IRIS MURDOCH

IRIS MURDOCH:
HER PHILOSOPHY IN TWO NOVELS

By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the thesis is to examine two novels written by Iris Murdoch, The Flight from the Enchanter and A Severed Head, to see how the author put into practice her philosophical theories of literature as explained in several philosophical papers written prior to the novels. The thesis begins by outlining Murdoch's philosophical views and theory of literature, then proceeds to examine the two novels in order to find out how she applied her views to literature. The concluding chapter reviews some of the critics of Murdoch's novels, as well as updating her progress in applying her literary theory and philosophy to her more recent novels.

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I

INTRODUCTION

Iris Murdoch, philosopher and teacher, began her career as a novelist in an attempt to put into practice her theories about the purpose of literature. Her academic career began with a degree in litterae humaniores from Oxford University, but was temporarily interrupted by the war. During the war she became acquainted with the British Civil Service, holding a position with the Treasury. Following this she entered into the realm of international bureaucracy when she served as an Administrative Officer with United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in England, Belgium and Austria. She returned to the academic community in 1947 to study philosophy at Cambridge University at a time when Sartre's work was causing great excitement in the philosophical world. The following year she took up a fellowship at Oxford, in St. Anne's College. She remained in this post, apart from teaching for four years in the mid-sixties at the Royal College of Art, until about 1970. While teaching, she published papers on moral philosophy and several more specialized papers on aesthetics related to moral and political concerns, as well as a study of Sartre. As her creative writing became more and more the centre of her work, with the publication of a novel almost every year after 1961, Murdoch ceased to present herself as a professional philosopher. To date, she has published nineteen novels and three plays. As a philosopher,

she may be classified as a moral philosopher but it is more difficult to classify her as a novelist. Her novels, a blend of narrative and moral analysis, are concerned with morals and ethics set in a social milieu. Her approach is intellectual, but this does not curtail a well developed social sense as exhibited in her characterizations.

Her theories of literature can be deduced from a series of articles published between 1958 and 1966.[1] From these it is apparent that she sees the stagnated situation of modern literature as a dual problem. First of all, in her view, there have been no new developments in philosophical ideas to inspire writers since Freud and Sartre turned everyone's attention toward concern for the individual. The resulting effect on content is fantasy and myth-making. Secondly, she argues that the lasting effect of the symbolist movement on style has been to induce what she calls qualities of "tightness" and "dryness" in writing, a rejection of eloquence. In her opinion, literature should express a recognizable and acceptable view of man and help him to ascertain the depth and usefulness of his morality. She feels that mid-century writers have failed to produce this type of literature and have continued to make use of Freudian psychology and existen-

[1]"Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch," Encounter, 16,(January,1961),16-20. "The Darkness of Practical Reason," Encounter,27,(July,1966),46-50. "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited,"The Yale Review,49,(December,1959),247-71. "The Sublime and the Good," Chicago Review,13,(Autumn,1959), 42-55.

tialist philosophy and psychology as it pertained to pre-World War II society.

Although Iris Murdoch is a philosophical writer, she is concerned with social morality and her views do not appear as abstract doctrines in her novels but are part of the action and characterization of her works. She is concerned with ethical or moral problems confronting man in the world as it exists rather than with the solipsistic man created by existentialists like Sartre. Murdoch's characters do not avoid or deny the contingent quality of the world. They do acknowledge a prevailing code of ethics which is affected by their behaviour rather than the other way around. It is the combination of theory and social interaction that makes her fiction significant in the development of mid-century English literature.

Speaking out against the quality of literature being published twenty years ago, Iris Murdoch made this statement of purpose:

> Real people are destructive of myth, contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination....Too much contingency of course may turn art into journalism. But since reality is incomplete, art must not be too much afraid of incompleteness. Literature must always represent a battle between real people and images; and what it requires now is a much stronger and more complex conception of the former.[2]

Literature cannot solve the problems of modern man by creating

[2]Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness" in Encounter,16, (January,1961),p.29.

myths which either invite the imagination to fantasize about a utopian existence or seek to lessen the fear caused by the contingencies of the modern world. That "real people are destructive of myth" seems unquestionable after the destruction of the Nazi attempt to exercise belief in the supremacy of the Germanic people. Fantasies created by man are constantly being destroyed by the contingent world: we have proven that the world is round and that there are limits to the resources of the earth.

Murdoch is critical of writers for trying to simplify the complexities of the twentieth century by exclusively employing symbolism and myth-making, as well as pursuing to an excessive degree existentialist philosophy and psychology. The latter ideas have proven helpful to a society fearful of the contingencies and responsibilities of a technological age, but Murdoch recognizes their limitations. Literature has become the work of many in society. It has been usurped from the philosophers, professional writers and intellectuals so that it would appear that serious or significant development of ideas or style is being ignored in favour of distracting society by reusing images and characterizations which were significant at the height of the symbolist or existentialist movements. Murdoch does state that man is still seeking to fulfill certain needs that Sartre and Camus were concerned with: the need to find a means of seeking truth, and of exercising freedom of choice. Camus was concerned with real

people, the destruction of myth, and he was certainly always aware of the contingency of society and nature. Murdoch admires Camus' eloquence in his attempt at speaking the truth in Exile and the Kingdom:

> All his novels were written; but the last one, though less striking and successful than the first two, seems to me to have been a more serious attempt upon the truth: and illustrates what I mean by eloquence.[3]

For a philosopher there must be a more pertinent reason for becoming a novelist than solely the concern that not enough eloquent, truth-seeking, myth-destroying literature is being produced. Murdoch sees the twentieth-century individual's dilemma as one in which there is "far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality."[4] This dilemma is due to the fact that modern man has lost his moral referents as a result of confronting and being over-awed by logical positivism, determinism, behaviourism and utilitarianism, and he has come to believe that reality is merely a quantity of material atoms. Iris Murdoch states (in the same article):

> We picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world. For the hard idea of truth we have substituted a facile idea of sincerity. What we have never had, of course, is a satisfactory Liberal theory of personality, a theory of man as free and separate and related to a rich and complicated world from which, as a moral being, he has much to learn.[5]

According to Murdoch, we have adopted these assumptions

[3]"Against Dryness,"p.20.
[4]Ibid.,p.16.
[5]Ibid.,p.18.

because of the strong influence of the rapidly growing developments in science which provided society with "rationalistic optimism" and its converse, a curiously romantic conception of the solitary and stark figure of the individual as representing the human condition. Murdoch concludes that this pattern has forced the modern writer to write stories or myths to console society. He can do only this because he is frightened by technology and has been robbed of any profound philosophical base or moral theory. Consequently, "truth is sincerity and his imagination is fantasy."[6] Fantasy then is expressed by two modes, the journalistic story (shapeless daydreams) or crystalline story (small myths, toys, crystals).[7] She explains the crystalline story and the journalistic novel:

> ...it is either a small quasi-allegorical object portraying the human condition and not containing "characters" in the 19th-century sense, or it is a large shapeless quasi-documentary object, the degenerate descendant of the 19th-century novel, telling, with pale conventional characters, some straightforward story enlivened with empirical facts.[8]

She feels that neither grips reality and therefore she concludes that they deal with "fantasy" and not "imagination".

Content is not the only aspect of writing that has been reduced in the twentieth century. Style has declined as a result of the impact of "symbolist ideals": "eloquence is out of fashion."[9] The "symbolist ideals" have as their basis a

[6]"Against Dryness,"p.19
[7]Ibid.
[8]Ibid.,p.18.
[9]Ibid.,p.19.

dryness which Murdoch defines as smallness, clearness, self-containedness, a "nemesis of Romanticism".[10] It exemplifies what Kant required of art, and the symbol corresponds to the lonely, self-contained individual. Murdoch is inclined to see art as linked to a moral or religious (perhaps mystical) quality in man, rather than as an intellectual, imaginative creation. She argues that "we have been encouraged to think of ourselves as totally free and responsible, knowing everything we need to know for the important purposes in life", but is it so?[11] "We need a post-Kantian unromantic Liberalism with a different image of freedom", Murdoch claims.[12] This view of freedom would move away from the self-centered false sense of truth (which forces man to create fantasy) to contend with the contingent nature of the world as it does exist, challenging us to face the difficulties of these complexities and contingencies. Instead of restricting our sense of ourselves, she believes that we should be deepening our concepts in order to experience moral progress. Literature can achieve this goal, in her view. It can be used as an exploratory and developmental tool if allowed to regain a type of eloquence: "I would connect eloquence with the attempt to speak the truth."[13] This type of literature would be a merger between the crystalline and the journalistic styles and it "must always represent a battle between real

[10]"Against Dryness,"p.19
[11]Ibid.
[12]Ibid.
[13]Ibid.,p.20.

people and images."[14] The result should be magical; existence is not a process which can be fully explained, nor should it be.

Murdoch criticizes Sartre for presenting the individual as "solitary and totally free."[15] As she sees his view of philosophy, "there is no transcendent reality, there are no degrees of freedom."[16] Again she is concerned with the idea that his existentialism separates the effects of contingent, social habits and bias from psychological desires and the will. Modern philosophy, in general, has not been able to counter Sartre's or the Marxist theory with any other view of man. Murdoch turns her hopes toward literature.

"Degrees of freedom" and love, its necessary partner, become of prime concern to Iris Murdoch in her philosophical thesis and the centre of her literature. For her, the essence of art and morals is love. Love is the discovery of reality because "love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real."[17] Therefore love is the referent needed to find a language to give life meaning. Awareness of others leads to freedom: "Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves."[18] In other words, "to perceive what is real and to

[14]"Against Dryness," p.20.
[15]Ibid., p.17.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," Chicago Review, 13, (Autumn, 1959), p.51.
[18]Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," The Yale Review, 49, (1959), p.270.

exist sanely and without fear is to be free."[19] The most particular and individual of all natural things is the mind of man and on account of this Murdoch believes that "tragedy is the highest art, because it is most intensely concerned with the most individual thing."[20] It provides a "true sense of that exhilaration of freedom which attends art and which has its more rarely achieved counterpart in morals."[21] Art and morals, thus love, suffer from similar enemies: "social convention and neurosis."[22] The tendency for modern writers, encouraged by Hegelian philosophy, is to try to see the world and man as a totality rather than see others as independent, distorting them by fantasy, the enemy of art and the imagination. Love is an exercise of the imagination, expelling fantasy to overcome the self. King Lear provides the example of this expulsion and the sense of exhilaration of freedom which it produces:

> The tragic freedom implied by love is this: that we all have an indefinitely extended capacity to imagine the being of others. Tragic, because there is no prefabricated harmony (as Kant believes), and others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves. Nor is there any social totality within which we can come to comprehend differences as placed and reconciled.[23]

The modern novel has lost this freedom and has been overcome by neurotic concern with self.

[19]Iris Murdoch, "The Darkness of Practical Reason," Encounter, 27, (July, 1966), p.50.
[20]"The Sublime and the Good," p.52.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid.
[23]Ibid.

