

MURDOCH'S DOUBLE MESSAGE: DISRUPTED SEQUENCE AND PARODY
IN THE EARLY MATURE NOVELS OF IRIS MURDOCH

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Murdoch's Double Message: Disrupted Sequence and Parody in the

Early Mature Novels of Iris Murdoch

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ABSTRACT

The three early mature novels of Iris Murdoch--The Nice and the Good, Bruno's Dream, and A Fairly Honourable Defeat--have frequently been examined in terms of their themes: good versus evil, the role of love, self and illusion. Critics have particularly noted how these novels demonstrate Murdoch's philosophical ideas about the nature of the self and the place of the novel in society. In the process, however, they have treated the novels as works of conventional realism, at times finding them implausible, overwhelmed by the narrator's manipulation of character and structure. The novels are seen to be disjointed, quirky, and difficult to read.

This difficulty is part of Murdoch's double message. On the one hand she presents apparently representational portrayals of characters which lull the reader into believing a novel with no unusual structural characteristics is under way. On the other hand Murdoch's narrator disrupts the temporal and causal sequence of events so that the emerging story is without the unities of time and space so essential to conventional chronological novels. In this way--through her use of juxtaposition, repetition, parallels, coincidence, and non-linear sequence--the narrator undermines the apparent seriousness of events. The result is a parody of conventional novel structures

and a mocking ironic treatment of character. These technical devices produce a novel that is of itself an experience because the reader must continually adjust and re-adjust to the effects of narrative destructuring. Murdoch has found this approach necessary in order to revitalize the novel in the face of the genre's contemporary trends toward the journalistic and artificial. Such an experience jolts the reader into questions about the surface and appearances not only of the novel, but of the characters therein (and their counterparts in life) who are unredeemably caught up in fantasies of self and the rational fallacies the self continually develops.

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Introduction

The Double Message

What is good, and how do we attain and lose it; what is the role of love; what is evil; and where is redemption? These questions work themselves out in the novels of Iris Murdoch through her presentation of character and her narrative structuring and destructuring.¹

Consequently Murdoch's is a double message: the reader is lulled into imagining that he or she is reading a novel of realism because the characters are drawn through conversation and portrayal in a representational way, and because the sequence of events is also highly representational. But as the reader goes deeper into the text, he or she realizes that realism is being parodied through the disruption of narrative sequence (as this impinges on character development and on conventional expectations of the novel) and also through Murdoch's ironic manipulation of character. It is through this parodying of realism that her message about the nature of good and evil and the fallacy of rationalism is exposed.²

The three novels from her early mature work that best exemplify Murdoch's double message are The Nice and the Good (1968), Bruno's Dream (1969), and A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970). In contrast to more representational or realistic novels, these three novels are not characterized by a time sequence that is strictly chronological and

linear; do not employ a narrator who refuses either to divulge the future or deviate from the supposedly straightforward march of events; do not have one or more characters or narrators who act as "readers" of the unfolding events and who put the total story together in such a way that we as readers are able to identify with them comfortably. In conventional novels of realism George Becker claims the "authors are collectors, or more accurately, experimenters. They want to know, they want to see, as in a laboratory, what happens to a given creature under varied conditions of experiences."³ This is surely part of Murdoch's intent, but she goes further in her handling of character and in her use of narrative sequence. Even though we agree with Georg Lukács that "the literature of realism aim(s) at a truthful reflection of reality,"⁴ we also accept his remark that "a realistic narrative or play, whatever the pretensions of the writer or critic, cannot be a literal copy of reality, it is a made thing and is therefore based on selection and is subject to at least minimal shaping."⁵ It is this pattern and shaping which concerns us in these three novels because Murdoch intends this patterned shape to be more than a reflection or copy of reality; she intends her novel to be an experience in itself. Part of that experience is irony, and Murdoch's ironic titles will be discussed in the appropriate chapters.

Earlier novels such as The Sandcastle and A Severed Head use comic and ironic devices while her later work, such as The Sea, The Sea and The Philosopher's Pupil have aimed for bulk on a Dickens-like

scale, and they have had to find other structures to support them aside from representational character portrayal and parody, although it is still possible to recognize some of the structural elements discussed below in these later works. What characterizes Murdoch's maturity as a novelist is her emerging mastery of the form demonstrated in these early middle novels. Here the untidy haphazard quality of the characters' lives reinforces the apparent realism at the same time as it is always carefully structured, often by a manipulative narrator, into a pattern that eventually undermines the very realism and seeming openness it presents. Such a form allows her to render her concerns about the nature of the self and its redemption. Somewhat surprisingly no critics tend to deal directly with the structural peculiarities of Murdoch's novels.⁶

The events in a Murdoch novel do not march forward to an inevitable closure. The shape of rising action, climax and falling action is not always respected; rather we find ourselves as readers involved in a matrix of shocks and reversals as we move from scene to scene and character to character. Events rapidly lead into events, often with little time for reflection or digestion by either the characters or the reader. The outcome of one event leads to the potential stage of another. Frequently these shifts are ironic or comic and the characters find themselves under fire where they hastily arrange their concepts of themselves and others just as we adjust our concepts both of their characters and our own expectations about the

nature of the novel that is emerging. Such a shape is Murdoch's narrative signature. As she has said, "the nature of a novel is somehow that a sort of wind blows through it and there are holes in it and the meaning of it partly seeps away into life."⁷ Those holes are holes in sequence, manifestations of chance and chance occurrence; here the rudeness of life shoulders aside the tight and tidy form. But there are limits. In Murdoch's work, sequence (a device of realism) nudges past imitation and representation and emerges as a parody of conventional structures. In the pattern she establishes, two conventional narrative elements are thwarted, that of causality of sequence and that of temporal sequence. Such a pattern can be--is intended to be--disturbing. In a perceptive review in the London Review of Books, Nicholas Spice, one of the few critics to note this recurring pattern and its significance, remarks:

Uncertainty about what has happened in the book, and what it's to be taken to mean, is a usual response to a new Murdoch novel. The scope of disagreement is always large, and one is led to ask: how can it be that a writer of such imposing, original and prolific intelligence, should produce novels whose individual stature is so disputed. This question which is so much the question about Iris Murdoch, loses some of its force when one accepts that if her novels are hard to look at, then this is because she means them to be hard to look at.⁸ (last italics mine)

This difficulty of "looking at" results from disrupted sequence, and disrupted sequence is her means of producing parody and providing us with the experience of her double message.

If, as Mieke Bal says, the "aim of textual analysis is not to account for the process of writing, but for the conditions of the process of reception,"⁹ then we must not only establish the fact of Murdoch's deconstructing but also demonstrate how and why Murdoch has treated her material and ordered her story to produce such an effect. In order to do this, we need to distinguish three elements in these novels--story, fabula, event--which will help us to understand in narrative terms how Murdoch has produced her double message. Mieke Bal's attempt to describe and delineate the processes involved in a narrative text offers the most insight into Murdoch's work. Bal's description makes clear distinctions between its narrative elements:

A story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An event is the transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions.¹⁰

Furthermore

the story does not consist of material different from that of the fabula, but ... this material is looked at from a certain, specific angle. If one regards the fabula primarily as the product of imagination, the story could be regarded as the result of ordering.¹¹

By examining the differences between the arrangement in the story and the chronology of the fabula, we discover the chronological deviation (or anachronies) which we know as disruptions in sequence of the

story's ordering. The time sequence may be varied, for example, through condensing or eliminating certain elements of the fabula. Yet through all these disruptions the fabula does not change. It remains a series of logical and chronologically related events that we as readers are continually attempting to rearrange linearly in the face of an idiosyncratic narrator. The fabula remains an abstract that we structure at the edge of the page, as it were, and which continually changes in Murdoch's novels as the story impinges on it. In narrative terms in Murdoch, the fabula works within the aspect we call realism (what Lukács refers to as "literature that aim(s) at a truthful reflection of reality"¹²) while the story creates that aspect we come to recognize as parody. The tug of war we experience in reading one of these novels (and which arouses so much of the acrimony in the debate about Murdoch¹³) could be stated not only in terms of the tension between realism and a destructuring that undercuts realism, but also as the interplay between fabula and story as it occurs within the receptive reader.

That interplay has a very specific quality--disjointed, disrupted. We are frequently casting back or ahead in the fabula that emerges from our reading in order to synchronize fabula with story. Synchronicity between fabula and story (which we expect from novels of conventional realism) is not the larger experience of reading these three novels. Instead we are continually re-evaluating the fabula in light of the story. When the causal linear sequence of a conventional

sort is denied to the reader, the story is ordered in such a manner that it does not correspond immediately or directly with the fabula. While the story tells us, for instance, that Adelaide--as we shall see--in Bruno's Dream is preparing for a funeral, the fabula is powerless at first to suggest otherwise or to provide us with the correct (that is logical or chronological) information because an ellipsis has occurred, a break in linear sequence. The fabula cannot tell us that Adelaide's tears are those of joy not grief at the thought of her forthcoming wedding to Will. The anachronicity here is used not only to satirize Adelaide's gushiness, but also to jolt the reader's expectation of the process of reading and of the expectation of a logical sequence of events.

It is exactly this interplay between fabula and story that makes sequence so critical in these novels. We are not allowed to settle too comfortably into any particular version of the emerging fabula, but are constantly readjusting our ideas of characters and situations as the story's ordering takes us where we least expect, where the fabula has least prepared us for, or where our previous notions of chronology are inadequate. Eventually it becomes clear that this continual realigning of fabula and story is the predominant feature of the novels, and each of these adjustments is the act required by the reader in order to compensate for the disruption in sequence, especially since this is not accomplished by either the narrator or chief protagonist. It is this quality which makes her novels so

difficult to look at--because she intends them to be experiences of the process itself.

The reader accustomed to a more normal causal and temporal sequence will be disoriented. Such a reader will have begun Murdoch's novel with the expectation (based on the attitude and information presented early in the work) that a work of realism is in hand. As the characters are presented in a community of events not all of which precede from previously narrated events, this initial impression begins to weaken. He sees certain events "arrive" with the force of epiphanies, cutting across the logic of events that has been working in the characters up till then. He might now accept that Murdoch's sequence may be able to produce the haphazard texture of reality and therefore a truer portrayal of character, but since he agrees with Viktor Shklovsky that "a work of literature does not exceed the sum of its stylistic devices,"¹⁴ what of the form that is emerging? In novels of conventional realism the concept of chronological sequence forces an assumption of cause and effect. Murdoch parodies that notion by disrupting her sequence. Yet even before we are aware of her parody, the disrupted sequence produces moments of representational portrayal so intense they begin to take on the quality of metaphor.

The disruption of temporal sequence occurs when her characters move from a state of self-deception to a full awareness that the world and others exist as relentlessly as themselves; then a new kind of

time comes into existence: this is the drama of recognition many of the characters muddle towards. Her characters normally live inside chronological time, but at certain junctures of sequence, chronology is superseded by another kind of time, a different perception.

Murdoch uses a term originally invented by St. Thomas Aquinas to account for the divine manifestation of matter, that is, angels.¹⁵

The "time of the angels" rises out of human chronology toward eternal time. In this third order, which William Hall describes as not human nor entirely other,

there comes to the protagonist what Miss Murdoch refers to as 'an apprehension of the strength of the natural world' as well as 'the volcanic otherness within the personality' which combine to produce in the protagonist a completely overwhelming sense of another person's separate identity.¹⁶

This awareness can empower the protagonist, and how that power is used--for good or not--is the central moral issue of her work. In the intensity of this awareness the characters discover--as Paula does in The Nice and The Good--"the deep dark logical injustice of the forces which govern our extreme moments and which ... must be recognized in our lives as gods."¹⁷ As this sentence and the term "time of the angels" implies, such moments take on the glimmering dimension of figurative language. The quality of dream and vision magnifies such events. If Murdoch is right when she insists that "reality is incomplete"¹⁸ then figurative language may be the means to express

full awareness, full reality. A scene of this nature is, in a sense, a "time-out", a sudden often sprawling attempt to stop sequence and eschew realism completely. As Murdoch has said, "metaphors are not peripheral decorations or even useful models, they are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition."¹⁹

Disrupted sequence produces parody of realism, operates as a kind of epiphanic metaphor, and each of these occurs within a tripartite structure that shapes the novel and generates its own kind of meaning almost separate from its contents. The first stage of this framing is characterized by the presentation of the viewpoints of nearly all the characters. The narrator shifts from character to character without regard to temporal order, and the emerging fabula--incomplete as it is--accentuates the sense of entanglement in the community. By the second stage the reader has become accustomed to these disruptions--and may even anticipate and enjoy them--with their often contradictory perspectives and information. The sense of community has been established and the reader is able to follow the narrator as she presents the various dilemmas and moral decisions with which the characters struggle. Eventually nearly all emerge--or are forced--into some new recognition about themselves and others. However false these truths may ultimately become, they do burst upon the characters with the force of a "time-out". These dramas of recognition form the core of the novel. As a result of their energy, the final stage of the novel produces a realigning of the lovers and

allegiances in the community. This readjustment is often ironic: characters frequently substitute one illusion for another, a new beginning gone stale.

