needing a new cover. The wide-shelved chimney piece was made of a dark slaty bluegrey marble and the cave of the grate beneath was framed by a design of black cast-iron rose garlands, complete with veined leaves and thorns. Pictures, all tiny, hung mainly upon the "false" wall, since I could not bring myself to pierce the wood, and the existing hooks upon the panelling were too high for my taste. Small oils these were, in thick, gilt frames, of little girls with cats, little boys with dogs, cats upon cushions, flowers, the innocent heart-warming trivia of our strong and sentimental forebears. There were two little elegant northern beach scenes, and, in an oval frame, an eighteenth-century drawing of a girl with loose hair, waiting. Upon the chimney piece and in the red, black, and gold lacquered display cabinet stood the little items, china cups and figures, snuffboxes, ivories, small Oriental bronzes, modest stuff, some of which I

may describe later since two at least of these objects play a role in the story.⁵⁴

Pearson's sitting room is unusual, but not particularly "valuable" in the monetary sense, as is, for example, Demoyte's or Gibson-Grey's. Pearson seems to amass objects that please him rather than choose them with any consistent attention to style, overall tone, and resale value. His eclectic approach to home furnishings indicates his attention to detail at the expense of overall effect as well as his willingness to settle for the second-rate. Pearson's taste in furnishings is also an indication of his humble origins. He is an eccentric whose home reflects his personality and forms a useful introduction to the extended examination that follows of Bradley Pearson and his "art object," The Black Prince.

The amassing of small things is essential to the appearance that Bradley Pearson so consciously maintains. It is, however, equally essential to the reader's "objective" correction of appearance, for his description is the clue to an underlying truth. To understand Bradley Pearson's description of his sitting room, the reader must apply both aesthetic and moral judgment to determine an aesthetic and moral reality beneath the appearance that the description intends to project.

⁵⁴The Black Prince, pp. 38-39.

In writing The Black Prince, Murdoch brings together the three artistic elements she has isolated in her earlier works, and she combines them with other typically Murdochian elements to create a highly wrought novel of considerable complexity. First, she chooses a title for the novel that recalls two Shakespearean plays, Hamlet and Richard III. Hamlet actually appears in the novel as an object of study. The play is also present by implication in characters who take on attributes typical of Hamlet, as well as in the novel's adaptation of the play's major philosophical concerns. Richard III is both "The black prince" of Shakespeare's play and the subject of recent dispute concerning the accuracy of Shakespeare's portrait (Marcus, 1978). The questions that are raised about Richard III's true historical function, whether he was or was not responsible for crimes as heinous as child-murder, for example, are precisely those that remain after Pearson tells his story.

Second, Murdoch writes a novel essentially about the artistic process by creating a central character who is a self-proclaimed artist with three published books to his credit, although the "great work" remains incipient. In Bradley Pearson appear the characteristics of the "aesthete" as well as the artist, the tasteful collector ("amasser") of beautiful but flawed objects. He is a fifty-eight-year-old finicky bachelor accused of latent homosexuality, with a fixation on the Post Office Tower. Pearson is the narrator and principal character in The

Black Prince: A Celebration of Love. His narrative technique includes frequent digressions on art addressed to his editor and "alter ego," P. Loxias, whom he credits with sustaining him through the arduous writing process. His digressions, or soliloquies, also include, in an almost eighteenth century manner, reminders that the work is being created even as we read it. Pamela's letters written in the heat of attempted rape are not more compelling. Pearson writes letters too, about which he has firmly fixed theories. All these "in process" observations and techniques serve only to emphasize the relativity of time in the novel and, with that concept, the relativity of space and personality that is at the center of Murdoch's philosophy.

Third, Murdoch prefaces the novel with two Forewords, one by P. Loxias and one by Bradley Pearson, and concludes the novel with six Postscripts by various characters. These textual additions emphasize, as if the narrator's frequent reminders were not sufficient, that the novel itself we are reading is a work of art. The reader then witnesses simultaneously its character revelation, subject to various interpretations, its construction and analysis of material, and the final product. In every conceivable way, The Black Prince incorporates the idea of art: as artifice, as artificiality, as role playing, as fantasizing, and as artifact, or literary product.

Consequently, the major theme of art, with all its subtle variations, joins two other central concerns in The Black Prince, the process of the individual personality (Bradley Pearson) and the relativity of time. These two concerns form parentheses around each

point that Murdoch makes about art in the novel, as if to remind the reader that the art object itself is never wholly understood by the casual observer, and never understood in the same way by two.

Bradley Pearson is characterized in a typically Murdochian manner, with all facets of his personality highly buffed and turned to reflect the light, as one would prepare a valuable gem for public display. Murdoch has Pearson himself reveal his vocation, his age, his sexual inhibitions, his scant literary productivity, his ambition to write a "great work," and his desire to escape for a prolonged holiday in which to write it. Because of Pearson's determination to explain "everything," we are allowed detailed descriptions of Pearson by Pearson himself, which testify implicitly to his constant and fastidious introspection.

The Black Prince begins with the "Editor's Foreword," a short, appreciative introduction by P. Loxias, to whom Pearson refers as "P" in his story. Loxias characterizes their relationship very simply: "He needed someone to believe him and someone to believe in him. He found me, his alter ego, at the time needful" (The Black Prince, ix). He presents these comments early in the introduction, as if to lend credence to repeated hints of Pearson's homosexuality, and with these implications the possibility of a totally Freudian interpretation of Pearson's plight. Loxias' Foreword also introduces the centrality of art as the primary issue in Pearson's novel, characterized by Loxias as a "love story" and interpreted by some as a tragedy. Through Loxias, Murdoch provides on the first page of The Black Prince all the major concerns of the novel, which are also those that dominate Hamlet. The

Foreword introduces the largely existential concerns of preoccupation with self, with art, with living life as if it were a story, with latent homosexuality and strong Oedipal implications, of indecision, and of doom. Loxias introduces the novel:

What follows is in its essence as well as in its contour a love story . . . Man's creative struggle, his search for wisdom and truth, is a love story. What follows is ambiguous and sometimes tortuously told. Man's searchings and his strugglings are ambiguous and vowed to hidden ways. Those who live by that dark light will understand. And yet: what can be simpler than a tale of love and more charming? That art gives charm to terrible things is perhaps its glory, perhaps its curse. Art is a doom. It has been the doom of Bradley Pearson. And in a quite different way it is my own.⁵⁵

Loxias' tone of high sentimentality appropriately characterizes Pearson's story which follows the Foreword. Hand-to-forehead romantic resignation is the psychological mode that Pearson adopts in order to fall in love and in order to write his story. Loxias' final note in his Foreword concerns the purpose of Pearson's story: "Why this tale had to be written will appear, in more sense than one, within the tale. But there is after all no mystery. Every artist is an unhappy lover. And unhappy lovers want to tell their story" (The Black Prince, x). Pronouncements like this one by Loxias abound in The Black Prince; he appropriately sets the tone and mood for Pearson's seemingly interminable theoretical meanderings. The reader is then left to decipher the statement by weighing the speaker, his possible intent(s), and his relationship to his subject, against their dramatic and philosophical implications.

⁵⁵The Black Prince, p. ix.

A repeated and overwhelming impression that Pearson's story communicates, however, is that the words "art" and "artist" (like "love" and "lover") are used and abused wholesale by almost every character so as to render the terms almost meaningless. In The Black Prince, Murdoch defines a work of art, an artist, and an art appreciator by bringing together what they are not, as if in answer to the popular misconception that everyone is an artist because everyone possesses a spark of the divine. For example, The Black Prince as art falls considerably short of Hamlet or Richard III; Bradley Pearson's promised "great work" beomes almost, as he suggests, a "writer's diary"; everyone seems to be a collector of some sort. Murdoch's definitive statement on art, then, in The Black Prince, is that art is "none of the above."

This kind of definition by exclusion also implicitly affects interpretation of her own philosophy of attentive love, which also can be popularly misconstrued so that its embodiments are flower children and over-zealous middle-aged matrons rather than careful, disciplined, attentive, rational beings. Once again, Murdoch's novelistic statement becomes the irrational reality that demonstrates the operation of her balanced ideal in everyday life. As a writer, however, as well as a devotée of the sovereignty of Good, Murdoch nonetheless has placed herself in the curious position of justifying her own most serious pursuits. In The Black Prince she writes her own Hamlet, a work about art in the same way that Hamlet is about art: the imposition of artistic order on chaotic existence, a work about indecision, the desperation of wanting to act and not being able to, and, finally, a

biographical and philosophical struggle which affirms that the human concerns Shakespeare touches on are Murdoch's also three centuries later, and thus those that have and will always affect man.

Following the "Editor's Foreword" is "Bradley Pearson's Foreword," which supplies pertinent particulars about the central character in his own words. Pearson describes himself as a careful man, fastidious to a fault, defensive about his writing, and eager that all should "understand" the predications of his effort, even if he must figuratively twist their arms to encourage proper appreciation. His first remarks are telling. Pearson first addresses the techniques of first-person narration employed throughout the novel, with the exception of the Editor's Foreword and the six Postscripts that follow his novel, and he mentions briefly the liberties that "the author" has taken with the conventions of time. Pearson thus introduces the two central concerns of his story: himself, first and always, and time, its fleet passing, his ability to stop time on paper in letters within the novel and with the novel itself, and its inevitability. He writes,

Although several years have now passed since the events recorded in this fable, I shall in telling it adopt the modern technique of narration, allowing the narrating consciousness to pass like a light along its series of present moments, aware of the past, unaware of what is to come. I shall, that is, inhabit my past self and, for the ordinary purposes of my telling, speak in many ways so different from the present. So for example I shall say "I am fifty-eight years old," as I then was. And I shall judge people, inadequately, perhaps even unjustly, as I then judged them, and not in the light of any later wisdom.⁵⁶

⁵⁶The Black Prince, p. xi.

Pearson is writing the novel in retrospect about his love affair with Julian Baffin, daughter of Arnold Baffin, a successful novelist and longtime friend of Pearson's. Julian is thirty-eight years his junior, which makes Pearson constantly conscious of his age. An attendant result of the trauma surrounding the affair is the murder of Arnold Baffin by his wife Rachel, the crime for which Bradley Pearson is found guilty and jailed. The "light of later wisdom," therefore, is the light that shines through the bars of his cell. The "disciplined simplicity of (his) life as it has latterly been lived" attains a special significance also in a prison regime and reflects the dignity with which Pearson would like to be remembered, but which he failed to maintain during the chaotic period of his affair. Time and himself, therefore, become particularly significant in the light of the facts the reader does not learn until three hundred pages later.

Early in Pearson's Foreword he raises the topic of art and his relation to it, thus extending and embellishing Loxias' brief previous comments. Pearson makes clear how very personal and important the effort is that he now offers the reader. He says, "The work of art is as good as its creator. It cannot be more so. Nor, such as he in this case is, can it be less" (The Black Prince, xi). His first remarks personalize his narrative, so that the reader is aware that any comments Pearson makes about any subject, especially art and writing, will be his opinion, tailored to the novel he is in the process of writing. Pearson's entire ego is invested in the work that takes shape under the reader's eyes.

He continues with an introduction to his concept of art, as he brings it to fruition:

I have already by implication described this "reportage" as a work of art. I do not of course by this mean a work of fantasy. All art deals with the absurd and aims at the simple. Good art speaks truth, indeed is truth, perhaps the only truth. I have endeavored to be wisely artful and artfully wise, and to tell the truth as I understand it, not only concerning the superficial and "exciting" aspects of this drama, but also concerning what lies deeper.⁵⁷

Pearson claims to be doing everything at once: he is telling the story, he is acting in it, he is flipping back the clock and his perceptions to the time of occurrence, and he is presuming to choose the details that render "the truth" most fully. Simply to list all his functions is to recognize the inevitable subjectivity of the entire affair for which Pearson is seeking vindication. In creating Pearson as the first-person narrator,⁵⁸ Murdoch calls particular attention to the artistic process she has employed; someone must always choose what details to include and which to omit. To lose sight of the self-conscious process is to ignore Murdoch's implicit purpose for making the form of the novel conform to its central preoccupations.

Pearson, fully conscious of the complexity of "the artist's" relation to these concerns, and thus makes the reader aware of his awareness, as well as of the intensity of his concern with himself. Pearson explains,

⁵⁷The Black Prince, pp. xi-xii.

⁵⁸See Chapter 1, Section III for discussion of first-person narrator Hilary Burde in relation to twentieth century existentialism.

I am aware that people often have completely distorted general ideas of what they are like and men truly manifest themselves in the long patterns of their acts, and not in any nutshell of self-theory. This is supremely true of the artist, who appears, however much he may imagine that he hides, in the revealed extension of his work. And so I am exhibited, whose pitiful instinct is alas still for a concealment quite at odds with my trade. Under this cautionary rubric I shall however attempt a general description of myself. And now I am speaking, as I explained, in the persona of the self of several years ago, the often inglorious "hero" of the tale that follows. I am fifty-eight-years old. I am a writer. "A writer" is indeed the simplest and also the most accurate general description of me. In so far as I am also a psychologist, an amateur philosopher, a student of human affairs, I am so because these things are a part of being the kind of writer that I am.⁵⁹

The "kind of writer" Pearson is concerned with profoundly. He takes great pains to explain his lack of productivity, both in terms of his three previous publications and his present inability to create.

A retired tax inspector, Pearson had been a creature of routine for "most of (his) official working life"--at least thirty years--and yet considers himself a writer when compelled to describe himself in a word. In explaining his conviction that the literary is his "true" vocation, Pearson explains his theory of personality:

But any human person is infinitely more complex than this type of explanation. By "infinitely" (or should I say "almost infinitely"? Alas, I am no philosopher) I mean that there are not only more details but more kinds of details with more kinds of relations than these diminishers can dream of. You might as well try to "explain" a Michelangelo on a piece of graph paper. Only art explains, and that cannot itself be explained. We and art are made for each other, and where that bond fails human life fails. Only this analogy holds, only this mirror shows a just image. Of course we have an "unconscious mind" and this is partly what my book is about. But there is no general chart of that lost continent. Certainly not a "scientific" one.⁶⁰

⁵⁹The Black Prince, p. xiv.

⁶⁰The Black Prince, p. xv.

The similarity of this passage to that in The Sovereignty of Good in which Murdoch explains her aversion to psychoanalysis is striking; she writes:

But once the historical individual is "let in" a number of things have to be said with a difference. The idea of "objective reality," for instance, undergoes important modifications when it is to be understood, not in relation to "the world described by science", but in relation to the progressing life of a person. The active "reassessing" and "redefining" which is a main characteristic of live personality often suggests and demands a checking procedure which is a function of an individual history. Repentance may mean something different to an individual at different times in his life, and what it fully means is a part of this life and cannot be understood except in context.⁶¹

Murdoch's theory of personality as an ongoing process is incorporated wholesale into her main character of Bradley Pearson, whose main purpose is to recreate the "context" for his particular acts that led to his "durance vile," in Francis Marloe's term.

Pearson sees human beings as a process of becoming, with the meaning in the process, rather than in any sort of "box score" at any particular stage. His defense of himself, then, rests within the situation. Murdoch's six Postscripts to Pearson's novel, however, make clear that others involved in the "situation" that is Pearson's story all have their own opinions of the proceedings, and none coincides. Just as the eyewitnesses to an accident have conflicting accounts, just as a sphere dropped by a cyclist looks to the cyclist as if it drops straight down, but to a stationary witness its path arcs before dropping, everyone in the novel, regardless of his proximity to Pearson, has a different opinion of his motivations and even of his actions. To

⁶¹The Sovereignty of Good, p. 26.

increase the uncertainty of the situation Pearson describes, the witnesses' postscripts cast serious doubt on his sanity, which brings his entire novelistic account into question. Murdoch's point here is that nothing is certain, that everyone lives in an individual, self-created world, and the mere coincidence of these worlds by no means suggests mutual understanding.

Incorporating her theory of personality in this way is consistent with the major themes Pearson establishes: himself as artist (writer) and time. First, everyone's world is an individual fiction, as Pearson's literally becomes on paper. The Black Prince as a unit, including all of its Forewords and Postscripts, testifies to the apparently infinite fictional possibilities among even a limited cast of characters, barring the possibility that, as in Hamlet, they eventually murder one another. Characterizing individual perceptions as individual fictions with Pearson as the author is yet another application of the art analogy and precisely what Pearson recalls in his defense.

Just as the contemplation of a classically "great" painting is comparable to contemplation of beauty in nature in its ability to redirect the spectator's attention toward understanding an external object and away from the self, so a novel or a fictional account, even purportedly semi-biographical, is comparable to the everyday individual worlds that everyone creates inside his head. Recognition of the distance and difference between these worlds, the ultimate impossibility of communication, is the substance of Murdoch's philosophical and novelistic efforts. Degrees of perception can be characterized by spatial removal

or language differences, both of which metaphors Murdoch explores, and also in terms of art, the artifice that is our daily mode of perception, unique and ultimately unintelligible. Attempting to record these perceptions on paper sets the impression at yet another remove, so that one risks misinterpretation of the words on the page, the intent of the work, and its effect. The Black Prince, or Bradley Pearson's Writer's Diary, is Murdoch's definitive example of the absolutely unique person and process of the artist. The novel is testimony to the impossibility of rendering a perception exactly into words on paper and the consequent reinterpretation or misinterpretation of the inexact rendering.

Murdoch's theory of the relativity of personality and the perceptions of the artist incorporate the second major theme of the novel: time. Not only does Pearson become hyperconscious of his age as a result of his affair with a twenty-year-old woman, but also that his "literary" cast of mind, his affection for letter-writing and novel-writing are his vain attempts to stop the clock. The fact that he is writing from jail, where time literally can be suspended, makes his semi-biographical defense even more appropriately timed. His many drafts of the letters and notes that litter the novel in typical Murdochian fashion, often forming the "accidental" revelations that move the plot, and incidentally motivates the murder of Arnold Baffin by his wife, are Pearson's (and others') conscious daily attempts to suspend time. His endless drafting of what he sets down to paper is his tailoring of reality, as are his many digressions on art and his seemingly interminable explanations of his motivations. He attempts to

fit the world and his experiences in it together like an immense jigsaw. By virtue of their weight of detail, he is most persuasive, and it is for this reason that the reversals of perception embodied in the six postscripts by other characters carry immense dramatic impact. Nonetheless, Pearson has assumedly succeeded for the moment in his intent and passed some long and restrictive hours in the bargain. He has created a literary artifact that many can use as a point of reference for that particular period of their lives.

One of Pearson's principal justifications of himself, and the vocation from which he derives his identity, is that he is, first and always, an artist. This point is repeatedly developed in numerous digressions on art within Pearson's novel, but centrally in terms of contrast to "the other" artist, Arnold Baffin, whose work Pearson reviews. Pearson defines himself by contrast from his first comments in the Foreword, however:

A writer is indeed the simplest and also the most accurate general description of me. In so far as I am also a psychologist, an amateur philosopher, and a student of human affairs, I am so because these things are a part of being the kind of writer that I am. I have always been a seeker. And my seeking has taken the form of that attempt to tell the truth of which I have just spoken. I have, I hope and I believe, kept my gift pure. This means, among other things, that I have never been a successful writer. I have never tried to please at the expense of truth. I have known, for long periods, the torture of a life without self-expression. The most potent and sacred command which can be laid upon any artist is the command: wait. Art has its martyrs, not least those who have preserved their silence. There are, I hazard, saints of art who have simply waited mutely all their lives rather than profane the purity of a single page with anything less than what is perfectly appropriate and beautiful, that is to say, with anything less than what is true.⁶²

⁶²The Black Prince, p. xii.

Pearson thus sees himself as an artist in the purest and most romantic sense.

His waiting for the "truth" and the appropriate moment to reveal it is particularly ironic in light of the acknowledged relativity of the term "truth" and its inevitably inaccurate mode of revelation. This description of himself, with these concerns in mind, removes him from the "ordinary" person on the street--even the "ordinary" Inspector of Taxes--and sets him apart as someone who has illusions about himself that are definitely formed and who therefore must be handled carefully. He is sensitive particularly regarding his limited literary productivity:

As is well known, I have published very little. I say "as is well known" relying here for my fame on publicity deriving from my adventures outside the purlieus of art. My name is not unknown, but this alas is not because I am a writer. As a writer I have reached and doubtless will reach only a perceptive few. The paradox perhaps of my whole life, and it is an absurdity upon which I do not cease to meditate, is that the dramatic story which follows, so unlike the rest of my work, may well prove to be my only "best seller." . . . I will not attempt to describe my publications. They were, in the context to which I alluded above, much talked of though not, I fear, read. I published a precocious novel at the age of twenty-five. I published another novel, or quasi-novel, at the age of forty. I have also emitted a small book of "texts" or "studies." I would not exactly call it a work of philosophy. (Pensées perhaps.)⁶³

Pearson's preoccupation with definition, justification, and full rendition lead him to refer repeatedly to his philosophical bent. His former wife Christian also comments that, had he had a better education, he would have been a fine philosopher. His presumptuous comparison of his own essays with Montaigne's Pensées, however, reveals the degree of

⁶³The Black Prince, p. xiii.

distortion implicit in his view of his literary abilities as well as its cause: a lack of humility. Again, Murdoch parodies herself as the philosopher and the novelist who has resisted the "philosophical novel." Indeed, The Black Prince is the closest she has come to the form, and characteristically she turns it into a satirical comment on philosophical novels and novelists.