In stating that the essence of art and morals is love Murdoch is also saying that "art improves us morally, but this is ...accidental."[24] The way in which art works is deeper and of more concern than the level at which we discern noticeable improvement. The importance of art, the nature of love, works at a deeper level than fashion can effect, be it for quantifying, destructive or didactic purposes: "art is for life's sake".[25] Art is necessary, as is love, to sustain life and morality. This aspect of Miss Murdoch's philosophy is made evident in most of her works through the importance a particular work of art has for the central character: the sculptured head in A Severed Head; the Artemis journal in The Flight from the Enchanter.

As is shown by the first passage quoted in this chapter, Murdoch does not view literature as the miracle cure for all the psychic ills of mankind, but as an essential instrument in contacting reality, truth, and freedom as part of the experience of love. She believes that if artists try to implement the suggestions she has made and avoid neurotic, egocentric fantasies, then literature "can give us a new vocabulary of experience, and a truer picture of freedom."[26]

It is the purpose of this study to consider the means

[24]"The Sublime and the Good,"p.54.
[25]Ibid.
[26]"Against Dryness,"p.20.

by which she implements her philosophical views and literary theories in two of her novels. Priority will be given to consideration of The Flight from the Enchanter (1956) and A Severed Head (1961). These novels have been selected because they deal with real people, contingency, images pertinent to modern man, modern myths and morality, and especially because they concern freedom and love. They touch the point of eloquence in parts which, for many readers, seem to come close to a sense of truth. The conclusion of the study will examine briefly some of her most recent fiction to see how it extends her theories, and consideration will be given to some of her critics.

We shall examine Murdoch's use of characterization and symbol. Characterization deals with the people of her novels and their qualities of realness as well as the role they play in presenting her philosophical views regarding love/art and morality. Symbols engage the use of images which combat the reality of the characters and the contingency of the world presented, the process through which imaginative creativity asserts itself. On this basis it may be possible to offer some judgements on the successes and limitations of her fiction.

II

THE FLIGHT from the ENCHANTER

The most significant aspect of Iris Murdoch's second novel, The Flight from the Enchanter, is the theme of power. It is central to major symbols and myths and the relationships between people in the novel. The most powerful person in this work is the enchanter mentioned in the title, Mischa Fox. He is not one of the major characters in terms of his actual participation or appearance, but because of his power he is a myth-shrouded figure. The effect of power on the characters in the novel influences their attempt to deal with the reality they perceive and their ability to cope with contingency, which makes this aspect of the work significant. The many forms power takes in the novel, as well as its continuous realignment, highlight the moral and artistic tenor of the work.

In order to examine the significance of power and its repercussions in the work, it would be helpful to discuss the characters in four groupings: Mischa Fox and Peter Saward; Annette Cockeyne; Rainborough and Rosa; Nina, Hunter and the Lusiewicz brothers. The characters, through their personal histories, personalities and actions, intricately exhibit myth or symbol versus reality, bringing out Miss Murdoch's views on freedom and love/art.

As discussed in Chapter I, freedom is an important aspect of Murdoch's moral philosophy and through the study of power The Flight from the Enchanter concerns itself with

people struggling to be free, by attempting to know and understand others. Power is the main factor preventing some of the characters from "perceiving what is real and existing sanely and without fear", Murdoch's concept of freedom as stated in "The Darkness of Practical Reason".[1] Annette Cockeyne is one extreme example of this concept. She is free because her perception of the world is not seriously influenced by power or the necessity for knowing and understanding anyone, and, due to the fact that she is young and rich, she is basically unaffected by contingency. Nina is another extreme example. A victim of power, she is prevented from being free in every respect because of her fear. The Lusiewicz brothers are both victims of and possessors of power. They deal with contingencies more directly than Rosa, Hunter or Rainborough. The significant difference between the brothers and the others is the degree of freedom they achieve. Mischa Fox and Peter Saward are very strong symbols of power and love. They participate in the action of the novel but remain basically unaltered by the contingent effects of love and power. They remain free and the degree of their ability to love others remains unchanged. They seem to be the most powerful, in Mischa's case, and the least affected by power, in Peter's case, of all the characters in the novel.

Mischa, as the enchanter, seems to be omnipotent and

[1]Iris Murdoch, "The Darkness of Practical Reason," Encounter,27,(July,1966),p.50.

omniscient as noted by Nina: "She could hardly believe that he could not read her thoughts."[2] This same view is expressed by Rosa: "...in the past I always felt that whether I went towards him or away from him I was only doing his will."[3] This dual quality is symbolized by Mischa's unusual countenance which gives him the appearance of having two faces. He has a brown eye and a blue one set in an ageless face. He never allows anyone to fathom his gaze as though his spell might be broken:

> Rosa looked at Mischa. He was gazing down into the valley, and she had never seen him look so subdued. When he was aware of her eyes he dropped his head still lower. She realized that she would not know his mind until the following morning.[4]

Mischa appears to be wise, all-knowing, benevolent and "the very spirit of the Orient, that Orient which lay beyond the Greeks, barbarous and feral, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon."[5] He says that he hates to see the innocent and the weak suffer. And he is overwhelmed by the feeling that the world needs his protection in a speech to Peter: "Do you ever feel...as if everything in the world needed your protection? It is a terrible feeling."[6] Qualities of evil which we attribute to Mischa are undercut by these statements, leaving us with the impression that power is the villain, not Mischa. His magical

[2]Iris Murdoch, The Flight from the Enchanter, Harmondsworth,1964,p.144.
[3]Ibid.,p.281.
[4]Ibid.,p.272.
[5]Ibid.,p.209.
[6]Ibid.

power makes him "a sort of screen onto which his slaves and victims project their own unconscious drives."[7] It is Calvin Blick who manipulates and interferes in the lives of others in a cold, ruthless manner, although it becomes apparent through the action of the novel that he commits destructive acts which only aid Mischa, which leads the reader to assume he does so by Mischa's direction. It is obvious, for the most part, that Calvin has no power of his own, but only through his close association with Mischa. His motives are unclear and the reader, like the characters in the novel, can only assume that Calvin is responding to Mischa's orders. The degree of freedom Calvin has in order to carry out these orders seems implicit in the clandestine manner in which he conducts himself while representing Mischa's interests.

Two aspects of power have been introduced: the victim and the possessor of power. Mischa appears to hold a dual role. His dominant position seems to be as the possessor of power. The mythological centre of the novel is the story of Minos and the Minotaur as introduced on the opening page. Mischa, or Minos, lives in a large labyrinth-like house and Calvin, the Minotaur, challenges or destroys those people who are necessary as sacrifices to Mischa's retention of power. Calvin is also possessed by Mischa for reasons unknown throughout the novel. His particular haunt is a maze-like laboratory in the basement of Mischa's house.

[7]Frank Boldanza, Iris Murdoch, New York,1974,p.43.

But Mischa is also like Circe, the enchantress who cannot resist transforming those whom she has enchanted. Why is he able to wield such great power over his victims? Why are some able to break the spell? Is he a victim of power? It would seem that he is a victim also. Mischa is a mysterious outsider. He is a refugee who has managed to turn his rootless past into an advantage. His understanding of the refugee mentality enables him to take advantage of refugees (political and others) like Nina and Calvin Blick. His assumed role of protector of the weak and vulnerable, to the extent of destroying them, shows him victimized himself by the enchantment of power. He has raised himself to the level of a god, as clearly indicated by the symbolic references already mentioned. He is entirely caught up in the role of enchanter. He is held in this role because of his inability to love others and because of his need to control others. His moral referent is power, not love. He uses love to trap others, like Rosa and Hunter, whose love for one another is used against them. Nina's love for him has made her his slave because it is neither returned nor fully rejected. He begins his campaign to dominate Rosa by starting with her weak but adoring brother, by trying to dominate him through the purchase of the journal Artemis, edited by Hunter, but controlled by shareholders such as Rosa. The Artemis is itself a symbol of freedom and love as it was founded by a group of suffragettes under the leadership of

Rosa and Hunter's mother. Acquiring ownership of the Artemis would symbolize the capture, ideologically, of the freedom of women like Rosa, replacing their moral values with his. He sees their moral weakness, apathy, and preys on it. Mischa is a Sartrean figure in that he shapes the world about him with his will. However, his weakness is his failure to see others' moral strength and the power of contingent forces. The journal remains free because of the love for an ideal which it represents on the part of the women who are shareholders. They maintain their spiritual freedom through their love and support for Rosa who represents the ideal, which was originally the cause of the emancipation of women. Rosa, then, is the symbolic emancipator from the enchanter's power. However, it is a role which Rosa does not fulfill of her own free choice.

Mischa is unable to hold Rosa in his spell for a number of reasons. Initially, Rosa fled from Mischa's attention and offers of marriage because "she decided ten years earlier that any relation with Mischa could only do her harm."[8] Rosa fears Mischa's power, but at the same time she is fascinated by it:

> But to find herself still, however partially and however obscurely, fascinated by the idea of Mischa was alarming, not so much because this fascination might ever come definitely to tempt her, as because of the endless variety of torments which such a situation could promise.[9]

[8]The Flight from the Enchanter, p.102.
[9]Ibid.

Rosa does not consider her relationship to Mischa except in terms of his power used for or against her. She does not see the relationship in terms of love or mutual need although she does confuse power and love before she reaches a degree of freedom at the close of the novel. Mischa's view of women hinders his ability to hold Rosa in his spell. He does not see women as individuals but in classified groups who hold varying degrees of power over men. He tells John Rainborough that there are three kinds of women: "perpetual virgins", "perpetual sirens", and "real women".[10] The former "thinks she has that virtue in her that can conquer anything";[11] whereas the siren is a "destructive woman" who "realizes that men have found her out, that she cannot save men, she has not that virtue in her."[12] He also believes that women can be transformed by struggling with them; you wear them down, destroy their romanticism in their love, until you have a "real woman", a "free woman".[13] Through his eyes we see Rosa as the woman in transition, the woman he has been struggling with for years. Clearly it is her romanticism which draws her to Mischa finally and the deliberate destruction of it that drives her away. When his attempts to conquer Rosa by acquiring the Artemis fail, Mischa destroys her romanticism by using her relationship with the Lusiewicz brothers to humiliate her.

[10] The Flight from the Enchanter, p.134.
[11] Ibid., p.133.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., p.135.