These stages are not brittle but arise out of Murdoch's ironic manipulation of character, part of her double message. Her narrator does not allow her characters to pass through these stages at the same rate or at the same time. Some characters hold us in stage two until the last pages, and it is characteristic of her novels that we don't know the outcome of all the characters once the climax of the main character (or characters) has been disclosed. This layering of individual stories accounts for the novelist's ability to hold our interest. Just as the novel builds its complications in the first stage by the unannounced and seemingly endless introduction of character after character, so it withdraws those characters one by one in the third stage and places them in hitherto unexpected circumstances. The result is an odd circularity.

It is just this circularity which provides us with a final clue to Murdoch's purpose here. Her three novels (all narrated in the third person) appear to begin with conventional approaches to character--dialogue, action, retrospection, interior monologue and a narrator who can enter any consciousness. This apparent realism lulls us into believing these are conventional novels about conventional upper middle class characters, some of whom we like, and some for whom we share the narrator's scorn. However, we begin to suspect her comic

parodic intent in the first stage because of her over-use of disrupted sequence and coincidence, both of which move the text beyond imitative realism; as a result we begin to see the characters--especially those who are self-serious--in an ironic light. By the final section of the novels when we are caught in this circularity, we have little doubt that her comic resolution is pushing us to look at conventional notions both of self and the novel. Her handling of character demands that we examine the concept of self just as her handling of structure demands we re-examine our ideas on the nature of the novel. While we enjoy the central dramas of recognition, the book-end structure around them must cause us to look again at the representational portrayals found there.

Murdoch has a dual purpose: first to create and portray the British rationalist with all her considerable powers, and second to satirize subtly and lovingly (and sometimes savagely) such people by parodying their conventional notions of themselves and the conventional domestic novels which elsewhere contain them.²⁰ By counterpointing fabula against story, Murdoch creates a maze where the reader is frequently without a guide; it is only when we apprehend this technique (and the double message that arises from it) that we begin to understand how manipulative her narrator really is. She presents her characters with moments of epiphany-like drama, richly, fully, and even sympathetically--and therein lies the ruse, for she is simultaneously placing them in a structure that shows them to be

self-involved, weak, failing. This treatment applies not just to those characters we initially and immediately dislike--probably the majority--but to all the characters, even those her narrator has made us feel deeply and compassionately about. For Murdoch, few have the strength to be good, even fewer are redeemed.

Chapter One

The Nice and the Good: Redemption Lost

Murdoch's narrator introduces us to the problem of a man's suicide in a Whitehall department, and the mystery remains unsolved throughout much of the book. How the novel's sleuth, John Ducane, unravels the mystery will eventually entangle all the characters including himself in a web far deeper than any of them might have realized when Radeechy's death was first mentioned. The mystery of the suicide acts as kind of spine for the novel and gives it the flavour of a whodunit, while at the same time parodying the whodunit's reliance on narrative sequence. The narrator returns to this spine, but also eventually transcends it. At the end of the novel we discover with John that for all Radeechy's playing with evil, his was a schoolboyish and pathetic world; the conventional mystery is a harmless one, even one without interest to us, and we discover that the narrator has diverted our attention toward what the characters have come to recognize about themselves rather than toward what they unravel about Radeechy. Nevertheless at the beginning of the novel we are drawn into the drama with Octavian Gray, head of the Department, Richard Biranne, first man on the death scene, and Peter McGrath, the office messenger.

The emerging fabula suggests two things will be forthcoming from this first chapter. We anticipate that the suicide investigation will continue in the following pages, and we are perhaps expecting that the centre of consciousness for the narrator will continue to be Octavian. Neither occurs; the Murdochian narrator thwarts our expectations at the very beginning. If we are expecting this chapter to develop into a novel that examines carefully and in a straightforward manner the psychological dimensions of how Octavian will deal with the personal and political ramifications of Radeechy's suicide, we are anticipating a more conventional novel than Murdoch ever intends to write. In fact it's one of her many little ironies to have Octavian's centre of consciousness begin a novel which then goes on to other characters and which shows Octavian to be virtually insignificant in and unchanged by the major events in the book. With the second chapter we are immediately confronted with Murdoch's method of digression. What is most interesting (in this case Radeechy's suicide) is put on hold and we are taken elsewhere. The sequence and the reading process are both disrupted and there is no synchronicity between fabula and story. Our narrator here is not simply a faceless voice at the edge of the page, as might be the case with a conventional mystery novel, but an active manipulator cutting off our expectations, introducing us not to the next stage in the investigation but rather to the other community involved--Dorset.

Here we find Mary Clothier and her son Pierce, the twins and

their mother Paula, Octavian's wife Kate and their daughter Barbara; here we experience the first disruption to logical sequence as the narrator digresses. Murdoch is interested in presenting a community of characters rather than in following a single character through to a thrilling psychological and logical outcome. We are not allowed to return to what for now is the central problem of the novel--Radeechy's suicide--in this chapter, nor even in the next which introduces us to John Ducane for the first time. In Chapter Three we get our first taste of the Murdochian imbroglio found in all her novels. Ducane is deeply entangled with his mistress Jessica Bird but longs to end the relationship so that he can pursue his new liaison with Kate sans sex. We seem to be reading several novels at once--that is, if viewed from the perspective of linearity and logic--and we are perhaps relieved when we find ourselves in Chapter Four back with Octavian at Whitehall discussing the suicide with Ducane and Biranne. This familiar world of straightforward narration is comforting, and only Ducane's long-standing but secret hostility to Biranne hints at the depths of emotional turmoil ahead.

By virtue of his role as chief investigator in the case, Ducane begins to emerge as something approximating a hero with a hero's share of the action. But Murdoch is patently not interested in heroes of a conventional sort; in fact the narrator turns next to single out one of the characters in the Dorset community rather than remaining with Ducane or returning to Whitehall. If our original expectations have

by now adjusted to accommodating these new Dorset characters, perhaps we are now surprised that the narrator has chosen Paula, one we might have originally overlooked, or at least seen with little interest as a result of the narrator's first presentation of her. Now when we enter Paula's consciousness, we are confronted with something unexpected: the spectre of her husband (Richard Biranne of Whitehall) fighting with her former lover (Eric Sears). The narrator presents Paula as someone of marginal interest to us, and then as a character of great interest. Our original and still unfulfilled expectations about Radeechy are becoming less pressing in the light of these new revelations.

The sequence at the beginning of the novel suggests two things about Murdoch's intentions: first that Paula's story, for example, is of equal importance to John's affairs and flirtations or Radeechy's suicide. Paula's horror when she reads a letter from Eric stating that he is returning to her from Australia is in no way connected to the original suspense of the novel although it clearly draws us into her story. The narrator, at this point at any rate, finds all stories equally interesting, valuable and entertaining. Secondly, this shifting of place and consciousness creates a greater texture of apparent realism than would arise in a novel bound to one main character and a linear unravelling plot. Because the narrator can drop into any situation and any character, she creates a sense of endless possibilities in which the next moment holds a completely

unknowable quality--and is this not an experience more usual in our "real" lives than in our fictions? Furthermore there is a quality of openness to this sequence: who and where is next? After Paula, in fact, we move in Chapter Six to yet another character, Willy Kost, the friend of John who has secluded himself away from the community in Trescombe Cottage and where, it is commonly accepted, he dwells on the horrors of his experience in Dachau. This seemingly haphazard narrator imitates the untidy lives of her characters.

In novels of literary realism, we expect linearity, but early in The Nice and the Good we have been submerged in an apparent realism which is (paradoxically it seems at first) free from the tyranny of linear or logical sequence. As the novel continues to build, revealing several people caught inside their dilemmas and dissatisfactions, we discover a corresponding disruption in the elements of cause and effect. If we follow the thread of a few of the characters through the ever-widening maze of narration, we discover how subtly the parody of conventional linearity arises out of Murdoch's apparent realism with its representational techniques. Paula's story, to continue, provides an excellent example.

When we are at last introduced into Paula's consciousness, she is recalling the awful confrontation in her past that produced "Richard's distorted face, Eric's screams, the blood that seemed to have got everywhere."¹ The complete fabula is only alluded to here and while the apocalyptic details are withheld until later, we do know

that the love affair with Eric resulted in a divorce between Richard and Paula, and Eric's subsequent flight to Australia. His letter, promising his return, now paralyzes Paula. She knows that while Richard was capable of violence, it was really Eric who frightened her: "there was something demoniac about Eric" (p. 43). As the novel continues, these feelings intensify as his letters arrive from various ports on the Eric-bearing sea--but we are not allowed to return to Paula's consciousness for another eight chapters! Murdoch of course has other characters carry the task of maintaining interest in Paula's dilemma by mentioning her obvious worry and preoccupation during these chapters. This helps maintain our connection with her even as we are thwarted from learning more about her state, her past, and the outcome of her situation.

Singapore. Suez. Eric slowly draws closer and Paula steels herself for meeting him as fatalism replaces paralysis. Her story in the novel has been building in tension toward a meeting of potentially explosive dimensions. We anticipate this effect; the fabula has led us to expect this. But the story takes us elsewhere, the expectation is diverted, broken. Eric meets "somebody perfectly marvellous" (p. 285) on the boat and marries her. Paula is "free." As readers, this turn of events might leave us feeling relief for Paula, disappointment at the disruption (one might even say interference on the part of the narrator), and certainly admiration for Murdoch who is able to use Eric not just as the necessary foil for Paula, but as a brilliant

example of irony. When he left Paula originally he met "somebody perfectly marvellous" (p. 283) just as he does on his return to her. In using this exact wording we can hear the narrator laughing in the wings at this concise example, not of luck, but of man's ability to repeat and be caught by his own patterns of deception. Eric the demon is Eric the human after all.

The intense scene Paula has been anticipating does indeed take place, but with Richard not Eric. Again the causal connection produces other than what we have been led to expect, and it brings with it a tremendous irony. Because of Eric, Paula is eventually led back to Richard. (It can also be said that because of Ducane, Richard is led back to Paula, but the circumstances are slightly different.) Along with Mary and Kate, she travels to London where her visit to the National Gallery takes her to Richard's favourite painting, Bronzino's Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time, and then to his house where she sees an "extremely attractive and well-dressed woman ... let herself in with a latch key" (p. 144) (Murdoch's italics). Paula is stunned into realizing that she had always assumed "without her, Richard was alone" (p. 145). Unconsciously drawn toward Richard for help against Eric she now must face Eric alone and in bitterness. The gulf between Paula and Richard could not be wider--from her perspective. She does not realize as the reader must that the beautiful Judy McGrath is perhaps the last person Richard wants to be associated with at this point because of her unsavoury connection with Radeechy. The

narrator, because she is working from the centre of consciousness of Paula in this scene, cannot tell us that the woman is indeed Judy McGrath, and further layers of suspense (if not confusion) are added to the novel. By carefully scrutinizing the fabula that has emerged up until this event, we can in fact deduce the lady's identity and in that way we learn an important clue to the mystery surrounding Radeechy's suicide even before John Ducane the official investigator comes to realize that Judy as Helen of Troy connects Biranne to Radeechy. This narrative entanglement cuts across the linearity of sequence, and by the juxtapositioning of events, a fertile ground for further irony emerges.

Perhaps the greatest such ground occurs in Paula's scene with Ducane. She has told no one of her secret life, and just moments after telling her story of the fight between Eric and Richard, the relief-giving letter from Eric arrives. But significantly she claims that the telling made the difference anyway--and that it enabled her to free herself from the demoniac quality she has invested in Eric. The narrator withholds Paula's complete story until she tells it herself, so that the telling corresponds to her breaking free from it: it is a labyrinthine art. It is also this scene (in which Paula is a narrator herself) which leads John to force Richard to meet Paula again. His understanding of what this release has meant to Paula enables him to meddle with Richard's fate. John, however, needs to come to his own recognition-and-release before he can fully take on

his new capacity--and act as a judge who is compassionate. It is these recognitions, arising from the narrator's manipulations, which act as tremors in the novel, cutting across the normal sequence of causality and setting up a system of signs and appearances that we need to continually re-interpret, re-adjust to, until we have finally absorbed the ironic and parodic narratorial tone, until we have finally adjusted fabula to story. In the narrator's manipulation of the ecstatic reunion between Richard and Paula, we soon hear an element of their own un-doing in the language of gushy frantic emotionalism: "Will I faint when I see him? Paula wondered" (p. 324). Or "Why, Paula, you're--Oh Paula, yes, yes, yes. Please give me your hand" (p. 330). The narrator ensures that the reader understands all will not be well between them in spite of their love words. Richard admits, for example, that "If the old pattern continues, I'd probably be unfaithful now and then" (p. 329), and we are a little reluctant to believe Paula when she tells Richard (after her emotions start running) that "I've never been out of love with you, never for a second" (p. 330). When normalcy returns, we ask, how will it be then?