Pearson is inclined to make "pronouncements" which are interesting when one has the patience to ponder them properly, but as daily fare, as Christian points out in her Postscript, they are "not much fun." His observations on the occurrences of the opportunities for "great works" are, however, worth noting in particular for the image as much as for the message itself:

. . . There is a kind of despair involved in creation which I am sure any artist knows all about. In art, as in morality, great things go by the board because at the crucial moment we blink our eyes. When is the crucial moment? Greatness is to recognize it and be able to hold it and extend it. But for most of us the space between "dreaming on things to come" and "it's too late, it is all over" is too tiny to enter. And so we let each thing go, thinking vaguely that it will always be given to us to try again. Thus works of art, and thus whole lives of men, are spoilt by blinking and moving quickly on.⁶⁴

Though Pearson relates this image particularly to the stories he had spoiled by either spending too much preparatory time on them so that they grew stale before the writing, and some were ruined by starting too soon. Once again Murdoch masterfully draws the major concerns of the novel into a single image: attention paid to the individual personality, the tragedy of poor timing, and the importance of careful consideration of every event.

⁶⁴The Black Prince, p. xiii.

The image is appropriately one of vision, which she notes particularly in The Sovereignty of Good as being preferable to metaphors of motion or space. The growth of moral perception for Murdoch, as for Henry James, is a process of training oneself to "see" others clearly and fairly. The metaphor appears repeatedly in the novels in "scenes of revelation."⁶⁵ Such an image is also absolutely appropriate for such a scrupulous scrutinizer as Pearson. He is always convinced that he has missed the best time, though he seems to have few doubts about his abilities as a writer. The moments at which he notes that he can "really see" another person are moments of intense romantic concentration. For example, when he "falls in love" with Julian Baffin, the realization strikes him like a thunderbolt. His descriptions then become particularly detailed; every element of his beloved becomes significant, down to the tiger lily chair on which she sat while studying Hamlet in his sitting room. The intensity of his awareness is what jolts Pearson into the "madness" that characterizes his affair with Julian and his subsequent fatal neglect of his suicidal sister Priscilla. While some events and people are brought into painfully sharp focus, others are allowed to remain on the hazy edges of the scene, or the victims of the involuntary blinking of the eye. One cannot be all things to all people; yet, Murdoch's philosophy of attentive love encourages as well this sort of expansiveness. The Black Prince is the story of the possible tragic results of indiscriminate

⁶⁵Scenes of revelation are defined and illustrated in Chapter 2, Section II.

"loving" attention when that attention must be divided three and four times, her implicit novelistic proof that her system will not function as everyday life.

Since timing has become of the essence to Pearson, he feels compelled to justify his scant literary productivity on this basis. Most of his Foreword and numerous digressions are devoted to this justification, which is usually evoked by contrast with Arnold Baffin, a prolific and popular writer. A long time friend of Pearson, Baffin has produced a great deal in a relatively short time. When Pearson orders Baffin's complete works, the list of titles sounds like a parody of Murdoch's canon:

I watched while Francis tore the cardboard and draffed the top off the box.

It was full of books. The Precious Labyrinth. The Gauntlets of Power. Tobias and the Fallen Angel. A Banner with a Strange Device. Essays of a Seeker. A Skull on Fire. A Clash of Symbols. Hollows in the Sky. The Glass Sword. Mysticism and Literature. The Main and the Magus. The Pierced Chalice. Inside a Snow Crystal.

Arnold's books. Dozens of them.⁶⁶

Pearson maintains that Baffin has sacrificed quantity to quality, assuring his reader (and himself) that there were many volumes that he destroyed, rather than allow them to be published before they were ready. In her Postscript, Rachel Baffin denies this professed destruction, however:

. . . He was often, to put it bluntly, rather a bore. The pretense of being an artist was psychologically necessary to him. I am told this is so with a lot of unsuccessful people. He pretends he wrote things and tore them up, and he goes on and on about how he waited and waited and was a perfectionist.

⁶⁶The Black Prince, p. 351.

I am sure he never tore anything up in his life. (Except my husband's books.) He was print-mad. He desperately wanted what my husband had, fame. He wanted just to be published at any price and was always going round the publishers with his stuff, he would have published anything. He even asked my husband to intercede for him with his publisher. He was not a stoical and ascetic sort of person at all, but remained like an eager boy who wants to get his piece into the school magazine. It was quite touching in an elderly man.⁶⁷

This rather shockingly unsympathetic evaluation of Pearson's literary capability serves as an example of the effect that the Afterwords have on the narrative itself. In Rachel's case, as the "wronged wife," she contradicts virtually all of Pearson's narrative, even reconstructing the murder of her husband to make Pearson not the indirect but the direct cause. Her remarks then are motivated by scorn, spite, grief, and an attempt to leave her husband's reputation relatively unscathed.

Pearson's description of himself is convincing by dint of the persuasion of length and detail. One must assume, to be consistent with Murdoch's philosophy, that he believes that what he writes is the truth, and that the others do too, regardless of their second-guessing of each other's motives. Pearson's self-evaluation is accurate; so is Rachel's. Pearson's picture of himself is designed also to gain one's sympathy and respect, even joy that after so long a period of non-creativity he now has a book:

. . . But in fact (I feel inclined to say "of course") my faith in myself in this respect, my sense of the absoluteness of this destiny, this even doom, has never weakened or wavered. I have "waited," not always with patience, but, in recent years at least, with an increasing confidence. I have felt ever behind the veil of the future that a great achievement was hidden still. Let those smile who have endured as long. And if it should turn

⁶⁷The Black Prince, p. 354.

out that this small story about myself is all my destiny is for, is the crown after all of my expectation, shall I feel myself cheated? Not cheated surely, for against that darkness one is bereft of rights. No man has the right to exercise divine power. All that one can do is to wait, to try, to wait again.⁶⁸

Pearson's consistent romanticization of his position becomes oppressive in the light of the novel he has actually written.

Pearson gives the reader some background on his childhood with his sister Priscilla in his father's "shabby unsuccessful shop," a "sort of paper shop, down in Croyden." His description leaves the distinct impression of lovelessness and poverty:

The shop sold daily papers and magazines, writing paper and so on, and horrible "gifts." My sister, Priscilla, and I lived in this shop. I do not mean that we actually ate and slept in the shop. We did in fact often have tea there, and I have a "memory" of sleeping under the counter. But the shop was the house and the mythical domain of our childhood. Some fortunate children have a garden, a landscape, as the "local habitation" of their early years. We had the shop: its drawers, its shelves, its smells, its endless empty cardboard boxes, its particular dirt. It was a shabby unsuccessful shop. My parents were shabby unsuccessful people. They both died when I was in my thirties, my father first, my mother not long after. They lived to see my first book published. They were proud of me. My mother filled me with exasperation and shame but I loved her. . . . My father I simply disliked. Or perhaps I have forgotten my affection for him. One can forget love, as you will perceive that I shortly find out.⁶⁹

The distance Pearson has travelled from these humble beginnings to the position of Inspector of Taxes, with publications, is evident, as is Pearson's pride in his having travelled the distance. His sister Priscilla, in the process of leaving her husband Roger and eventually committing suicide, has not fared nearly so well. Pearson has an

⁶⁸The Black Prince, p. xiii.

⁶⁹The Black Prince, p. xiv.

affection for her, but she is far from his central concern in this vindication of himself.

At no point in the narrative does Pearson offer a parallel description of Arnold Baffin's background. He offers instead the history of his friendship with Baffin ("my protégé") rather than any insight into Baffin's childhood. We get information about Baffin strictly through Pearson's eyes:

. . . I am anxious (this is not just a phrase, I feel anxiety) about the clarity and justice of my presentation of Arnold, since this story is, from a salient point of view, the story of my relations with Arnold and the astounding climax to which these relations led. I "discovered" Arnold, a considerably younger man, when I was already modestly established as a writer, and he, recently out of college, was just finishing his first novel. I had by then "got rid of" my wife and was experiencing one of those "fresh starts" which I have so often hoped would lead on to achievement. He was a schoolmaster, having lately graduated in English literature at the university of Reading. We met at a meeting. He coyly confessed his novel. I expressed polite interest. He sent me the almost completed typescript. . . . I thought the piece had some merits and I helped him to find a publisher for it. I also reviewed it quite favorably when it came out. Thus began one of the most, commercially speaking, successful of recent literary careers. Arnold at once, contrary . . . to my advice, gave up his job as a teacher and devoted himself to writing. He wrote easily, producing every year a book which pleased the public taste. Wealth, fame followed.⁷⁰

Implicit in Pearson's description of Baffin's success is the ease with which it came to him. Baffin was clearly from another class than Pearson was, a status which allowed him a university education and exposure to a good deal of "classic" art for the larger proportion of his life. Baffin clearly had a more solid preparation for a career as a writer than did Pearson. Pearson addresses the question of his jealousy of Baffin's success directly, however:

⁷⁰The Black Prince, p. 11.

It has been suggested, especially in the light of more recent events, that I envied Arnold's success as a writer. I would like at once and categorically to deny this. I sometimes envied his freedom to write at a time when I was tied to my desk. But I did not in general feel envy of Arnold Baffin for one very simple reason: he achieved success at the expense of merit. As his discoverer and patron I felt from the start identified with his activities. And I felt, rather, distress that a promising young writer should have laid aside true ambition and settled so quickly into a popular mold. I respected his industry and I admired his "career." He had many gifts other than purely literary ones. I did not, however, much like his books. Tact readily supervened, however, and . . . we soon instinctively avoided certain topics of conversation.⁷¹

This categorical defense of his position has the two-fold effect of a definite statement of his beliefs and the implication of Baffin's defense. Having already noted his wife's comments on Pearson, his words retain a certain dignity, but the undertone remains to suggest that Pearson is simply creating an elaborate justification of his failure.

Pearson's envy of Baffin's success is construed in various ways by observers, who claim everything from Pearson's love for Baffin (latent homosexuality) to the fact that he never reviewed Baffin's work in his life. To read the Afterwords after being wholly convinced by Pearson's sincere statement is to realize once again that people do not know each other and that, if Pearson is to be considered "mad," then the term applies to most opinionated people.

In essence, Pearson's theory of art contradicts basically that of Arnold Baffin, if he has a theory, and interested observers are likely to give it any sort of name--homosexual attraction, jealousy, the imaginings of an old man--in order to explain a phenomenon that has

⁷¹The Black Prince, p. 11.

reality only for those involved, and only in the terms in which they conceive the phenomenon. Rendering this phenomenon on paper distorts even Pearson's view.

The differences in Baffin's and Pearson's theories of art, basically for Pearson a question of quality or quantity, are discussed also by Pearson in light of Baffin's personality. The obvious question here is whether Pearson, despite his claiming superiority over Baffin, actually is superior to him. Since we are provided neither with direct statements from Baffin, nor with samples of his work, Pearson's evaluation must hold:

I should make clear that Arnold was not in any crude sense "spoilt" by success. He was no tax-dodger with a yacht and a house in Malta. (He sometimes laughingly discusses tax-avoidance, but never tax-evasion.) He lived in a fairly large, but not immodest, suburban villa in a "good class" housing estate in Ealing. His domestic life was, even to an irritating extent, lacking in style. It was not that he put on an act of being "the ordinary chap." In some way he was "the ordinary chap," and eschewed the vision which might, for better as well as worse, have made a very different use of his money. I never knew Arnold to purchase any object of beauty. He was indeed quite deficient in visual taste, though he was rather aggressively fond of music. As to his person, he continued to look like a schoolmaster, dressed shapelessly, and retained a raw shy boyish appearance. It never occurred to him to play "the famous writer." Or perhaps intelligence of which he had plenty, suggested this way of playing it. He wore steel rimmed specs, behind which his eyes were a very pale bluish-green, rather striking. His nose was pointed, his face always rather greasy, but healthy looking. There was a general lack of colour. Something of an albino? He was accounted, and perhaps was, good-looking. He was always combing his hair.⁷²

The major differences in personality become evident here. Baffin has the house in the suburbs; Pearson a flat in the city. Baffin has a wife, a daughter, and frequent affairs; Pearson none. Baffin writes

⁷²The Black Prince, p. 12.

easily, is famous and produces, like Murdoch, a book per year; Pearson three in a lifetime. Baffin is younger, has regarded Pearson as a "spiritual father," and still retains his good looks; Pearson ages. Baffin is not an art collector; Pearson amasses. Baffin is "addicted" to music; Pearson scorns it.

These last two points are significant ones to Pearson, and telling ones in the scope of Murdoch's work. Anyone who is not at least a collector, especially in a book devoted to art, suffers from an unforgivable insensitivity of the kind that Randall Peronett displays in forcing the sale of the Tintoretto belonging to his father in An Unofficial Rose. Likewise, music is a subject that Murdoch avoids whenever possible. When she mentions it, she always admits to a lack of understanding, or implies that it is not to be trusted; her response to it is a nonrational one, and she distrusts anything that she cannot pin down particularly. In The Black Prince, however, having created in Bradley Pearson a person who has given careful consideration to most forms of art, Murdoch ventures her longest statement on the subject.

The scene in the opera Rosenkavalier, attended by Pearson with Julian Baffin, who is still innocent of Pearson's having fallen in love with her some days before during their Hamlet tutorial. Picturing Julian as Hamlet in black tunic over white silk shirt with black tights accomplished the fact for Pearson. She actually appears dressed as Hamlet at Patara, where the couple hide away, and again the costume initiates the fait accompli. Pearson has been writhing in the flames of his passion since the study period, however, and the opera is their

first "date." Rosenkavalier is a particularly appropriate opera in the light of the affection of an old man for a young girl. Julian, innocent of the discomfort that the mere proximity of their bodies creates for Pearson, outlines the story for him before it begins, and he becomes aware that he will see on stage a dramatic rendition of his plight. His pain is thus greatly intensified by the knowledge that the young beloved of the opera will eventually leave the older mate in favor of someone younger, the resolution that occurs as well in The Black Prince.

Pearson becomes acutely aware of his body as he carefully places it beside Julian's in the next seat. His silent ruminations on music, therefore, give way to the intense impressions of all Pearson's senses. First, however, he begins to think about music in the abstract:

. . . And now there began to be heard in the background that awful and inimitably menacing sound of an orchestra tuning up. How I feel about music is another thing. I am not actually tone deaf, though it might be better if I were. Music can touch me, it can get at me, it can torment. It just, as it were, reaches me, like a sinister gabbling in a language one can almost understand, a gabbling which is horribly, one suspects, about oneself. When I was younger I even listened to music deliberately, shunning myself with the experience. True pleasure in art is a cold fire. I do not wish to deny that there are some people though fewer than one might think from the talk of our self-styled experts who derive a pure and mathematically clarified pleasure from these medleys of sound. All I can say is that "music" for me was simply an occasion for personal fantasy, the outrush of hot muddled emotions, the muck of my mind made audible.⁷³

In keeping with a philosophy that admits to the persistence of fantasy, it is indeed logical that non-appreciation of music of all kinds should be a consistent theme in her fiction and philosophy.

⁷³The Black Prince, p. 218.

Julian takes his arm, and with the contact, Pearson's other senses rush in to create a cacaphony within his head, the intensity of which eventually sends him running for a place to vomit. Murdoch's description of Pearson's state of mind is delightfully overstated:

. . . I was breathing very short in, I hoped, not audible pants or gasps. The orchestra was continuing its jumbled keening of crazed birds. I felt a void the size of an opera house and my stomach might have been and through the middle of it travelled the great scar of desire

The softly cacaphonous red and gold scene swung in my vision, beginning to swirl gently like something out of Blake: it was a huge coloured ball, a sort of immense Christmas decoration, a glittering shining twittering globe of dim rosy light in the midst of which Julian and I were suspended, rotating, held together by a swooning intensity of precarious feather-touch . . . I was in a golden scarlet jungle full of the chattering of apes and the whistling of birds. A scimitar of sweet sounds sliced the air and entered into the red scar and became pain. I was that sword of agony, I was that pain. I was in an arena, surrounded by thousands of grimacing nodding faces, where I had been condemned to death by pure sound. I was to be killed by the whistling of birds and buried in a pit of velvet. I was to be gilded and then flayed.

"Bradley, what's the matter?"

"Nothing."⁷⁴

Music to Murdoch is for those who do not think. This transport of Pearson's is her parody of its effect on someone who does not appreciate its mathematical precision.

Her last comments on music are found in P. Loxias' Afterword, in which Pearson's death is announced and final comments on his novel delivered. Loxias (or "Luxias") is supposedly a murderer that Pearson met in prison and became attached to; Loxias, Pearson's "editor" and "alter ego," is the only person present at Pearson's death. He is also a "virtuoso musician" who murdered another musician, according to Rachel

⁷⁴The Black Prince, pp. 218-219.

Baffin's Afterword. The parallels here with artist Pearson accused of murdering artist Baffin are clear. Loxias' comments about music are, therefore, assumedly informed ones, but the nature of his criticisms of Pearson's art are strictly impressionistic and vague. He thus becomes a character created around Murdoch's lack of appreciation for music. Evaluating Pearson's novel, Loxias writes in sweeping metaphors:

As for music, which Mrs. Belling (Julian Baffin) acutely says is . . . the image of all the arts but not their king: I am not disposed to disagree. In fact I am well placed to appreciate her argument. Known as a musician, I am in fact interested in all the arts. Music relates sound and time and so pictures the ultimate edge of human communications. But the arts form not a pyramid but a circle. They are the defensive outer barriers of language, whose elaboration is a condition of all simpler modes of communication. Without these defenses men sink to beasts. That music points to silence is again an image, which Bradley used. All artists dream of a silence which they must enter, as some creatures return to the sea to spawn. The creator of form must suffer formlessness. Even risk dying of it. What would Bradley Pearson have done if he had lived? Would he have written another book, a great one? Perhaps. The human soul is full of surprises.⁷⁵

To say, then, that Arnold Baffin is a devotee of music, to picture him running to turn on the phonograph the moment Pearson leaves the house, as Pearson imagines, is simply to state in another metaphor that Baffin is a non-thinking popular writer who makes a great deal of money writing pot-boilers for the public taste.

Pearson's affair with Baffin's daughter Julian and his debated "pass" at Rachel, Baffin's wife, are interpreted as the diabolically planned revenge of a jealous man who clings to the hope of producing a publishable work before he dies. In Pearson's detailed description of

⁷⁵The Black Prince, p. 365.

the "attempted" affair initiated by Rachel and the full-blown adventure with Julian, he manages a dignity that is entirely lost when viewed through the eyes of anyone else, even Rachel or Julian, who both deny "affairs" more or less positively.

Pearson begins his book with the Baffins and his relationship to them. He is called to their house because Baffin is afraid he might have killed his wife. In the last scene in the novel, it is Rachel who is standing over Baffin's body, with Pearson again the witness. Pearson uses the superimposition of unity on events to emphasize the stormy history of the Baffin marriage, largely because of Baffin's apparently insatiable appetite for extra-marital affairs, and Rachel's inability to tolerate them any longer. In this history of the Baffin marriage and his relation to it (their "pussycat," as Julian called him), Pearson reveals the difficulties inherent with living with a recognized "artist": the fat ego, the constant need for admiration, and the neglect of those who made his success possible. All of these charges Baffin categorically denies, until Rachel reads the letter which holds the proof of Baffin's affair with Pearson's former wife, Christian, and Rachel cannot bear the truth. Living with Arnold "the artist" has meant believing in his daily fictions as well as the yearly ones that everyone reads. Once this fictional illusion is destroyed, it remains only to destroy its perpetrator. Ironically, Arnold Baffin's fate parallels Bradley Pearson's. Neither survives the destruction of their fictions.