He uses the nasty turn the relationship takes, first to blackmail Hunter into aiding in the take-over of the journal. Hunter is willing to co-operate to prevent Calvin Blick from using photographs of Rosa and the two brothers in an amorous embrace, to discredit Rosa. Hunter proves to be ineffectual in persuading Rosa to sell and it is Mischa's action to get rid of the Lusiewicz brothers by causing questions to be raised in Parliament about illegal aliens that finally brings Rosa to him. She mistakenly believes that his gesture is done as a kindly disinterested favour; a show of good faith. Unaware that Mischa is drawing the net of control closely around her, Rosa, in a romantic frenzy, rushes to his Italian villa telling herself that "this was the day that would decide her fate. ...Her destiny was already made."[14] Her romanticism about her relationship to Mischa is shattered by Calvin Blick's revelation that Mischa knew about her relationship with the Lusiewicz brothers, and in fact had instructed Calvin to photograph Rosa with them to use this as an instrument for blackmailing her brother. Mischa had known about her entanglement with them for some time. Calvin also points out to Rosa how she was too self-centered to see Nina's desperate need for help, thus causing her suicide. By destroying her romanticism about Mischa's power over her, Calvin enables Rosa to set herself free. It is not clear whether or not Calvin's

[14]The Flight from the Enchanter, p.275.

breach of secrecy is part of Mischa's plan or done on his own initiative. However, since he asks Rosa to behave as though everything is all right by waving to Mischa who is on the beach, the reader is left with the impression that he is acting on his own. It seems that Calvin is exercising what little power he has left by diverting Rosa from Mischa. He reveals that Mischa has destroyed him long ago and now he is allowing Rosa the benefit of freeing herself from Mischa before it is too late.

This break in Mischa's net of power underlines the contingent aspect of life, of real people being able to destroy myth, "illusion" as Rosa puts it. It is at this point in the novel that the role of evil becomes clear.

> Evil is the catalyst which defines personality most acutely because it brings the personality into its sharpest clashes with other discrete, opaque, contingent persons. It forces the essential moral dilemma by which one encounters the "hardness" of reality.[15]

Certainly Rosa encounters "the hardness of reality" through direct exposure to the evil in Mischa and Calvin. She achieves a sudden freshness and clearness of thought which she has been unable to do prior to this event. Coming face to face with evil makes Rosa reflect and see that she has willed much of the disorder and disaster upon herself and others by abdicating any power she did have to people like

[15] Iris Murdoch, p.44.

Mischa and for failing really to love anyone for themselves; Mischa, Hunter, Peter or the Lusiewicz brothers. Mischa is as opaque, discrete and contingent as Rosa saw him, but not as powerful as she believed. Mischa has not altered, but Rosa's view of him has. The effect Rosa has on Mischa is never made clear beyond the fact that he is trying to possess her. It does not appear that Mischa loves Rosa because of the methods he has used to possess her. Mischa, or Minos, remains safely ensconced in his fortress with his power intact. Calvin, the Minotaur, has destroyed yet another threat to the status quo.

Rosa leaves Mischa and turns to Peter Saward, who has always loved her. Peter is a foil for Mischa, because he is basically powerless, and unlike Mischa he does not try to possess Rosa. He realizes that Rosa does not love him for himself but because she enjoys basking in the reflection of Peter's adoration of her. Her continued self-centeredness does not allow her to accept him as she finds him; she would become bored with his adoration. He senses this and protects them both from this eventuality by refusing to marry her. Mischa, on the other hand, is only interested in conquering Rosa. He would like to possess her love without acknowledging her needs or individuality. Neither concept of love encourages freedom to grow or is based on a sound moral footing. Mischa tries to throw a net over Rosa in order to pos-

sess her; whereas Rosa is seeking a moral arbiter for her life. Although she knows from past experience that Mischa is capable of both good and evil acts, she ignores her own capabilities to solve her problems and reaches out to him.

Iris Murdoch uses Mischa Fox as the linchpin for her views on freedom and power. Most of the characters in the novel look to Mischa for personal salvation. They confuse his power with moral superiority and spiritual strength. However, Mischa's power is a net to prevent others from exercising their own will or moral integrity. He fails by overestimating his strength. Even his most closely bound victims, Calvin and Nina, act independently, asserting their own wills. Nina commits suicide to free herself from his power. Calvin confirms Mischa's lack of moral integrity to Rosa and exposes the myth of his power. By his surprising action he shows how individual will can conquer great power. His action brings out Iris Murdoch's view that all power is affected by contingent moral action.

Rosa learns that there are no absolutes regarding moral behaviour. According to Peter Wolfe, in his comprehensive study of Iris Murdoch's work, the terms gold and golden "are vital analogues of her cordial acceptance of external reality. The perception of the finite world as rich and precious is the discovery of personal freedom."[16] Certainly

[16]Peter Wolfe, The Disciplined Heart, Columbia,Missouri,1966,p.28.

this imagery seems apparent in the scene at the Italian villa where Rosa is freed from Mischa's spell by Calvin's revelation. The sun on the villa's wall is a dazzling "rectangle of gold" and the "sea lay before them between two bare golden hills...."[17] The setting is preparing the way for what is to come. The air and colours of the setting are clear, vivid and intense. Rosa's senses are acute, honed by the starkly beautiful setting. Upon learning the truth of her relationship to Mischa "the warmth of the morning sun took her in a golden embrace."[18] The world remained incredibly beautiful and whole, but Rosa was no longer drawn to Mischa by some inexplicable force. She was free. Mischa, however, is not free. He is bound by his own fantasy world, his mythmaking which is seen by Murdoch as a form of neurosis.

Mischa's concept of love, hence of art and morality, represents what Murdoch terms "Romantic freedom" by which "the individual is seen as solitary and as having importance in and by himself."[19] These qualities would make him a hero in most twentieth century novels, but for Murdoch he is a tragic figure because he cannot truly be free, because he is unable to love others for themselves. His neurosis prevents him from viewing art or humans as separate from himself, standing outside his sphere of influence. However there are significant contingent forces that affect his world; Peter Saward, the shareholders

[17]The Flight from the Enchanter,p.272.
[18]Ibid.,p.279.
[19]Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," Chicago Review,13,(Autumn,1959),p.53.

of the Artemis and natural forces such as the ocean.

Mischa is a part of the real world presented in the novel and he is affected by relationships and forces that he cannot control by rational or positive action. He and Peter have a bond of genuine need and warmth between them that is left unexplained. It appears that Mischa is seeking strength or moral direction from Peter who has a moral code that includes love and art separate from power and which provide him with a degree of freedom in his limited world. Mischa is a victim of the modern age of technology. His appreciation of art and nature does not carry over to his relations with humans. His imaginative understanding of the world about him is limited because of his failure to comprehend the real world as it exists outside his own creation of a pragmatic, self-willed existence. He is awed by the ocean's power and beauty which bring him closest to overcoming himself, to humility through the experience of the sublime which could free him from convention and neurosis. The power of the sea and the beauty of nature, as represented by the moth in John Rainborough's garden, bring Mischa as close to experiencing the sublime as possible. However, because he must always be in control of the world around him, he is unable to be genuinely humbled by the beauty of nature. Reason commands his actions at all times, but it would appear that some inexplicable force drives him in his quest for power.

The shareholders of the Artemis represent social convention which reacts out of fear and mistrust of Mischa and the rapidly changing technological society he represents to them. Mischa is the powerful alien whose moral values directly contrast with traditional ones held by the aging dowagers. In their own fashion, they are sustaining a fantasy by keeping the politically impotent and outdated Artemis afloat.

Mischa's art-filled urban palace reflects his personality. The public rooms are grand, mysterious and stifling because of the wall-to-wall carpets and floor-to-ceiling French tapestries. The tapestries are figured with a myriad of insects, birds, flowers and animals preying on other animals, but completely void of humans. Even the windows are covered, closing out the real world of humanity. Mischa's art works do not improve him morally by helping him to confront reality, they are merely possessions that support his fascination with the natural world which he is unable to possess. His servants also protect him from the intrusion of the real world by intercepting all callers. His financial empire is as mysterious as his background and his exotic homes. Added to this, his network of informants make his pervasive knowledge of people's personal lives reinforce his role of enchanter.

Peter Saward's view of his research echoes in part Murdoch's theory of freedom. Berated by Rosa for wasting his time when he discovers his work on the cipher has been "off track" he replies:

> One reads the signs as best one can, and one may be totally misled. But it's never certain that the evidence will turn up that makes everything plain. It was worth trying.[20]

Although Murdoch's theory of freedom is complex, and one must consider the novel as a whole to understand what she is trying to achieve, she believes that it is worth trying to understand, to fathom "the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons."[21] Unlike the positivists, she does not believe this is a simple task requiring only empirical evidence. "Reading the signs as best one can" is not adequate for coming to grips with reality: "We need a new vocabulary....We need more concepts in terms of which to picture the substance of our being; it is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place."[22] Peter is the scholar looking for a new 'lost' language which will help historians to better understand a pre-Babylonian society. Murdoch feels that it is the role of the novelist to find a new vocabulary to help man enrich his moral progress toward a degree of freedom.

Like Mischa, Peter has a controlled lifestyle which may be viewed as romantic. Peter represents a form of Kantian freedom as defined by Murdoch: "The individual is seen as a non-historical rational being moving towards complete agreement

[20] The Flight from the Enchanter, p.287.
[21] Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness," Encounter, 16, (January, 1961), p.20.
[22] Ibid.

with other rational beings."[23] This is exhibited in the way he orders his day, filling each moment with academic projects or meetings with individuals and concentrating on both with equal passion. He excludes the contingent aspects of life by removing himself from the mainstream of life. However, his vulnerability and sense of tolerance with regard to Rosa and his friends temper his Kantian freedom in a way which brings him closest to Murdoch's view of moral freedom. Peter accepts others as they are without trying to impose his desires and expectations on them. He appreciates them for their particular differences. In the same way he accepts the mystery and uniqueness of the cipher he is trying to unravel. Its beauty lies in its unique form bringing both delight and challenge to Peter. His love for this work of art does improve him morally because it humbles him by stirring his passion and overriding his rationalism. It allows him to transcend the reality of his own small role in society. He gains power from his work that is neither negative nor destructive. John Rainborough envies Peter this power or self-will:

> His personality had become in some profound way looser, less rigid; and yet the deep crack which Rainborough suspected had the strange effect of making Saward not weaker but more powerful.[24]

The "deep crack" is the effect of Peter's serious disability which forces him to lead a quiet life. But the quotation may

[23]Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," Chicago Review,13,(Autumn,1959),p.53.

[24]The Flight from the Enchanter,p.28.

tell us more about Rainborough than Peter. Rainborough sees others who are better able to cope with contingency than he. He also considers Peter unmanly because he is vulnerable and sensitive, lacking brutality in his nature. Though Peter's unrequited love for Rosa seems a waste of time and energy to Rainborough, he has loved Rosa and still would if she paid him any attention. Peter is an appealing and sympathetic character because of his gentle loving nature. He seems to have achieved a degree of freedom encompassing love and art that the other characters have not.

Peter has a priestly role in the novel; the other characters take refuge in his study and reveal themselves, their private lives, to him and he gives them comfort. It is through conversations with him, as well as his own observations of Mischa, that the "barbarous and feral" aspects of Mischa's character are revealed.[25]

A stable, comforting, quasi-religious atmosphere is present in Peter's single room. His scholar's cavern is removed from the world of politics and commerce and within it Peter thrives like the luxurious green plant on a corner table. Like the plant, Peter's work bears no fruit, but his human relations sustain him because he handles them with the same care and diligence as he does his work. Peter Saward needs to find a new language not only in the artistic sense but in the philosophical one, in order to be free from the social

[25]The Flight from the Enchanter, p.209.

convention that dominates his life, limiting his imagination and ability to transcend reality.