Murdoch uses the moments of recognition, "the time of the angels" which operates as a metaphor--in Paula's moment with Eric's letter, John's moment in the cave, Theo's time with the letter from the monastery--as a means to cut across the logic, often paralyzing logic, that has been working in the characters up till then. Other

treatments of this recognition include the less epiphanic, or those which occur but are not narrated, having taken place off page, in the fabula but not in the story. Jessica, for example, John's mistress, has a jolt to her expectations when the mysterious and (suddenly) loquacious Willy Kost confronts her in her search through Ducane's room, intent as she is upon finding evidence that Ducane was involved with another woman. Jessica finds no evidence to damn the dour John but rather a strange alluring man who helps her to free herself from the power she has given over to John. Later, when McGrath follows through with his scheme to extort money from Ducane and sends Kate's love letter to her, she eventually realizes she "was not going to die after all for John Ducane. She was his superior now" (p. 228)--and then she turns her eye immediately to the postscript: Willy Kost (p. 229). When she appears again in the novel she is pursuing Willy as she flees out the back of Trescombe Cottage, not quite ready yet for life-affirming. What we originally know of Jessica and her desperate yet passive clinging to John hardly connects with this assertive "gazelle" (p. 344)--the story and fabula do not quite connect. Murdoch injects a large dose of disruption into the story of Jessica. But with that injection, she also places irony (that Jessica could "recover" from John so quickly) and satire (and be so attentive to her next connection, one who was supposed to be impotent--Willy's reason for rejecting Mary's marriage proposal). In the rapidity of this change, and the way such changes are found in others, Murdoch is

playing with our notions of conventional endings with their often happy resolutions. The closure of an apparently perfect marriage (between Mary and Willy in this case) is what we expect in a conventional novel. In Murdoch's parody, such a resolution not only does not take place, but is made to seem improbable. Nevertheless the parody does not overshadow the dramas of recognition as they unfold. To do so would impose a dryness on the work.

When the characters supersede the usual linear time because of the release of a pent-up apocalyptic past or because of a profound recognition, a "time of the angels" results. We have already seen such an experience with Paula, and the narrator uses this device again with Mary and Willy. Mary returns to her old home in Gunnersbury; she relives the accident which took her husband's life, but there is no relief: the scene of Alistair's death takes on "the slightly menacing and elusive familiarity of a place in a dream when one thinks: I have been here, yet where is it and what is going to happen?" (p. 138). This is not what Mary expected. She felt the need to confront Alistair's ghost so she could talk to Willy about him--she had after all proposed to Willy--but she did not anticipate "how absolute and absorbing that confrontation would be" (p. 140). In fact she fails here to exorcize his ghost, his demon. That comes later: the full recognition-and-release from Alistair's sad life (with his failed novel, his terribly accidental death) and her realization that he is still somehow drawing on her strength--all this comes when she talks

to Ducane. It is not Willy who hears Mary (as both she and we have been led to expect: she by her own persistent hope, we by the fabula as it emerges) just as Paula is not led back to Eric but to Richard. Similarly Willy's long-awaited telling of the "most terrible thing that ever happened" (p. 161) to him, which he addresses to a breathless Mary, is not about his time in Dachau (which is of course what the fabula has been leading us to expect), but about the death of a small dog when he was a child. The story of the concentration camp is withheld and later told to Theo who does not, cannot bear to listen, and instead remembers an incident involving another "most terrible thing": the drowning of the seagull with the broken wing which the twins had so hopefully presented to him. We follow the narrator into one story only to be diverted into another. It is these stories out of the past which take on the intensity of figurative language, working as metaphors for an apocalyptic past which holds the characters in bondage that confession helps to release. Breaking the demoniac hold of the past disrupts the cause and effect sequence in unexpected ways and releases a new kind of time and a renewed sense of self in some of these characters.

The narrator does not enter the consciousness of Judy McGrath and Richard Biranne (and only peripherally enters those of the minor characters Peter McGrath, Ducane's manservant Fivey, Octavian and his daughter Barbara), and consequently we are not presented with a "time of the angels" for them. For others, notably John Ducane, recognition

forms the core of the novel's drama, first with the descent into Radeechy's haunt (itself a parody of the descent into the underground), then with Pierce in Gunnar's Cave, and finally the judgement of Biranne in Whitehall. This fits Murdoch's tripartite structure, but the narrative element of temporal sequence needs to be explored first (since like the sequence of causality) it shapes the novel and points us beyond realism to parody of conventional novels that rely too heavily either on linearity or elaborate or improbable plots. The disruption of temporal sequence, with its overlapping and distorting of linear time, is perhaps most evident in the narrator's use of parallels and coincidences.

Chapter Fourteen begins "The three women were walking slowly along the edge of the sea" (p. 121) and the narrator echoes this sentence in Chapter Seventeen which begins "The three women were in town" (p. 137). In this latter chapter, Paula sees Judy McGrath entering Richard's house and her description of Judy as "an extremely attractive and well-dressed woman" (p. 144) parallels exactly Jessica Bird's description of Kate Gray as Kate enters John's house. The second incident appears to be a re-run of the first, as if the narrator wishes us to see the two incidents as identical although with different characters. We are reminded of Gertrude Stein's affirmation that "Beginning again and again is a natural thing."² While Stein is interested in exploring the nature of composition itself (since "Everything is the same except the composition"), Murdoch seems more

intent on jolting our notions about the limits of coincidence. The second "beginning" parodies the conventional novels that require coincidences to make their plots work. G. K. Chesterton has suggested that coincidences are spiritual puns. Here Murdoch uses coincidence as a structural not verbal pun. We watch as Jessica and Paula react with remarkable similarity--hot jealousy--but we notice not just their reactions but the presentation in which their acts are couched. The narrator so coolly presents this parallel that our expectations of the meaning of coincidence in a text is suddenly brought into question. The shock of recognition each woman receives helps to change their lives, but by having our attention drawn to the parallel between their experiences as well as the experience itself, we are made to hear the manipulative narrator framing the situation with a sequence that undermines and parodies.

We are thus presented with two women, identically perceived and ironically mistaken for two other women. These two scenes appear to occur simultaneously, not necessarily in the order in which they are presented in the text, first to Paula, then to Jessica. The interior time of these characters appears simultaneously even though that is textually impossible. Murdoch accomplishes this through the carry-over effect of the connecting parallel with the earlier Chapter Fourteen. In that chapter we entered the consciousness of the women directly, without introduction. The memory of that presentation stays with us and is re-awakened by the similarity between the beginnings of

the two chapters. The result: we invent the same sense of simultaneous parallel time in Chapter Seventeen as we experience in Chapter Fourteen. Murdoch's narrator is quite devious in her disruption of linear time. The reader either feels disoriented or begins to understand that the disorientation must be part of a larger purpose, part of what she is making us experience.

Murdoch uses another kind of parallelism to disrupt temporal linearity in the two major scenes in which Ducane and Biranne confront each other. The initial marathon confrontation (in which Ducane finally outwits Biranne into confessing more than he needs to about Radeechy's death) ends with this short paragraph:

Ducane felt the need to touch Biranne. He put a hand upon his shoulder for a moment in a gesture which was almost shy. Biranne moved away, and then turning held out his right hand. They shook hands hastily and Biranne disappeared into the street. (p. 247)

Nine chapters later they meet again, and Ducane pronounces his "judgment." But this scene comes after Ducane's recognition ordeal in the cave where he vowed "if I ever get out of here I will be no man's judge" (p. 307). Consequently his terms for Richard include Richard's return to Paula. The second scene between the two men ends with this short paragraph:

They moved toward the front door. As they reached it Biranne touched Ducane's shoulder. Ducane hastily held out his hand and they shook hands, avoiding each other's eyes. The next moment Biranne was in the street. (p. 317)

The reverberations between these two paragraphs suggest that time has doubled back on itself, and that we are again involved in a re-run scenario, a beginning-again. The second scene works then to replace the first in the reader's memory, or at least to negate some of the first scene's impact.³ Yet there is a way in which the two endings are very different. In the first, Ducane reaches out to Biranne; in the second the opposite occurs. This great difference is in fact accentuated by the similarity in the rest of the paragraph. Despite the déjà-vu generated by similar wording and tone, the impact is different--and yet there remains the feeling that these two characters are at times literally going in circles. The narrator both distorts linear temporal sequence here and undermines our expectations of sequence. What results from these distortions is a narrative entanglement (in this case between Richard and John) that mirrors and enacts the confusions and contortions in the lives of the characters as they work their way toward redemption. At the same time such entanglements nudge us toward realizing that they are parodying the conventional whodunit that offers elaborate plots without much character development.

Murdoch's narrator is able to convey the sense that whatever is happening at any particular moment has other temporal counterparts; this apparent simultaneity we have seen is part of her technique for disrupting temporal order of a conventional sort. Certain of these disruptions take on a comic element, part of her parodic intent. Two

chapters end with the tumult caused by Pierce's swimming into Gunnar's Cave at low tide. Chapter Thirty-two ends with Mary staring out of Willy's cottage; she is filled with dejection because of his refusal to marry her--and then she exclaims "something perfectly extraordinary is going on down there" (p. 278) at the beach. We don't find ourselves back at that same moment in time again until the end of the next chapter and not (as might be expected) at its beginning; here again the fabula is being readjusted to an unexpected turn in the story. Only at the end of Chapter Thirty-three do we discover that the extraordinary event is Barbara's raising of the alarm--or so we surmise since there remains a delightful ambiguity about Mary's exclamation. But prior to Barbara's shouting we are presented with an entirely different layer of the novel: John Ducane with Paula on the beach and her subsequent relief-giving confession to John followed by the letter from Eric. We carry through this chapter the suspense which Mary's exclamation has generated at the end of the previous chapter. We ask what extraordinary thing is happening. Is Paula's confession what Mary sees through Willy's binoculars? Such overlaps and delays and digressions (all of which are exhibited in this example) in the temporal sequence increase the tension in a curious way. When information or incident from one layer is deliberately withheld or juxtapositioned with events arising from another layer, one or both of these events can take on a comic quality. To move from Mary's exclamation to Paula's confession tends to diminish the high

seriousness of both moments. Isolated, each of the scenes is characteristically realistic; placed in a text in such a way that temporal continuity is distorted, their realism is parodied, their characters comic or melodramatic. In this way Murdoch satirizes the self-involvement of the characters at the same time as she parodies the conventional novel that thrusts improbable situations upon the reader in a less than sophisticated way.

This comic element is not always understood at first reading so finely is it subsumed in the apparent realism of the characters and their dilemmas. Gradually it becomes clear, for instance, that the parallel between the two women in Chapter Seventeen parodies the conventional whodunit with its elaborate twists and improbable plot turns--and in fact we have almost forgotten at times that there is a whodunit here: who killed Radeechy? Murdoch's narrator drives her plots to the very edge of unbelievability--and frequently beyond--while still allowing us to believe in her characters. As a result we are caught up in a mesh of contradictory reactions as we read. On the one hand we can empathize with or deride the characters while on the other hand we begin to feel that they (and consequently we) are being led into situations that are bordering on the ridiculous and improbable. In this way we enjoy the apparent page-by-page realism even as we become aware that this very realism is being undermined and parodied. This tug of war is one of the great pleasures of reading a Murdoch novel. In The Nice and the Good the

three-part structure helps to intensify that tension and move us toward a greater appreciation of her parody.

The initial stage of the novel, with its presentation of several different viewpoints, gradually moves toward the central dramas of recognition, but it is only in the third stage that parody moves onto centre stage. In the hasty realignment of characters, we glimpse the narrator's parody of the "happy ending." The coupling is relentless. Mary and John (their very names mocking the "average couple" whom they distinctly believe they are not) eventually "find" each other when they have ironically been side by side throughout the novel. The narrator suggests that John's new-found love for Mary may well be the genuine thing (he does after all see a vision of her in the cave); the coincidental happy resolution which finds Mary in love with him might be pressing the believability further than the reader will accept. At any rate the narrator includes a caveat later when she has John realize that "His married life would not be without its problems" (p. 348). Willy and Jessica, Paul and Biranne, Barbara and Pierce, Fivey and Judy, Theo and his green valley, Ducane and Mary and a new chauffeur McGrath--the pairing of characters characterizes the ending of the novel. Even pets contribute to the parody of the happy ending: Montrose and Mingo share a basket in the end. The narrator cunningly stays within the limits of her characters so that we nevertheless continue to believe that such a pairing is quite possible; however, by presenting them in this flurry of resolution she leads us to intuit

her parodic intent. All of these characters change to some extent; the novel has drawn us into those changes. Yet the "happy ending" structure suggests that these changes (and the self-revelations that result from such changes) are less profound or significant than originally surmised.

Murdoch suggests through her parody that the way to self-knowledge is far more difficult than these characters suspect. Jessica, for instance, does recognize that Willy not John has value for her, just as John recognizes the same about Mary, and as Mary does about John; the list continues through all the characters. These recognitions are genuine in terms of the apparent realism of the novel and they provide us with much of the novel's traditional psychological power and value. But the comic structure of the hasty resolution suggests that Murdoch is asking us to suspect these recognitions, even spurn them, because what appears to be self-knowledge is simply the substitution of one illusion for another. When Willy asks Theo if there is no way out of illusion, no way to overcome the corruption of the heart and know truth, Theo announces that "There are a million ways out on this side, back into the fantasy of ordinary life. Muffins for tea is a way out" (Murdoch's italics) (p. 126). Back into the fantasy of ordinary life--Murdoch is using her structure to draw attention to the weaknesses of her characters, for all of them are caught in illusion, willingly trapped, and unwilling to be free of the comforts of such illusions.