Pearson's instincts seem fairly true, if we take his novel at face value, as he intends. His affection for writing is demonstrated in his frequent allusions to The Black Prince itself, to his review of Baffin's

latest novel, and to his letter-writing, which he finds most gratifying. Not only is every piece of writing a sort of fiction of its own, but, as such, each seeks to stop time, Pearson's most serious enemy, which remains undefeated. Writing the novel is a way of recreating the years that preceded his incarceration. Publishing the review is a way of stopping the seemingly inexorable success of Arnold Baffin by telling what he would like to be "the truth" about him:

Arnold Baffin's work was a congeries of amusing anecdotes loosely garbled into "racy stories" with the help of half-baked symbolism. The dark powers of imagination were conspicuous by their absence. Arnold Baffin wrote too much, too fast. Arnold Baffin was just a talented journalist.⁷⁶

Such a definitive statement arranges Pearson's opinion of Baffin in his mind, categorizes him, and places him in a cubbyhole where Baffin cannot annoy him.

Writing several drafts of letters is a sure means of reconstructing reality three and four times, and always with the option of not delivering the missive. The final letter that brings about Arnold's death was written by Pearson. Murdoch has Pearson explain his philosophy of letter-writing, as he did his theories on art and music:

I am, I must confess, an obsessive and superstitious letter-writer. When I am troubled I will write a long letter rather than make a telephone call. This is perhaps because I invest letters with magical power. To desiderate something in a letter is, I often irrationally feel, tantamount to bringing it about. A letter is a barrier, a reprieve, a charm against the world, an almost infallible method of acting at a distance. (And, it must be admitted, of passing the buck.) It is a way of bidding time to stop.⁷⁷

⁷⁶The Black Prince, p. 30.

⁷⁷The Black Prince, p. 41.

The ego involvement for which Pearson criticizes Baffin is his own downfall. Implicit in his writing is the pride in his manner of expression as well as the assurance that even a "select few" will read his "Seducer's Diary." Pearson becomes so very concerned with, first, getting out of London to write his book, and, second, pursuing Julian that he allows his sister to commit suicide after her first futile attempt in his own bed: "I simply did not love her enough to be of any use to her, and it seemed wiser to make this plain at once" (The Black Prince, 52). Priscilla is artless, clumsy, and not terribly bright; her brother therefore does little more than entrust her to various interested bystanders until the deed is done. (Pearson admits, "'I felt fear and disgust at the idea of "mental breakdown," the semi-deliberate refusal to go on organizing one's life which is regarded with such tolerance these days'" (The Black Prince, 52).

Pearson's judgment of himself, however, once again emphasizes his awareness of his own shortcomings but also the limitations of his form. His digression on Priscilla and Arnold, as he has drawn them, is worth noting:

Irony is a form of "tact" (witty word). It is our tactful sense of proportion in the selection of forms for the embodying of beauty. Beauty is present when truth has found an apt form. It is impossible finally to separate these ideas. Yet there are points at which by a sort of momentary artificiality we can offer a diagnosis. This again is, that which amuses logicians, something which is a case of itself. How can one describe a human being "justly"? How can one describe oneself? With what an air of false coy humility, with what an assumed confiding simplicity one sets about it! "I am a puritan" and so on. Faugh! How can these statements not be false? Even "I am tall" has a context. How the angels must laugh and sigh. Yet what can one do but try to lodge one's vision somehow inside this layered stuff of ironic sensibility, which, if I were a fictitious character, would be that much deeper and denser? How prejudiced

is this image of Arnold, how superficial this picture of Pricilla! Emotions cloud the view, and so far from isolating the particular, draw generality and even theory in their train. When I write of Arnold my pen shakes with resentment, love, remorse, and fear. It is as if I were building a barrier against him composed of words, hiding myself behind a mound of words. We defend ourselves by descriptions and tame the world by generalizing. What does he fear? is usually the key to the artist's mind. Art is so often a barrier. (Is this true even of the greatest art, I wonder?) So art becomes not communication but mystification. When I think of my sister I feel pity, annoyance, guilt, disgust and it is in the "light" of these that I present her, crippled and diminished by my perception itself. How can I correct these faults, my dear friend and comrade? Priscilla was a brave woman. She endured unhappiness grimly, with dignity. She sat alone in the mornings manicuring her nails while tears came into her eyes for her wasted life.⁷⁸

What Pearson is asking, essentially, is what is the truth? How can I make myself see more justly? These questions are by now the familiar ones at the heart of Murdoch's philosophy.

His falling in love with Julian, however, reverses his entire repressed and introverted way of looking at the world. Love for Julian literally transforms him physically and psychologically. Describing his new-found blissful state, Pearson refers to Plato's love for a young boy, which harks back to the passage quoted earlier from The Sovereignty of Good; the two works thus draw together closely at this point:

. . .I lay in bed, floating in my secret bliss. For my first consciousness also brought that with it: that I was a man dedicated to a secret task. And forever. There was no doubt about that either. If I love thee not, chaos is come again. The foreverness of real love is one of the reasons why even unrequited love is a source of joy. The human soul creaves for the eternal of which, apart from certain rare mysteries of religion, only love and art can give a glimpse. (I will not pause to answer the cynic, possibly the same one whom we heard from just now, who will say: "And now long does your romantic foreverness last, pray?" or rather, I will simply reply: "True love is eternal. It is also rare; and no doubt you, Sir, were never lucky enough to experience it!") Love brings with it also

⁷⁸The Black Prince, p. 58.

a vision of selflessness. How tight Plato was to think that, embracing a lovely boy, he was on the road to the Good. I say a vision of selflessness, because our mixed nature readily degrades the purity of any aspiration. But such insight, even intermittent, even momentary, is a privilege and can be of permanent value because of the intensity with which it visits us. Ah, even once, to will another rather than oneself! Why could we not make of this revelation a lever to lift the world? Why cannot this release from self provide a foothold in a new place which we can then colonize and enlarge until at last we will all that is not ourselves? That was Plato's dream. It is not impossible.⁷⁹

Pearson moves from this ideal position to one of selfish possessiveness, as his passion for Julian grows in intensity, gradually shutting out the rest of the world except to deal with it in an expansive golden haze that bears little relation to what is really going on.

From the point of view of others who regard Bradley in his transport, he seems to have lost his senses and becomes a benign Santa Claus. He loses evidence of age in the transports of love, becomes youthful-looking again, only to return to age fifty-eight or older in a manner that recalls the portrait of Dorian Gray when Julian leaves him. After the death of Arnold Baffin and the ignominious trial, Pearson maintains a certain faith in his experience, and he has learned from it. His final statements in the Afterword reveal the romantic posture he has chosen to strike, which he will maintain until death:

This book has been in some way the story of my life. But it has also been, I hope, an honest tale, a simple love story. And I would not wish it to seem at the end that I have, in my own sequestered happiness, somehow forgotten the real being of those who have figured as my characters. I will mention two. Priscilla. May I never in my thought knit up the precise and random detail of her wretchedness so as to forget that her death was not a necessity. And Julian. I do not, my darling girl, however passionately and intensely my thought has worked upon

⁷⁹The Black Prince, p. 176.

your being, really imagine that I invented you. Eternally you escape my embrace. Art cannot assimilate you nor thought digest you. I do not now know, or want to know, anything about your life. For me, you have gone into the dark. Yet elsewhere I realize, and I meditate upon this knowledge, that you laugh, you cry, you read books, and cook meals and yawn and lie perhaps in someone's arms. This knowledge too may I never deny, and may I never forget how in the humble hard time ridden reality of my life I loved you. That love remains, Julian, not diminished though changing, a love with a very clear and very faithful memory. It causes me on the whole remarkably little pain. Only sometimes at night when I think that you live now and are somewhere, I shed tears.⁸⁰

In the character and narrative of Bradley Pearson, Murdoch has presented her philosophy of attentive love through the analogy of art; she has shown how, for a brief moment in Pearson's life, he glimpsed an intimation of the way that Platonic love can function in the world. The emotional heights that brought the insight, however, are impossible to sustain, so that the love descends once more to mundane, everyday sexual attraction. though Pearson's perceptions are permanently changed by the insight, he is incapable of bringing his original insight to any kind of useful fruition, but now cherishes its memory.

Appropriately, Pearson dies in prison shortly after his book is finished. The pressures of ego and time are antithetical to true art, but paradoxically a necessity in its creation. In the same way, selfless love can be denigrated by the "fat ego" over time. "The black prince" of Eros and Thanatos may be reconciled to everyday experience only through an immense, sustained effort of will, and even then one is still far from an approach to the Good. Contemplation cannot be a forced action; Murdoch writes in her Sovereignty of Good that, Good, not will

⁸⁰The Black Prince, p. 341.

is transcendent. Will is the natural energy of the psyche which is sometimes employable for a worthy purpose. Good is the focus of attention when an intent to be virtuous coexists (as perhaps it almost always does) with some unclarity of vision. . . . beauty appears as the visible and accessible aspect of the Good.⁸¹

Pearson's glimpse of the sun, "the Good," was the beginning of a transformation that gave rise, among other things, to his "work of art," The Black Prince. The distance Pearson fell short is the distance his novel is from great art. It is the distance human beings must remain from the ideal conception of selfish love.

⁸¹The Sovereignty of Good, p. 70.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH: "WITHOUT CONSOLATION"

I

"Philosophy is the study of death" (Sovereignty of Good, 68).

Death is the element in Murdoch's philosophy, as in life, which provides all other elements with a locus around which to arrange themselves. Her observations on language, love, and art, previously discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 respectively, derive their ultimate reference from the reality and inevitability of death. Conduct of one's life and the effective integration of these other elements is determined by one's attitude toward what is generally termed "the end" of life as we know it on this planet. We must also realize simultaneously that death can occur at any time, without warning. Death is the element that eludes human control, regardless of religious conviction; it is the involuntary reality that must therefore precede and lend order to the realities that yield to voluntary manipulation.

Murdoch's philosophy is other-directed, primarily aimed at a picture of the courageous, humble, virtuous man, the intellectual alongside the peasant. Murdoch describes this man, however, in images that incorporate his idea of death. For example, in describing courage in her essay "On God and Good," Murdoch chooses an extreme situation:

. . . if we reflect upon courage and ask why we think it to be a virtue, what kind of courage is the highest, what distinguishes courage from rashness, ferocity, self-assertion, . . . we are bound, in our explanation, to use the names of other virtues. The best kind of courage (that which would make a man act un-

selfishly in a concentration camp) is steadfast, calm, temperate, intelligent, loving. . . . This may not in fact be exactly the right description, but it is the right sort of description.¹

Courage in the face of almost certain death, in the experience of starvation, physical and psychological tortures, and wholesale human destruction is to give away what little reserve one might possess for another, with no faint hope of reward. There is, in these extreme situations, absolutely no external reason for unselfish action, no promise of reward, recognition, or even understanding. Implicit also is the rarity of this sort of courage. Perception of the absolute order of Murdoch's universe, with the Sun at its center and death a palpable reality, immediately transforms all human beings to equals, so that possessions become ephemeral and self-serving actions foolish.

In the same way, this perception makes criticisms like that of James Griffin sound as if they miss her point entirely:

. . . of course, sympathy, empathy, imagination are at the centre of morality. But contact with reality does not solve all problems. It may shrink the fat ego but it does not magically make it disappear. I may become an Oxfam field worker and have the horrible reality of starvation constantly filling my field of vision. I may be sensitive and sympathetic, and I may still not do what I believe to be my duty. And the failure need not be in my perception of reality. The failure could be that I cannot easily bring myself to treat other people's interests, even once I have grasped them, equally with my own. This selfishness comes in different shapes, not just failure to perceive some reality which then furnishes us with an ideal but also the failure to live up to the ideal. And Miss Murdoch seems to want to make all selfishness of one kind.²

¹Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 57.

²James Griffin, "The Fat Ego," Essays in Criticism 22 (1972), p. 80.

The "reality" Griffin refers to is of much more particular reference and specific situation than that reality in Murdoch's view which fosters unselfishness. Griffin's exceptions are well taken, and, if he would read Murdoch's fiction alongside her philosophy, he would see her embodiment of various kinds of exceptions. The true unselfishness that Murdoch speaks of in her philosophy is the complete selflessness of Zen masters, approachable but ultimately impossible for the ordinary human being to achieve in daily life without great determination.

Murdoch's use of language as an analogy for her philosophy of selfless attention embodies the same sort of unmistakable truth as does the image of the man in the concentration camp. Murdoch discusses the inconsistencies and inadequacies of words as names for objects and of terms for communication:

If I am learning, for instance, Russian, I am confronted by an authoritative structure which commands my respect. The task is difficult and the goal is distant and perhaps never entirely attainable. My work is a progressive revelation of something that exists entirely independently of me. Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality. Love of Russian leads me away from myself toward something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny, or make unreal. The honesty and humility required of the student--not to pretend what one does not know--is the preparation for the humility of the scholar who does not even feel tempted to suppress the fact which damns his theory.³

The undeniable existence of a body of knowledge alien to one's experience encourages the same point of view, the same virtuous humility, that is required of the man in extremis in the concentration camp. The example of learning a foreign language is, granted, milder

³The Sovereignty of Good, p. 89.

and more readily understood by a larger majority of people, but the attitude and the results are similar. They differ in that eventually even partial knowledge of Russian might be considered a "reward" for one's effort, but to view the result in this way is to misconstrue the example. For this reason, she also cites the scholar doing independent research, answering only to his conscience in gathering and revealing the information he collects. Reward here again must be external to the effort; it must be like that of the virtuous peasant, "for nothing":

It seems to me that the Platonic metaphor of the idea of the Good provides a suitable picture here. With this picture must of course be joined a realistic conception of natural psychology (about which almost all philosophers seem to me to have been too optimistic) and also an acceptance of the utter lack of finality in human life. The Good has nothing to do with purpose, indeed it excludes the idea of purpose. "All is vanity" is the beginning and end of ethics. The only genuine way to be good is to be good "for nothing" in the midst of a scene where every "natural" thing, including one's own mind, is subject to chance, that is, to necessity. That "for nothing" is indeed the experience's correlate of the invisibility or non-representable blankness of the idea of Good itself.⁴

In the same way must be construed Murdoch's continued attention to the somewhat more complex topic of love. If virtuous, obedient humility characterizes the ideal human being, the selfless recognition of the multiplicity of the universe with as much attention to detail as one can manage, then an almost child-like disinterestedness in the selfish machinations of everyday life is mandatory. Murdoch's main point here is that "love" should not be confused with "the Good" itself. Love is a means to perception of "the Good," as are language and artistic study, if one exercises the right sort of love. Love must always be subordinate

⁴The Sovereignty of Good, p. 71.

to the Good because there exists both "good love" and "bad love," similar to Sartre's "good faith" and "bad faith." The selfless, attentive, interested "good love" can transform through selfish passion and the impulse to possess into "bad love."

Murdoch's differentiation between the two types of love emphasizes simultaneously her understanding of the workings of human passions and seeming impossibility to "let go" that is required to achieve "good love":

I have not spoken of the role of love in its everyday manifestations. If one is going to speak of great art as "evidence," is not ordinary human love an even more striking evidence of a transcendent principle of good? Plato was prepared to take it as a starting point. (There are several starting points.) One cannot but agree that in some sense this is the most important thing of all; and yet human love is normally too profoundly possessive and also too "mechanical" to be a place of vision. There is a paradox here about the nature of love itself. That the highest love is in some sense impersonal is something which we can indeed see in art, but which I think we cannot see clearly, except in a very piecemeal manner, in the relationships of human beings.⁵

Because love can change form and become self serving rather than other directed, love is probably the most difficult concept to grasp in Murdoch's philosophy. Her novels are predominantly concerned with the possessive "machine" of marriage, with a relationship that has become static and predictable for all involved. For this reason, the Platonic concept of love in her philosophy is frequently mistaken for the mechanical sort. The emphasis on forgetting the self is thereby effectively undercut. Therefore, only the reminder of the presence of death for everyone provides a telling reference. Again, the generous man

⁵The Sovereignty of Good, p. 75.

in the concentration camp displays the sort of love that Murdoch intends:

The love which brings the right answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really looking. The difficulty is to keep the attention fixed upon the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolations of self pity, resentment, fantasy and despair. The refusal to attend may even induce a fictitious sense of freedom: I may as well toss a coin. Of course virtue is good habit and dutiful action. But the background condition of such habit and such action, in human beings, is a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness.⁶

The third major theme that unites her fiction and philosophy, the theme of art, is more easily defined in terms of its incorporation into her major philosophical theory and the idea of death. Her image of the artist bears great resemblance to the courageous man and the scholar she has described earlier. She states that "the good artist, in relation to his art, is brave, truthful, patient, humble" (Sovereignty of Good, 86). To Murdoch, appreciation of the arts, like appreciation of natural beauty, stimulates the attention away from the self toward the object viewed, thus encouraging the aforementioned "good" qualities of virtuous humility:

. . . especially literature and painting show us the peculiar sense in which the concept of virtue is tied on to the human condition. They show us the absolute pointlessness of virtue while exhibiting its supreme importance; the enjoyment of art is a training in the love of virtue. The pointlessness of art is not the pointlessness of a game; it is the pointlessness of human life itself, and form in art is properly the simulation of the self-contained aimlessness of the universe.⁷

⁶The Sovereignty of Good, p. 86.

⁷The Sovereignty of Good, p. 86.

As with love, there is "good art" and "bad art." Whereas good art reveals "the minute and absolutely random detail of the world . . . with a sense of unity and form," bad art lacks the mysteriousness embodied in good art, and its forms are "the recognizable and familiar rat-runs of selfish daydream" (Sovereignty of Good, 86). Embodied in this view of the great artist is pity and justice, a studied intuition of his subject so that his is not a photographic statement, but an accurately comprehensive one.

Understanding the function and nature of great art is again best understood in terms of its relationship to death and chance. The temptation of art is to conceal the necessity of death in consoling forms that make the concept easier to live with because it is falsified, made to look like something that is not, imposing a pattern on what is really "intolerably chancy and incomplete." Murdoch reminds us,

However, human life is chancy and incomplete. It is the role of tragedy, and also of comedy, and of painting to show us suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation. Or if there is any consolation it is the austere consolation of a beauty which teaches that nothing in life is of any value except the attempt to be virtuous. Masochism is the artist's greatest and most subtle enemy. It is not easy to portray death, real death, not fake prettified death. . . . The great deaths of literature are few, but they show us with an exemplary clarity the way in which art invigorates us by a juxtaposition, almost an identification, of pointlessness and value. The death of Patroclus, the death of Cordelia, the death of Petya Rostov. All is vanity. The only thing which is of real importance is the ability to see it all clearly and respond to it justly which is inseparable from virtue.⁸

The consciousness of one's own mortality, kept constantly at the forefront of one's thought as an undeniable standard, must reorder the

⁸The Sovereignty of Good, p. 87.

values and the intuitions one experiences, as well as one's ability to distinguish quality in language, in love, in art, as in philosophy. The false, the "prettified," the self serving become readily obvious when evaluated from this unyielding point of view.

All three of the topics considered in relation to Murdoch's philosophy and fiction can be falsified and sentimentalized to create fictions which are much more readily palatable by large numbers of people because they ignore the necessities of chance and death. For instance, the thematic complexity of Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov gains its richness through each brother's individual recognition of necessity and chance. Without these recognitions, the novel descends to the level of soap opera.

Further, death and chance themselves are susceptible to falsification, especially through excess of sentiment. In defining her own concept of death, Murdoch mentions that the romantic movement was largely responsible for its popularization through transformation of the idea of death into the idea of suffering:

. . . romanticism tended to transform the idea of death into the idea of suffering. To do this is of course an age-old human temptation. Few ideas invented by humanity have more power to console than the idea of purgatory. To buy back evil by suffering in the embrace of the good: what could be more satisfying, or as a romantic might say, more thrilling? Indeed the central image of Christianity lends itself to just this illegitimate transformation. . . . Death becomes Liebestod, painful and exhilarating, or at worst charming and sweetly tearful. . . . When the neo-Kantian Lucifer gets a glimpse of real death and real chance he takes refuge in sublime emotions

and veils with an image of tortured freedom, that which has been rightly said to be the study of philosophers.⁹

Any excuse to avoid necessity is seized upon with great enthusiasm, and substitutes abound, e.g., "History, God, Lucifer, Ideas of power, freedom, purpose, reward, even judgment" (Sovereignty of Good, 92). The idea that one can overcome death by suffering in this life or the next is a peculiarly attractive thought, however, and one which leads Murdoch to identify sado-masochism as the arch-enemy of great art.

Though Murdoch attaches the idea to Kant and the nineteenth century romanticists at their worst (Majdiak, 1972), the idea of the inherent worth of suffering to atone for real or imagined sins is ages old. One is reminded particularly of the long trains of early Christians (Hauerwas, 1972), each lashing the back of the person ahead in the interests of spiritual purification. Murdoch's discussion of "buying back evil in the embrace of the good" places suffering appropriately in the self-serving and even business-like function that it serves.