Since The Flight from the Enchanter is a novel about how humans must struggle to overcome obstacles, particularly social ones in order to be free, Murdoch has included characters from many social backgrounds to show the obstacles from as many points of view as possible. One of these characters, the nymph-like Annette, represents a breed of people who seem doomed to a limited existence because of the curious isolation they live in. Annette lives a thoughtless, hedonistic life guided by an innocence that seems to mean her certain downfall eventually. She and her family live outside the moral structure of society. They are generally unaffected by the ramifications of their actions. Annette's guilelessness and unabashed romantic self-centeredness provide a form of comic relief. The other characters in the novel do not take her seriously because she is far removed from their struggle for self-awareness and freedom. Because she is isolated from, and used unwittingly by, the other characters she learns very little about moral insight, love or self-realization, and through frustration and lack of guidance nearly commits suicide. It appears unlikely that Annette will develop into a morally responsible individual, given the ease with which she emerges unscathed from her every encounter. Annette is solipsistic and she places her neurotic, self-centered brother in the role of her moral model which limits

her chances for developing into a morally free person even further.

Annette's fragility and innocence are highlighted by the animal imagery used to describe her. She is a fish and mermaid to people like Rainborough and Rosa. Mischa sees this likeness also. She is both preyed upon and protected by these two as well. Perhaps the one aspect of Annette's personality which may save her from a rootless and morally bankrupt existence is her intense desire to be one of the common people:

> Annette felt always that she was travelling at a speed which was not her own. ...But the world of [ordinary things]...haunting and puzzling her with a dream of something slow and quiet from which she was forever shut away.[26]

The final image we have of her is on a train with her parents, her one remaining gem set in "gold" set alight from a sudden blaze of sunlight through the window. It appears to be an optimistic omen.

As much as Mischa represents the new ruling class in British society--a powerful, rootless, self-sufficient man of money, who is able to manipulate the bureaucracy--John Rainborough represents a threadbare social structure based on a pre-war "status quo" tradition. Rainborough believes that having gone to the "right" schools, inheriting family wealth and home, and being socially accepted by people of wealth, power and a similar background are enough to secure him a

[26]The Flight from the Enchanter, p.58.

lifelong position, a sinecure, with the civil service, as well as respect and a genteel life without any further exertion on his part. His beliefs are constantly threatened and actively attacked by the upwardly mobile, efficient and clever people like Agnes Casement and Mischa Fox. Although he has the financial means and the intellectual training to compete with these aggressive newcomers, his complacency and weak moral base make his efforts to cope with them ineffective. He lacks Agnes' ambition, energy and sincerity. Rainborough feels victimized by Agnes and her female colleagues, as well as confused by the untraditional operation of SELIB, the government bureau where they work:

> "It's the women," said Rainborough. ...They're furies masquerading as secretaries and ... Organizing Officers. ...They take one's work away."[27]

> He looked back with nostalgia to the Civil Service, where an age-old hierarchy, ancient values, and hallowed modes of procedure reduced to a minimum the naked conflicts of personalities.[28]

Like Annette, he is seeking self-knowledge and, although he possesses the experience and intelligence to acquire it, he is unable to act on any moral decisions.

When Agnes shows a personal interest in him, Rainborough makes a rational emotional commitment to marry her, not based on love:

[27] The Flight from the Enchanter, p.132.
[28] Ibid., p.87.

> Need ballast. All this wandering about no good. Must root myself in life. Children and so on. Marriage just what I need. Must have courage to define myself. Naturally, it's painful. But best thing really. That's my road, I knew it all along.[29]

He is unable to carry out this decision, nor can he decide to break the engagement himself. He lets Marcia Cockeyne make the decision for him and carry out the deed. Having resigned from his job he abdicated any further responsibility by letting Marcia arrange his flight from England.

He is unable to cope with the bureaucracy not only at work but also at home. The secluded family garden is symbolic of Rainborough's outdated moral code. He mourns the inevitable destruction of his garden, and in particular the ancestral wistaria tree, when a neighbouring hospital is extended. He cannot see the greater need of the hospital, only that he is being victimized. Rainborough is unable to build new moral concepts with which he can cope with contingency. By destroying the tree with the help of Agnes Casement, he takes positive action to try to change. It is the closest he comes to freedom from his old moral concepts:

> With a look of extreme fierceness she lifted the axe and brought it down three times across the thick root. Pierced to its golden interior, it was almost severed. ...He stood with Miss Casement, their feet deep in the earth, and side by side they began to pull. ...Rainborough thought she looked rather improved.[30]

The use of the word golden connotes the possibilities of

[29] The Flight from the Enchanter, p.247.
[30] Ibid., p.213.

Rainborough's freeing himself from his bankrupt moral code. And after a fleeting comparison of Agnes to the treacherous Clytemnestra, he comes to a new way of looking at her. This freedom leads him to propose to her, but it is a short lived change.

Even though he sees the sinister side of Mischa and finds his unorthodox methods of behaviour distasteful, he is unwilling to dissociate himself from Mischa or act against him. On the other hand Mischa sees Rainborough for what he is, weak and morally impotent, as well as easily manipulated:

> Rainborough, if he had ever cared to think about it, would have found now in his heart very little real fondness for Mischa, but an enormous concern about Mischa's opinion of him and the continuance of their relations. ...He wanted very much to have been invited and to have been present....Mischa's parties, as Rainborough knew from experience, were as often as not carefully constructed machines for the forcing of various plots and dramas....[31]

Rainborough reveals Mischa's manipulative methods of which he is nervous, yet he attends the party even after he finds out that Agnes has received an invitation when she does not know Mischa. Rainborough has forgotten that he has revealed his horror of her power to Mischa earlier. Although he does not want to get involved with Agnes, especially after she has ruined his chances for promotion at SELIB, he not only attends the party, but he escorts Agnes at her request. Showing a complete lack of tact and understanding of Agnes as a person, he becomes amorously involved with her at the party. His

[31] The Flight from the Enchanter, p.178-9.

complete lack of control over his personal and professional life gives a clearer example of Murdoch's statement about modern society:

> In morals and politics we have stripped ourselves of concepts. ...We need more concepts in terms of which to picture the substance of our being; it is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place.[32]

John Rainborough avoids moral progress by not taking action that could bring him closer to knowing others, or to love, so that, through self-knowledge, he could transcend the reality he finds so frightening. He allows himself to become a "hollow man" such as T.S. Eliot wrote about:

> For a moment the pain in his heart seemed a little like pity. Then a great wind was blowing through him. It blew right through him without hindrance. He was empty.[33]

Rosa Keepe is from a similar social background to Rainborough, although her moral code is not as traditional because her mother was a socialist and suffragette. However she suffers from the same malaise as he does; she is unable to act on a moral decision. It is difficult for Rosa to find a meaningful outlet for her half-hearted commitment to socialism. She assumed her moral concepts from her late mother, but they no longer serve a purpose in the more fluid society in which she functions:

> She disappointed her mother by failing to be a fanatical idealist. ...She had come to the

[32]"Against Dryness,"p.20.
[33]The Flight from the Enchanter,p.256.

> factory in a mood of self-conscious asceticism. Work had become for her something nauseating and contaminated, stained by surreptitious ambitions, frustrated wishes, and the competition and opinions of other people.[34]

Like Rainborough, Rosa is concerned with the opinions of others concerning her moral concepts and her self-worth. She is unable to reach a degree of freedom because she has dissociated herself from meaningful intellectual work, of which she is capable, such as Artemis (which has become meaningless under her brother's editorship), and from the society which may offer the challenges and possibilities for her to gain new moral concepts. Her boring work in the factory isolates her from personal contact with people:

> ...she had hoped that she would get to know some of her workmates; she had even hoped that, somehow or other, she might be able to help them. But none of this had come about... Life became impersonal and mechanical.[35]

Rosa is unable to help herself find truth in her existence, let alone aid anyone else to confront the reality of a technological society.

She fears the only close human relationship she has, with her brother, because she cannot alter him as a person. Also, she realizes that he is aware of her as she really is, so that she cannot hide behind pretense or convention. The one aspect of their relationship she fails to recognize is Hunter's deep love and dependence on her and his recognition

[34]The Flight from the Enchanter, p.44.
[35]Ibid., p.45.

of his oneness with her. She would like to put aside the responsibility of their closeness:

> Rosa never wanted other human beings to come too near. Her intimacy with the person closest to her, Hunter, inspired in her at times a certain horror. ...One's closeness to oneself, she thought, is made tolerable by the fact that one can alter oneself, the structure is alive.[36]

What she does not see is that one cannot alter the structure of oneself unless one is willing to accept others as different, separate beings who can help one to understand reality and transcend it through loving relationships. Rosa gains satisfaction through involvement in conventional, empiric action, or in exercising her will in relationships. She finds such a relationship, initially, with the Lusiewicz brothers. She gets satisfaction in exercising her will over these "poor savages", refugees from the inhumanity of war and aliens in a hostile society. Rosa transfers her feelings of angst to the brothers. Rosa's role as teacher to the brothers is a romantic attempt to change the world as she finds it. It is an egoistic move that relieves the boredom of her retreat from the real world. Her retreat has become "simple, with the simplicity hardly of beauty or goodness but of monochromatic tedium".[37] As Murdoch relates "beauty" and "goodness" to morality she is showing how Rosa inhabits a fantasy world in which the brothers are part of her obsession. She treats them as her "children and secret".[38] In fact, they are real

[36]The Flight from the Enchanter,p.45.
[37]Ibid.,p.44-5.
[38]Ibid.,p.43

people and consequently destroy the myth she builds around them. Their unpredictable behaviour towards her, by making her the victim of sexual power, brings Rosa to make a moral decision and act on it. After Stefan Lusiewicz moves into her home and threatens Hunter, she decides that she must force him to leave because of the threat he poses to letting the truth be known to Hunter about her sexual captivity by the brothers--an ironically meaningless decision, because Hunter already knows. Her action is to turn to Mischa, who has greater power than the demonic Lusiewicz brothers. She agrees to let Mischa deal with them by "any methods" he pleases. Her brief moment of freedom, after having made the decision to get rid of the brothers, is replaced by the feeling that she was "selling herself into captivity".[39] Rosa sees herself as unsubstantial in relation to Mischa and the Lusiewicz brothers. They are sinister, opaque and unintelligible to her. Even her conversation with Mischa about Peter Saward makes her feel that she is being manipulated:

> He is cutting my links with other people, she thought suddenly, he is blocking my routes of escape...It made no difference. Whether she ran towards him or away it was all the same.[40]

Since she is preoccupied with her fantasy about the demonic brothers and the mythical enchanter, Rosa cannot recognize Hunter's terrible psychological pain which presents

[39]The Flight from the Enchanter,p.241.
[40]Ibid.,p.258.

itself as a physical illness. Nor can she observe the desperate state that Nina is in when Nina seeks her out.