It is no accident that Kate and Octavian remain virtually unchanged. Smug and self-involved at the outset, they remain smug and self-involved at the end.⁴ While others have been granted glimmers of truth which they cannot sustain, the almost infantile self-indulgence of Kate strikes us not merely because it deviates from the pattern of recognition and realignment, but because it provides the norm of un-knowing ordinary life. Redemption is not possible for any of these characters--the comic resolution of events assures that--but such a possibility does not even occur to one such as Kate. She sees her world as perfect, herself fitting perfectly therein, and her task as that of one who can make others perfectly good. Like most of the characters in the novel, she is not particularly nice, but she believes more than most that "good" is concomitant with "nice." Blinded to the reality of others by her self-satisfaction, she has no real inkling of the work involved in "good." Through her characterization we fully appreciate the compound structure of Murdoch's title which ironically suggests that "nice" and "good" are parallel, even equal values, and that one automatically flows into existence with the other. In a novel intent on savaging high regard of self, Kate's presentation is more ironic than most.⁵

The lives of the characters in The Nice and the Good are rendered by a narrator who initially seems to have a clear allegiance to realism; however soon enough the sequence of events draws attention to itself, we find ourselves caught in the interplay between fabula

and story, and the sequence ultimately undermines the contents of the events themselves. What we may have originally assumed was one kind of novel--the fast-paced psychological whodunit--develops into another kind--the fast-paced psychological whodunit that is also a parody of itself. Manipulation of sequence produces this parody through which Murdoch's irony and themes are fully revealed. Without the parody, The Nice and the Good would not illuminate the questions of love and evil in the self as well as it does.

Chapter Two

Bruno's Dream: Redemption Possible

We begin and end Bruno's Dream with important sections devoted to the central character Bruno Greensleave but the chapters between do not always follow the conventional linear order such a frame suggests. Instead, as in The Nice and the Good, the narrator presents us with a sequence in which the reader moves from character to character, event to event, without the usual regard for causal or temporal continuity. The fabula that therefore emerges is almost always incomplete, developing out of isolated characters who are denied knowledge of others in much the same way the reader is denied completeness and linearity by the story's sequence and arrangement. Indeed the novel begins with a psychological plunge into the consciousness of Bruno, and it appears as if the book will continue as psychological realism. But as Elizabeth Dipple points out "realism as strict reportage is not what Murdoch is after,"¹ and it gradually becomes clear that if the narrator's manipulation of sequence creates the texture of psychological realism, it does so only to have that quality deconstructed and parodied. What Murdoch presents with one hand is cunningly parodied with the other, but such legerdemain does not fully emerge until the end of the novel with its typical Murdochian realignment of characters. After the anxiety the characters have experienced, they are often willing to return to the comforts of

illusion.

As the novel opens, Bruno is dying; he has become monstrous in his final stages and deeply plagued by his need to alleviate the burden of his past. He is particularly stressed by his failure to console his dying wife Janie, and he hopes to lessen that pain and guilt through a rapprochement with his estranged son Miles. Unable to live with his own son, Bruno stays with his son-in-law Danby Odell. All three of these men are tied to the past--and to each other--through death rather than life; each has lost a wife and each is unable to function fully as a result of the death for which each feels partly if not completely responsible.

Caught in the cross-fire of emotional forces are the women--Diana and Lisa, the two sisters, and Adelaide the maid. (Three women also appear in The Nice and the Good, suggesting that three might be an arrangement particularly favoured by Murdoch, perhaps because of its spiritual or mystical connotation, or perhaps because three is an unstable number in terms of human relationships, or perhaps just as likely because she wants to tease us into such assumptions.) Diana is the fashionable but cold wife of Miles who wins him back from his grief over the loss of his wife Parvati, but she is unable to create for him the great self-releasing love he requires. She is already dwindling inside their relationship as the novel begins, sometimes flirting with adultery, sometimes with death. Yet it is she who sees Bruno through to the end, and it is she who learns

that love is the test of the real. This knowledge elevates her above her counterparts Kate Octavian in The Nice and the Good and Hilda Foster in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, neither of whom come to substantial self-awareness. Lisa, who has perhaps always known the connection between love and death, cannot at first break out of her sense of martyrdom (she cannot bring herself to destroy Diana's marriage even though she loves Diana's husband Miles) until at last she recognizes in Danby's protestations that his love has the capacity to be real, and she follows this glimmer of recognition out of her earlier nun-like self into a fully sexual being. Adelaide, Danby's mistress, connects the cast of characters to the twins, the brutally violent Will and the spirit-force Nigel. Adelaide and Lisa are more fortunate than others in the novel; they recognize in time what they had previously been unable to see: where their love lies truly. Or at least the novel suggests this if read simply as a work of realism.

Apart from the question of the narrator's manipulation of sequence, realism seeks to depict characters without bias on the part of the narrator, supposedly without the depiction itself either affecting or being affected by the narration. In that tradition Murdoch creates the illusion that what we are reading is occurring, and she is careful not to intrude into that sense of actuality. Murdoch's apparent adherence to this kind of realism enables her to move us within easy earshot in Bruno's Dream of curses, punches, pistol shots, dialogue and interior monologues. We believe, when we

first begin Bruno's Dream, that the realism enables us to "see" the characters and participate in the depths of their feelings so easily. We see her blending the psychological novel with the detective thriller, and still we believe we are reading a novel of realism. But since, according to Viktor Shklovsky, there are "laws governing the dialectical self-generation of new forms"² we begin to realize that Murdoch's realism--if realism it is--is certainly different from any other literary realism per se which precedes her. Murdoch, more than most contemporary novelists, would agree with Shklovsky when he says that new forms arise because "the canon of the novel genre, perhaps more than any other, lends itself to multiple parody and modification;"³ every successful novel presents one more possible form, and that possibility can itself become the basis of a parody which extends the form. Nevertheless our initial appreciation of Murdoch arises from her gift for representational portrayal, unparodied and seemingly straightforward, and which we can hardly be faulted for mistaking for realism.

Her allegiance to representation means she peoples her novels with imperfect characters. Accordingly we see Danby and Bruno and Diana (as well as others) as creatures of failings, and while some failings are greater than others, all are connected to the too strong sense of self and ego. For all these characters self-concentration is the stumbling block each must overcome; each must break out of the half-conscious self and into a vision of the real around them--and

love is often the route that takes them, truly or otherwise, into the drama of recognition--the time of the angels--central to their growth as people. Danby is perhaps the least self-involved, but his lackadaisical commitment to Adelaide arises from his incapacity to see her as a real person. Diana cannot break out of her self at first. The list continues with each character needing to learn that love is self-forgetting. Here we have one of Murdoch's major themes: the role of love as it either traps the messy imperfect characters or enables them to grope toward a reality beyond themselves.

Within this context works the narrator. She can watch and record (much in the same way Nigel operates at times) but she cannot act or intervene directly. The narrator's only mode of action is arrangement. How she places her characters becomes critical, and eventually it becomes clear that sequence (and the structure it spawns) determines the nature of the novel. First, within the presentation of a single character, and more importantly in the introduction and juxtapositioning of characters, we see the narrator vigorously at work. In both cases causal linear sequence of a conventional sort is denied to the reader; what the fabula prepares us to anticipate, the story deliberately withholds.

The narrator opens with Bruno in an agony of self-address. In his consciousness the time of his mother's love is recounted next to his time with his wife Janie and his mistress Maureen. Certain events are alluded to but not explained. At first we ask what happened at

Harrods, or even more fundamentally, who are Maureen and Janie. Working from the centre of consciousness of Bruno, the narrator does not introduce or complete any of the anecdotes or sequences. Instead she careens through time, touching on Miles, Danby, and Gwen and leaving large gaps in the fabula in a way that creates suspense and plays against the reader's desire for closure. This occurs of course with other characters as well, but Bruno's is the first and therefore the most vivid example of disrupted sequence. The a-chronological recall we experience here and elsewhere frequently circles around the continual after-the-fact replaying of past pain, a concentration on self and ego. It is a familiar place to most of these characters, each entering his or her own particular version of that isolation and futility. Late in the book Lisa tells Bruno that "there are things one can do nothing with. Try to draw a sort of quiet line around it."⁴ The narrator presents the inner worlds of her characters as unavoidably returning to past traumas, and she does so without regard to the causality and logic which the reader instinctively seeks out. She continues this technique when she moves beyond Bruno and begins to build the community of entangled lives.

The first chapters thwart our sense of conventional expectation. Information from one chapter discredits information from another. As the story unfolds, we are required to make adjustments to the fabula. Chapter Two introduces us to Danby and Adelaide in bed together--a situation neither known nor suspected by Bruno in the previous

chapter. Chapter Three begins with Nigel eavesdropping outside Danby's and Adelaide's bedroom just after we were told by Danby in Chapter Two that the two lovers were "quite shut off in this part of the house" (p. 26). We learn early in the novel to consider the context of the information and not just the content. What the narrator presents to us through the centre of consciousness of one character is gradually expanded to include what the narrator presents through the consciousness of another. Here is a narrator who reveals less than she knows, or one who chooses only to reveal what she knows first through the limitations of one character's consciousness and then through the entire structure of the limited consciousnesses as she knits them together into the bulk of the novel. As our understanding of the nature of this novel gradually emerges, we find ourselves continually re-assessing our previous judgement in the light of new often contradictory information; in a word, we experience movement because the fabula and story are in a state of continual interplay and adjustment. This re-looking enacts and confirms the difficulty of knowing another person. Each of the characters in Bruno's Dream lives in a self-created world, the virtually inescapable dream of consciousness; the real outside world beyond the characters remains constant, but few seem capable of glimpsing it as a shared world beyond self. If the sequence presented in these early chapters would continue through the novel, it would be one of cancellation and digression rather than logical cause and effect. Consequently we

learn to keep one eye on the structure created by the narrator even as our other (perhaps less sophisticated) eye enjoys the characters the narrator is creating. Eventually it becomes apparent that the narrator dominates the novel.

Not only is the arrangement of events presented in a disrupted non-causal way, but within the workings of the character's motivations, the narrator frequently introduces unexpected shifts and changes. We are led to expect that Danby's phlegmatic character will protect him from the buffeting of chance; if we consider his liaison with Adelaide indicative, his character seems more practical than passionate. But we have not anticipated that his feelings for his dead wife Gwen will surface so strongly and so strangely. In his new role as emissary for Bruno, Danby must meet and deal with Miles, Gwen's brother, and he finds himself confronting the memory of Gwen. Perhaps the reader can place his experience logically within the cause and effect of unexpressed grief even though we know that Murdoch has not been interested in such situations for their own sake in earlier novels. We are even less confident about continuing with such a label when Danby becomes infatuated with Diana. When he arrives at an understanding of his real love for Lisa, we realize that the Danby of the latter part of the novel is not a logical outcome of his earlier incarnation. Murdoch is not concerned with logic in a character's life, but with the irrational forces that momentarily swing open the doors into deeper illusion--or redemption--and which parodies or

subverts our expectations of plot and character.

Other examples of unexpected events cutting across our usual notions of cause and effect: that Lisa has been secretly in love with Miles, but that she eventually returns to seek out Danby; that Adelaide who has been so fearful of Will eventually marries him; that Nigel, apparently a dreamy ethereal character, physically forces Diana to see that Danby does not love her; that Miles, stricken by his love for Lisa, is nursed back to health by Diana; that Nigel loves Danby and intervenes to save him from Will; that Nigel not Lisa flies off to Calcutta. Such changes in the characters (and in what the fabula has led us to expect of them) are often ironic and even satiric. Misunderstandings between characters frequently result from this disruption in the sequence of events. Danby's experience in the garden provides an excellent example.

When Danby climbs over fence after fence in his attempt to see Lisa, we are reminded of the love-crazed characters of Shakespeare. The blinding yet liberating paradoxical power of love is one of Murdoch's themes, and she plays out this concern with Danby. When Diana sees Danby standing drenched in rain in her garden, she can only assume he has come for her. Her assumption arises because she does not have all the information privy to the narrator and the reader. The sequence, manipulated by the narrator, conspires to present Diana as one locked in the private self, unable to see what others (including the reader) gather in easily. Similarly, when Miles comes

out of the house to deal with Danby, he says that someone has engaged Lisa's affection but without admitting his own love for her. Danby of course doesn't assume it is Miles--the thought never occurs to him at all. In Bruno's Dream, no matter how much turmoil a character is experiencing, he rarely can see similar turmoil in another. When Lisa arrives, she confirms this new situation yet without revealing Miles as her new lover, and Danby slinks off, dejected.

Such entanglements are wildly funny because of what is assumed by a character, or because of what is not said. What is happening to a character--his discomfort and agonizing--is not comic of course, but the junctures at which his agonizing takes place in the novel are certainly intended to provide the pleasures of irony for the reader. Danby does not know of the love connection between Lisa and Miles just as Diana does not know of Danby's love for Lisa. The causal linear sequence of a conventional sort found in the fabula is denied to the characters not the reader. With the help of the narrator, the reader reads the structure and not just the characters. However, the narrator does not always take the reader into her confidence. There are instances when the linear cause and effect sequence is disturbed because the narrator and characters are in collusion, and the reader is left to fabricate a logic that initially works against the assumptions the narrator has so carefully prepared; once again the interplay between fabula and story provides work for the reader. Chapter Thirty, for example, begins with Adelaide's tears and the

suggestion of a funeral; whose funeral, we automatically ask?