Causing suffering through tortuing oneself (masochism) or others (sadism) is particularly tempting because it is usually done for "a good cause," with implications of immortality. One escapes the fear that death engenders in most people through physical or psychological torture with this knowledge. Indeed, Murdoch's philosophy embraces suffering by recognizing it as a necessary part of human existence, not, however, as

⁹The Sovereignty of Good, pp. 82-83.

an end in itself. She acknowledges her debt to Simone Weil (Anderson, 1971) on the subject: "Will is obedience, not resolution" Sovereignty of Good, 40). Murdoch then continues to explain the relationship of the idea of suffering to the idea of Good:

Even suffering can play a demonic role here, and the ideas of guilt and punishment can be the most subtle tools of the ingenious self. The idea of suffering confuses the mind and in certain contexts (the context of "sincere self examination" for example) can masquerade as a purification. It is rarely this, for unless it is very intense indeed it is far too interesting. Plato does not say that philosophy is the study of suffering, he says it is the study of death (Phaedo 64A) and these ideas are totally dissimilar. That moral improvement involves suffering is usually true; but the suffering is the by product of a new orientation and not in any sense an end in itself.¹⁰

Again the orientation toward death and chance puts the contributing elements into proper focus. Even though the flower fades, the statue is broken, and the experience ceases, the essence of the beauty remains. When one begins to enjoy suffering, one has lost sight of necessity.

The breadth of perspective that allows disaster and suffering their proper proportions, such as W. H. Auden discusses in his "Musée des Beaux Arts," is the perspective that Murdoch seeks to achieve in her fiction. In order to explain the concept, she returns to the humble and virtuous man of her earlier example:

Simone Weil tells us that the exposure of the soul to God condemns the selfish part of it not to suffering but to death. The humble man perceives the difference between suffering and

¹⁰The Sovereignty of Good, p. 68.

death. And although he is not by definition the good man he is the kind of man who is most likely of all to become good.¹¹

Murdoch's fiction embodies a number of divergences from this ideal, showing in these less-than-exemplary characters the difficulty entailed in first visualizing, then attaining, and then maintaining any sort of consistent vision day to day. Murdoch's fictional worlds embody all the elements discussed here--language, love, art, and death--and none reigns supreme. All are continuously present; her vision encompasses them all, though one element may be highlighted at one time or another. Like the occasion of Icarus' descent from the sky, "everything turns away/Quite leisurely . . . the sun shone/As it had to . . . and the expensive delicate ship . . ./Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on" (Baylor and Stokes, 1972). Murdoch's fictional worlds continue to revolve beyond the last pages of her novels in order to maintain the larger perspective.

Courage, especially steadfast and loving courage, is still in the process of being forged. Murdoch's limited and often selfish characters have completed one struggle, but the reality of death and the ultimate equality of all humanity remains.

¹¹The Sovereignty of Good, p. 104.

II

Since Murdoch's total view of the sovereignty of Good takes as its fundamental reference an acknowledgment of death, the topics considered in previous chapters bear her intended full significance only in light of death's inevitability. These three complex topics are likely to be misconstrued as ends in themselves if not measured consciously against this necessity. In the same way, death itself can become a fixation, creating a life of self-centered masochism which excludes the larger scheme. Murdoch has created human examples as illustrations of various divergences in all of these philosophical areas; these people can be arranged on a continuum to show their proximity to the locus of death. By creating these characters, Murdoch demonstrates that death acts as an organizing element which places all other elements into perspective.

First, the extreme cases in which language, love, art, and/or death become a "major obsession" will be discussed, with an example to show how the topics function practically when placed in their "proper" perspective. What follows, therefore, are particularly dramatic examples of the four major philosophical concerns in order to illustrate their operation in everyday life.

Implicit in the collection of these examples is the assumption that those cases where a topic functions as a "major obsession" in the life of a certain character, it is functioning antithetically to Murdoch's total vision. When a particular topic gains control of a person's perceptions to the exclusion of all others, that topic is usually in

some way related to the self, which needs little encouragement to become overwhelming. When a person's interests become entirely self-serving, consideration for others gradually fades from the scene, which to Murdoch is the principal danger.

As a philosophical concept, language occupies a good deal of Murdoch's attention in the first essay in The Sovereignty of Good, entitled "The Idea of Perfection." She discusses Wittgensteinian language theory principally in relation to her theory of attainment of "the Good."¹² Her fundamental assumption in regard to the function of language in the process of selfless attention is two fold. First, words are inadequate symbols for the description of "inner data," held to be ultimately indescribable (Sovereignty of Good, 26). Second, because of the inadequate symbolism of words, one must try to develop a particular language that will communicate with one particular person in an attempt to know that person as completely as possible. One therefore constructs a different language for each person he seeks to know intimately. Initially, words are once removed from experience, as uniquely perceived by the spectator or participant. To describe the experience means putting nonverbal impressions into words which are by their nature imprecise and ambiguous. The perception of this experience by the listener, who has his own unique interpretation of the words in use, places the experience at least two removes from the initial phenomenon.

The point here is, of course, to increase the accuracy of the rendition of the experience by choosing the most appropriate words for

¹²See Chapter I for a full discussion of language in Murdoch's philosophy and fiction.

the situation and the audience. Obviously, also, all words are "loaded" with certain kinds of information and associations that must also be tailored to their particular usage. On the topic of the innate ambiguity of language, Lewis Thomas compares the use of words by humans to other biologic systems of communication in order to isolate an important point about human communication:

Perhaps it is in this respect that language differs most sharply from other biologic systems for communication. Ambiguity seems to be an essential, indispensable element for the transfer of information from one place to another by words, where matters of real importance are concerned. It is often necessary, for meaning to come through, that there be an almost vague sense of strangeness and askewness. Speechless animals and cells cannot do this. . . . when the bee is tracking sugar by polarized light, observing the sun as though consulting his watch, he does not veer away to discover an unimaginable marvel of a flower. Only the human mind is designed to work in this way, programmed to drift away in the presence of locked on information, straying from each point in a hunt for a better, different point.

If it were not for this capacity for ambiguity, for the sensing of strangeness, that words in all languages provide, we would have no way of recognizing the layers of counterpoint in meaning, and we might be spending all our time sitting on stone fences, staring into the sun. To be sure, we would always have had some everyday use to make of the alphabet, and we might have reached the same capacity for small talk, but it is unlikely that we would have been able to evolve from words to Bach. The great thing about human language is that it prevents us from sticking to the matter at hand.¹³

The innate ambiguity of language makes mandatory the increase in breadth and variety of words and expressions from which to choose in order to "touch" one's audience. It is not difficult to imagine, however, how language can be manipulated to convey not only the experience

¹³Lewis Thomas, The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher (New York: Viking Books, 1974), p. 101.

itself but also, in a particularly skillful speaker, a certain impression of himself as well. This egoistic concern with one's self-image embodies a fundamental departure from Murdoch's ideal system. In her discussion, the emphasis is consistently on the listener and on the effort to record the experience as accurately as possible. If an image is conveyed at all of the speaker, it is of an open, sincere individual entirely engrossed in what he is saying, rather than what the listener is thinking of him as he is saying it. However, this preoccupation is constantly present, and Murdoch seems to indicate that the way to deal with one's "fat ego" is to stifle it with attention to other people and things outside oneself.

In her novels, however, Murdoch deftly maneuvers egos of all sizes. The best example of how Murdoch uses the topic of language to dominate an entire novel is in A Word Child (1975), Hilary Burde's first-person narration of his adventures under the constant domination of languages of various sorts.¹⁴ The notable feature about Hilary, however, is that for all his claims that languages have shaped him, he succeeds to various extents in manipulating words in order to construct different versions of reality and, simultaneously, alternative versions of himself. The use of language to create fictions is a natural human propensity; we use it in order to make life more bearable and to hide from ourselves the perception of death. The "veil of fantasy" (Sovereignty of Good, 28) that characterizes most human lives and which

¹⁴See Chapter I, Section III for a full discussion of the novel and this theme.

encourages preoccupation with the self is the human failing that Murdoch's philosophy recognizes and wishes to prevent. Her cure for living with the inevitability of our own destruction, at whatever time, is to steep ourselves in "the truth," in other human beings (i.e., Murdoch's "love"--seeing others as an active process), and in other things (e.g., learning languages, appreciating "great" art). In these ways one gradually but persistently moves away from the self.

Another excellent novel for consideration in this regard, especially in a study concerned with death, is Bruno's Dream (1969). Large sections of the novel consist of old Bruno's monologues, mostly interior, on his imminent death of an unspecified but terminally progressive disease resembling hydrocephalitis. The disease has symbolically and physically increased and distorted his skull while emaciating his body, focusing all attention on his painful but inevitable reconciliation with his fate. Bruno Greensleave is also a published arachnologist, and his consciousness of spiders, their habits and idiosyncracies, becomes a controlling metaphor in the novel for his consciousness of people who visit him and for himself, immobile in the center of his littered web. Murdoch's description of his appearance is a justifiably frightening one, which incorporates his knowledge of spiders and of the imminence of his death. The description also shows, through the interior monologue, Bruno's awareness of how he seems to others:

. . . It was not just the smell, it was the look. He knew that he had become a monster, animal-headed, bull-headed, a captive Minotaur. He had a face now like one of his spiders, Xysticus perhaps, or Osyptila, that have faces like toads. Below the huge emergent head the narrow body stretched away, the contingent

improbably human form, strengthless, emaciated, elongated, smelly. He lived in a tube now, like Atypus, he had become a tube. Soma sema. His body was indeed a tomb, a grotesque tomb without beauty. How different death appeared to him now from how it had seemed even three years ago when he still had his white hair. Real death was nothing to do with obelisks and angels. No wonder they all averted their eyes.¹⁵

Eighty-three-year-old Bruno must accept that he is dying. He exists in one room; unattended trips to the bathroom are major undertakings, as is putting on his own bathrobe. His recognition of his condition, growing daily weaker and more grotesque, along with intermittent pain, is impossible for him to bear constantly. Therefore, he uses champagne to ease his perceptions back to happier days. He constantly dwells on his relations with his wife Janie. Those days were idyllic for them until her discovery of his mistress Maureen. After her discovery, their relationship to each other changed essentially:

His relation to Janie had fallen into two parts. In the first part, before Harrod's, they had played social roles, put on smart clothes, been admired and envied, lived above Bruno's station and beyond his means, and borne two handsome and talented children. In the second part, after Harrod's, they seemed to have been alone, really related to each other at last, in an awful shut-in solitude, becoming demons to each other . . .¹⁶

He still wishes Janie to forgive him for his sin, but her death by drowning prevents it. Again and again he relives the scene of Janie's discovery of Bruno and Maureen, as Bruno helps Maureen remove a dress at Harrod's:

It had gone on, the froufrou and the wit and the bright artificial lights, right on it seemed to him until that moment in

¹⁵Iris Murdoch, Bruno's Dream (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 78.

¹⁶Bruno's Dream, p. 15.

crowded sale-time Harrods when Maureen had been struggling with the dress. It was the early days of zip fasteners. Bruno, who often bought her clothes, was standing just outside the curtain of the trying-on room. Maureen had got the dress half over her head, but because the zip had stuck she could get it no further. She came out to Bruno, masked by the dress, her arms helplessly waving, a foot of frilly petticoat showing. "Quick, Bruno, get it off, I can't breathe." Bruno laughed, pulled. Then there was suddenly a moment of panic. "Maureen, keep still, you won't suffocate, you fool. You're tearing the dress." The dress came away. Bruno looked over Maureen's bare shoulder into the eyes of Janie. Janie turned at once and disappeared among the shoppers. Bruno, for whom Maureen no longer existed, darted after her. He sought for her desperately in the slow crowds as he had sought her long ago in the foyer of the theatre. He glimpsed her ahead, hurrying, and then she was gone. He came back to the department and paid the assistant for the torn dress. Maureen had vanished too. You taught me how to love you, Now teach me to forget.¹⁷

The constant replay of Janie's face over Maureen as she struggles to remove the dress over her head, the minute descriptions Bruno allows himself, of looks, conversations, and feelings surrounding the crucial scene are all a way of coming to grips with the inevitability of his death. Because, first, his vital processes are challenged, he thinks of women, and because the women most important to him are now dead, he feels even more alone:

It was odd to think that Janie and Gwen and his mother and for all he knew Maureen now existed more intensely, more really, here in his mind than they existed anywhere else in the world. They are part of my lifedream, he thought, they are immersed in my consciousness like specimens in formalin. The women all eternally young while I age like Tithonus. Soon they will have that much less reality. This dream stuff, this so intensely his dream stuff, would terminate at some moment and be gone, and no one could ever know what it had really been like. All the effort which he had put into making himself seemed vanity now that there were no more purposes. He had worked so hard, learning German, learning Italian. It seemed to him now that it had all been vanity, a desire at some moment which never came, to impress somebody, to succeed, to be admired.¹⁸

¹⁷Bruno's Dream, pp. 30-31

¹⁸Bruno's Dream, p. 10.

Here in Bruno's consciousness he struggles to make the life force balance the death force; he thus views his life (his "dream") from the standpoint of its termination, the final reality.

In Bruno's recognitions Murdoch personifies the perspective from which she writes her philosophy. The evanescence of everyday concerns becomes the central reference point: All is vanity. The task then remains to circumvent the morbidity and the psychological suffering induced by the recognition that all one's works and even one's body passes away and metamorphoses into other forms of energy. Repeating experiences from the past is an attempt to arrest the inevitable metamorphosis. Bruno is witnessing a most dramatic transformation in his appearance; the disease makes him almost unrecognizable to himself. He shuns mirrors to avoid confronting the bristling, convoluted, gargantuan distortion that has become his cranium. By remembering Janie and Maureen vividly, he remembers his youth, and thereby escapes the present misery for a few seconds. His inventions become the fictions which take him from painful awakening to painful sleep.

At one point, Bruno realizes that Janie's attitude toward Maureen, and his consequent abandonment of her, could be traced back to one comment of Janie's: "Janie had called Maureen a pathetic little tart." Bruno realizes ". . . how remote words, particularly angry words, are from the real thing at which they aim" (Bruno's Dream, 13). For Bruno, Maureen had hardly been a "pathetic little tart" as they played and shopped and made fun of everything, including Janie's absolute innocence of Bruno's infidelity. However remote, though, the angry words do have

their effect, and for Bruno the effect was to shatter half his world, as glass shatters from a clear tone. In his memory, the whole Janie-Maureen complex of emotions is preserved in those three words.

In the same way, a few angry words have isolated Bruno from Miles Greensleave, his son. Miles, a writer manqué, is at the beginning of the novel waiting for the onset of the godly inspiration for the "great work" he feels is incipient. Miles's state of mind, like Bruno's, is dominated by death, but in his case it is the death of his former wife. He married her directly after their graduations from Harvard, where she had taken a first in economics. Bruno had opposed the marriage, as did her family, on the basis of her Indian origins. Parvati was a Brahman, dedicated to bringing her knowledge of economics back to her people for practical application. Once she convinced her family of her choice, both were to live in India. Miles and Parvati were completely in love, expecting a baby, and sure that their mutual liberality would yield a loving and useful union. Parvati's plane crashed in the Alps on her way to rejoin her father in Benares.

Bruno's recollection of the matter conflates the entire affair to a few words, much like his memory of Janie and Maureen. Bruno lives with the guilt of his opposition of his son's choice as well:

Miles had forgiven nothing. Perhaps it was her death that fixed him with such endless resentment. That often-quoted remark about "coffee coloured grandchildren." Well, there had been a judgment.¹⁹

Bruno's racial epithet, which reveals his disgust at mixed grandchildren, was received with absolute disbelief and then utter rejection

¹⁹Bruno's Dream, p. 12.

by his son. Their relations were severed from then on.

Now, however, with Bruno's death imminent, he wishes Miles's forgiveness for his ill-mannered and hasty remark, even developing nightmares which picture Miles as the judge sentencing him to eternal guilt. In the meantime, Bruno has learned what a gifted and beautiful woman Parvati was, accepted fully by his daughter Gwen, who defended Parvati eloquently to Bruno to no avail. What was and is an ignorant judgment threatens to accompany him to the grave. Bruno therefore insists on seeing Miles, in order to right the record before he dies.

The meeting between Miles and Bruno is itself an unsatisfactory one which ends in anger on Miles's part and wretched petulance on Bruno's over the petty issue of who will inherit the valuable stamp collection. Nonetheless, with Bruno's advanced illness manifest, Miles suffers a great shock in confronting his father, whom he had frozen in the images of the past much as Bruno has Janie and Maureen. No amount of verbal preparation from his well-meaning brother-in-law Danby Odell, in whose house Bruno stays, could prepare Miles for the great transformation that is physical evidence of elapsed and ravaging time:

Miles had adjusted his picture of his father. He had imagined the silver hair thinned, the back bent a little, the face more hollow. What confronted him was not a death's head. It was a huge bulbous animal head attached to a body shrunken into a dry stick. Bruno's head seemed enlarged, the completely hairless dome swollen, bulging out over big sprouting ears. The face below, so far from being gaunt, seemed to have gained flesh. The nose was immense, a shapeless heap of fleshy protuberances. Hair unlike human hair sprouted upon it and upon his cheeks, together with fungus-like stains and excrescences. The bulgier parts of the face were unwrinkled, curiously smooth and pink, almost childlike. Under bushy brows, out of which a few much longer stiffer hairs emerged like probosces, were the slits of eyes, strangely luminous and liquid. Below the thin stalk of neck the tiny narrow body, on which pyjamas hung like garments draped upon

a pole, lay extended in the bed. Blotched arms, the bones separately visible, promenaded two shrivelled sharpened hands upon the counterpane.²⁰

Expecting to solve all the old complaints with just one sweeping gesture, both Miles and Bruno are dismayed at their deep and permanent scars and how many thousands of words it would take to know one another again and to forgive. Both are now too stubborn to bend easily; Bruno's attempted apology, therefore, is neither received nor even graciously declined:

"I would have liked Parvati, Miles, I would have accepted her and loved her, if only someone had made me meet her, if only you'd all given me a chance, it all happened so quickly, I just said something foolish without thinking and then it somehow got fixed that way, if only you'd given me a little bit more time and not got so angry--"

"Please, father, all this is totally unnecessary. I don't want to talk about Parvati."

"But I do, Miles. Don't you understand that I've been thinking about it all these years, that it's been torturing me?"

"I'm sorry to hear it, but I don't see--"

"I've got to have your forgiveness. You've got to understand--"

"It doesn't mean anything, father. It's all over long ago, it's gone."

"It isn't gone, it's here, it's here--"

"Don't excite yourself, please."

"I would have liked Parvati. I would have loved her, we could all have been happy, I would have loved your children. Oh Miles, your children--"

"Stop it, please."

"You must forgive me, Miles, forgive me properly, when you've understood it all. If only Parvati--"

"I don't want to talk about Parvati. She's nothing to do with you, please."²¹

Miles's stoic refusal to initiate the machinery of forgiveness reveals how he has dedicated his life to the machinery of suffering,

²⁰Bruno's Dream, p. 113.

²¹Bruno's Dream, p. 115.

even to taking a second wife (Diana) who, far from a substitute Parvati, acts as an attractive mother figure so that his impressions of the past remain untouched. Miles allows his righteous indignation to prevent reconciliation with Bruno even though Miles suffers guilt for not looking after his father. He can analyze all aspects of a situation and then sink right back into his fantasy of "how things were."

Language has been shown in these examples to be a way of escaping the inevitable and a method of alienating human beings from each other. It can also be, of course, a method of consolation. Because of Bruno's grotesque appearance, people find it difficult to look at him, much less converse for any length of time, or love him. Through Bruno Greensleave, Murdoch creates a physical example of how it feels to confront death. Not knowing what one will find on arrival, some cannot face it at all, and others are able to accept it, even befriend and comfort it. In Bruno's Dream, all of the major characters confront Bruno at some point, and their behavior becomes an index of their adjustment to the knowledge that they too will die.

Two unusual characters are most notable for their acclimation to Bruno's illness: Lisa, Miles's sister-in-law, a former nun, and Nigel Boase, a young man who acts as Bruno's nurse. Both characters also have the ability to communicate consolation. Lisa's attitude can be summarized in the one line that she delivers to Bruno on their first meeting, when she arrives with her sister Diana and Miles, neither of whom can bear Bruno's presence very long. Lisa, however, goes to his bed, takes his hand, holds it, and speaks with Bruno for a long time. The statement she makes is not calculated to yield anything but Bruno's

momentary pleasure. She leans close to the grotesque head and says, with wide, honest eyes, "'I want you to know that you are still attractive'" (Bruno's Dream, 120). Two great tears roll down Bruno's cheeks for this touchingly generous statement, which in turn symbolically reveals Lisa's acceptance of her own old age and death. She realizes that she, like all of us, will eventually be Bruno.