The chapter in the book describing Rosa's pilgrimage to Mischa's house is a clever blend of fairy-tale, psychological drama and 19th-century prose. She is in control of the situation for a few moments only, when she makes the decision to seek Mischa's help, and then she is like someone possessed by a demonic force. Nina approaches her as she makes her way to Mischa's house, but she is blind to the dressmaker's urgent need for her help. Nina reacts to the danger she sees lurking in Mischa's enchanted house and flees in terror, but Rosa enters. By means of a loving embrace, in a scene depicted in eloquent detail, Mischa puts Rosa under his spell. Rosa talks about being lost in a forest and describes Mischa as a character from a fairy-tale, the occupant of an "enchanted" house. By the end of the scene she is his slave. Her abandonment of morality is picked up in descriptive words such as "fire", "hell" and "demons". Not until Calvin destroys the myth, the "illusion", of Mischa's power over her is Rosa able to free herself to some degree. Peter Saward points out that she is not entirely free when, at the conclusion of the novel, Rosa asks him to marry her:

> "You can imagine, my darling," he said, "how much it moves me to hear you say this, but you don't really want it. Some god or demon makes you say it, but you don't really want it."[41]

[41] The Flight from the Enchanter, p.287.

Peter forces Rosa to continue to face reality by reminding her of Mischa's power. She must create a believable concept of truth by emerging from her egoistic shell. A hopeful note in this concluding scene is the challenge presented in the late Mrs. Wingfield's will. The will leaves the shares of the Artemis to Rosa, plus an annuity if she will edit the journal. Creative art may bring about new moral concepts for Rosa if she accepts the challenge. This view is part of Murdoch's literary theory. The gesture is made out of love, the love between Rosa's mother and Mrs. Wingfield and their love for the Artemis. The fact that Rosa finds this strange shows her continuing inability to understand others, but it does demonstrate that she is now able to observe others separate from her own egoism. Iris Murdoch's story is left unresolved: "...since reality is incomplete, art must not be too much afraid of incompleteness."[42]

The victims of the novel are a blend of comic and tragic. Nina is truly a victim of the post-war society. An alien in an alien world, she becomes both the victim of Mischa's power and Rosa's egoism. She is unable to live "sanely, without fear", and while alive she is not free. By giving Nina financial aid but denying her either love or guidance Mischa keeps Nina imprisoned in her role of the alien. She comes to believe that she cannot act of her own free will:

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

> She was ready from the first to be his slave...Nina was incapable of opposing any will of her own to Mischa should he wish to define her position further in any way that he pleased, she simply agreed....[43]

When she devises a plan to escape from Mischa, the only person she trusts or believes is able to help her is Rosa: "...Rosa figured in the mind of the dressmaker as a kind of archangel, a beneficent power, and in any case her only hope."[44] For Nina, Mischa's power is enormous in its mythical quality. Her fear of authority is unsurmountable due to her past. Her attention has been consumed by Mischa's power, so that she can see nothing else. When Rosa fails her, because Rosa's attention is also turned toward Mischa's power, Nina sees only one path of escape. Moments before plunging to her death, the tragic Nina opens her passport, her past: "At the Nina whose hair was "golden" a younger black-haired Nina stared back, anxious, haggard and fearful."[45] The word "golden" transforms her despair.

Mischa's behaviour toward Nina follows a pattern that takes shape in the novel. His beneficence and initial interest in Nina enslave her, while his ensuing indifference and role-playing confuse and isolate her. Finally, it is his indifference to Nina's needs as a woman that drives her to despair and suicide. Mischa is in control of the situation as he has

[43]The Flight from the Enchanter, pp.140,142.
[44]Ibid., p.145.
[45]Ibid., p.263.

the information that would set Nina free from political and psychological fear but he does not exercise it. However, where Mischa is incapable of seeing others, Rosa is not. Rosa fails to observe Nina's need for assistance because of her consuming self-interest. She is not able to console Nina, let alone help to free her.

Hunter Keepe is another victim. He is a man whose life is controlled by neurosis. Although he suffers real anguish, his ineffectiveness lends an air of comic relief to the novel, as he does not appear to be in any real danger or continuing despair. His name is ironic; the "Hunter" is pursued by the agent of the "Fox". He is completely powerless. He is unable to "Keepe" his sister safe from Calvin's blackmailing efforts, although Hunter's name is synonymous with the name of the goddess Diana, the goddess of chastity, wild animals and vegetation. He is ineffectual in his attempts to save the Artemis, a name which is also synonymous with Diana. Camilla Wingfield saves it. Camilla was the goddess Diana's favourite huntress in myth. Diana's brother was Apollo and the reversal of roles between Rosa and Hunter from the myth, highlights not only Hunter's uncertain masculinity, but also relates Rosa to the god of political life and agriculture. Rosa does not fare well in the comparison. Murdoch uses mythical imagery to point out that modern contingency does not permit the same moral responses as the

omnipotent mythical gods acted on. Rosa is unable to act virtuously with whatever power she does possess. She toys with Peter's affections, assaults Annette, behaves indifferently toward Hunter and neglects to give Nina the advice she needs to save her life. Hunter retreats into a psychosomatic illness when he is rendered completely helpless in his attempts to help Rosa, first by Calvin and then by Stefan Lusiewicz. Only when the danger passes and Rosa is free does he recover.

The Lusiewicz brothers are both victims and possessors of power. They are victims of political power which is exerted over them by Mischa who is aware of their illegal refugee status. They are not destroyed by this sudden evoking of bureaucratic power, they are only frightened off. They are victims of their own illusions about their interchangeable roles as sexual beings. Their moral code has a strange quirk in it that allows them to perceive all outsiders as their enemies. They are handsome, gay, and youthfully appealing. They accept Rosa's kindness, but respond to her treatment of them as children by first seducing her and then trying to take over her house and life. They are simple, basic men, survivors. They are nothing more than they present themselves to be; two rough aliens taking what they can from their country of refuge. Mischa represents some inexplicable, magical, evil power whereas Jan and Stefan Lusiewicz are evil in a basic manner.

Their world represents a lack of morality, love or art. Their junk-filled room, with their ailing mother isolated in one corner, and their mechanized jobs symbolize the effect society has had on them. They represent the baser qualities of life untouched by spiritual qualities.

In The Flight from the Enchanter, Murdoch is examining man's struggle to become "free and separate" though related to a rich and complicated world from which, as a moral being, he has much to learn."[46] At the same time, she has not excluded the two views of modern man which she believes to be inadequate products of a muddled moral philosophy, the Ordinary Language Man and the Totalitarian Man described in her essay "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited". The Ordinary Language Man, accredited to the Logical Positivists, sees himself as "rational and totally free except in so far as--in the most ordinary sense--his degree of self-awareness may vary. He is morally speaking monarch of all he surveys and totally responsible for his actions. Nothing transcends him. His moral language is a practical pointer, the instrument of his choices, the indication of his preferences. ...His moral arguments are references to empirical facts backed up by decisions. The only moral word he requires is 'good' (or 'right') the word which expresses decision. ...The virtue which is fundamental to him is sincerity."[47] John Rainborough

[46]"Against Dryness,"p.18.

[47]"The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," The Yale Review,p.17.

is such a man. He justifies his rational actions, especially his decision to marry Agnes, as the "right" decision because it is good for him. His major concern is to have others view him as he sees himself; a man of rational behaviour who makes morally "right" decisions for the good of all concerned. The inadequacy of this view of man as Murdoch sees it is borne out in his egoism and his inability or reluctance to deviate from his view of the world, limiting the variety of experience and people he can relate to in the world around him. This accounts for his hostility toward Mischa and Peter.

Mischa Fox is an example of Totalitarian Man as exemplified by the existentialist philosopher Sartre. He is a man who feels angst in the presence of a hostile universe. "His highest value is his own will, his own assertion of his solitary self, against a society suffering from an absence of God and its own hypocrisy and pointlessness."[48] He too wishes the world to see his virtue as sincerity by taking great care to present himself to others as he views himself. The failure of this view of the world is also its egoistic quality and limited exposure to the variety of experience, people and moral concepts which are part of society.

Both men believe that they are at once in control of themselves and the world as they perceive it. However, the contingency they confront disproves this view. Rosa is also a Totalitarian person who is overwhelmed by the hostility of

[48]Iris Murdoch,p.7.

society and retreats into a completely egoistic state from which she is unable to exercise her own will. The virtue of sincerity fails her as well. Through her we see the complete breakdown of the moral concept of the liberal man. It is necessary for Rosa to discard her moral concepts and begin again by the close of the novel. The contingent actions of real people have helped her to free herself to a degree from the mythical world in which she has existed.

Power still exists in the real world in which the characters exist, but their perception of it is different. The difficulty in recognizing the lack of freedom or tyrannical power in modern society is expressed in many ways in this novel, and Murdoch is successful in showing that society does not make it easy for individuals to be free from the "enchanter" that lurks within the human mind:

> Unless we define our moral obligations, we face the prospect of a corrupt social creed that can only be aggravated by the romantic ideas of power and isolation we desperately introduce to ease guilt and doubt.[49]

[49]Peter Wolfe, The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and Her Novels, Columbia,Missouri,1966,pp.87,88.

III

A SEVERED HEAD

Freedom, love, art and morality are the themes of Iris Murdoch's fifth novel, A Severed Head. Wit and humour are the mode used in this fast-paced work, in sharp contrast to the tone of evil which pervades her earlier novel, The Flight from the Enchanter. Symbol and characterization are the methods by which she delivers her message. As in the earlier work one character has great power which appears to be dark, but is a positive force in this case. Honor Klein is the "tawny-breasted witch" and the "severed head" of the title.[1] She provides the power needed to free the other characters, especially the protagonist and narrator of the story, Martin Lynch-Gibbon.

A clearer narrative and a more personal immediacy are found in this novel compared with The Flight from the Enchanter because it is written as autobiography. By recounting his personal story, Martin is acknowledging his understanding of morality and love which reflects Murdoch's view. He is consciously documenting the possibility for creating a different concept of morality in modern society and in doing so substantiates the author's view.

Martin, by his own account, is a well-read, observant aesthete, a romantic with a generally conservative nature. The other characters in the novel are depicted by their re-

[1]Iris Murdoch, A Severed Head, Harmondsworth,1974, p.138.

sponses to him, as well as through the action of the story. The point of view is made clear through the symbolism. The complexity of the relationships between the characters and the fast pace of the events hold the reader's attention, but subtly convey Murdoch's views.

Convention and neurosis are played off against one another in order to show their effects on love and freedom. As she stated in her essay "The Sublime and the Good", "the two great enemies of Love [are] convention and neurosis."[2] These elements, especially neurosis, are what is wrong with modern novels according to Murdoch: "Modern literature presents us with the triumph of neurosis, the triumph of myth as a solipsistic form."[3] She parodies the negative aspects of modern literature in this work through Martin's obsession with myth and in the detail he uses to describe the various love affairs. Humour and credibility are the desired effect. The main characters are again studies of the Totalitarian Man and the Ordinary Language Man and their subjection to the power of myths. Murdoch demonstrates how neurosis and convention control the lives of men, inhibiting their ability to be free. Love is the spring to the trap. The discovery of what love, morality and consequently freedom may be is expressed by an elaborate parody of Sartre's and Freud's theories,

[2]Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," Chicago Review,13,Autumn,1959,p.53.