The narrator has another important tool, temporal discontinuity, with which she destructures her apparent realism. Discontinuity results when the narrator takes us into an event (and into the centre of consciousness of the character relaying the event) that is told and perceived more than once. The reader experiences a doubling back in time. Chapter Sixteen ends with Lisa fleeing into the underground while Danby walks slowly up the avenue of tombstones in the cemetery. The next chapter begins with Miles stopping "abruptly in the Old Brompton Road as he saw in a shaft of sunlight Lisa and Danby Odell deep in conversation inside the railing of the cemetery" (p. 133). By repeating this scene, and by playing it back to us from Miles's perspective, Murdoch gives it a quality of refracted or double vision. We leap about trying to orient ourselves. We seem adrift in déjà vu. The fabula is repeating itself and we are unsure what this will mean to the story. Because we already know what has taken place between Lisa and Danby, we can see how Miles will handle this new information; because we know that Danby failed to hold Lisa, Miles's growing recognition of his love for Lisa and his fear of losing her becomes ironic--and later when we discover that Lisa has been in love with Miles all the time, the irony becomes cruel. Temporal discontinuity produces irony, either because of what the narrator has revealed to the readers but not to the characters, or because of the assumptions the narrator has allowed the characters to have. In Murdoch's world

the disrupted time sequence therefore heightens the sense of the isolated individual who cannot see beyond the emotionally charged boundaries of his/her own consciousness.

Disruption in time sequence allows the narrator to counterpoint different moods from different situations which are nevertheless occurring at the same time. Near the end of Chapter Fourteen Danby sees Diana talking to Will Boase who is painting the iron railing in front of the house. (Much earlier in Chapter Five we were introduced to the idea that "Danby said you could paint the outside of the house if you'd like" (p. 39) and then without any further narratorial mention of arrangements between Danby and Will, we find Will involved--or not quite involved--in his task.) Danby ends Chapter Fourteen in tears, unexpected both by himself and the reader. We might have expected Lisa or Diana or Bruno to be upset since they are still involved with the traumatic scene between father and son in which Bruno attempts to confess and unburden himself, but which Miles could not bear. Immediately following this chapter we move "back" to the slightly earlier time and place, adjusting the fabula to accommodate the story from a new perspective. We now see the scene (first observed through Danby's suddenly grieving centre of consciousness) through Adelaide's point of view. We hear Will flirting with Diana, and Diana patronizing Will--and both are filtered through Adelaide's resentment: these emotions are strong but petty and contrast with Danby's grief. The simultaneity of different

emotions is effectively captured because of the narrator's disruption of time. Once again we are provided with an experience of the enigma of the individual; each character is locked within an emotional space of which another character in time has absolutely no knowledge. It is out of such a juncture of isolation, in this instance, that Adelaide decides to steal the valuable Cape Triangular stamp for Will.

Because the narrator neither follows one character through the novel nor stays with any of them in strict chronological order, we are presented with an arrangement near the end of the novel that is cumulatively humorous. Chapter Twenty-six finds Diana toying with the idea of suicide until Nigel physically forces her to look at her situation closely. Yet when the chapter ends, Diana is still confused, strained; the tension remains. Despite Nigel's interference, the narrator does not reveal what Diana's fate might be. Chapter Twenty-seven ends with Danby swimming under Battersea Bridge as he enacts the ritual death of his wife.⁵ Perhaps the duel which precedes this action dissipates the tensions between Danby and Will, but once again we are left with a question--what will happen to Danby in the Thames? Since the experienced reader knows that someone always dies in Murdoch's novels, we begin to wonder if our original assumption--that it must be Bruno--will turn out to be incorrect. Chapter Twenty-eight increases the tension still more; it ends with the flood sweeping away the stamps, and with Bruno falling on Adelaide "into the black surge of water below" (p. 230). We are presented with

three chapters of great climactic intensity, each ending on an unresolved note, and each from a different time.

In a more conventional novel we might expect that the chapter that follows would have to be equally intense and active in order to resolve the tensions presented. But this does not happen; such a pattern of presenting the unexpected occurs in her other novels as well. Chapter Twenty-nine begins with Miles saying calmly to Diana, "You know ... one can actually hear the crack of the swallows' beaks as they catch the flies. Listen" (p. 231). They walk through Brompton Cemetery, chatting amicably. The narrator has abruptly changed her pace--from frenzied activity to quiet walking, from frantic self-absorption to reflective discussion--and this counterpoint does not lessen the tension but actually increases it since it delays resolution yet again. As Diana and Miles walk casually along, we are eagerly awaiting the answers to all the questions the previous chapters have raised: Has Danby drowned? Have Adelaide and Bruno survived the flood? The reader continues in one mode while the narrator has shifted to another. Eventually we realize that time has passed since the times of the previous chapters--and we find ourselves readjusting the fabula to this turn in the story--until the narrator reveals through the conversation between Miles and Diana that both Bruno and Danby survived. The narrator's casual handling of such material serves to undermine the experience originally presented. Because the apparent realism is deconstructed through disrupted time

sequence, the result is finally humorous rather than tragic or grim. As readers we become less aware of the fabula--which seeks to present the seriousness of the individual situations--and more attuned to the story with its cumulatively undermining and comic effect.

In Murdoch's disregard for conventional time sequence, Nigel has a unique role to play, one not found in the other two novels considered here. In his letter to Danby, Nigel says that "in a sense Nigel never really existed" (p. 247). He acts as a device for moving the story forward, and perhaps his purpose relates more to the other characters and their dilemmas than to himself. To use a Jamesian term, he is a ficelle whose main existence gives the reader in dramatic terms the kind of help he needs to grasp the story.⁶ Nigel as catalyst echoes the narrator's role by forcing situations and information upon people, often what they have previously avoided. He "drops in" on Will and Adelaide when Will is convincing Adelaide to steal a Cape Triangular stamp from Bruno's collection. He then tells Danby who in turn confronts Adelaide, all of which results in the duel between Will and Danby and Danby's subsequent re-enactment of Gwen's death in the Thames. Later Nigel finds Danby's ripped up letter to Lisa and he presents this to Diana, thrusting her beyond the false hopes for a rescue from Danby. In the process she asks him "How do you know all these things?" (p. 79) and he replies "Because I am God" (p. 79). He might also have replied, "Because I am the agent of the god-like narrator and I am not bound by time or space."

Perhaps Nigel is believable simply as a crazed or drugged mystic; perhaps we can reconcile our ideas of traditionally realistic character with Nigel only if we don't think too much about the unities of time and space. He makes more sense if we understand him as the stirring stick that moves Diana and Danby and Adelaide forward into a truer recognition of themselves. Nigel as agent for the narrator helps provide the out-of-time moments of recognition-and-release that take on the qualities of metaphor. The reality that the character comes to understand hurls him or her into seeing the world anew as it exists beyond self and outside the usual linear notions of time, a "time of the angels."

Nigel, however, is not the only character responsible for the push-to-recognition in the novel. Danby comes to a full realization of his wife's death only through Lisa. Lisa, in turn, acts upon Miles in a similar way. But what is significant is not the "acting upon" but the recognition within. The in-sight only comes when there has been true out-sight. Lisa comes to see Danby is offering her something when he offers her his love; Adelaide recognizes (however fatalistically) her need for Will. These moments are critical to the development of the characters. However, unless we "read" them in their context and not just in their content, we miss Murdoch's intent. Adelaide provides the most obvious example of context to undermine content, story to undermine fabula.

The final chapter that deals with her, Chapter Thirty, finds her

crying in a hotel room where she muses "I certainly look right for a funeral" (p. 238). The reader is surprised to learn that her forthcoming marriage to Will is the reason for her tears, and later the narrator takes us ahead to a "sunnier" time when "Will would be one of the most famous and popular actors in England, and a greatly transformed Adelaide would be Lady Boase" (p. 242). This remarkably happy turn of events, including the windfall of Auntie's jewels and her best-selling memoirs, all fall within the realm of the nearly improbable. Such resolution viewed realistically is only humorous; as a parody of the "happy ending", it draws our attention to the circle in Adelaide's life: unable to maintain her own self separate from Danby, she moves to Will. Like other characters in Bruno's Dream, she substitutes one situation for another quite similar one. Nevertheless the narrator remains gentle with Adelaide. By taking us ahead to a happier time, the narrator is indulging the reader's desire for closure and perhaps even for sentimentality. In Adelaide's happy story we have the conventional ending two chapters before the actual end of the book. The narrator's scorn might be directed not so much at Adelaide's weaknesses as at the reader's.

Adelaide with Will, Diana with Miles, Lisa with Danby, perhaps even Nigel with India--the novel's resolutions are realistic enough, but the hastiness of such resolutions is surely a caveat for the reader. As in The Nice and the Good, the tripartite structure of her novel (the first section involving the presentation of a community of

viewpoints, the second carrying the central dramas of recognition, the last presenting the realignment of characters) moves more openly toward parody in the final phase. In the last scene between Lisa and Danby, Danby's failure to understand that Lisa has indeed returned to him gently satirizes Danby's self-absorption. Danby becomes a parody of the love-stricken; Lisa a parody of the self-interested. The emotional catharsis in which Lisa and Danby are participating is not meant to be taken at face value by the reader. By making the situation comic, the narrator expects us to devalue the seemingly high significance of their reunion, as was the case with John and Mary in The Nice and the Good. By placing their reunion in the context of other similar reunions, the narrator is asking us to suspect the profundity of such moments altogether. Once again, it is the story rather than the emerging fabula which requires our attention if we are to understand Murdoch's intent.

The narrator's larger concerns are less easily intuited when the tone is not comic, as is the case with Miles. His story ends not only with him back with his wife Diana but writing the poetry he has so long yearned to produce. Aside from the causal placement within the collage of realignments, what tells us here that the narrator is once again undermining what she is presenting? We accept that Miles's emotional collapse after Lisa's departure is real enough, and we can accept that he relives Parvati's death in this trance-like state. With the help of Diana, he experiences a rebirth, and there is no

indication that the narrator intends us to envision another purpose here. However, when Miles finds himself writing, we hear a sardonic note quietly enter: "he heard in poetry for the first time his own voice speaking and not that of another. And he knew that the moment had come at last when he could with humility call himself a poet" (p. 236). While there is a truth in what the narrator is saying in this section about the nature of art, it becomes clear that Miles is returning to his old self-absorption and that he has really learned very little about the realities around him. We are certain he will not write the great poetry he vainly and smugly assumes he has earned by suffering. We see that his involvement with poetry will become another route back to rather than away from self. Miles is without humility; his growing pride of achievement undermines his potential real achievement. The narrator's fine comments on the nature of the artist are ironically placed within the centre of consciousness of a man incapable of moving beyond self, and the reader soon hears the undertone of mockery that presents Miles as a parody of the self-involved, self-protective, sterile image-maker.

"What has bundled him through the barriers to the real world, this Miles knew ... but now that his life's work had begun he averted his gaze" (p. 236). Presented with the possibility of redemption, Miles looks away, turns back into solipsism disguised this time as art. The saccharine description of Diana and Miles as they "walked very slowly, like an old couple" (p. 236) recalls the precious

self-flattering qualities of Miles's Notebooks of Particulars: "The evening sun shone upon the shining arches of the new grass and a rich smell of wet earth floated in the warm air. The avenue of lime trees was misted with young leaves" (p. 236). It is the narrator's final irony that it is the same "old" Miles who emerges among the new leaves. As a parody of the self-obsessed artist, Miles represents one of Murdoch's most subtle and savage portrayals.

Yet Bruno's Dream still suggests that redemption is possible, and in this way it is different from the novels that immediately precede and follow. The final chapter takes us into the consciousness of Bruno, one confused by time: "Danby and Gwen often sat with him together" (p. 258) and "Bruno wanted to ask for the young man but he could not recall his name" (p. 259). He has forgotten Nigel, forgotten that Gwen is dead; he remembers "his book in two volumes the Great Hunting Spiders" (p. 259) that we know from the first chapter "did not get beyond the planning stage" (p. 12). In the opening of the chapter Bruno asks "is there nothing outside the dream" (p. 13) and the answer comes now: "it's all a dream. Reality is too hard. I have lived all my life in a dream and now it is too late to wake up" (p. 263). But Bruno is given more.

In the presence of death he recalls again how Janie had called to him on her own deathbed, a call he could not find the courage to answer because he feared she would curse him. Yet in his own last moments he realizes that Janie could only have wanted to forgive him:

"it would be impossible in this presence not to know" (p. 264). This recognition of the truth that love is indeed greater than death is not mocked. Nor are we allowed to include Diana's understanding of the meaningfulness of Bruno's death within the narrator's circle of parody. Bruno (and to a slightly more ambiguous extent Diana) are able to penetrate the obfuscating dream which is the ordinary life of consciousness. At the end, Diana "loved the reality of death and felt herself made nothing by it" (p. 267). To give up the self is to begin in the real. No undercutting structure or tone asks the reader to reassess these recognitions. The narrator wishes to present Bruno and Diana as examples of the possible redemptive. We can now answer positively the implicit question that the title of the novel has posed for us: is there anything besides the reality of self and consciousness, and the dream world we create there? "Bruno's dream" is a syndrome out of which we may step, although Murdoch suggests here that it is the contingency of grace rather than personal will that is the agent for change.