"Nigel the nurse" acts as gentle daily consoler and semi-violent peacemaker. Dressed always in black, young and thin, he meditates and creeps about at night, looking in windows and eavesdropping so that he can act "lovingly" in people's lives. He regards himself as God, dedicates himself to "setting things straight" in the lives of various people. Both Lisa and Nigel will be discussed further in the following section on love and death, but Nigel's consolation should to be noted here as well, for in his own way, his actions and his words are a most eloquent and unexpected statement of Murdoch's philosophy, especially effective for Bruno. The extent to which he interpolates his beliefs into the lines of others, however, suggests the egotism that is the enemy of the Good. By incorporating both aspects of his nature, Murdoch is careful to assert Nigel's human fallibility in the face of his "selfless pursuits."

Until Lisa's visit, Nigel is the only person who conversed with Bruno, who shared his fears of death and offered some degree of consolation in the sharing:

"Odd," said Bruno, "There are people with whom one always talks about sex. And there are people with whom one always talks about God. I always talk to you about God. The others wouldn't understand. . . . What is God made of, Nigel?"

"It doesn't matter what He's made of."

". . . Do you love Him, Nigel?"

"Yes, I love Him."

"Why?"

"He makes me suffer."

"Why should you love Him for that?"

"I dig suffering."

". . . I never much went in for suffering," Bruno went on.

"But I wouldn't mind it now if I felt it had any meaning, as if one were buying back one's faults. I'd take an eternity of suffering in exchange for death any day."

"I think death must be something beautiful, something one could be in love with."

"You're young, Nigel. You can't see death."²²

Nigel is indeed a strange young man, but his particular strangeness offers some consolation to Bruno. Only when death is truly inevitable can a person realize it, so the truth of Bruno's final statement can hardly be denied. Nigel has no "final answers," but he can mentally as well as physically ease Bruno's troubled mind and body.

A second novel oriented strongly toward death presents its reality in an entirely different manner. Instead of the oppressively meditative sickroom atmosphere of Bruno's Dream, The Nice and the Good (1968) takes on the tone of a detective story. It begins with the suicide of Joseph Radeechy in his Whitehall office one summer afternoon for no apparent reason. The absence of the suicide note from the scene of his demise puzzles his colleagues because he was "an indefatigable writer of circumstantial minutes." The note appears much later in the possession of the man responsible for Radeechy's desperate act. Before the facts surrounding the murder are gathered, however, a full private investigation is conducted by John Ducane, also a Whitehall employee and

²²Bruno's Dream, pp. 100-101.

the moral center in the novel. Ducane represents the standard against which the ethics of his associates and friends are measured. Trained as a lawyer, Ducane believes that he missed his calling as a judge (The Nice and the Good, 76-77). In Murdoch's careful construction of Ducane's character his moral dilemma becomes obvious; he is portrayed credibly, with failures as well as triumphs. A hard task master, he is most exacting with himself and possesses a curiosity to match his considerable intellect. Through his persistence, the Radeechy suicide is handled with a minimum of public involvement, while those implicated are made to account for their deeds.

From the beginning, however, the turmoil over Radeechy is a source of controlled gossip of which, like all gossip, people soon tire, wishing it "put away," "on the shelf," "packed in," so that they can pursue other, newer reports. Contemplating death, even a sensational suicide by a man known to deal with poltergeists and black magic, quickly wears thin. The desperation and despair involved in the contemplation are best avoided in the long term.

Language becomes important in Radeechy's death not because of the gossip it engenders, but in his suicide note itself which emerges later and in the discovery of Radeechy's involvement in black magic. Because Ducane is discreet about the facts of the case, which he gathers accurately and personally, gossip is minimal, and other people's constructions of reality therefore have little bearing on Radeechy's desperate act. Once the suicide note is uncovered, however, its words unmistakably implicate another Whitehall colleague, Richard Biranne, who had witnessed Radeechy's murder of his wife, an act initiated by his

discovery of her infidelity with Biranne. Radeechy then forced Biranne to witness his suicide, leaving the following note:

"This is to state to the police, the public, and before God if He exists, that in September of last year I murdered my wife Claudia by pushing her out of a window. I acted impetuously and without premeditated intent to kill her. My motive was jealousy of her liaison with Richard Biranne. Biranne witnessed my act and has since attempted to blackmail me. I die now by my own hand. Biranne has my dying curse.

Joseph Radeechy

I loved my wife"²³

This document restructures reality in an irrefutable way; its straightforward statement of the facts unambiguously implicates Biranne and puts the burden on Ducane to deal with him fairly. Ducane must either reveal Biranne's guilt, thus ruining his career and reputation, or make him privately accountable in some manner. Biranne's admission of stealing the note is difficult enough for him, but Ducane's solution commits Biranne to another, more difficult course of action in partial atonement for his deeds. Ducane finally felt that the public destruction of Biranne would yield less than his private promise to return to his wife and try to make their marriage work once again. In this way, Ducane opts for the possible happiness of two people rather than the dissolution of one, thus fulfilling Murdoch's prescription for love in terms of complete attention paid to another individual. Ducane's decision yields him nothing; his attention is completely directed toward a fair and humane judgment regarding a legally culpable individual. Like the man in the concentration camp, Ducane is mercifully

²³The Nice and the Good, p. 245.

"for nothing."

In the course of his investigation of the suicide, Ducane inevitably visits the scene of Radeechy's magic rituals. His guide is Peter McGrath, the man who procured Radeechy's herbs, women, and other ceremonial equipment. The dank underground room, a former air raid shelter under Whitehall itself, still held the costumes, the table with its narrow black mattress, the silver chalice and candelabra, and the group of pigeons whose blood was needed for the ceremony. In examining the equipment and thoroughly investigating the room, two notable discoveries come to light through Ducane's consciousness, which relate to the power and ambiguity of language.

First, in familiarizing himself with Radeechy's rituals, he allows McGrath to display some objects on the black mattress as they were used in the ceremony:

First there were a number of well-corked, clearly labelled glass jars such as one might find in a kitchen. Ducane looked at the labels: poppy, hyssop, hellebore, hemp, sunflower, nightshade, henbane, belladonna. The black bread and a pile of walnuts were laid next to them. There followed a large packet of table salt, a small silvergilt bell, a Bible, a battered Roman missal, some sticks of incense, an elongated piece of silver on a stand with a cross bar close to the foot of it, and a slim black whip.²⁴

Gradually Ducane becomes aware of the depth and detail of Radeechy's creation of another language whose objects and symbols are somewhat meaningful to him, but he still lacks the key to their capabilities. He is nonetheless palpably affected by the atmosphere. Long before he comes to any intellectual awareness of the secrets of Radeechy's ceremonies, he relives what Radeechy must have felt in

²⁴The Nice and the Good, p. 220.

conducting them. These impressions reveal to Ducane how the magic substituted for the powerlessness Radeechy experienced in other more lighted aspects of his life. Radeechy used the magic to feel omnipotent, offsetting the superfluity he felt in daily human endeavors.

Ducane begins to feel faint; Murdoch then indicates that the underground room is airless and filled with the stench of dead pigeons: "All dead now of course," said McGrath with a certain satisfaction. "Mr. Radeechy wanted them alive." (The Nice and the Good, 221). Ducane's fear of McGrath, a known blackmailer and opportunist, prevents him from being entirely overcome by the close familiarity with the rites. McGrath gradually leads him into the details of the ceremony. As his familiarity increases, Ducane begins to feel a strange affinity for McGrath, which he fights, accompanied by the intuition of power that he imagines Radeechy enjoyed:

It's the dreariness of it, thought Ducane, that stupefies. This evil is dreary, it's something shut in and small, dust falling upon cobwebs, a bloodstain upon a garment, a heap of dead birds in a packing case. Whatever it was that Radeechy had so assiduously courted and attracted to himself, and which had breathed upon him, squirted over him, that odour of decay, had no intensity or grandeur. These were but small powers, graceless and bedraggled. Yet could not evil damn a man, was there not blackness enough to kill a human soul? It is in me, thought Ducane, as he continued to look through the empty blue staring eyes of McGrath. The evil is in me. There are demons and powers outside us. Radeechy played with them, but they are pygmy things. The great evil, the real evil is inside myself. It is I who am Lucifer. With this there came a rush of darkness within him which was like fresh air. Had Radeechy felt this onrush of black beatitude as he stood before the cross reversed and rested the chalice upon the belly of the naked girl?²⁵

Ducane's fear of McGrath and McGrath's repeated attempt to blackmail him delivers Ducane from the bewitching power of the magical symbols. Fear

²⁵The Nice and the Good, pp. 223-224.

for his own life and survival disintegrates the illusion that the symbols created.

Murdoch's treatment of the black magical rites that Radeechy engaged in is similar to her impression of learning a foreign language. Instead of "good" action that leads out of the self, however, the black magic becomes a dangerous lesson because it leads back to the self with an enormous power implicit. Instead of squelching the ego it magnifies it to godlike proportions, thus dramatically illustrating the polarity of evil and good in her scheme of reality.

The second example of the use of language as illusion is a much more literal one, consisting of the actual hieroglyphs and markings used in the magical rituals which Ducane discovers etched on the wall of the underground room. Standing at the foot of the table where Radeechy had stood while performing the ritual, Ducane notices some writing on the wall which he records for later study. They are old pencil drawings and slogans by soldiers marked by soldiers during wartime, but on closer inspection Ducane discovers newer markings made with a blue felt pen:

. . . There were several carefully drawn pentograms and hexograms. Then in Radeechy's small pedantic hand was written Asmodeus, Astaroth, and below that Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of law. Directly above the cross was a large blue square which Ducane, moving the candle nearer, saw to be composed of capital letters. The letters read as follows:

O	Y	P	A	T	E	A
H	R	O	T	A	S	R
C	O	P	E	R	A	D
E	T	E	N	E	T	O
E	A	R	E	P	O	M
D	S	A	T	O	R	I
O	A	R	S	U	N	A

"What does that mean?" "Lord, Sir, I don't know. It's in some funny foreign language. Mr. Radeechy wrote it up one day. He told me to be careful not to smudge it when I was dusting."²⁶

Several weeks later, when Ducane has dispensed with the mechanics of the case, resigned his job at Whitehall, and is recovering from a traumatic near-death encounter, he discovers the meaning of the cryptogram and is quite disappointed with the solution. What had seemed mysterious and other worldly proved to be only the extreme egoism of "the magician":

. . .Something about the centre part of it was beginning to look curiously familiar. Then suddenly Ducane saw what it was. The central part of the square consisted of the Latin words of the ancient Christian cryptogram

R	O	T	A	S
O	P	E	R	A
T	E	N	E	T
A	R	E	P	O
S	A	T	O	R

This elegant thing can be read forwards, backwards or vertically, and consists with the addition of A and O (Alpha and Omega) of the letters of the first two words of the Lord's Prayer arranged in the form of a cross.

	A	
	P	
	A	
	T	
	E	
	R	
A	P	A
T	E	R
N	O	S
T	E	R
O		

²⁶The Nice and the Good, p. 224.

Who had invented, to scrawl mysteriously upon what darkened wall, that curious charm to conjure, by its ingenious form and its secret content, what powers surely more sinister and probably more real than the Christian god? And what had Radeechy done to it, to divert its power and make its talismanic value his own? Ducane studied the letters round the edge of the square. A and O again twice, only reversed. The other letters then simply read RADEECHY PATER DOMINUS.

Ducane threw the paper down. He felt disappointed, touched upset. There was something schoolboyish and pathetic in the egoism of Radeechy's appropriation of the Latin formula. It was the sort of thing one might have carved inside one's desk at school. Perhaps all egoism when it is exposed completely has a childish quality. Ducane felt piercingly sorry for Radeechy. The solving of the cryptogram had given him a sense of speech about him, but babbling baffled speech.²⁷

Ducane's reflections on his discovery lead him to a significant statement, which joins Radeechy's magic and suicide with his knowledge of evil and places them all in the context of Murdoch's philosophy:

. . . After all the machinery of evil, the cross reversed, the slaughtered pigeons, the centre of it all seemed so empty and puerile. Yet Radeechy was dead, and were not the powers of evil genuine enough which had led him to two acts of violence? Ducane could not see into that world. He saw only the grotesque and the childish, and whatever was frightening here seemed to be something of limited power, something small. Perhaps there were spirits, perhaps there were evil spirits, but they were little things. The great evil, the dreaded evil, that which made war and slavery and all man's inhumanity to man lay in the cool self-justifying ruthless selfishness of quite ordinary people, such as Biranne and himself.²⁸

Free of the oppressive atmosphere of Radeechy's room, Ducane responds to the symbols in the objective way that is his habit. In the clear light

²⁷The Nice and the Good, pp. 329-330.

²⁸The Nice and the Good, pp. 330-331.

of day, he recognizes the symbols as well as Radeechy's practices to be the self-aggrandizing machinations that they are, mental aberrations of an intelligent but emotionally neglected individual. With his characteristic objective insight, Ducane recognizes the threat that he poses to justice as a rational but innately self interested human being as greater than all of Radeechy's elaborate machinations.

The Nice and the Good also offers an extended and quite dramatic example of language as consolation, embodying as well a gesture of selfless love. Ducane risks his life to save Pierce Clothier, the fifteen-year-old son of an old friend who eventually becomes his wife. To spite his girlfriend, Pierce has deliberately entered a cave by swimming, the mouth of which becomes entirely closed as the tide rises. Pierce has announced his intention of remaining within the cave until the ebb. When Ducane learns of his desperate plea for attention, he strips and swims into the cave to find Pierce, who already has lost his flashlight and his bearings in the interstices of the cavern attempting to find the compartment with the highest roof. The situation becomes increasingly desperate as the tide fills compartment after compartment, and Ducane, after finally locating Pierce, becomes almost incapacitated by the cold. They eventually find a chimney, and with much difficulty wedge themselves into the tiny cylindrical opening, keeping Pierce's dog between them for warmth. Neither Pierce nor Ducane know whether they are above tidal level, but owing to his age, Ducane is the more aware of their crucial position. Though suffering from cold, Ducane manages to keep calm and give Pierce sufficient support to prevent panic. For example, in order to raise himself into the chimney, Ducane suggests a

rope of clothes. He donates his underwear as a beginning, and Pierce follows suit:

Ducane climbed awkwardly out of his vest and underpants. He seemed to have lost the schema of his body and had to find out the position of his limbs by experiment. He began to shiver uncontrollably.

"No, keep yours till I've torn mine. Oh Christ, they won't tear. I'm losing my strength."

"Tear them along the side seams first," said Ducane. "Don't drop anything, for God's sake, we'd never find it again. Here, I'll hold the end, pull now, pull." There was a faint rending sound. "Good, good, now these, go on. Do you think that's enough? It'll stretch of course. Can you knot them? Reef knots."

"My hands won't work," said Pierce's voice. There was a tearful tremor.

"Think about the knots, don't think about your hands. Let me--good, you've done it. Now Pierce, listen and obey me . . ."²⁹

Transcending his own intense pain, Ducane speaks with authority in the pitch darkness and roaring water, thus keeping Pierce from losing energy and will, so that his youthful strength can be used to save himself, Ducane, and Mingo, the dog. Faced with drowning, they survive by concentrating on externals, clothes and explicit action. In this scene Murdoch creates an explicit example of the consolation of language in the face of death.

A third novel, An Accidental Man (1971), is principally concerned with death, in that it begins with the description of the desperate financial and emotional states of a number of characters, many of whom attempt suicide and one by chance succeeds. Austin Gibson-Grey is the existential focus of the novel, though his family, his brother Sir Matthew and his son Garth, share the spotlight from time to time and provide alternative philosophies. Austin Gibson-Grey has lost his job,

²⁹The Nice and the Good, p. 333.

is separated from his wife, has no money and few resources. His character is delineated early in the novel when, between bouts of asthma and self-recrimination, he attempts a courtship of sorts with Mitzi Ricardo whose chief function in his life is to provide his shelter. Aging Austin has little to recommend him besides his rather fleeting charm which makes him unaccountably attractive to a variety of females. Sir Matthew has returned to London from Japan to help his brother, and Garth has returned from Harvard to his home. The two brothers, Austin and Matthew, are at odds physically and philosophically. Garth is young enough to vacillate dramatically in his beliefs. Neither Matthew nor Garth is able to help Austin appreciably.

Language is predictably important in Austin's life. Were he not able to charm women verbally, he would have literally no roof over his head. An extreme example of Austin's use of language to escape the realities of his rather desperate situation takes place in Mitzi's sitting room with Austin. As usual, they are sharing her bottle of whiskey; Austin speaks:

"We're on an island," . . . "You and me, Mitzi, we're on an island. Where's Ludwig?"

"He's taken Gracie to the cinema."

"Good. Was I saying? We're on an island. Man needs a woman, tenderness, nothing like it, always one at the right time. Have's more whisky. I'm thingummy bob and you're what'shername, years and years on this island and all the time there's a wee wifie waiting"

"Austin, you're drunk."

"Oh, I'll get there in the end. Mitzi, it's lovely there, you know, at least it will be after they're all dead and the old dog will recognize me and wag his tail."

"The bottle's empty."

"Shall I tell you a story?"³⁰

³⁰Iris Murdoch, An Accidental Man (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), pp. 68-69.

Austin's "stories" are thinly disguised reality which he refuses to face. He takes refuge therefore in any sort of escape that presents itself. When he cannot keep his mind from dwelling on his love and inadequate treatment of his young and beautiful wife, or on his intense jealousy of his successful brother, he speaks of the situation in parables, yet finds no release or solution. He faces death by starvation or alcoholism and must take refuge in the fictions that language can create.

Isolating the element of love is, as has been mentioned before, almost impossible. In any circumstance, language or the lack of it is significant, and always the consideration of art in terms of conscious scenery is a consideration. Love's proximity to death in the romantic tradition has also been discussed (See Chapter 4, Section I.) in light of its devaluation through sentimental overdose. In Bruno's Dream, however, the most significant statements about love and its function in relation to death are voiced by Bruno himself and by Diana, who has come through grief to tend Bruno in his last days selflessly and tenderly. Both realize, in regarding their lives, that selflessness and good are the elements that endure, though their opposites, selfishness and evil, are the elements that obtain.

Their comments place Murdoch's conception of Platonic love into the perspective of imminent death; some of Bruno's last reflections concern this relationship:

It's something simple really, he thought. Something to do with Maureen and Janie and the whole thing. One sees how pointless it all was, all the things one chased after, all the things one

wanted. And if there is something that matters now at the end it must be the only thing that matters. I wish I'd known it then. It looks as if it would have been easy to be kind and good since it's so obvious now that nothing else matters at all. But of course then one was inside of a dream.³¹

Bruno's comment is an unusually direct statement of Murdoch's philosophy. The last sentence is especially characteristic in that it immediately calls into question the observation that had just been made, emphasizing Murdoch's description of our daily lives as "veils of illusion."

Diana, who tends Bruno just before his death, finds herself painfully attached to the old man, so that the lesson she learns is a particularly difficult one. She has lost her husband and a potential lover to her sister who is quite blameless, and now she is losing Bruno. His death is unavoidable, however, and she must face it:

She tried to think about herself but there seemed to be nothing there. Things can't matter very much, she thought, because one isn't anything. Yet one loves people, this matters. Perhaps this great pain was just her profitless love for Bruno. One isn't anything, and yet one loves people. How could that be? Her resentment against Miles, against Lisa, against Danby had utterly gone away. They will flourish and you will watch them kindly as if you were watching children. Who had said that to her? Perhaps no one had said it except some spirit in her own thoughts. Relax. Let them walk on you. Love them. Let love like a huge vault open out overhead. The helplessness of human stuff in the grip of death was something which Diana felt now in her own body. She lived the reality of death and felt herself made nothing by it and denuded of desire. Yet love still existed and it was the only thing that existed.

The old spotted hand that was holding onto hers relaxed gently at last.³²

³¹Bruno's Dream, pp. 304-305.

³²Bruno's Dream, pp. 310-311.