[3]Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," The Yale Review,49,1959,p.265.

discussed in the works of A.S. Byatt, Linda Kuehl and R. Rabinovitz. Moral behaviour is perceived differently by each proselyte in the novel. Murdoch shows that the responsibility for moral action lies with an individual's acceptance of love which frees him from power as victim or victor. A discussion of each major character and his/her relationship to the others will clarify Murdoch's views.

Martin Lynch-Gibbon on first impression seems to be an Ordinary Language Man, whose life is ordered by moral control and convention. He has married a society beauty, runs the family wine business, has a good degree from a noted university, lives in a well-ordered home and writes historical analysis for a hobby. However, convention is a trap, the power which holds Martin.

Martin is smug about his life at the beginning of the novel. He has let the current of convention lead him through life. He wishes to see himself in the tradition of the Ordinary Language Man. The events of his personal life, especially his relationship with his wife, Antonia, and partially the one with his mistress, Georgie, reveal his character:

> In my own marriage I early established myself as the one who took rather than gave. ...I wanted Georgie as well and did not see why I should not have her. Although, as I had remarked, I was not indifferent to the 'rules', I was certainly capable of being cool and rational about adultery. ...and I did not think that the marriage bond, though solemn, was uniquely sacred. It may be relevant here to add that I hold no religious beliefs whatever.[4]

[4] A Severed Head, p.14.

Antonia is the centre of his world and in a Freudian sense is the mother figure he lost in his adolescence. She is five years his senior causing her sometimes to be mistaken for his mother. According to Martin's description of her she has ancestral connections to an artistic clan and dominates his life as did his artistic mother. He admits that during the first years of their marriage, "I was absorbed completely into the delightful task of being Antonia's husband."[5] When he eventually awakened from "The warm golden haze of those honeymoon years, [I found] certain roads were closed to me."[6] Although he feels somewhat altered in his role as husband, he relates the change not to anything within himself but to his state as Antonia's husband. Martin's romantic attitude toward Antonia is reinforced by his strong attachment to his late mother. Whenever he visits his family home, Rembers, he is overwhelmed by his mother's presence:

> I always think of Rembers as my mother's house. ...the house retains indelibly the mark of my mother's gentle fey rather vague personality, and it is in my thought of it perpetually clouded over with a romantic, almost medieval, haze.[7]

Not only does Rembers retain the atmosphere of his mother's personality, but also that of Alexander, Martin's brother: "...the form of his face perfectly recalled my father, its spirit and animation perfectly recalled my mother."[8]

[5] A Severed Head, p.16
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., p.32.
[8] Ibid., p.39.

In both his brother and his wife Martin finds his lost mother and because of these two figures avoids reality and mature love. He is able to assess clearly his relationship with his mother, but fails to recognize that this same relationship has been extended to his brother and wife: "...I recalled her [his mother] clearly, with a sad shudder of memory, and with that particular painful guilty thrilling sense of being both stifled and protected...."[9] The irony of the story is the liaison of these two mother figures. Their relationship exists from the beginning of Martin's and Antonia's marriage. When it is finally revealed to Martin, he is then able to see them as separate individuals free from the role he has given them. He is free, and reality replaces the dream in which he has existed.

Antonia represents reality, although Martin is unable to see her as she really is. In Martin's words, "'golden' is the best epithet for her appearance".[10] As noted in the previous chapter, references to gold and golden, and their cognates, are Murdoch's indicators of reality. The reality of Martin's relationship with Antonia is only fully understood by her. She knows that he relies upon her for his social status, his moral position and his emotional responses. She is aware of her power over him. Consequently, she is able to deceive him about Alexander and manipulate his behaviour dur-

[9] A Severed Head, p.40.
[10] Ibid., p.16.

ing her affair with her analyst and Martin's friend, Palmer Anderson. He willingly abdicates his personal freedom to her judgement. It takes the introduction of a stronger, more compelling force in the person of Honor Klein to awaken Martin from his dream world. Until his awakening Martin sets up Antonia as his ideal of womanhood and is not perturbed that he sees her as "perpetually playing the role of being a woman" because, "the extent to which Antonia was inside society was important...."[11] Antonia is inside society because of the value she places on modern arbiters such as psychoanalysis and sexual power. The power she holds over Martin comes from his worship of her as a woman, especially in her role as his substitute mother. She blames her affair with Palmer on the failure of her marriage to Martin because of this role. This explanation provides an excuse for Antonia's adulterous behaviour as well as indicating the power she holds over Martin. Her moral values are backed up by her understanding of psychoanalytic theory. She rationalizes her behaviour through discussion and exercises her will in personal relationships, so that what she does appears to be done on the basis of what is good, or right, with disregard for the injustice or victimization of others. It is important to both lovers that Martin be a willing, rational victim, giving their unconventional behaviour his sanction. They not only want his forgiveness, but more than that they want him to love them as though

[11] A Severed Head, p.20.

he were their child:

> ...it is not at all our idea that you should leave us. In a strange and rather wonderful way we can't do without you. We shall hold on to you, we shall look after you.[12]

Martin does not react or act independently because his morality is so much a part of theirs. He allows himself to be victimized:

> It was important to them that I should let them off morally, that I should spare them the necessity of being ruthless. But if I had power, I was already surrendering it.[13]

Martin realizes that they need his forgiveness and rational acceptance of their blatant break with convention to free them from guilt. However it takes the stronger moral force of Honor to make him fully aware of the unnaturalness of the situation before he can release his violent reaction to it. The affair ends, not because of Martin's reactions, but because of their guilt, and because of the lack of a basis for their moral convictions. Their relationship is based on an intellectual theory which does not sustain their love in the face of contingency, or the reality of their other sexual liaisons. Martin describes them as "deities upon an Indian frieze, enthroned, inhumanly beautiful, a pair of sovereigns...."[14] In reality they are human and they lack the power of the gods to control contingency. Also, they are unable to set themselves apart from the conventions of

[12] A Severed Head, p.31.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., p.58.

the society they live in. If Martin had not chosen to do nothing "except act out with dignity... his appointed task of being rational and charitable", their affair might have ended upon its coming to light, as does his.[15]

The indication that there is something incomplete or false about Antonia's qualities as a love partner is given when Martin describes Georgie. Her lack of pretension, her youth, her toughness and her spontaneity are attractive to Martin: "That I could love such a person was a revelation and education to me and something of a triumph: it involved a rediscovery of myself."[16]

It is not by chance that Martin eventually rediscovers himself and is freed by love; rather, this is part of Murdoch's thesis that love is a redeeming moral quality. Martin's love for Georgie, however, does not free him despite his assessment of the situation. It does show him that he can make moral decisions outside Antonia's sphere of influence. The contingent factors which impose upon their relationship bring him towards accepting responsibility for himself and his actions.

Martin swears Georgie to silence about their love because public knowledge of their relationship might alter it. He elevates his rationalization by likening their situation to the legend of Psyche. However, they are real people and unable to affect the power of gods. In reality, when

[15] A Severed Head, p.59
[16] Ibid., p.20.

Georgie becomes pregnant she has an abortion, because Martin wants to keep their love secret. She suffers silently. Martin escapes making a moral decision, but in dreams he has "glimpses of a punishment which would perhaps yet find its hour."[17]

Georgie accepts Martin as a being separate from herself and loves him as an equal unique being and lives in the constant hope that he will eventually, publicly acknowledge her in the same way. She rejects his fantasy life with Antonia, that is, her moral values, especially with regard to her zealous conversion to psychoanalysis. Martin finds her conversion charming and harmless, until Antonia reveals her affair with Palmer. Until then, he accepts Antonia's appraisal of Palmer's cure for life's problems unquestioningly. When he tells Georgie that "Palmer is good at setting people free", she replies:

> As for setting people free, I don't trust these professional liberators. Anyone who is good at setting people free is also good at enslaving them, if we are to believe Plato. The trouble with you, Martin, is that you are always looking for a master.[18]

Martin is unable to recognize this side of his nature. He would rather see himself as a kind and good person. His lack of personally-derived moral convictions permits him to be victimized and to use Georgie. It is only when his reliance on his masters causes continuing harm to his psychological

[17] A Severed Head, p.13.
[18] Ibid., p.7.

and emotional well-being that he considers that they may be fallible. Murdoch uses Martin's dilemma to point out the failure of certain moral values or the lack of them.

It is in the opening chapter that Murdoch makes her theme clear. Martin appears to be free only in a superficial way. It quickly becomes apparent that he has several masters: Antonia, Palmer, and his own convention. The use of the word "gold" links Georgie to the reality which surrounds Martin, but with which he is unable to integrate himself. He is fascinated by the strands of gold in her hair. Throughout the novel an emphasis on descriptions of people's hair and heads underlines the theme of the severed head and its implications. The severed head is both an object of horror, like Medusa's snake-covered head, and as described by Honor, one of worship because of its ability to prophecy. Honor is the severed head of the novel because she is both horrifying to and worshipped by Martin.

For Martin, his relationship with Georgie is existential in its nature. Murdoch is pointing out the failure of Sartre's philosophy to provide a viable moral ethic. In her synopsis of Stuart Hampshire's view of the modern man, related to Sartre's philosophy, she captures Martin's moral view:

> The only moral word which he requires is "good" (or "right"), the word which expresses decision. His rationality expresses itself in awareness of facts, whether about the world or about himself. The virtue which is fundamental to him is sincerity.

> ...in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, essentially the same picture [is found]. ...On the one hand there is the mass of psychological desires and social habits and prejudices, on the other hand there is the will. ...Again the only real virtue is sincerity.[19]

The Ordinary Language Man is related to the first view and Totalitarian Man to that of Sartre. The former believes man has control over himself and society and the latter believes man can control his actions regardless of society. Martin sees himself as an Ordinary Language Man and he values rational behaviour and the ability to do what is good or right. This shapes his reaction to Antonia's and Palmer's affair and explains his need to keep his own affair secret. On the other hand, it is because of his values that his marriage is less than successful and he seeks out the existential relationship with Georgie. Both are sincere moral expressions on Martin's part. He is caught between convention and neurosis. What he knows about the world or himself is limited because Martin cannot transcend his preoccupation with himself. If he loves Antonia because she is inside society, he loves Georgie because she fills the gaps Martin finds in his conventional marriage. It is due to the weakness of his will that Antonia has power over him and Georgie betrays them.

Martin's relationship with Georgie frees him from convention and allows him to assert his will:

> ...I reflected a little guiltily that after all there was nothing very much that Georgie

[19]Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness," Encounter,16, (January,1961),p.17.

> could do to me. Her power was limited. Here at least I was free.[20]

When his wife leaves him, he takes Georgie to his and Antonia's home in order to break the spell of duplicity. Martin thinks that he can diminish the power of convention and Antonia's power by his sincerity in showing Georgie his other life. However, his actions only result in the destruction of his love for Georgie. When the secret is out it has the effect Martin feared. Other people knowing changes their love. Martin feels guilty about deceiving Antonia and angry that Georgie has been the one to tell their secret. He feels victimized.