The characters in Bruno's Dream are thrown into situations which offer them the possibility of radical change. At the centre of this maelstrom is love--and the illusion of love that frequently leads back to the self. At first reading we might believe that all the characters have indeed changed, but once the parodic element of the novel emerges through the disrupted sequence and the interplay between fabula and story, it is clear that for most characters inner

transformation is either denied or faked regardless of the outer alteration of circumstances. Within the apparent realism the characters are given their chance for redemption; within the novel's parody, redemption is denied (with the significant exceptions of Bruno and Diana), and once again we are aware of Murdoch's double message.

Chapter Three

A Fairly Honourable Defeat: Redemption Ambiguous

A Fairly Honourable Defeat differs from the two novels that precede it in a number of significant ways. First of all the title itself presents us with more ambiguity. Rupert's "virtue" is defeated, but it is an honourable defeat nonetheless--this could be one interpretation. Or the title could mean that the defeat was only marginally (that is, "fairly") honourable at best. Or yet again it might mean that the defeat was indeed a "fair" one. Secondly the variety of ways in which Murdoch manipulates temporal and causal sequence is restrained so that the novel exhibits more linearity than either Bruno's Dream or The Nice and the Good. Finally, A Fairly Honourable Defeat is more overtly a parody than either of the other novels. While parody in the earlier novels emerges subtly to undermine the apparent realism and thus reveal Murdoch's deeper intention of exposing the shallowness of conventional and rational notions of self, in Defeat the continual atmosphere of tête-à-tête (and the humorous interruptions of such coziness), the romantic tangles, the gossip, the misinterpreted letters, the secrets, the confessions--all parody the conventional drawing room comedy quite deliberately. Whereas the intrigues of a drawing room comedy end happily, Defeat ends with death and disillusionment. Murdoch's message is clear: those who play with the powerful forces of love and

truth (as one would play in a parlour game) may not survive.

The novel begins with Rupert, a successful civil servant, celebrating with his wife Hilda; it is their twentieth wedding anniversary and they are expecting company at any moment. With the exception of a single paragraph that sets the scene and describes the couple--"They were a handsome pair. They were altruistic, but treated themselves judiciously to luxuries"¹--the chapter consists entirely of dialogue. We learn much about the other characters in this way: that Hilda's sister Morgan will be returning soon from America; that she had a love affair with Julius King; that perhaps now she will return to her husband Tallis Browne; and that--as the imbroglio begins--Julius King is now back in England himself, having renounced (so we are told) some genocidal research project in America. We learn that Rupert was up at Oxford with Julius and with another friend, Axel, who is currently involved with Rupert's younger brother Simon, both of whom are on their way to help celebrate the evening. There is also some parental concern about Peter, Hilda's and Rupert's only son, who is determined not to follow in his father's path and who is avoiding Cambridge.

All of this emerges from the conversation between Hilda and Rupert, and there is a gossipy smug quality to what we hear. While we learn about others, we also learn a great deal about this couple. Rupert speaks at times as if he is reading from his nearly completed book on moral philosophy. "There are times when one's just got to go

on loving somebody helplessly, with blank hope and blank faith ... Then love becomes almost impersonal and loses all its attractiveness and its ability to console ... It is just then that it may really be able to redeem" (p. 26). These fine-sounding sentiments are parodies of Murdoch's themes of love and goodness in all her novels, and the novel gradually demonstrates (what Julius and Tallis alone among the characters already know) that Rupert is "speaking rot" when he falls into such notions. When Julius later manipulates them into a position that tests these platitudes in the flesh, the result is disastrous: the collapse of his marriage and his own death by misadventure when he couldn't "endure the destruction of his self-respect"² (p. 428). The important themes of love (and love as self-deception) are introduced in this opening chapter. Eventually we discover that the possibility of redemption is denied to these characters because, as Julius remarks, "Every man loves himself so astronomically more than he loves his neighbour" (p. 234).

As with the opening chapter, much of the novel focuses on characters talking with one another. Murdoch's narrator takes us within earshot of several couples, and at first (as with Bruno's Dream and The Nice and the Good) this seems to be what we expect from a narrator in a novel of literary realism. It is only as the novel continues in this perpetual pairing that we begin to intuit another purpose at work, another intent behind this particular order. Almost every chapter involves a tête-à-tête. The notable exceptions are the

party scenes that centre around the swimming pool in Rupert's and Hilda's back yard. The narrator draws attention to the importance of pairing--and to the secrets that develop. Chapter One involves Hilda and Rupert; Chapter Two Axel and Simon; and so on with important scenes between Morgan and Hilda, Morgan and Rupert, Peter and Morgan as the plot ravel and unravels. There is nothing in any of the particular scenes which would lead us to intuit parody of the drawing room comedy. The fabula appears to be conventional realism (in that the narrator creates the illusion that what we are reading is taking place, as it were, on the other side of the page) while the story deconstructs that apparent realism and creates a parody of the drawing room comedy. It is the sequence that plays a central role in constructing the parody.

Murdoch's narrator provides us with certain expectations and then disrupts them. We are told that Morgan (who does not know that Julius is already in England) will not be arriving back in England for several days; then she arrives almost immediately (in Chapter Three). The narrator begins the long series of unexpected visitors, the disruption of expectation. With each of these disruptions, the story forces the fabula to change. In Chapter Six the second of the unexpected visitors is Tallis; he drops in on Simon and Axel when Julius is visiting them. We have been led to expect that Julius and Tallis will react strongly even violently to each other--as one would perhaps expect from the conventional lover and husband--but instead

they shake hands. Julius regards Tallis "with a slightly sardonic and yet friendly air" (p. 84) and "Tallis drank some of the wine ... as if this was a grave almost ritualistic action" (p. 84). There is a communion of sorts between these two men and while there is no element of bonhomie about that relationship, they recognize that each is somehow beyond the norm, capable of seeing beyond the conventional. As the unexpected visitor, Tallis breaks the expected linearity of events. At first these disruptions seem firmly within the limits of literary realism and only gradually do we become aware that their frequency generates a sequence that is not the usual cause and effect, and that interruption is the dominant narrative line. In this way we see that the story undermines the apparently serious and seemingly realistic quality of the fabula.

The next unexpected visitor arrives at Priory Grove where Rupert, in his tremendously vain way, is giving Morgan the benefit of his wisdom: "Don't be foolish, Morgan. If you use your mind and your heart you can put everything together again" (p. 89). Morgan is enjoying her own anguish in the light of Rupert's patronizing attention when "a tall pale-clad figure was seen standing in the gloom of the doorway ... It was Julius" (p. 97). We have been led to expect that Morgan, who has already fled from America to get away from Julius, will again run away or react with aversion. Instead she flies out the door after Julius, leaving Rupert alone with his sighs and whiskey. In Chapter Ten when Morgan visits Tallis for the first time

since her return to England, we expect her to be shocked at the dreadful condition of his house, its earthy smell, the door that will not close, its crowded tenants. The fabula has prepared us to expect tears, anger, recriminations to result from this encounter, but we begin to realize that despite her steely talk, Morgan will "give way to that ghastly heart breaking tenderness, that animal feeling" (p. 120) for Tallis. The tension builds as she sorts through the clothes and manuscripts she left behind, and just when she seems most generous to Tallis, Peter unexpectedly arrives to provide "relief at the ending of the tête-à-tête with her husband" (p. 126). The intense interaction occurs between Morgan and Peter now rather than between Morgan and her husband, and Morgan (in her simplistic way) assumes that "everything was going to be ever so much easier and nicer" (p. 126) now that she was through the shock of meeting Tallis for the first time.

Morgan, in her turn, becomes the unexpected visitor when she calls on Julius in Chapter Twelve. Whatever we might have anticipated from this meeting--and we have been anticipating it ever since Julius left Morgan sobbing against the brick wall in Chapter Eight--we do not imagine that Morgan will be left naked in his apartment attempting to cover herself and keep warm with some fat petit-point cushions. In turn, Simon (set up by Julius) becomes the unexpected (to Morgan) visitor who rescues her. Later in Chapter Sixteen "Morgan had called in unexpectedly" (p. 195) at Simon's and hears from him the story of

how Simon met Axel in Greece. The over-use of the unexpected visitor motif reminds us that the novel is a parody, and not the novel of realism we may have assumed from its beginning.

Disruptions are not always comic, even in their more overtly drawing room mode. In Chapter Seventeen Peter once again interrupts Morgan and Tallis just as "Tallis slipped his arm around her waist and pulled her off the table" (p. 215). While this is comic, it is also pathetic--because the resolution between Morgan and Tallis seems fated to be stymied. When they meet next in Chapter Five of Part Two, Tallis asserts himself and the results are more physical but Morgan twists away just as the doctor, a "round-faced young man with spectacles carrying a black bag" (p. 286) arrives unexpectedly to announce that Tallis's father Leonard has cancer not arthritis. Later still, in Chapter Thirteen of Part Two, Morgan and Rupert (tricked by Julius into believing they are lovers) are interrupted by "a sound so loud that they could not at first understand what it was" (p. 361). It turns out to be Peter, accosting them with his accusation "So it is true" (p. 362). Out of this disruption comes Peter's intensified father-hatred which eventually leads him to destroy Rupert's manuscript, ripping it into many pieces so that "the floor, the chairs, the desks were covered in drifts of white" (p. 383). There is a grim side to these disruptions, and we come to accept that Murdoch is gradually building up her narrative to deal with issues that involve more than comedy.

Interruptions, unexpected visitors, chance meetings, arranged meetings, trysts of one sort or another foster a great many secrets. In the drawing room comedy, secrets and half-truths abound and initiate sequence, and no less occurs in Defeat. As with the unexpected visitor, each incident is part of a fabula that is characterized by apparent realism (largely because of the narrator's representational portrayals) while cumulatively these incidents stitch together into a story that constitutes a parody. Out of these secrets come further narrative entanglements not just in the manner of distorted linear sequence (as in Bruno's Dream and The Nice and the Good) but in a more directly parodic way. The narrator in Defeat still moves from one situation to another, one tête-à-tête to another without regard to conventional linear cause and effect; however, secrets bring new information into the story and frequently draw characters together in unusual (sometimes unholy) alliances. The use of secrets as a narrative device, like the unexpected visitor, disrupts and challenges our expectations at the same time as it parodies the attitudes and values dominant in a drawing room comedy. Such a ploy reminds us that Murdoch's intent is to create a novel that is of itself an experience and not merely a reflection of the world. Parody, not realism, is necessary for her to produce such an experience; disrupted sequence not linearity is required.

Julius begins the lists of secrets with his clandestine invitation to Simon: "Come around to my flat next Friday evening at eight.

Don't tell Axel" (p. 86). Immediately Simon is thrown into a dither; Axel has repeatedly told him he must not lie, but Julius has power over him. Because he eventually does go to Julius's flat, he becomes deeply involved in his own fabrications. Simon finds a naked Morgan, and after being talked out of his own clothes, is eventually found in his underwear by Julius. When Morgan returns, she and Julius convince him that "this must be our secret, no one else must know" (p. 171)-- and Simon "felt that fear again, a feeling as of taking a first step under a dark canopy" (p. 171). Julius is already playing with Simon here. Later in Chapter Nineteen, he tells Morgan that "I could divide anybody from anybody" (p. 233). "There is no relationship, dear Morgan, which cannot quite easily be broken and there is none the breaking of which is a matter of any genuine seriousness. Human beings are essentially finders of substitutes" (p. 233). As a consequence of this speech, Morgan and Julius wager that he can detach Simon "quite painlessly from Axel" (p. 234).

We expect that Julius is indeed capable of carrying out his threat, but this is not exactly what occurs. In fact Julius attempts to divide Hilda from Rupert and he does so by using Morgan. But the reader is not drawn into the narrator's confidence on this matter and we do not learn this detail of the fabula until much later. Only in hindsight might we recall the conversation between Julius and Rupert, in the chapter (Eighteen) that immediately precedes his bet with Morgan. There Julius vigorously, cynically argues that "the top of

the structure is completely empty" (Murdoch's italics) (p. 224). He becomes agitated, "staring intently at Rupert" (p. 226), and forcefully insists that the concept of a perfectly just judge is an illusion. Only when we learn of Julius's entrapment of Morgan and Rupert, only then might we recall this scene, and we can perhaps believe that here is the moment when Julius's trick originated--in his own cynical reaction to Rupert's smug virtuousness. The narrator has buried his connection in the fabric of the novel, but it is there nonetheless. Soon after Julius makes his bet with Morgan, he develops a more cruel plan, one that traps his partner in the bet--Morgan--in ways neither she nor the reader could foresee.