Finding similarly straightforward statements in the other two novels is a more difficult task. It is much more typical of Murdoch to mask her philosophical insights with character and situation than to provide outright examples of what she believes is "right conduct," i.e., attentive love. The best example from The Nice and the Good is found in the scene referred to earlier in the examination of language. As Ducane, Pierce, and Mingo are waiting for the tide to rise, to see whether or not they will survive the day, all is silent except for the rush of water. In this silence Ducane contemplates:

I wonder if this is the end, and if so what it will all have amounted to. How tawdry and small it has all been. He saw himself now as a little rat, a busy little scurrying rat seeking out its own little advantages and comforts. To live easily, to have cosy and familiar pleasures, to be well thought of. He felt his body stiffening and he nestled closer to Mingo's invincible warmth. He patted Pierce's shoulder and burrowed his hand beneath it. He thought, poor, poor Mary. The coloured images were returning now to his closed eyes. He saw the face of Biranne near to him, as in a silent film, moving, mouthing, but unheard. He thought, if I ever get out of here I will be no man's 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. Forgiveness, reconciliation, not law.³³

The threat of death by drowning has forced Ducane to see his life from a different perspective. Immediately on being saved, he tenders his resignation from Whitehall, and proposes to Pierce's mother, Mary Clothier, whose face sustained him through the ordeal. Even Ducane's judgments and counsel are shown to be indulgences of the ego, a recognition which Ducane happily lives to realize. The example of John

³³The Nice and the Good, p. 313.

Ducane is an effective one because his counsel and curiosity has helped a great number of people. In him, Murdoch shows how a potentially "good" man can realize himself, or how a "nice" man can become a "good" one.

An Accidental Man leads the characters with most moral insight to a state of confusion rather than lucidity. Sir Matthew Gibson-Grey, also a counselor and "guru" owing to his experiences in the Orient and his calm willingness to hear and advise, proves to be mortal. Matthew's personal belief, however, is that Eastern and Christianity are equally superficial; when one is truly in a dilemma, one might just as well flip a coin. His recognition of his inability to achieve a true mystical state carries the most significance when he is on board ship with Ludwig, bound for America. Matthew finally evaluates himself honestly:

From the good good actions spring with a spontaneity which must remain to the mediocre forever mysterious. Matthew knew with a sigh that he would never be a hero. Nor would he ever achieve the true enlightenment. Neither the longer way nor the shorter way was for him. He would be until the end of his life a man looking forward to his next drink. He looked at his watch and drifted down to the bar.³⁴

In Sir Matthew, Murdoch embodies the man with all the answers in terms of the secrets to a satisfying life. She shows how simply knowing the answers or where to find them can remain a purely intellectual process, like the remembrance of a state of recognition. Without incorporation into emotional awareness and actions the intellectual knowledge cannot sustain a man.

³⁴An Accidental Man, pp. 440-441.

From this point of view it then becomes possible to speculate that Diana Greensleave of Bruno's Dream and John Ducane of The Nice and the Good stand to lose their momentary recognitions, though Ducane takes action to incorporate his realizations into major changes in his life, quitting his job and taking a wife. As the most recent of the three novels, however, An Accidental Man can be viewed as a cynical retrospective on the many sincere beliefs Murdoch embodied in preceding novels. She then continues to incorporate the cynical comment alongside the idealism to create later novels of much greater complexity. A main ingredient in the cynicism is undeniably the sense of time passing, beliefs constantly changing, and situations falling apart. Transcending daily flux then becomes the focus of attention.

Each of the three novels also makes a statement on art in proximity to death. Bruno's Dream incorporates a would-be writer in Miles Greensleave, whose main literary output has been occasional poems and one long purgative Liebestod to his dead wife Parvati. Miles keeps a Notebook of Particulars in which he records his observations in an attempt to teach himself to observe his surroundings once more. The fact that he is so concerned with his capacity to see undercuts that very capacity. His art therefore remains sentimental and self-oriented, never what Murdoch would call "great art"; Miles is too much concerned with himself to produce anything with an independent life. Speaking of his daily entries into his notebooks, Miles thinks:

How hard it was to describe things. How hard it was to see things. He wondered if, since he had completely given up drinking, he had actually been able to see more. Not that he had

ever drunk very much, but any departure from total sobriety seemed to damage his perception. Even yet he was not sober enough, not quiet enough, to take in the marvels that surrounded him. The ecstatic flight of a pigeon, the communion of two discarded shoes, the pattern on a piece of processed cheese. His Notebook of Particulars was in its third volume, and still he was simply learning to look. He knew that this, for the present, was all of his task. The great things would happen when he was ready for them.³⁵

Miles's investment of ego is evident here; he is concentrating completely on himself, his main occupation since Parvati's death.

Even his second wife Diana has succeeded only because she mothers and tends him rather than encouraging him to come out of himself. He waits for "the gods" of inspiration to descend so that he can begin his great work. All until then is preparation and readiness. Miles reflects on his past achievements:

The poetry of his youth seemed insipid and flimsy now. And the long poem he had written after Parvati's death seemed merely turgid stuff. He had had to write that poem, to change into art and into significance and into beauty the horror of that death. It was a survival poem, born of his own outrageous will to survive. It had sometimes seemed to him like a crime to write that poem, as if it had prevented him from seeing what he ought to have seen and what he had never allowed himself afterwards to see, the real face of death. But it had come with a force of necessity which he had not known before or since. He had called it Parvati and Shiva.³⁶

Miles's recognition of the quality of his past work should place into perspective the attention that he is giving now to his preparation for

³⁵Bruno's Dream, pp. 55-56.

³⁶Bruno's Dream, p. 57.

"the gods," but he remains sunk into himself despite his efforts to look elsewhere. He is trapped into his suffering and lacks the will to transcend it and himself with it.

No artist exists per se in The Nice and the Good. The closest example is Joseph Radeechy, who is discussed earlier in this section. The elaborate preparations that his black magical rituals required, the costumes, the performers, the atmosphere, the language, and Radeechy's total dedication to the artifice of himself as God becomes its own statement on Radeechy's "great work" that ultimately destroys him in its function as substitute reality. He had only to close the door of the office and descend to its basement to wield the power that he lacked on upper levels. His machinations in the nether world never saw daylight, except for the cryptogram Ducane deciphers. All is buried with Radeechy himself.

Murdoch uses a young pseudo-artist in An Accidental Man for her comment on art as illusion. Garth Gibson-Grey, Austin's son, has lost his novel when his luggage was stolen at the London Air Terminal on his return from America. His effort lost, he devalues it as well as the incident that inspired it. On a west side street in New York, Garth witnessed a stabbing. The person who was eventually murdered was struggling with another man, but, on seeing Garth, cried out for his help with extended hand. Garth did nothing to help the man, and the man's throat was cut as a result. Quite understandably, Garth cannot banish the memory. His novel, which reappears at the end of An

Accidental Man, bears its original title The Life Blood of the Night.

Ludwig Leferrier, a former Harvard classmate of Garth's, questions him about the experience, but Garth passes it off:

"Say, did that bag of yours ever turn up?" said Ludwig.

"No."

"Austin said there was a novel in it."

"Yes, but it's not important, I would have torn it up anyway. It was a false sort of thing--personal muck--you know. I'm not a novelist."

"What was it about?"

"Well it was about a chap who saw somebody stabbed in the street and felt it meant something absolutely important to him, and kept trying to explain this to everybody, to his parents and his girl and his teacher and so on, and nobody understands and then they think he's mad and imagined it all and in the end he commits suicide."

"It sounds jolly good," said Ludwig.

"Don't be silly, Ludwig," said Garth. "You must have developed softening of the brain since you came to England."

"Don't bite me. I can't conceive of anything you wrote not being somehow good."

"I'm not a writer, that's the point, not an artist. You may know a truth but if it's at all complicated you have to be an artist not to utter it as a lie. Almost everything uttered is lies."

"What about philosophy?"

"That's the worst lie of all, because it's so gentle."

"Gentle? Why did you give up philosophy?"

"Because I saw a man stabbed in the street."³⁷

When Garth's stolen bag is returned to him many months later, Garth's attitude toward his work has mellowed considerably. A policeman delivers the black leather suitcase and, after ascertaining Garth's ownership, comments before he leaves:

³⁷An Accidental Man, p. 300.

Garth goes on to be a literary success; the novel becomes a best seller; he edits another which is also quite popular; and he plans a third before An Accidental Man closes. His earlier recognition of art as illusion and his incapacity to live a lie are no longer important as he becomes reconciled to fame, wealth, money, wife, and children.

Murdoch's final comment on art in relation to death becomes increasingly explicit. Her own work proves through its subject matter and its external reality that if art is not incorporated into the stuff of daily life, into a wealth of conflicting images and circumstances, as it really exists, then it becomes merely the product of a limited mind, self serving and banal. The same principle applies, as has been proven here, to language and love. Section III on Henry and Cato makes the principle explicit on the subject of death and chance as well.

Henry and Cato (1976) is Murdoch's most cynical and deliberate attack to date on the "veils of illusion" that human beings create to sustain themselves. Murdoch systematically probes each character's life-giving illusion and finally exposes each to an unalterable knowledge of the proximity of death. Whereas her earlier novels have treated death in its finality, she has, until Henry and Cato, managed a certain objectivity about the final statement. In Bruno's Dream we know that Bruno is to die; his and Diana Greensleave's revelations at his deathbed, that "love and good" are the only things that matter, therefore complete the web that Murdoch has spun around her characters, and no one is lost. The Nice and the Good affirms life's illusions, making them more intense and valuable through John Ducane's and Pierce Clothier's experience in the cave. An Accidental Man begins to show the cynicism and pessimism that can infect old age, uselessness, and poverty, but finally makes the rather grim statement that, despite several attempted suicides, we will somehow survive. Taking one's own life, which occupies much of the novel's concentration, is shown to be a basically self-indulgent act unless one succeeds by accident; only the least expected but successful suicide cannot be misinterpreted. Finality is silence. Peppering An Accidental Man liberally with cocktail-party distortions, however, relieves the desperation in many lives through brightly phrased lies, or complete ignorance of necessity.

In Henry and Cato, Murdoch subjects each character's system of reality to the test of practice. Accordingly, she divides the novel into two parts: "Rites of Passage" and "The Great Teacher." Though the marriage and pregnancy at the end of the novel are intended as hopeful affirmation of the future, the image of Colette's and Henry's happiness communicates as a lone, small, sweet white flower drifting in a barren field. Experience, the great teacher, sobers and orders lives as no education or religion can.

Henry and Cato begins as Cato Forbes, a gentle, thirty-one-year-old priest who is gradually becoming convinced of the death of God, throws a gun belonging to "Beautiful Joe" Beckett into the Thames. This act complete, Murdoch shifts the scene to America, where Henry Marshalson, a mediocre-to-dull thirty-two-year-old pseudo-art historian, a childhood friend of Cato's, exults over his brother's fatal auto wreck. Henry has been a victim of his father's, Burke Marshalson's, absolute primogeniture which left him nothing of the considerable family fortune at Laxlinden Hall and everything to his handsome brother Sandy, a famous race car driver. So Murdoch stacks the deck: disposal of a murder weapon, loss of faith in easy answers, inexcusable ecstasy over a brother's sudden death, and the over-thirty recognition of limitations. Through these elements, Henry, Cato, and others navigate their "rites of passage," and Murdoch creates a horror story the effects of which are absolute.

The two male main characters, whose lives become unalterably and intricately intermingled, are nearly the same age and, because of the

proximity of their family dwellings, their families have maintained contact in their absence. Both young men left home to study history, Henry at Cambridge and Cato at a provincial university. Each found careers in entirely different disciplines which have alienated them from their families: Henry is a professor of art history, and Cato is a Catholic priest. At the beginning of the novel, both these vocations are disintegrating. Because of his unexpected inheritance and the consequent necessity of returning to England, Henry sees himself and his achievements from an unflatteringly objective perspective. Cato, his community Mission bankrupt, has returned to the conviction that God is dead after all. Neither career nor set of beliefs held by Henry or Cato survive their permanently horrifying brush with death, which in essence was no more than a vengeful whim of Beautiful Joe's. "The great teacher" transforms Henry into a thorough conformist and Cato into a bitter recluse.

Henry has settled himself into a rather comfortable niche in a small liberal arts college just outside of St. Louis, Missouri, where he owns a small house and has been figuratively adopted by an older couple, professors of philosophy and sociology. It is important to note that Murdoch's initial description of Henry's life in America as intellectually second- or third-rate and morally lazy may spring from her own experience with an American school in the midwest (Sentinel, 1977) and her implicitly British judgment of the barbaric "New World," but it is also intended to embody Henry Marshalsen's low estimation of himself. His constant need to compete with his older brother for fame,

achievement, and their beautiful mother's love results from his peculiarly self-centered and derogatory evaluation of his moneyless condition by virtue of his birth. Now that he has inherited Sandy's wealth, he wreaks his vengeance for his years of suffering on his family and friends in most imaginative ways. The early description of Henry, however, serves the dual purpose of juxtaposing the British standard of excellence which Henry himself has never forgotten with Henry's own inferiority in light of that standard:

. . . The funeral had just taken place. Henry put the receiver down and fell back on his bed, salivating with relief. Inheriting the property was nothing. What mattered was that bloody Sandy was no more.

Alienated Henry, now thirty-two years old, had spent his years of exile in America, after obtaining a second class degree in modern history at Cambridge, England. He had spent three years at Stanford messing with a doctorate, and had then obtained an insecure teaching post at a small Liberal Arts college at Sperriton, Illinois. Henry's academic career had not been glorious. At Stanford he had begun, cautiously at first, to pass himself off as an art historian, an idea which would have amazed his tutors at Cambridge, England. At unexacting self-indulgent little Sperriton, where no one knew much and he could do as he pleased, he taught "fifty great historical pictures." Later he taught "fifty great pictures." His courses were popular and Henry's ramblings did the kids some good, he thought. Would he have stayed on at Sperriton if it had not been for Russell and Bella Fischer? He was not sure; and in any case there had been no rush to offer Henry jobs. Sperriton was a very long way from anywhere out in the flat cornlands where miles and miles away against the sky one could perhaps see a silo. Through the corn here and there ran the freeways, along which Henry and Russ and Bella would sometimes tear about. Once they went as far as Mexico.³⁹

Henry's dissatisfaction with himself because of his brother's hatefully good looks and birth has allowed him to create a second-rate life for himself when he is perhaps capable of better. Murdoch, however,

³⁹Iris Murdoch, Henry and Cato, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976), pp. 3-4.

pounces on the ideas of self-improvement and identity-questing as typically American traits that Henry has not uncritically accepted for himself:

. . . Henry had long ago adjusted himself to his modest talents and settled down, he sometimes suspected too soon, to a sense of his limitations. He took the pattern of his life and character for granted. They (Russ, Bella, The Americans) seemed to have no way of taking things for granted, but assumed a regime of perpetual change wherein they unceasingly asked: am I developing, am I succeeding, am I fulfilled, am I good? This made unpredictability a right and constant exercise of will a duty. Psychoanalysis, which might ideally produce a humble self-awareness, seemed to Henry in this heroic scene to promote a restless nervous desire for change and improvement. He looked on with awe, like an idle slave watching some battle of Titans. What he could never decide was whether this grand refusal to be defined was something good, perhaps a kind of innocence, or whether it was something bad. As he could not regard himself as good he decided that the opposite must be in some way admirable, and he made that wonderful instability into an object of admiration, although he knew that he could never share it. Having had the orderly frustrated childhood of an English middle class child he could not, in early middle age, still think that all things were possible. He gave himself no credit. He thought of himself as a demonic man, but failed. A failed demon, that would be something spiteful; only even his spite was contained by his deep sense of his limits.⁴⁰

Henry lives in the shadow of his older brother even in another country, a fact that Sandy would probably be amazed to discover. Henry's insecurity matches the American one, as Murdoch interprets the situation, and he is therefore settled quite comfortably among pseudo-scholars like himself whose main ambition is to land a position "on the coast." The Fischers have acted as surrogate parents and self-appointed analysts: "Carefully and slowly they unwound him, they unpacked him like china" (Henry and Cato, 6). Henry had an affair with Bella which was thoroughly discussed by all three, and they live à trois,

⁴⁰Henry and Cato, p. 6.

insulating each other against standards of excellence and reinforcing their mutual mediocrity. The Fischers renounce Henry when their opportunity in California materializes, and the break is, understandably, much less painful than Henry had anticipated. Instead of helping Henry to work out his inferiority through achievement on his own, his adventure in America only reinforces his family hatred. His return to England is high-spirited, however, because the miracle has occurred: the threat of Sandy has vanished from the earth, and the earth is Henry's therefore. Henry recounts his family history to himself:

. . . There had always been a legend based on nothing whatever of "grandness" which Henry loathed with every cell of his being. Burke Marshalson spent his life tinkering with the property, which relentless governments were reducing. His wife Gerda, left a young widow, preserved the legend and did her best with the money. In this fictitious importance Sandy, the elder of the two children, had early clothed himself, or been clothed by the attentions of relatives and servants. When still a boy Sandy had inherited Laxlinden Hall, the park and farmland, and the still substantial fortune needed to "keep them up" for transmission in due course to his son. Henry, soon made aware that Sandy owned everything down to the very earth that tolerated Henry stood upon, used to pray daily for his brother's death. Sandy always appeared to be the clever one, though he only studied engineering and even gave that up. He had identity, while all Henry's qualifications failed to endow him with any credible being. Sandy patronized Henry and laughed at him and called him "Trundletail," or "Trundle" for short. He never even noticed Henry's hatred. To Henry in America he sent Christmas cards, even birthday cards. No one had intended to be unkind to Henry and perhaps nobody had been unkind to him. He had just been born a bit unreal and second rate. "The little one is a puny child," he had heard his mother saying in a context where Sandy was being praised, and quick Henry learnt a new word.⁴¹

Impressions from others about Sandy are few, but telling. They illustrate clearly Henry's myopia where family is concerned. Seen

⁴¹Henry and Cato, p. 8

objectively, Henry's achievements outstrip Sandy's easily, if only because they are the result of a great deal of deliberate effort and Sandy's none at all. Lucius Lamb, an old acquaintance of Henry's mother who resides at Laxlinden with her, reflects on Sandy differently:

. . . Henry had been very unkind to him in New York. He had had a way of life with Sandy. Lucius had been grateful for Sandy's total lack of interest in Lucius's life, in the justification of Lucius's life, in the question of why Lucius was there at all. Had this blandness been assumed? Lucius thought not. Big red-haired philistine Sandy simply did not care. Gerda saw Sandy as some sort of hero, but really Sandy was just a big calm relaxed man, unlike dark manic Henry. Lucius had never seen Sandy as either an obstacle or a critic. Semi-educated Sandy only cared, and amateurishly at that, about machines.⁴²

Another impression of Sandy is delivered casually when Cato Forbes comes to stay with his fellow priest Brendan Craddock, who is attempting to convince Cato to maintain his vows. Their first conversation, in which they catch up on latest events, touches on Sandy's death. Craddock's comments are characteristically perceptive:

"Do you remember Sandy Marshalson? I brought him in to dinner once."

"That tall redheaded drunk who smashed himself up in his Ferrari, not on that night, thank God?"

"Yes. We were all rather sozzled that night."

"I wonder if he was drunk when he killed himself. He seemed to me a man filled with desperation."

"Poor Sandy. Well, his brother's back, I think you never met him, Henry Marshalson, he was in America."⁴³

Both Lucius Lamb's and Brendan Craddock's summations of Sandy Marshalson bear witness to the multiple perceptions on which Murdoch's philosophical theory is based. She here reveals brother Henry's neurotic

⁴²Henry and Cato, p. 7.

⁴³Henry and Cato, p. 8.

jealousy by juxtaposing it with the opinions of less personally involved but reliable acquaintances of the Marshalsen family.

A final impression of Sandy, and the most telling one, comes from his mother long after Henry's and Cato's ordeal at the hands of Beautiful Joe, and after Stephanie Whitehouse, Henry's fiancée, has revealed her true identity as Sandy's housekeeper, not his mistress. Gerda Marshalsen has remained strongly and wisely mute throughout the trauma of Sandy's accident and Henry's selling the family property. Most people around her have assumed a grief too deep to be communicated, without bothering to ascertain her true feelings. She finally states them, first to Lucius in an irritated outburst, and then to Henry in the first real conversation they have ever had. Her remark to Lucius reveals her irritation at his prolonged pursuit of her without definite commitment. Gerda tries to break from Lucius decisively, still believing that she will have to forfeit Laxlinden Hall as Henry wishes and live in a small cottage on the premises. Lucius and Gerda review their relationship:

"If you had been more passionate you might have been more successful. You only cared about yourself. Did you want me to run after you and beg you?"

"So it was just pride then. And it's just pride now."

"Oh Lucius. Never mind."

"I am a passionate man, I am, I am. I'm not going to leave you, I won't, I won't."