Their love is completely broken when he finds Georgie with his brother. He fears his brother's power. Georgie has taken action where he cannot. Georgie has acted in order to free herself from the unreality of their relationship:

> I had to do something of my own. I feel twice as real now. I was just stopping being free. And for me that's stopping existing. I was getting to be no good to either myself or to you. You've got to <u>see me</u>, Martin.[21]

Martin cannot see her outside the world which he has created for them. Georgie is doubly free because the duplicity is gone and also because Alexander is able to see reality. When the outside world is forced on their relationship, Martin concedes any power he might have had by revealing everything about it to Antonia. It is his lack of freedom in making

[20] <u>A Severed Head</u>, p.67.
[21] <u>Ibid.</u>, p.104.

moral decisions that destroys his love for Georgie. He acquiesces in the decisions of his moral arbiters by acting in a rational fashion. He does not act on his beliefs or knowledge of reality but on other people's.

Alexander represents more to Martin than his lost mother. As an artist, he holds a key for understanding certain aspects of people and seeing reality that Martin envies and somewhat fears. He sees in Alexander's sculpted heads "a technique for discovering more about what is real." Alexander challenges Martin's limited view by replying, "So have you. It is called morality."[22] In viewing Alexander's sculpted heads, especially one of Antonia, he states his fear that a severed head represents "an illicit and incomplete relationship" and Alexander underlines this fear by carrying the imagery farther:

> Perhaps an obsession. Freud on Medusa. The head can represent the female genitals, feared not desired.[23]

The remark makes Martin uneasy because it reflects his feelings about his relationship to Antonia and Honor. Women's bodies are the essential and comforting part to Martin in his relationship to them.

Antonia and Palmer, who take on the role of Martin's parents, dispatch him to fetch Honor. Waiting for her in the dense fog he is unable to recall her face although he has met

[22] A Severed Head, p.43.
[23] Ibid., p.44.

her before. The reason for this may be her "animal-like and repellent face."[24] Her first remarks cause him to reflect on his reactions and inaction over his wife's infidelity. Driving through the fog he recognizes her femininity in her headless body as she leans out of the window. He feels a bond with her because of her help to him in getting through the treacherous fog. This is an indication of the role she will play in the remainder of the story. She is transformed in his eyes by the power he sees radiating from her when she confronts the lovers "...like some insolent and powerful captain, ...confronting the sovereign powers whom he was now ready if need be to bend to his will."[25] Honor represents a challenge to the golden pair because she is aware of the reality and unconventional aspects of their relationship and has the power to act against them where Martin does not. He admires Honor's power as he does that of the military heroes he writes about, but he is unable to emulate it.

Honor begins dismantling Palmer's house, removing the things which belong to her. This symbolizes the dismantling of his adulterous liaison with Antonia. She uses her power to force the truth on the complicated relationships of the other characters. The truth eventually brings Martin to a confrontation with reality.

His second significant encounter with Honor occurs in

[24] A Severed Head, p.55.
[25] Ibid., p.58.

Palmer's house when she reveals to Martin certain aspects of her morality. The incident fuels Martin's impression of her as a powerful, almost magical, person. The scene is both artistically subtle and theatrical in its proportions. The setting is dramatic. It takes place on New Year's Eve in candlelight with Antonia's and Palmer's presence lingering over the remains of their meal, now presided over by Honor, and to Martin "it was like an arrival at the shrine of some remote and self-absorbed deity."[26] Once again he is aware of an unconscious link with Honor. He sees in her near ugliness a subject for an artist like Goya. What follows is a touch of the sublime, an inexplicable experience. She will not allow him to touch the Samurai sword she is holding. It is spiritually symbolic to her and she realizes that Martin has no understanding of its meaning. Martin considers his marriage important, Antonia gives him the framework for his morality, but his marriage bond is not sacred to him and he holds no religious beliefs. He learns from Honor that the use of Samurai swords is "not merely an art but a spiritual exercise."[27] For Martin it is only an instrument for severing heads, but she tells him that "being a Christian, you connect spirit with love. These people connect it with control, with power."[28] It is the combination of these qualities that are present in Honor's spirit and morality. She exercises control

[26] A Severed Head, p.93.
[27] Ibid., p.96.
[28] Ibid.

over her will, giving her power, yet she is capable of love. She is a Jew who believes in people not dark gods. As a Jew, she represents a link between modern society's Christian view of the world and ancient, more primitive ones. Modern society disguises the use of power by giving the appearance that an open, loving and democratic morality is in place, whereas ancient society and the one represented by mythology, openly admired and rewarded power and the triumph of the will instead of love. The role of victim and victor is no longer easily identifiable. People, not gods, are the arbiters of morality so that they can control their behaviour to a greater degree.

Martin is moved by the power and reverence with which Honor displays her skill with the sword. She has power, control and a strange beauty with which he eventually falls in love. Honor is an integrated person who sees people and the world as they really exist. She also has courage which enables her to reach out to other people and to act on her convictions. She is not afraid of power, but Martin is.

Their next encounter is a violent one. Martin takes out the rage he feels toward Antonia and Palmer by beating Honor, whose truthfulness brings him to the breaking point. His exposure to Honor has made him aware of his real feelings toward his wife and his friend. He reaches a degree of freedom and at the same time begins to love Honor. His rage reflects his resentment at being treated like a child by the two lovers and his feeling of powerlessness. He finds it un-

bearable that his wife steals his friend, his friend seduces his wife and his brother steals his lover.

In the scene following, Martin isolates himself to reflect on the muddle of his feelings and relationships. Since his coming under the influence of Honor and the power of Antonia and Palmer, London is shrouded by fog. With the use of words like brimstone and newspapers reporting deaths caused by the fog, it is symbolically a hell for Martin, indicating his spiritual torment. Stumbling along beside the Thames in an alcoholic stupor he is aware of the golden haze created by the sun trying to break through the fog. Familiar landmarks come in and out of focus. The landscape reflects the presence of reality which is all around Martin, but he finds it difficult to separate it from his fantasy world. His anguish is real, but his will, his morality is not strong enough to help him find his way. He is drawn to Honor's power as he has been to Antonia's and Palmer's in the past. He is suddenly aware of his love for her and he sets out for Cambridge to find her.

The description of Cambridge contrasts with the London one by its "luxurious brilliance".[29] Martin is compelled by the force of his love for Honor and he sees himself as "the terrible figure of Love as pictured by Dante."[30] It is Honor's power that draws him there. He is seeking a myth, but what he finds is stark reality in the incestuous love scene between

[29] A Severed Head, p.124.
[30] Ibid., p.126.

Palmer and his half-sister. The shock has an amazing effect on Martin. He sees Honor as a woman, an individual separate from his fantasy of her. The contingency of Martin's impetuous journey has destroyed the fantasy of a virgin goddess who has been waiting for him to awaken her sensuality. It wakes him up to reality. In her essay, "Against Dryness," Murdoch states that "reality is not a given whole." This is borne out in the novel. Martin must confront each relationship and fantasy before he faces reality as a whole. The experience exposes him and the reader to the many ways modern man interprets and comes to grips with reality by drawing on psychoanalytic Freudian concepts, Sartre's theories, and mythology, as well as creating new ways of coping with the world.

Palmer appears to be the Totalitarian Man until the incest scene. He is rational, acts on his beliefs and uses his will to control the world about him. He is a Freudian analyst and offers Martin professional sympathy:

> The psyche...has its own mysterious methods of restoring balance. It automatically seeks its advantage, its consolation. It is almost entirely a matter of mechanics, and mechanical models are the best to understand it with.[31]

As A.S. Byatt points out, this "remark is a statement of a partial truth which interests Iris Murdoch very much."[32] She goes on to discuss Murdoch's views in 'On "God" and "Good"' concerning Freud's theories which have had considerable influence on

[31] A Severed Head, p.31.
[32] A.S. Byatt, Iris Murdoch, Harlow, 1976, p.25.

Murdoch's work and Byatt sums them up:

> There are several novels which one could call "mythical" novels in which Miss Murdoch's interest in these mechanisms, in parodies of good, in patterning, leads to the structure seeming to hold more aesthetic power than the individual characters--even though the morality of these novels continues to assert the paramount imperative of observing the free individual.[33]

Palmer is not able to set Martin free by showing him how good he is in forgiving Palmer and Antonia, but the impact of Palmer obsessed by something beyond his control--his passion for his half-sister--gives Martin a sense of power over Palmer. This power helps to restore a sense of balance to their relationship. Martin feels pity for Palmer and Honor because he has seen them together and discovered their dark secret. He survives his wife's infidelity, and because he observes Palmer and Honor he is able to see Palmer more clearly as an individual. Also, this experience helps bring Martin closer to accepting Honor as a real woman rather than a myth.

Once his affair with Antonia is over and his relationship with Honor is terminated, Palmer resumes control and offers Martin his friendship and advice again. He tells Martin to let his imagination help him break the convention which holds him, gaining him freedom to have what he really wants. Martin is not ready to make such decisions. His need for conventional forms still has a hold on his imagination through Antonia and his marriage.

[33]Iris Murdoch,p.26.

Honor and Martin are brought together again by the contingent act of Georgie's attempted suicide. Martin realizes he has avoided seeing Georgie as a separate being because he did not want her to exist outside of the fantasy world he had created in their relationship and admits, "I had enjoyed but never had to pay."[34] Although he is as yet unaware of Antonia's and Alexander's relationship, which has caused Georgie's suicide attempt, he knows that his love for both women is dead. Knowing that Honor and Palmer plan to leave England he makes a desperate appeal to Honor. He tells her that his marriage is over and that he loves her. She in turn tells him to return to his wife and reality and not to think that his love for her "is more than a dream," explaining to him what she sees, but he cannot:

> Your love for me does not inhabit the real world. ...Because of what I am and because of what you saw I am a terrible object of fascination for you. I am a severed head such as primitive tribes and old alchemists used to use,...And who knows but that long acquaintance with a severed head might lead to strange knowledge. ...As real people we do not exist for each other.[35]

Throughout the novel Honor has been connected with dark gods and mythological allusions because of her Jewish ancestry, appearance and her position as a professor of anthropology who spends time studying primitive societies. She understands that at present Martin is in love with a myth, not a real

[34] A Severed Head, p.173.
[35] Ibid., p.182.

woman. She intimates that the cost of believing in myths is high and far removed from ordinary life. She is aware that real people are destructive of myths; a view held by Murdoch. She sees his love as destructive, similar to the kind he had for Georgie. Martin wishes to worship Honor and she sends him away because he is "living on dreams".[36]

It is only upon the final destruction of Martin's fantasy marriage that he awakens to reality. Antonia tells him that she is going away with Alexander whom she will marry and whom she has loved even before she married Martin. Martin's unreal understanding of his perfect marriage is shattered by the truth. Antonia admits that she also was living in a dream until Palmer woke her up and she tells Martin that he dreams along without facing things. Since she managed to hold Martin's love in spite of her infidelity with Palmer, she assumes that she can do the same where her love with Alexander is concerned. Her experience with Palmer has given her courage to be honest with little cost to her. She tries to continue her manipulation of Martin, explaining that since he was unconsciously living in an unreal world and loving her, he should be able to continue loving her, because now that the truth is out it will be better. She believes that if they are good and brave and will it to be it can happen. Her liberal view of morality is a net of terms and theories with which she is trying to hold Martin's love; "I must keep

[36]A Severed Head,p.183.

you in my loving net."[37]

It is at this point Martin knows that Antonia's morality, which he has willingly accepted, is shallow and limiting. He has allowed her views to imprison his will and imagination. The "loving net" keeps Martin a child in his relationship with Antonia and she is free to choose other real husbands, while she remains loved by all without having to pay any great price. Martin is not unkind to Antonia for wakening him to the truth, because he has gained his freedom without a struggle, without paying a great price, because he never had a real marriage with her. Martin is free from Antonia's "loving net" but he is unable to free himself from the extreme love he feels for Honor.