But we know nothing of this as we plunge into Part Two of the novel. We share Rupert's shock when we read the love letter he receives from Morgan because nothing in the preceding fabula has led us to expect this turn of events in the story. We are surprised to find that Morgan has received a similar letter from Rupert: "the incredible, the impossible has happened" (p. 261). We are almost ready to believe that perhaps Rupert and Morgan have fallen in love after all. Because the fabula is incomplete--that is, because we don't know the true context of the letters--we believe the story. The sequence makes it difficult for us not to. The letters after all seem to be tangible evidence, and both characters seem changed, flattered, full of purpose, suddenly and deeply enchanted with each other.

The events continue to move quickly. Once the narrator has

changed our expectations, we are immediately swept up in another scene that explains some but not all of the mystery. Julius positions himself and Simon to witness the rendezvous between Morgan and Rupert. We do not understand exactly how he has arranged this, and the matter of his manipulating old love letters is not revealed until we arrive at the section of the novel that is marked by numerous confessions. At this point we know only what Simon knows--that Julius has somehow manipulated Rupert and Morgan, and Simon cannot tell anyone of this arrangement because he is so afraid for himself and his real love for Axel. He utterly believes Julius when he says "Make no mistake, dear Simon. If I chose to I could destroy your relationship with Axel very easily" (p. 269). We are immediately reminded of Julius's bet with Morgan. The narrator is soliciting just this reaction from us. It is part of her joke on the reader that we don't yet know that Julius has no intention of dividing Simon from Axel although the reader is continually watching for that development, and this in turn distracts from the real separation between Hilda and Rupert. Julius has larger more illustratious quarry to pursue than Simon, and much of Part Two of the novel develops the entangled web Julius spins around Rupert, Morgan and Hilda. In keeping with the parody of the drawing room comedy, the smug (Robert) is deflated and made to appear ridiculous. We share Julius's delight in "the refined and lofty muddle" (p. 267) Rupert and Morgan spin for themselves once the machine (as Julius calls it) has got underway. But we do not foresee how this

entanglement will have a sad ending.

If the narrator has up till now disrupted our expectations of causal sequence, she now begins to move even further away from chronological linearity by disrupting temporal sequence as well. Chapter Two of Part Two does not begin where the previous chapter left us, with Rupert alone with his love letter from Morgan. Now we find Rupert and Morgan saying the kinds of things lovers have always said to each other--"I admire your confidence, your sense" (p. 273)--but because we realize that their love is indeed a trumped-up affair, the effect is one of bitter satire. By supplying us with new information (Julius's confession to Simon) Murdoch makes us hear Rupert and Morgan in a new way; we begin to see them, in fact, as Julius does, in a cynical way, or at least with an ironic eye. The disruption in temporal sequence provides the narrator with a device for delivering some of her most savage comments on the self-deceiving power of love and love's illusions.

Julius appears twice at Priory Grove when Rupert is not at home. In Chapter Six he appears mysteriously and plants suspicion in Hilda's mind about her husband; in Chapter Nine he says much more boldly "Well, I suppose you were bound to find out ... About Rupert and Morgan" (p. 322). It was during one of these visits that he furtively implanted one of the love letters Morgan had written to him in the secret compartment of Rupert's desk. As readers we do not learn this information until much later, during the confessions. When Hilda goes

to search both desks, she finds three pieces of evidence: that the love letters Rupert wrote to her are gone, that Morgan received 400 pounds from Rupert, and the implanted letter. The narrator has provided us with an understanding of the second piece of evidence--and we recall the innocence of the scene in which Rupert gave Morgan money but which they decided to keep secret from Hilda. We know nothing of the first and third, and casting back and forth in the fabula can provide no clues. If the narrator has convinced us by now that Julius controls these matters--in a way which seems more and more powerful and god-like, and not unlike the narrator herself³--and we still have not been given the kind of chronological linear sequence (or at least the information that arises out of such sequence) that would immediately reveal all. This distortion of temporal sequence draws the reader into an entangled maze in which we must ask, as Simon does, "Had Julius really engineered it all, made Rupert and Morgan each believe that the other was in love? How on earth had he done it?" (p. 301). It is at this point in the novel that the confessions begin to occur, and we begin to see the kind of understanding and information the narrator has withheld from us up until now. Gradually we see that the fabula begins to correspond with the story.

These confessions--from Morgan, Simon, and most significantly, Julius--have a quality of simultaneity, as if they are told at the same time. Linear temporal sequence is utterly dispensed with here. As a result, the narrator's choice of which confession to reveal, and

in what order, becomes critical. Morgan is the first--in Chapter Sixteen--to come to some recognition about her true situation.

"Compared with her bond with Hilda, these matters of men, of lovers and husbands, seemed utterly flimsy" (p. 388). She writes first to Rupert to dismiss him, and then to Hilda to "hang on. We will not be divided" (p. 389). In the following chapter Simon unburdens himself to Axel, confessing all his secrets, and while they understand the enormity of the ruse, they are too involved with self and with each other to carry the news of Julius's trickery to those characters involved. Murdoch's narrator makes a subtle moral point here about the protective nature of the self. Their particular situations become resolved, but the narrator has still not supplied all the answers to how Julius has arranged the duplicity; while we know the story, we still do not have the complete fabula. The third confession in precisely the next chapter reveals all that we have been waiting for; Julius explains to Tallis how he used some of his own love letters--from Morgan--to begin the affair. Each of these confessions reminds us that we are reading a parody of the kind of comedy that has one character after another confessing to small stupidities, secrets, tricks of one sort or another. But A Fairly Honourable Defeat does not end "happily ever after" once the mechanism of trickery has been revealed. Some other more deadly system has been set in motion.

When Hilda learns the truth from Julius, she is alone in her cottage in Wales. What follows is a gothic/comic interlude in which

the phone and car break down and she is unable to make contact with Rupert. Immediately following this chapter, Morgan stumbles upon "something weird and awful" (p. 423) in the pool--Rupert's dead body. Within moments, she answers the phone to hear Hilda asking for her husband, then going on to tell Morgan that "nothing terrible has happened at all" (p. 425). By presenting us with information that is withheld from Hilda through the disruption of temporal sequence, the narrator makes her phone call bitterly ironic. A sequence that jumps from character to character without regard to linear or chronological development can provide us with the pleasant reading experience of shock. The content of Hilda's joy is undermined by its context, and the "just missed" opportunity is again a feature of the drawing room comedy that is parodied here.

In the first two novels considered here, some of the characters are presented with a drama of recognition--a time of the angels--that allows them to realize some truth in their lives--and yet even as this happens the emerging structure undercuts these apparent truths, even expects us to consider them specious and self-satisfying. Because the parodic structure is more overt in Defeat, operating less on a level we intuit and more as a readily accessible aspect of the form, the experience is somewhat different. The over-use of such devices as secrets, interruptions, unexpected visitors, confessions--all function to undercut the apparent seriousness which the narrator is presenting to us. We are more aware in Defeat (than in the other two novels)

that parody is part of the foreground of the experience of the novel; and because parody involves the humorous imitation of another form (in this case the drawing room comedy), we are naturally skeptical of any "truths" which may emerge for the characters.

The book ends with a series of "happy endings"--and we are surely expected to see these ironically. These constitute the final phase of Murdoch's usual tripartite structure just as unexpected visitors and secrets form the first section, and the confessions mark the moments of recognition-and-release. As in the preceding novels, this last stage presents a series of mocking closures. Simon feels "in his veins the warm anticipation of a new happiness" (p. 437) as he sits in the French village Axel and he have escaped to. The scene is warm and cozy, but we are not convinced that Axel and Simon have the kind of stuff in their love that will allow them to survive; as Axel says, "we were so damn self-absorbed" (p. 433). Nevertheless this happy ending is similar to the circular structure we've noticed in the other novels: characters return to a situation not remarkably different from the one in which they began in spite of tremendous intervals of upheaval. There is a self-deception at work that allows one illusion to be substituted for another. Murdoch's happy ending not only parodies that substitution but reveals it as a basic weakness at the heart of these characters. Hilda writes to Tallis from America to tell him "A good start had been made" (p. 433)--Morgan has taken a job on the West Coast, they have a big Chevrolet, Peter is living with his analyst. Her letters are chatty, "mentioning Morgan in a casual way

as if this were a dear friend with whom she had always lived" (p. 433). All appears to end well, not so different from how it began. Even Julius (for whom the last chapter is reserved) feels "so much better now that he was not closely involved with human beings" (p. 447). Strolling through Paris, he is without guilt, and the novel itself ends with his off-hand assertion that "Life was good" (p. 447). For these characters redemption is not possible: Simon, Axel, Hilda, Morgan and Peter are muddlers. Julius is clearer and without the quality to deceive himself, but his cynicism prevents him from finding and sustaining a truth that is also touched by compassion or real love. All return to their old ways radically unchanged by the events surrounding Rupert's death. While the fabula presents these individual happy endings, the story uses exaggeration and juxtapositioning and repetition to draw our attention to Murdoch's serious intent--the depiction of the hollow selves which have emerged from the misadventure, and the self-protective measures which have developed: hence the "fairly" (that is, marginally) honourable defeat.

There remains, however, the moment which the comic aspect of the parody has not prepared us for, namely, Rupert's death. The narrator allows herself to step outside the parodic framework at this point, for there is no parallel to death in the drawing room comedy. It is just this serious quality which slides with us into the chapter that follows (Twenty-one). Because the narrator has stepped so suddenly out of her usual comic/parodic mode, we are no longer certain how to

hear the new information she provides here--that Julius spent his "cosy war" (p. 93) in Belsen, and that Tallis's sister did not die of polio but was raped and murdered by a sex pervert when she was fourteen. Because this information comes bearing some value other than parody, we need to reassess these characters; once again our expectations are disrupted. Julius, we realize now, perhaps has a terribly valid reason for his cynicism. Only at this last minute, as it were, does the narrator provide us with some justification for the cruel machine Julius constructed around Rupert.⁴ Because this chapter does not seem to belong to the parody of the drawing room comedy, neither does it seem deconstructed. We find ourselves accepting Julius's internment in the concentration camp as justification for his trick of destroying Rupert's smug ideals of justice. This process is a curious reversal of what occurs in the preceding novels. There parody comes to the foreground only at the very end of the novel and in doing so it destructures the apparent realism and openness it has been presenting. In the ending of Defeat, the narrator has momentarily dropped her parodic intent and part of this chapter appears to stand as straightforward narration in a manner similar to the treatment of Bruno and Diana in Bruno's Dream.

Just as Bruno and Diana are allowed to slip outside parody and provide us a glimpse of redemption, will the same occur for Julius and Tallis? Not so for Julius. After the move away from overt parody, the narrator soon returns to the circular structure of the "happy

ending," and Julius (as has already been suggested) is presented as self-protective. The narrator offers a more ambiguous stance toward Tallis.

It is Tallis who acts: in the Chinese restaurant, he hits the thug who threatens them; after Julius's confession, he makes him phone Hilda. But Tallis is also acted upon by "the ambiguous presence of his sister. Her visitations disturbed him with a sense of an alien..." (p. 442). Tallis, like Julius, has an understanding of life which runs much deeper than the other characters, but this does not necessarily galvanize him into action all the time. Instead there is a paralysis in Tallis that holds him back from telling his father the real condition of his illness. He procrastinates because he knows that "It's much easier to live with him in the lie than live with him in the truth" (p. 336). Tallis, in contrast to the others, keeps his secrets to himself: the secret of his sister's death "because it remains--too dreadful ... I don't tell people" (p. 430); the secret of his father's illness because he could not find the right time, not to tell his father but to admit to himself that "the usualness of Leonard, his special predictable liveliness, gave comfort" (p. 441)--and that Leonard's "fearfully characteristic vitality" (p. 441) would come to an end. Tallis guesses that perhaps Leonard already knows and asks himself "if a comedy was not being played out between them" (p. 441).

It is difficult to read the narrator's intentions here. This is

the opposite of the "happy ending" we have seen with the other characters. Tallis does not have the energy to shape events in the manner of Julius; he is too caught up in the torment of his father's dying and his attitude toward Leonard remains compassionate but ineffectual. The narrator has placed this chapter between the happy endings of Simon/Axel and Julius, and by contrast, the narrator does seem to be allowing Tallis to slip beyond the parody she constructs--yet it remains difficult to say if Murdoch's narrator is satirizing or admiring Tallis's determination, his phlegmatic continuation with the daily tasks. The narrator has revealed a man capable of acting in another's crisis, yet unable to put his own house in order. As his section of the novel closes, Tallis struggles over his lectures. If Tallis is not parodied, the redemption he offers is ambiguous, and perhaps finally so hard so as not to be worth the effort and risk of being honourable and decent in the continual struggle with defeat.

A Fairly Honourable Defeat presents characters caught up in a web of intrigue and lies and secrets; the events of the novel are manipulated by the narrator into a parody of the drawing room comedy. By deconstructing her apparent realism through disruption of temporal and casual sequence, the narrator keeps her parodic intention in front of us, and by continually undermining the seriousness of events throughout, she creates a more humorous book than straightforward realism could create. Much of her novel is devoted to parodying the

self-serious, the idealistic and the foolish. Manipulation of sequence allows her to savage the illusions of the self-righteous. In this way, Defeat differs little from the preceding novels--and then it goes one step further. Certain parts of this novel not included in the parody help reveal Murdoch's full "meaning" about the nature of the self and its illusions. Once again, shape and context provide us with her ultimate intention. But in this case the pattern changes. From apparent realism out of which parody emerges to make its most cogent statement we move toward parody out of which representational narration is allowed a penultimate statement about the nature of love and goodness.