"All right, call it pride. I do want to be alone at last and without witnesses. You belong to the past, Lucius, as far as I'm concerned you're a ghost. Oh you are so stupid! You are stupid, so is Henry, so was Sandy, so was Burke. Oh God, why was my lot cast among such stupid stupid men!"⁴⁴

To Henry, Gerda presents a calm demeanor and is entirely in possession of herself throughout his long revelation of his early frustrations and

⁴⁴Henry and Cato, p. 9.

resentments regarding Sandy and his parents' unjust treatment of him.

Gerda begins by drawing Henry out:

"Why do you think you haven't got the gift of happiness?" . . .

"Because you and my father stole it from me when I was an infant."

"So you think you had it earlier, in the womb, perhaps?"

"You're smart, Mother. Maybe. But consciousness doomed me. My confidence was broken before I was six. Everybody combined to put me down. Sandy bullied me, my father mocked me and discouraged me and contradicted me. He jeered at me and encouraged you and Sandy to jeer. You could have protected me. All right, you much preferred Sandy, but you could have stopped Father from crushing me. You didn't--you were his ally and agent. Because we were taught to be so bloody tight-lipped and stoical you probably have no idea how much I suffered as a child, how absolutely my will was broken. Every little project that I ever made for myself was somehow destroyed by Father, shown to be petty and laughable and worthless. You both waged war on me. Of course Sandy joined in. I spent my childhood concealing my misery, concealing my tears. No wonder I've never wanted to do anything since except run and hide."

"This is unjust, of course," said Gerda, sitting very still with folded hands.

"All right, it's only my impression. But people are responsible for the impression that they make on children."

"I think you were often happy."

"O.K. Forget it."

"Your father was an impatient strong-willed man."

"A bully. Yes."

"Yes."

Henry tapped the ash off his toe and looked at his mother.

"You accuse me of being his ally," said Gerda. "Perhaps I should have fought him, but the cost would have been too great. I had to submit. Of course he absorbed me and dominated me as the years went by. I had to attend to him and not to you. I loved him and I tried to make him happy and be happy myself. It wasn't easy, perhaps it wasn't possible. I kept on sacrificing my will to him, and I kept on thinking that I had come to the end of my will and the end of the sacrifice, but there was always something more that he wanted from me that was hard to give. He loved me and it was one sort of way of having a satisfactory marriage. But I couldn't deal with both you and him. Sandy was all right, I think he sort of understood, and anyway he was independent. I hoped you'd be. You weren't. You were demanding, then you were terribly hostile. A child's hostility can hurt too. I couldn't reach you. I had my own fight, and my own tears. It was partly just a matter of energy.

I liked Lucius because he was so absurd and sensitive and gentle. And then when Burke died Lucius was somehow useless, he didn't seem to care enough, at any rate he didn't assert himself enough. Lucius and I mislaid each other because I had lost the will to happiness, I had lost the key. I ought to have taken hold of Lucius then, but my strength was gone and I stood there coldly and waited for him to take hold of me. And now there's nothing left of that either. I let him become a dependent, a figure of fun, a silly idle man. I almost made him inferior because he had failed my hopes. Sandy was the only thing that gave my life any pure sense and any pure joy, but I never talked to Sandy. I never communicated with Sandy. I never told him what I've just told you. I never touched him or kissed him after he was twelve." Gerda's voice was perfectly steady, only her immobility conveyed emotion.⁴⁵

Taken together, these random impressions make increasingly obvious the fact that Henry has shaped his life on the basis of a misconception about his family's opinion of his brother. Murdoch seems to exaggerate the ordinariness of the two brothers as if to make abundantly clear how often this sort of situation exists. Everyone has had a "difficult childhood" if he is encouraged to view it that way. Gerda's evaluation of the Marshalsen men, given her emotional and intellectual strength, conveys the objective judgment that Henry needs to right himself morally. After his conversation with his mother, he can go on to take charge of his property, take his lovely wife Colette Forbes, and begin to live generously, confident that he is loved and respected by the most important women in his life. Instead of executing figurative matricide (Henry and Cato, 166) by putting his mother out of Laxlinden Hall and into a tiny cottage, he can now live comfortably next to her. The line of communication lies open after thirty-two years of silence. Gerda and Henry have discovered together the "machinery" of forgiveness and love.

⁴⁵Henry and Cato, p. 10.

Murdoch's philosophy of language is incorporated into her conception of the Marshals family, in their inability to "see" anyone else but themselves, which only prolongs their isolation and creates an untenable situation for everyone. Though Sandy's fate forced them to confront one another, only the threat of death to Henry, Cato, and Colette from Beautiful Joe opened the communication decisively. Gerda's last comment to Henry on the evening of their first real conversation indicates more than her acceptance. She says, "Don't wish, Henry. We've both got to accept what you called the way the universe is flowing" (Henry and Cato, 302). Her statement embodies Murdoch's fundamental belief and the donnée of her fiction, which does not transform Henry into a handsome genius, but allows Henry as Henry to see Gerda as Gerda and for both to understand something of one another. Recognizing the proper time and space for language is the rarely encountered gift that Gerda possesses.

As Sandy Marshals's place in Henry's world has led Henry to interpret himself and to arrange his life accordingly, so Cato Forbes has used God to dictate his life, though for a shorter time. The death of Sandy for Henry and the death of God for Cato are equally revolutionary events; their lives are profoundly reorganized by the knowledge that the locus in their lives has vanished. Each also finds substitutes for that locus. Henry uses Stephanie Whitehouse to comfort the flesh and certain paintings to console the spirit. Cato falls in love with a beautiful young man. Natural and aesthetic beauty are subjects of the contemplation that at first console Henry and Cato.

Cato's relationship with God has been short lived compared with Henry's life-long competition with his brother. Cato had never planned to devote any portion of his life to God; he simply responded to a "miraculous visitation":

The period of Cato's conversion now seemed inconceivably remote, a prehistory, a mythical time of creation out of chaos which did not cease to be, even now in his life, a centre of authority and power. He had been invaded by Christ. That he had been "armed" by a strictly rationalist atheist upbringing was nothing. Such arms were exceedingly ambiguous. A reaction was "to be expected" some people said. But Cato had his own deep resistance against sudden emotional religion. He had, as it were, quite early inoculated himself against falling in love with that mystical beauty: the ritual, the intellectual delight, the drama, the power. As a budding historian he had gone into it all and probed in himself the weakness that made him vulnerable to what was after all, in the end, a vast vulgarity. Christ himself of course was untouchably pure and had never put a foot wrong, though this was true also of Socrates. No vulgarity there, no vanity, not a shadow of trickery or falsehood, but what this showed was how vastly perfectible human beings were after all. This Jesus was an old friend, a great saint whom he had often discussed with his father, as between them they had dissected Christianity, sorting out good from bad, truth from illusion. Christ was a good man. But the superstition, the symbolism, the hoax: Cato had perfectly understood, had studied it all with sympathy, had seen exactly why it happened and why it appealed to him and why it could never really attract him or even, profoundly, interest him. As a historian he was more interested in Islam. Then suddenly, with no warning and with a sense of immense barriers dissolving in the mind, he had tripped and stumbled into reality. Suddenly, with faculties which he had not been aware of, he experienced God. All that he had "known" before now seemed a shadow land through which he had passed into the real world, into a form of being which indeed he did not "know" because he lived it and was one with it. He entered quite quietly into a sort of white joy, as if he had not only emerged from the cave, but was looking at the Sun and finding that it was easy to look at, and that all was white and pure and not dazzling, not extreme, but gentle and complete, and that everything was there, kept safe and pulsating silently inside the circle of the Sun.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Henry and Cato, p. 26.

In describing Cato's revelation, Murdoch incorporates literally the language of the sovereignty of Good, in which the image of the Sun represents the Good (Sovereignty of Good, 86), thus joining the Christian symbolism with the Platonic beliefs that span religions and underlie her philosophy. For Cato, his conversion was a surprise that included the use of senses that "he had not been aware of." The same sort of awakening is what Murdoch encourages in her treatises for attentive love and selfless appreciation of beauty.

If Cato Forbes had not been well educated and of a rationalist atheist family with a strong father, one might doubt the authenticity of his conversion. As it happened, however, Cato had no choice but to acknowledge the personal revelation and rearrange his life around it. He left schools and home, above his father's protestations, to become a Roman Catholic priest:

Cato never, at that time or later, dignified these happenings with any grand name, such as "mystical experiences." What he had learned was that all was mystical. He did not need any spectacular "vision" of Christ. He was with Christ, he was Christ. He was invaded, taken over, and it all happened so quietly and with such a sense of perfect reality. Cato said nothing to his father, nothing to Colette. He wanted to be told, and he was told. It was not a headlong rush into a new life of self sacrifice and strenuous devotion. It was like a river, like a growing plant. The will did nothing, there was no will. That nothing less than the gift of his entire being would be adequate to this reality was from the first clear, he was already given, indeed possessed. What exactly he had to do emerged more slowly. He must become a priest, his whole life must be a showing of what he now knew. And he did not even think that it would be easy, he did not even feel himself in any danger of being deluded, since with his new cleansed vision he also saw, still existing, still there as part of the world, his old self, unchanged and perhaps (and this was one of the most remarkable teachings of all) unchangeable.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Henry and Cato, pp. 27-28.

He changed his life at the sacrifice of his relationship with his father, John Forbes, who could not bring himself to believe that his son was seriously adopting the Roman Catholic faith in the face of his eminently rational upbringing. Forbes considered Cato's conversion to be pure imagination, or sorcery, or some sort of psychosis. He cast about for any possible explanation that might "save" his son from "ruining" his life over a "silly" belief:

His father met his announcements with absolute incredulity. He thought that his son almost literally had gone mad, and could scarcely have been more stunned and amazed if Cato had declared that Peter the Great was risen from the grave and was now his constant companion. For a short time, John Forbes behaved with the energy of desperation, behaved as he might have done if he had seen his child drowning before his eyes. He begged, he threatened, he went and stormed at Father Craddock and Father Bell and practically accused them of sorcery, he talked wildly of going to law, he even (in a frenzy, although he despised psychiatrists) besought Cato to admit himself to be mentally ill and enter a hospital. Cato went quietly and steadily on with his plans, never arguing, constantly begging his father's pardon for the pain he had to cause him. At last John Forbes gave up and retired into a bitter contemptuous coldness which had lasted ever since. Cato wrote to his father and visited him at slightly increasing intervals. The letters received no reply, the visits passed off politely, with no discussion of anything of importance. His sister Colette was upset by the family quarrel but she loved her brother dearly and though she considered his beliefs absurd she never for a second regarded them as a barrier between them.⁴⁸

For a while Cato maintained his studies, dividing his time between theology and Byzantine history. He lived in a community house and counselled students as "Charisma Forbes: the swinging priest." Eventually his superiors decided to give Cato a change, and he began visiting the poor east end of London, a process which led him quickly to the limits of Christian love. He had not imagined or expected the utter

⁴⁸Henry and Cato, pp. 28-29.

lack of a spiritual dimension in the lives of most of the poor people that he encountered. Nor was he prepared for the fact that most were content in their spiritual oblivion:

. . . "You'll be shocked, you know," Brendan had told him. "Nothing can shock me," said Cato. But he had been shocked. He had been frightened of his penitents, frightened of the dumb failure of his authority, and at a world where news of Christ had never come and, as it often seemed, could never come. "I was in prison and you visited me" had lost its charm. Cato could sometimes discern no light at all in those whom he devoutly attempted to love. He saw for the first time the willfulness of vice as a part of everyday life, and the way in which despair and vice were one. Just beyond the confines of ordinariness there were places where love could not enter; it was as if the concept broke. Cato knew perfectly well that the power of God could pass through the broken concept, and that this was the lesson which it most behoved him to learn. He measured now how cloistered he had been by his father's clean idealism. Perhaps it was this very breaking point that he had been seeking when he fled away into Christ. He prayed ceaselessly and hoped to find some blinded understanding in his prayer as he brought it with him into scenes where he knew himself to be powerless, detested, or even (worst of all) a figure of fun. Yet in the midst of it there were families, especially Irish families, who took him absolutely for granted. "Ah, here's Father come. Sit down now, Father, will you have some tea?"⁴⁹

A greater shock was actually living among the poverty stricken and the criminally inclined in "the Mission": "There was a great difference between visiting a poor area and going home to a clean book-lined room, and living in a poor area night and day" (Henry and Cato, 33). Cato had to learn to lock the door, or have all the simple survival implements like saucepans, crockery, and cutlery stolen, and to become a sort of one-man citizen's advisory board, "expert on all sorts of practical matters concerning supplementary benefits, rent rebates, tenancy

⁴⁹Henry and Cato, pp. 30-31.

agreements, hire purchase, legal costs, insurance, and how to fill in tax forms" (Henry and Cato, 33).

He learned that there were people who were not only miserably poor, but also illiterate. In the midst of this peculiar sort of twenty-four-hour activity, he found little time for contemplation and the quiet repose with God that had been his habit. He could not even depend on being alone at night, but knew that he must somehow find absolute calm in the midst of practical activity that characterizes a priest's life. While he was waiting through this "test" period, he lost his faith, as simply as it had come:

. . .Cato hoped soberly and confidently for grace, the power when tested to live more deeply in and through the ground of his being.

When this hope seemed to be disappointed Cato was not at first alarmed. He ascribed the spiritual dullness which he felt to all sorts of natural causes, tiredness, lack of solitude, the irritations of his exposed existence or simply to the mysterious rhythms which, as he already knew, govern the spiritual life. The dullness, the blankness was a phase which would pass. It was just proving harder than he had expected to enjoy loving Christ without more frequent *tête-a-tête*. However, the phase did not pass, and Cato woke up one morning with the absolute conviction that he had been mistaken and there was no God. The conviction faded; but from that moment Cato began to treat himself carefully, almost tenderly, like someone who has discovered in himself the symptoms of a serious disease, and for whom the world in consequence is totally altered. Brendan came on a flying visit. Cato said to him, "Oh by the way, I've lost my faith." "Rubbish." "God is gone. There is no God, no Christ, nothing." "I expected this." "You expect everything." "That darkness comes to us all." "I knew you'd say that. But suppose the darkness is real, true?" "Hold on." Brendan went away, then wrote him a wonderful letter, but the darkness persisted.⁵⁰

As has been noted, Murdoch deliberately uses the language of the Sovereignty of Good to describe Cato's spiritual expansion. His loss of that faith overnight shows how momentary such vision is, and how, in order to sustain it, one must practice almost superhuman faith. Cato

⁵⁰Henry and Cato, p. 34.

lost the vision and waited patiently for its return, but in the waiting was forced into a crucial decision. The Mission's finances were pressed to a degree that closed its doors, which meant that Cato must go elsewhere, with or without his faith. In contemplating leaving the Church and the Mission simultaneously, he reflects on what he will miss most, and the answer is simple: Beautiful Joe Beckett.

Parallels with Platonic idealism again surface here in passages that depict Cato's immense and apparently irreversible attraction for the small slim boy with hexagonal glasses and long blond hair. Plato's discussion of physical beauty, as an example of beauty in nature, centers on young men in the Phaedo (Grube, 1935) as the perfection of physical beauty in human beings. Beautiful Joe has a palpable effect on Cato at a time when he feels an immense void. Contemplation of the boy is a source of pure joy to him almost as his faith had been. Joe visits Father Forbes regularly, and Cato is a source of joy to him as well, but ironically because he is Father Forbes, not Cato. They are suspended in the pupil-teacher relationship, neither committed homosexually, the teacher aware of his inability to help the pupil, but the pupil's blind faith persisting. In short, Cato's love for God and all men descends and focuses on one young attractive boy:

. . . Perhaps Beautiful Joe had been sent especially to tempt him. When had he begun to doubt God? At the time when Beautiful Joe came into his life. Was not the boy playing with him, coolly probing him, reaching into his soul and confusing all his thoughts? That curious amused cynical aloofness: how could a boy of seventeen be so detached and cool?

Of course these thoughts were mad, as he recognized when he next talked to Joe, seeing now no demon, but the confused silly vulnerable boy, the boy who depended on him and needed him, the

boy whom only he could reach. "I'm off shoplifting." "Good." "I'm going to Belfast to kill those Protestant shits." "No, you aren't." "Aren't I, Father?" "I wish I could see into your heart." "You can." But Cato could not. His own heart was swelling and aching. When they looked at each other Cato was the first to look away. Yet Joe was perfectly tactful, perfectly docile, there was no exhibition of emotion, they remained priest and pupil and a weird decorum reigned between them.⁵¹

Cato's affection for Joe sustains him through this difficult time of decision. He anticipates Joe's visits and begins to believe that he can really help him to rise above his life of crime by living with him and being his source of strength. When Cato leaves the Church, however, he becomes to Joe "a fag in a cloth coat," and from then on Cato suffers Beautiful Joe's vengeance.

Just before the beginning of the nightmarish episode involving Cato's kidnapping and Henry's ransom money, Cato reflects on his loss:

The new world, he thought, the new life, and how sad it is. I suppose I should be congratulating myself, it may even be that later I shall look back on this as heaven. I have escaped, I have got off scot free from a stupid erotic entanglement and a big intellectual illusion. I am home again with my kind good father and my sweet loving sister. I have even got a job. But how worthless it all seems now. And in a great void he saw the face of Beautiful Joe beaming at him through those bright hexagonal glasses, with that deceptive air of untouched childish innocence, that utterly enchanting utterly desirable boy-girl innocence, that energy of life which shed its light upon all things. I shall never see him again, thought Cato, I must take that in as a certainty, perhaps my only certainty and the beginning of my truth. I could not help him, and perhaps I always knew this; he simply, completely baffled me, he defeated me with a graceful demonic brilliance. He made a fool of me in the worst sense. Lucifer, bearer of light. And Cato remembered how he had once thought of Joe as a symbol of breakdown in his life, as a significant temptation, even as an emissary of the devil. And he thought, no, that was just a consoling dream, a last attempt to give sense to what in the end had none. Beautiful Joe was just a passer-by, a little unimportant delinquent boy who will lead a

⁵¹Henry and Cato, p. 39.

mean unhappy swindling sort of life, who will go to prison, on some day when I am teaching a class somewhere in the north or somewhere in America, and I shall never even know. I loved him, but my love was a self-deception and a vanity, it had no meaning and no saving strength. Men cannot help each other, they cannot even see each other, nobody can be changed or saved even by the most extreme of loves. 'While I was gazing at Joe in a dream it was all taken away, the high edifices of my faith were dismantled: the three-personed God, the Fall and the Redemption, the life of the world to come, in saecula saeculorum. Now there is only sin and woe and no saviour. Jesus was not the Son of God, he was just a victim, just a good witty man with a delusion. And so my life has become tiny and mean and incomplete and I must begin it again without comfort and without magic. It is the end of the story, and what follows will be quiet and dull, and I am fortunate that it is so and that I am not crippled and I will not even be miserable for ever.⁵²

In comparison to his earlier vision, Cato has recognized the void in his life and is trying to accept it philosophically, as one would try to redirect his attention from a lost love. Cato's attention was directed at God, then at Joe in place of God, and now neither exists. He is sad, but not despairing at this point because he still believes that Joe's resentment of him is limited to verbal abuse. Just as he is accepting his losses, Joe kidnaps him and shows him the reality of the song he has been promising to write, entitled "Fear is a knife."

Henry Marshalson also has a source of strength, a redirection of attention, that sustains him through his traumatic questioning of his origins and himself. Immediate affection is provided by Stephanie Whitehouse, Sandy's former charwoman whom Henry mistakes for Sandy's mistress. Henry proposed to her partly out of pity, but largely because of his jealous resentment of Sandy and his peculiar American-Marxist hatred of property. In Stephanie Henry envisioned the opportunity to

⁵²Henry and Cato, pp. 213-214.

have quite literally what Sandy had; in addition, marrying "below" his class reinforces his attempted renunciation of Laxlinden and his mother.

In particularly trying times, however, Henry seeks solitude and finds somewhat unexpected comfort in his limited knowledge of art. Contemplation of his mother's tapestry of Actaeon and Athena, now his to give away, as well as the Titian at the National Gallery lead him to mythological worlds removed from the chaotic and upsetting one he has created at Laxlinden. He also reflects on his book on Max Beckmann that he had begun to research at Sperriton College. Beckmann's mode of artistic perception invades Henry's consciousness to the point that Beckmann's words and images forge a principal metaphor for Henry's life. The theme of contemplation of beauty and art in Henry and Cato, then, takes on a literal interpretation aside from Cato's Platonic appreciation of beautiful young men. Art history of several centuries joins with appreciation of actual art objects to sustain Henry through difficult times at Laxlinden.