Conclusion

The Experience of Reading Murdoch

The three novels considered here provide no point of entry which would enable the reader to grasp immediately the swirl of events and characters. The reader unaccustomed to the Murdochian imbroglio will soon be frustrated by the lack of sequential unity. The narrator moves from time to time, character to character, apparently without regard to any kind of logic or chronology. Furthermore there is no character with whom the reader may identify and under whose tutelage the reader may find a logical path through the maze of narration. None of the characters in The Nice and the Good, Bruno's Dream, or A Fairly Honourable Defeat can act as guides for the reader since none are aware of all the unfolding events; indeed, most are deeply self-involved and out of touch with the world around them. Eventually the reader discovers that the narrator herself is actively unwilling to provide the reader with the comfort and consolation of putting the story together. The compositional nature of these three novels determines that none but the reader can decide how they are to be read, understood, and more importantly, experienced.

Each of the novels begins in medias res. In each we begin in the middle (one could almost say "muddle" and not be inaccurate or pejorative) of a complex set of connections and relationships that comprise the histories of the characters: John Ducane's ambiguous and

uncomfortable connection with Richard Biranne in The Nice and the Good; Danby's off-hand practical arrangement with his father-in-law Bruno, his less satisfactorily defined relationship with Miles, his brother-in-law, in Bruno's Dream; Morgan's love and hate tension with both Tallis and Julius in A Fairly Honourable Defeat--to name a few of many. Much has happened prior to the opening of the story because we have in fact begun in the middle of the fabula. As we read, the fabula appears to strive to provide us with all the logical and chronological information; it appears to provide us with answers to the questions we are continually asking about the characters. Why are they in this situation now, what has happened that the narrator has not yet told us about? As readers we want to know this kind of information as soon as possible; we want to end both the fabula and the story without further disruption or digression. In a scene (such as the one in the office early in The Nice and the Good in which the death of Radeechy is discussed, or the more harrowing scene with the thug in the restaurant in A Fairly Honourable Defeat, for instance), the fabula roughly equals the story as we are not involved either in retroversion or anticipation. We have neither to cast back nor ahead in the fabula that emerges from our reading in order to synchronize fabula with story.

But this synchronicity is not the usual reading experience in these novels. Disrupted sequence results when fabula and story do not mesh chronologically, and this disruption heightens the sense of the

isolated individual who cannot see beyond the emotionally charged boundaries of his/her own consciousness. But Murdoch is not content to create characters caught up in the untidiness of fractured and disrupted lives occasionally shot through with brilliant moments of clarity and meaning. What distinguishes these novels is Murdoch's intention of reaching beyond such characters to the reader. The disruption of temporal and causal sequence is not a mere intellectual construct upon which she builds her novel. Disrupted sequence becomes a texture which the reader must experience firsthand, as he/she is frustrated, puzzled or shocked by the sequential arrangement.

The result of Murdoch's focus on the experience of the reader is at the heart of all her novels. We frequently feel lost in the maze that the novels create, cut off from the usual comforts of linearity. The isolation we feel mirrors the self-involvement and self-imprisonment many of her characters endure and suffer, some more willingly and consciously than others. We, too, it seems, must work to find our way. We, no less than the characters, are in the hands of an idiosyncratic narrator, and our responses both to the characters and to the developments in the novel as a novel are continually being called into question, particularly if they tend toward the conventional. One cannot read these novels without asking questions both of one's self and of one's idea of the nature of the novel.

We run the risk of misunderstanding and underestimating much of the structure's impact if we do not see these novels as moving beyond

representation toward parody. We must reach this conclusion because of our experience with the narrator, and with the questions she evokes from us. Murdoch's later novels do not use parody to the same extent as these three novels, yet all continue to present disrupted reading determined to thwart our understanding and predictions of where the novel is going. Because as Nicholas Spice comments "not knowing where we are going is crucial to the meaning"¹ of her novels, we can see that foregrounding of disrupted sequence has been Murdoch's most consistent device for shaping her novels² and pushing her reader to experience her themes of the nature of love, and of good and evil. The result is that her novels, shunting us as they do through her use of sequence between realism and parody and between fabula and story, become experiences to be gone through rather than simply texts to be read and looked at.

These novels are determined to enact within the reader the difficult moral choices plaguing the self and its redemption in the contemporary world. Again and again we learn that true in-sight is not possible until there has been true out-sight. Only when Diana has seen Bruno with the selfless eye that can love, only then can she see her own life in clear perspective; only when Morgan sees the true nature of her trumped-up love for Rupert is she able to understand her love for Hilda, even if the insight is not sustained. Even the experience of moving from a state of self-deception to a full awareness that the world is far more free than the imprisoned

self--even that experience is no guarantee that the self will maintain its tenuous hold on the real. Miles, for instance, slides back into his fantasy world of poetry and beautiful insignificant particulars after his love for Lisa has opened him up to the strength of the world beyond himself. In all the novels the relentless coupling at the end suggests that whatever moments of truth have been achieved, that these cannot be sustained, and here some of Murdoch's most savage satires on the self-deceptions that arise from love and love's illusion are allowed to unfold. As we "experience" these novels, we also feel as the characters themselves must, out of touch with the real and the tangible, unable to secure a place in the shifting sequence that is other than the bright but enchanting neurotic world of the self. Surely, though, we have been jolted out of conventional expectations: by being mocked through denial of narrative sequence and progressive character development, we (like the characters) have learned to question appearances and surfaces.

Footnotes

Introduction

¹Murdoch's unusual structural techniques arise in part because she is unwilling to accept a literature bound to the "undeveloped heart" of the English character that leads, according to Warner Berthoff (1967) to the "dead end of crippling obsession with perfect truth and unimpeachable sincerity."

²These notions of good and evil are developed in Murdoch's philosophical essays, chiefly Sartre: Romantic Rationalist, "The Sublime and the Good," "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," "The Idea of Perfection," "Against Dryness: A Polemic Sketch" and "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts."

³George Becker. Realism in Modern Literature. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980), p. 17.

⁴Georg Lukács. The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (London: Merlin Press, 1963) p. 23.

⁵Lukacs, p. 23.

⁶A few critics have located form as the key to understanding her intent: Berthoff (1967) comments on her novel machine of boisterous melodrama; William Hall (1965) suggests there is a pattern of conventional/male and contingency/female that shapes the novels; Martin (1965) sees her work in the light of the symbolist novel and states that "she wants an art that cannot be used as magic, which cannot be substituted for the experience"; Hoskins (1972) sees A Fairly Honourable Defeat as a "parody-inversion of A Midsummer Night's Dream" but then continues to discuss the allusions involved; Thomson (1969) sees her work as creating myths rather than realism, and then suggests "the sense of outrage consequent on peripety looks to some like a failure, wilful or blind, to observe the necessary laws of cause and effect"; Beams (1981) identifies her novels as allegories "in which ... other centred truth inheres as an ideal end point of understanding and the reader's task is a progressive looking as it unfolds this structure"; Jenkins (1984) describes her "impatience with fiction-making"; but only Spice (1985) accepts the fact that the novels are difficult for a reason--because she intends them to be that way. There is a very gradual movement toward understanding Murdoch's novels in this way, but none of the critics look at them directly in

terms of sequence, disruption, representation, or parody.

Most of the criticism has focused on other important (usually thematic) aspects of her work: philosophy in Baldanza (1965), Hall (1966), Martindale (1981); characterization and contingency in Culley (1965), Kermode (1963), Piper (1979); love in Berthoff (1967), Whiteside (1964), Packer (1977), and in all the general studies including Baldanza (1974), Byatt (1965), Gerstenberger (1975), Rabinovitz (1968) and Wolfe (1966). Of these studies only Dipple (1982) begins to look beyond thematic concerns and general readings of specific novels to see her work as game-playing beyond realism. Of the interviews--Bellamy (1977), Biles (1979), Heyd (1965) and Rose (1968)--Bellamy offers the most insight into the way Murdoch writes, but there is still no mention of such terms as sequence, disruption, or parody.

After about The Black Prince there has developed a general critical disinterest in Murdoch, perhaps because she was seen not to have changed, that she was writing a kind of formula novel. This drop in critical attention has not affected her energy or output.

⁷Michael O. Bellamy. "An Interview with Iris Murdoch." Contemporary Literature, 18, no. 2 (Spring 1977), p. 132.

⁸Nicholas Spice. "Take That White Thing Away." Review of The Good Apprentice. London Review of Books (October 17, 1985), p. 8.

⁹Mieke Bal. Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, trans. by Christine von Boheimen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 49.

¹⁰Bal, p. 5.

¹¹Bal, p. 49.

¹²Lukacs, p. 23.

¹³Some critics found Murdoch's early novels annoying; Linda Kuehl (1969) was perhaps foremost among those who found her novels ill-shaped, bound by form and by anachronistic literary theory. Even sympathetic critics such as William Hall (1969) described her work as flawed and confused.

¹⁴Viktor Shklovsky. "Plotless Literature." Poetics Journal, no. 1 (January 1980), p. 5.

¹⁵William Hall. "Bruno's Dream: Technique and Meaning in the Novels of Iris Murdoch." Modern Fiction Studies, 15, no. 3 (1969), p. 434.

¹⁶Hall, p. 436.

¹⁷Iris Murdoch. The Nice and the Good (London: Triad/Granada, 1983), p. 41.

¹⁸Iris Murdoch. "Against Dryness." Encounter, No. 88 (January 1961), p. 20.

¹⁹Iris Murdoch. The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts, the Leslie Stephens Lecture (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967) p. 1.

²⁰Novelists such as Elizabeth Goudge, Angela Thirkell, Norah Lofts, Jean Plaidy, Phillipa Carr, the Miss Read Series.

Chapter One

¹Iris Murdoch. The Nice and the Good. (London: Triad/Granada, 1977), p. 41. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the chapter.

²Gertrude Stein. "Composition as Explanation." Writings and Lectures 1909-1945 (USA: Penguin, 1967), p. 23.

³M. Perry. "Literary Dynamics: how the order of a text creates its meaning" (1979) is quoted in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's Narrative Fiction, Contemporary Poetics (New York: Methuen, 1983), p. 120. Perry's "primacy effect" is expressed as "information and attitude presented at an early stage of the text tend to encourage the reader to interpret everything in their light."

⁴Compare with Murdoch's treatment of another couple, Hilda and Rupert Foster in A Fairly Honourable Defeat. While the Grays are allowed to escape the narrator's wrath, the Fosters do not. Murdoch's vision becomes progressively darker.

⁵Compare with Murdoch's treatment of Miles in Bruno's Dream. Because Murdoch allows Miles more self-awareness than Kate, his return to self-deception and fantasy is more savagely condemned.

Chapter Two

¹Elizabeth Dipple. Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 8.

²Viktor Shklovsky. "Plotless Literature." Poetics Journal No. 1 (January 1980) p. 9.

³Shklovsky, p. 6.

⁴Iris Murdoch. Bruno's Dream (London: Triad/Granada, 1977), p. 54. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the chapter.

⁵Other occurrences of this Jungian struggle down the birth canal into self-discovery and consciousness include: Tim's literal descent underground via the canal in Southern France in Nuns and Soldiers; Hilary Burde's emergence from the mud after his fight with Gunnar and his failure to rescue Kitty from the Thames in A Word Child; or Tom McCaffrey's dangerous journey into the steaming underworld of the spa's mechanical apparatus in The Philosopher's Pupil.

⁶Wayne Booth. The Rhetoric of Fiction. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, 2nd Ed.), p. 102.

Chapter Three

¹Iris Murdoch. A Fairly Honourable Defeat (USA: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 11. All subsequent references to this text will appear in the body of the chapter.

²Compare Rupert's loss of self-respect with Thomas McCaskerville's lecture to Edward Baltram in The Good Apprentice (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985), p. 72. "Sometimes, because of a catastrophe, a bereavement or some total loss of self-esteem, our falsehoods become pernicious, and we are forced to choose between some painful recognition of truth and an ever more frenzied and aggressive manufacturing of lies." (italics mine)

³Compare Julius's role with that of Nigel in Bruno's Dream; both are powerful agents of the narrator. See the following footnote as well.

⁴Julius's triumph makes it clear that Rupert's rationalist philosophy cannot account for Belsen, and Murdoch may even be suggesting that Rupert's kind of rationalism is in some way responsible for such atrocities. Julius's entrapment of Rupert, at any rate, is not unlike Murdoch's manipulation of the reader. Both are determined to force their subjects into new unexplored areas.

Conclusion

¹Nicholas Spice. "Take That White Thing Away." Review of The Good Apprentice. London Review of Books (October 17, 1985), p. 8.

²Frank Kermode. "Secrets and Narrative Sequence," in On Narrative, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 84. Kermode discusses the idea of sequence as a foregrounded technique.

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