Henry had not always been interested in art, and his enthusiasm for teaching the "fifty great paintings" at Sperriton was wearing thin. On returning to England, however, his knowledge of art history, though scant, became an unexpected pleasure to him, providing a metaphor for interpretation of his experiences and an external, nonpersonal means of comfort. Henry's tastes have never run to the arts, much less painting, a circumstance Murdoch stresses:

. . . Sperriton was tiny and lonely. St. Louis was vast and lonely, and lost Henry delighted in its besieged loneliness. He loved its derelict splendours, the huge ornate neglected mansions

of a vanished bourgeoisie, the useless skyscraper-tall steel arch through which the citizenry surveyed the view of the shabby warehouses and marshalling yards on the Illinois shore. The empty palaces beside the immense eternal river: what an impressive image of the demise of capitalism. (Henry hated capitalism. He hated socialism too.) Russell and Bella went to concerts. (There was virtually no theatre.) Henry cared for none of these things; he just wandered about seeking an identity. Eventually he got onto the trail of Max Beckmann whom a fate even stranger than Henry's had exiled to St. Louis in his later years. Henry had been told by the head of his department that he must write a book, any book. He decided to write about Beckmann. Henry's book would not soon appear. Russ and Bella laughed at it.⁵³

Henry's book on Beckmann begins to interest him personally, however, as Henry begins to identify with the German symbolist painter. Beckmann portrays segments of the world on his canvasses with a nightmarish intensity similar to Henry's blackest moods: "He pictured himself like Max in a frightful harlequin world of extreme situations and inquisitions taking place somehow in nightclubs or circuses. Of course Max had had his real horrors: the Nazis, and the nineteen-fourteen war with a pencil and no paint" (Henry and Cato, 5). On closer investigation of Beckmann, Henry's identification with him, which also foreshadows the horrible blackmailing and kidnapping in an old underground air-raid shelter, becomes easily credible.

Max Beckmann (1884-1950) paints with an infectious existential enthusiasm. Every painting to him is an existential experience. He writes, "My dream is to change the idea of space, the optical impression of the world of objects, through a transcendent arithmetic of my inwardness" (Haftmann, 1966). This "arithmetic" perpetually affirms and creates human reality, overcoming alienation in the midst of eternity,

⁵³Henry and Cato, 4.

not through reproducing reality through real elements, but of creating reality with real elements. Haftmann writes of Beckmann, ". . . every manifestation of visible reality is felt to be an existential summons to perform an act of ordering. Painting ceases to be an aesthetic concern and becomes an ethical activity necessary to the safeguarding of life itself" (Haftmann, 1966). And Beckmann himself states, "Nature is chaos; it is our duty and our task to order this chaos, to perfect it. . . . If we wish to grasp the invisible we must penetrate as deeply as possible into the visible" (Haftmann, 1966).

Henry will take the title of his book from Beckmann's early drawing Screaming or Yawning, which for him represents Beckmann's (and his) perception of the human condition most accurately. The distortely, gaping mouth responds ambiguously to the feeling of Angst, either by screaming or yawning; one's existential plight is incorporated into the image, either anguish or ennui. As Henry returns to his home and his childhood friends, particularly Cato, his personal insights through Beckmann's paintings become increasingly significant. Either Henry is reminded of Max's existential nightmares, or he is taken with Max's purely aggressive ego. Beckmann's statement that "All objective minds strive for self-representation" is taken quite literally by Henry who, as a result of studying Beckmann, begins to regard himself as a failed artist; no matter that he has never been one. Beckmann, then, invades Henry's fantasies with his paintings, his history, and his personality.

Murdoch thus uses Beckmann for visual and thematic unity. Beckmann's City Night series, for example, includes a large canvas entitled

Night (1918-19), which depicts in gruesome detail a gang of desperadoes invading a slum dwelling at night (Haftmann, 1966). The painting could be Beautiful Joe's glorious vision as he single-handedly and quite delightedly kidnaps Cato, takes his shoes, cuts the buttons off his clothes, and imprisons him in an old, beetle-infested underground air-raid shelter, with only an orange bucket as a lavatory. Joe leaves a radio outside tuned to a foreign station to give the impression of a gang. He forces Cato to write ransom notes to Henry and to Colette, whom he also escorts to the shelter and tortures as he pleases. The line across Henry's knuckles will bear permanent evidence of Joe's motto, as will the livid trail down Colette's right cheek, that "Fear is a knife."

Because Murdoch prepares us, through Henry's background in Beckmann, for such a scene, it fits into the novel as the central example of "the great teacher" in Part II with almost unbearable intensity. It also serves as an index of how profoundly the experience affects Henry. He sees, as does Cato, that empathy with nightmarish violence depicted on canvas, or with discussions in a room, is quite different from actual experience. Killing Joe, who was raping Colette, changed Cato irreversibly, making him unfit for ordinary existence, probably forever.

Violence in art is incorporated also in mythological renditions, in the seventeenth century Flemish tapestry at Laxlinden of Athena and Achilles as well as in Titian's Actaeon and Diana, the National Gallery's latest acquisition that Henry visits periodically. Both

scenes raise Henry's spirits considerably. His new appreciation of the tapestry at his ancestral home reveals to Henry that his limited background in art has benefited him after all:

. . . Seeing the tapestry for the first time, he studied it now in the bright sunless northern light of the morning. The goddess, her longtailed helmet thrust back over her curls, wearing a much-pleated robe with the aegis rather carelessly falling off one shoulder, was striding out of a large foliated shrubbery which took up most of the left side of the tapestry. A determined sandalled foot, heel-down, emerged from the swinging skirt. The right hand held a tall vertical spear which divided the sky above the shrubbery, while the left, in an elaborate and implausible pattern of flowing locks and crooked fingers, grasped from behind the bright hair of the helmetless hero. who was also represented as moving away to the right, holding a sword, and a forshortened shield and wearing extremely brief glittering fish-scale armour beneath which a fancy undergarment fell in pleated flounces so as barely to cover his private parts. The long brazen-grooved muscular legs, glimpsed through the foliage, were lovingly rendered.⁵⁴

Henry examines the tapestry in great detail, but his final thought on it, "I wish I had a goddess to grab me by the hair," entirely discounts the fear and violence implicit in the romantic scene.

Much more literally frightening is the drama in Actaeon and Diana:

The immortal goddess, with curving apple cheek, her bow uplifted, bounds with graceful ruthless indifference across the foreground, while further back, in an underworld of brooding light, the doll-like figure of Actaeon falls stiffly to the onslaught of dogs. A stream flashes. A distant mysterious horseman passes. The woods, the air, are of a russet brown so intense and frightening as to persuade one that the tragedy is taking place in total silence.⁵⁵

Viewing the oil carefully at the National Gallery, Henry feels immense elation in what he takes to be his understanding of Titian's genius. ("Henry felt such intense pleasure as he looked at the picture, he felt

⁵⁴Henry and Cato, p. 54.

⁵⁵Henry and Cato, p. 96.

so purely happy that he wanted to howl aloud with delight. Smiling, he sat down nearby.") After the melodramatically excruciating sequence of kidnapping, blackmail, and murder, however, Henry has a quite different reaction to the painting. Joe's resentment of Cato for disarming him, leaving the priesthood, and falling in love with him; of Henry for his class and his money; and of Colette for being Cato's virgin sister, for which resentment Joe dies by Cato's hand, convinces Henry that experience is a stronger teacher than pigment on canvas.

Reflecting on the trauma in the air-raid shelter and constantly reminded by the scars on his hand and on Colette's cheek, Henry visits a transformed Cato who expressionlessly and mechanically pulls weeds in his father's yard. The conversation ends violently:

"Why did you come here? . . ."

"I came out of affection for you."

"You came out of curiosity."

"I came because we're old friends."

"You came as a tourist."

"Cato, stop."

"Did you ever kill a man?"

"No."

"You should try it sometime. It's a funny feeling. It's so easy to end a man's life. Once you've done it you feel you might do it again. Why not go around killing people? . . . One realizes that there are no barriers, there never were any barriers, what one thought were barriers were simply frivolous selfish complacent illusions and vanities. All that so-called morality is simply smirking at yourself in a mirror and thinking how good you are. Morality is nothing but self-esteem, nothing else, simply affectations of virtue and spiritual charm. And when self-esteem is gone there's nothing left but fury, fury of unbridled egoism. . . . I just hope and pray for you--may you never see what I see now, never know what I know now, never be where I am now!"

"Cato!"

"Oh get out, get out'!"

Henry fled to the door and half fell down the first stairs. The door closed behind him. He paused, and heard again that awful lonely sigh, now prolonged into a kind of quiet moan. He ran down the remaining stairs and out into the street and hailed a taxi. "National Gallery."⁵⁶

All communication fails between the two former friends. To calm himself, Henry flees to the National Gallery, hoping to regain his perspective, along with his regular heartbeat, in viewing the masterpiece. That magic also fails:

Twenty minutes later Henry was sitting in front of Titian's great picture. His violently beating heart was slowly calming a little. He kept his eyes fixed on the picture as in an activity of prayer. . . .

He stared at the picture and his heart became quiet. How different it is, violence in art, from the horror of the real thing. The dogs are tearing out Actaeon's entrails while the indifferent goddess passes. Something frightful and beastly and terrible has been turned into one of the most beautiful things in the world. How is this possible? Is it a lie, or what? Did Titian know that really human life was awful, awful, that it was nothing but a slaughterhouse? Did Max know, when he painted witty cleverly composed scenes of torture? Maybe they knew, thought Henry, but I certainly don't and I don't want to. And he thought of Cato now with a horrified pity which was a sort of disgust, and he gazed into the far depths of the great picture and he prayed for himself. "May I never see what he sees, never know what he knows, never be where he is, so help me God!"⁵⁷

In this passage is incorporated Murdoch's most pessimistic statement about the ability of art to console in the daily world. While the canvas creates the illusion of order, even in a savage encounter, in practice the reality the canvas depicts is chaotic and unbearable. As a

⁵⁶Henry and Cato, pp. 295-296.

⁵⁷Henry and Cato, p. 296.

result of this perception, Henry abandons his book, his career, and America.

Cato's tragedy has been described as the most credible one in Henry and Cato by virtue of Cato's long philosophical debates with Brendan Craddock, Cato's most perceptive friend and fellow priest. Peter Prescott writes that

. . . Cato belongs to the darker center of this story. . . . his renunciation of God and his priesthood is made credible in a way that Henry's dismissal of his family and inheritance never is--if only because Murdoch. . . throws Cato up against a superior priest in a sequence of intelligent theological debates. Only these arguments resist Murdoch's shaping and enervating touch; only in them does her story find a genuine human dilemma, a sense of anguish.⁵⁸

Cato had earlier thought that Craddock was blessed with an unquestioning faith by virtue of his Roman Catholic origins, that he had "inhaled the faith with every breath." For whatever reason, Craddock's conversations with Cato had been a source of strength for both. Craddock appeared to be the superior debater, the unshockable and ready resource from which Cato could draw advice and consolation.

After Cato's kidnapping and Joe's death, Cato and Craddock have a final conversation before Craddock departs for Calcutta; theirs is also the final conversation of Henry and Cato. Craddock and Cato discuss, as usual, Cato's loss of faith and his now intense lostness, despair, and isolation:

"Why don't you hang on?"

"Because I know that if it did come it would be an illusion--one of the most, oh, splendid. The original felix culpa is thought itself."

⁵⁸Peter Prescott, "Worldly Goods," Newsweek (10 January 1977), p. 68.

"That sounds to me like despair."

"The point is, one will never get to the end of it, never get to the bottom of it, never, never, never. And that never, never, never is what you must take for your hope and your shield

"That sounds to me like despair."

"The point is, one will never get to the end of it, never get to the bottom of it, never, never, never. And that never, never, never is what you must take for your hope and your shield and your most glorious promise. Everything that we concoct about God is an illusion."

"But God is not an illusion?"

"Whosoever he be of you who forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

"I don't believe you've given up theology at all. Theology is magic. Beware."

"I know So I won't see you before you go?"

"No."

"Shall I come and see you in Calcutta, if I can raise the money?"

"Well, better not."

There was silence for a moment. Cato put on his coat. "So you're giving me up too?"

"I'm giving you up too."

"I've always kept you as a last resource," said Cato.

"I know. But you mustn't have this sort of last resource. More conversations like this won't help you. What after all would they be about?"⁵⁹

Craddock leaves Cato to his own devices, knowing that his role as "last resource" is one that creates dependence, not the new independence that Cato needs. Last, he gives Cato the beautiful ivory crucifix, and Cato feels it "heavy and awkward inside his macintosh pocket, banging irregularly against his thigh at each step" (Henry and Cato, 340).

Murdoch's last word, having destroyed and reduced all illusions to their precise and prosaic reality, is that one simply must have faith, that it must be a conscious action, that in light of all the misery in the world it is probably the most difficult solution of all. But it is

⁵⁹Henry and Cato, pp. 338-339.

the only thing that will keep Cato alive. Brendan Craddock realizes this, and, with the simplicity and order of and artistic creation, Murdoch allows the cross to symbolize the faith that Cato needs to regain, and Murdoch depicts his leave-taking devoid of the suffering he must have felt.

CONCLUSION

After I had finished the present study, Murdoch's latest novel The Sea, The Sea (1978) was published. Reading it in light of this thematic analysis emphasizes the centrality of the four major themes here identified, along with several attendant minor motifs. Language, love, art, and death are all crucially interdependent in The Sea, The Sea, encompassed by the image of the restorative ocean that Murdoch reasserts regularly.

Language again is a fundamental element, not only in terms of letters and dialogue, but also in Murdoch's particular function as the unique mode of communication which must be recreated for each individual. Charles Arrowby, the protagonist of The Sea, The Sea, has great difficulty in discovering new verbal pathways to Mary Hartley, his childhood sweetheart, and to her adopted son Titus. His difficulty stems from his inability to consider the situation outside himself with any degree of objectivity; hence, his vision is obscured by his own ego. His lack of ability to communicate successfully with people is an accurate measure of his moral obliquity. His egoistic plan is to reclaim Hartley so that they can spend their last years together, regardless of her husband, family, and personal preferences. His "saving" Hartley from her present situation is patent proof of his mammoth ego, which blocks any sort of appreciation of her wishes, much less her affection for her husband and son. He wants to hear the answers he desires, and only those, so that his efforts at communication are doomed from the start.

Love is the central motivation of Arrowby's obsession. His not-so-devout desire for Hartley is a consummation of an innocent adolescent flirtation which he claims has remained pure in his memory for more than forty years. Mary Hartley was his first love and therefore the truest. It does not matter to Arrowby that she has now grown old, wrinkled, and very attached to her sometimes brutal husband. Her marriage brought with it the sexual awakening that her relationship with Arrowby lacked, and she finds her marital ties stronger than the early superficial ones they share. This fact, plus, their decades of shared experience, make it impossible for Hartley to consider divorce. In fact, she is miserable apart from her husband's harangues. These considerations mean nothing to Arrowby because he refuses to admit their existence. By sheer force of will he means to have Hartley to himself because he has decided that theirs is a marriage conceived in heaven, despite anyone else's opinion, even that of Hartley herself. Implied is the fact that Hartley, in her youth, tired of waiting for a consummation and left to find more action. Now, at the other end of their lives, Arrowby wishes to have it all: a ready-made son, wife, and companion for his old age. Hartley's husband is understandably appalled and enraged at the proposition and aggressively opposes Arrowby. He finally wins, as he did in their youth, by taking action: removing Hartley by deporting to Australia after the death of their adopted son Titus.

Margaret Drabble, in her review of The Sea, The Sea, leaves several issues unresolved in reference to Murdoch's use of the theme of love:

References to the Iliad and the Odyssey abound--is the stout and aging Hartley Helen of Troy held captive against her will by a false abductor in the form of her legal husband, or is the narrator himself the ravisher? Or is Hartley nothing but a shadow Helen, placed there by gods or demons in order to stir up raging warfare in the hearts of men? Is love an illumination or a blindness, a passionate act of devotion and attention to a loved object, or a mad possession, regarding nothing but its own arbitrary ends?¹

Drabble's intention is perhaps to indicate Murdoch's penchant for the deliberately ambiguous moral allegory. Whereas a case could be made for this kind of interpretation in her earlier works, this latest novel seems transparent in its moral message, if only because of its repetition in various guises. Murdoch presents the story of Hartley and Arrowby primarily through Arrowby's consciousness, and this view is clearly shown by friends and relatives around him to be the "fat ego" at large. The increasingly assertive intervention of Arrowby's friends into his plan, and finally the decisive action of his wise cousin James, is testimony to Arrowby's determined temptation of fate and his dogged refusal to accept warnings, bad omens, and wise advice. Murdoch's example proves how destructive the neurotic urge to possess can become when allowed to run unchecked.

Arrowby's cousin James physically saves him from drowning in the whirlpool and psychologically saves him from drowning in his own passions. The account of James's "impossible" rescue of his cousin is noteworthy, for it draws together numerous minor motifs in Murdoch and epitomizes her view of selfless love. James has had a distinguished career in the foreign service and has always been one to whom intellectual, academic, and athletic honors have seemed to come

¹Margaret Drabble, "Of Treacle Tarts and Eternal Love," Saturday Review 6 (6 January 1979), p. 53.

effortlessly. Arrowby has long since passed from idolatry to jealousy of his far-seeing, all-capable cousin, while James has retained his somewhat distant but constant affection for Charles.

James's multiple capabilities drew him naturally to the study of Eastern religions, and his Tibetan adventures gave him first-hand experience with extra-natural phenomena resulting from heightened consciousness, e.g., the "trick" of raising body temperature to a sufficient height to sustain two people simultaneously. James's love, born of wisdom far beyond Charles's, saves Arrowby's life and saves Hartley's marriage. The intervention of James's ego into Arrowby's obsessive plan upsets the plan but involves James to such an extent that he dies.

James is also another of Murdoch's "collectors," in this case of Eastern relics, idols, and literature, some pieces so rare that the British Museum cannot believe its luck in receiving them after James's death. In this way, the theme of art mingles with that of physical and mystic love. James has collected the pieces in the east, mainly during his assignment in Tibet, and they are physical evidence of his other-worldly consciousness that has directed his actions ever since.

Like The Black Prince, the novel itself is intended to be a work of art. Arrowby is writing a diary, a record of his past life, about which he is very self-consciously concerned. This concern is not sustained, however, and often gives way to rambling narrative. Art also functions in terms of Arrowby's forsaken profession as actor, though his reputation is also questioned. To his mind, he has been and seen the best in that busy, kinky, frivolous world and in slack periods has even

written plays of questionable quality. He retired from the theatre to collect his last years peacefully and wholesomely by the endlessly restorative sea, "turning magic into mysticism." Unexpectedly meeting Hartley at Narrowdean, where she and her husband have come to live anonymously, sets Arrowby off on his near-psychotic quest of a less-than-perfect Grail. His enormous ego once again is galvanized into action as he creates a drama of his own and attempts to live it. All his years in the theatre have not taught him the difference between art and life; he still wants to live his life as a play in five acts. He interprets his past in terms of Shakespearean drama, his first love in the theatre. His latest Narrowdean production casts him unmistakably as Prospero in a literal and psychological tempest from which no one emerges unscathed.

Violence and death intrude to shatter the unreal world that Arrowby's passions have created. The rage of Hartley's husband becomes the prime mover in a series of almost impossible catastrophes that put a permanent end to Arrowby's hopes for a son in Titus and a helpmeet in his cousin James, not to mention a wife in Hartley. The conclusion of the novel revolves around the death of James and Arrowby's attempts to come to terms with his cousin's extraordinary capabilities. He remains sceptical to the end, even when James's casket mysteriously falls from its stand: "Upon the demon-ridden pilgrimage of life, what next, I wonder?"

Joyce Carol Oates's comments on the final philosophical direction of The Sea, The Sea bear note:

. . . We are offered unanticipated moments of terrible, even tragic lucidity; we are purified by suffering; but our powerful revelations fade, our insights dissolve, and we are back in the world of appearances, of strife and desire and illusion. Given the opportunity to experience freedom we prefer to be, in the end, puppets of God. The work that is central to an understanding of Murdoch's oeuvre is Plato's allegory of the cave: I suggest that all Murdoch's novels are commentaries on it.²

In the end, Murdoch wishes us to evaluate our worlds from the locus of death, in terms of our own death and of those close to us, in order to achieve a fair perspective on the importance of daily concerns. Such a perspective is impossible to maintain; we are lured by the shadows away from the flame. This recognition seems also to invade Murdoch's fiction. It becomes more ponderous, contemplative, repetitious, and less sparkling and allusive than in her earlier works. But her twenty years of novel writing have multiplied the complexities within her work and sharpened her vision. The vision is restorative nonetheless.

²Joyce Carol Oates, "The Novelists: Iris Murdoch, The New Republic 179 (18 November 1978), p. 28.

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