Accepting the futility of such a love he performs a ritualistic assassination of it, by forcing himself to go and watch her leaving the country with her brother. The fog has lifted and London returns to a bright world. Martin sees the necessity for self-reliance in overcoming the moral tyranny he has experienced in order to emerge from his personal hell, to survive. The religious symbolism in this scene underlines Murdoch's theme that in a world which has lost its religious beliefs, as Martin professes he has, man must create through his imagination his own morality and not depend on myth or fantasy. Love is the key to this morality. In this scene Martin sees at last three people separate from

[37]A Severed Head,p.190.

himself. He acknowledges the fact that Honor is mortal and that she has not altered since he first met her but his need for a master transformed reality into fantasy and made her into a severed head. His love for her has brought him to reality and he "could see, in her ugliness, her beauty."[38]

The final scene is like the beginning of a new book. Sitting alone in his flat Martin acknowledges his situation as "the first moments of some entirely new era."[39] Until this point Martin has not been able to experience real emotional pain because he was not living in the real world. Now he "surrendered to grief and to the physical pain which is the mark of true emotion."[40] His pain began at the airport forcing him to leave before Honor's departure, which he could not bear to witness. While he grieves she enters. She has stayed because Palmer was "frantic" to get away from her. Whether as an explanation for Palmer's frantic leave-taking or for the possibility of a relationship between her and Martin, Honor asks him if he recalls the legend of Gyges and Candaules. Although he can recall the tale he no longer sees myth as significant and asks Honor if it is possible to "have relations with a severed head."[41] In analysing their position he states that the dream they have been living in is over and that they must take hold of each other in order to stay together in confronting reality. He is ready to

[38] A Severed Head, p.198.
[39] Ibid., p.201
[40] Ibid., p.202.
[41] Ibid., p.205.

face reality. Freedom and love are the possibilities of such an awakening. They both realize that chance, or contingency, is involved and they are willing to take the risk.

The closing chapter is inconclusive yet satisfying. The imagery and symbolism seem confusing, but they are put into proper perspective by the reality of the two people. Martin is facing the real world. He and Honor accept one another on equal terms. The possibility of real people destroying myth and contingency destroying fantasy are clearly evident. Murdoch does not have the pair fall lovingly into one another's arms; "since reality is incomplete, art must not be too much afraid of incompleteness. Literature must always represent a battle between real people and images."[42]

The power of victor over victim present in The Flight from the Enchanter is not as powerfully portrayed in A Severed Head, but the concept that freedom from power comes through the acceptance of reality is more clearly presented. The net Martin must escape is the same one Rosa must crawl out from under. Freedom cannot be attained by retreating into fantasy or worshipping myths in order to avoid moral responsibility. Professional liberators like Freud or Sartre are shown as possible enslavers. Imagination is seen as the liberator, the guide to morality, by both artist and psychoanalyst in the novel. Love is seen as the moral referent helpful to survive reality and contingency. Alexander attempts to capture this

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

in his sculptures:

> I've never wanted to do an imaginary realistic head before. ...We don't believe in human nature in the old Greek way any more. There is nothing between schematized symbols and caricature. What I want here is some sort of impossible liberation. ...I shall go on playing with it and interrogating it and perhaps it will tell me something.[43]

What Alexander is seeking is a reflection of Murdoch's theory about art and morality. They differ for reasons connected with sense and form. The idea of a "loving respect for a reality other than oneself is as relevant to making a vase as it is to writing a novel" for "the artist strives to make what he creates self-contained and as far as possible self-explanatory."[44] The critical question is: does this apply to this novel? Certainly the characters in the novel have an independence from the author. The work is autobiographical in form and therefore more selective and limited in its characterization. The imagery and mythological references working with the action of the novel create an imaginative view of morality which is believable.

Martin's love for homely Honor renders her beautiful. The beauty is based on his seeing her as a real woman. He is first aware of her beauty when he finds her with her half-brother and he is shocked into a view of her as a woman detached from his mythical concept of her. It is through his

[43] A Severed Head, p.43.
[44] "The Sublime and the Good," pp.54-5.

love that we see beauty and love are not separate from reality or morality. What is being worked out in the novel is part of Murdoch's theory which is discussed in her essay, "The Sublime and the Good":

> Art and morality are...one. ...The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality.[45]

In the novel, Murdoch is trying to show how individuals trap themselves by convention and neurosis so that they are unable to realize others as real and separate from them. The degree to which the characters of the novel do this reflects their morality and ability to love others. In A Severed Head Murdoch succeeds in presenting her view of morality through a comic presentation of exaggerated moral theories, applied to unusual problems in a bizarre social setting.

[45]"The Sublime and the Good,"pp.51-2.

IV

CONCLUSION

The two novels discussed in this study are successful in achieving a great part of the task that Murdoch has set herself as a novelist. They are inventive works of art presenting solid characterization and a deeper, more complex view of humanity against a realistic modern setting than is commonly found in contemporary novels. She evokes a concept of morality which is possible, clearly related to and arising from the muddle of modern ethics of power, lack of religious belief and growing preoccupation with the self. In this way she provides the reader with some possible solutions to moral questions. Her style has moments of eloquence and starkness that balance the dialogue and description in a unique way. My chief criticism is of the dense, almost superfluous imagery which dominates the characterization in her work. At times it impedes understanding of what is actually happening to the characters; it distracts the reader instead of making the theme more comprehensible. However, it would seem that this is due to her determination to move away from what she calls crystalline or journalistic novels. A great amount of concentration is needed on the part of the reader in order to grasp the whole of the picture she is painting.

In an interview in 1962, Murdoch claimed that her theme is "the conflict between the artist and the saint."[1]

[1]"Iris Murdoch," The Observer Profile in The Observer Weekend Review, London, Sunday, June 17, 1962.

It may be understood from this comment that she is looking for a supportive relationship between imagination or art and morals, an idea she elaborates in "The Sublime and the Good." The problem is one of creating complete characters within her own style and of harmonizing the conflict between heart and mind, as she explains it in the same article. The Flight from the Enchanter and A Severed Head were studied for this reason. They, along with her first novel Under the Net and her most recent one The Sea, The Sea, seem to come closest to her goals.

In her first work the protagonist, Jake Donaghue, is an artist whose struggle is the centre of the piece. In his moral development he encounters a saint-like father figure in Hugo Belfounder. As an artist he achieves personal and artistic freedom by facing reality and by loving others as beings separate from himself. The main character in The Sea, The Sea is a retired actor and playwright, Charles The saint-like person in this work is a youth, Titus, whom the playwright wishes was his son. Personal freedom comes to Charles when he faces reality rather than trying to escape from it and when he learns to accept love free from power or control. Artistic maturity comes to him, or at least becomes a possibility, through the process of writing his memoirs which form the novel. Murdoch blends many styles in this work as she does in A Severed Head. Diary, biography, legend and romantic novel are present in this new creation. The

imagery is much more vivid and an integral part of the plot and theme. An important aspect of the novel is the idea of an artist retiring from the very reason for his existence, the striving for perfection in his art, or the concept of humans retiring from the reality of their existence, not just from work. Retirement from work allows humans time to reflect upon and redirect their lives as Charles discovers during his brief retirement by the sea.

This newest work is prone to tricks of magic and fantasy, but they are pared down to a conceivable level. The characters are of a more approachable and natural scale than in previous works. Indeed most of the characters seem to be more free of the novelist's will than in preceding novels. One aspect of the novel which may seem incredible to some readers is the mystical quality given to the sea, especially the presence of a sea monster. The monster is part of the mental baggage Charles has been carrying about with him. He tries to explain it away as a reoccurrence of a "bad trip" from a distant experience with the drug LSD. The association is with dark spiritual evil which is universal, inescapable and ever present within man. The image is too frightening for Charles to confront. Another fantastic aspect of the plot is the protagonist's miraculous escape from drowning which is later explained by his memory of being lifted from the boiling sea by the superhuman actions of his cousin, a mystic. The introduction of eastern mysticism and mind-over-

body "tricks", including his cousin's self-willed, non-medical death, are a "task for the credulity of a sceptical westerner" as Charles puts it.[2] At least, in this work magic and mysticism are dealt with in a more direct way, confronted openly, rather than being obscured in the action. The reader is expected to be as sceptical as Charles is initially.

She has written so many novels between the two studied in the previous chapters and her latest, The Sea, The Sea, that it is difficult to single out particular ones as resounding failures or great successes. With each novel her craft is progressing but she has, as yet, to produce a great work of art. A Severed Head is thought to be too playful, or too fantastic by some, but The Unicorn (1963), while intriguing, is one of her least successful works mainly due to its excesses. On the other hand, A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970) succeeds by refining the techniques used in the early novels and by presenting her ideas of morality and love through less exotic characters. In a quite recent work, The Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974), Murdoch provides a fresh look at the ideas presented in both The Flight from the Enchanter and A Severed Head, and it is an absorbing novel of action and ideas. A brief examination of these later works will give an indication of the direction in which Murdoch is heading.

The work in which fantasy and myth confuse and detract from the theme is The Unicorn. It is a Gothic romance which

[2]Iris Murdoch, The Sea, The Sea, London,1978,p.410.

stumbles over its allegorical, mystical and literary referents. The mystical fantasy which prevents the characters from gaining moral insight or personal freedom also obscures their real moral dilemma from the reader. The setting, Gaze Castle and the mansion Riders on a remote coastline, and the bizarre plot centering around a modern imprisoned "princess", Hannah Crean-Smith, who is surrounded by slightly mad servants and fanciful rescuers, make it difficult for the reader to discern the serious moral problems presented. The fantasy is too much. The most memorable scenes deal with the landscape and nature, whereas the theme suffers from the extraordinary situation of the plot. The shattering of the illusion that Hannah and the others build around her imprisonment is in keeping with Murdoch's view that reality is destructive of myth and contingency is destructive of fantasy. All attempts to confront reality are ineffectual and the contingency does not destroy fantasy, but heightens the fantastic aspects of the plot. The moral dilemma is overwhelming. Although the story is intricate and interesting, an essential element is missing from the tragedy. There is a lack of understanding on the part of the survivors of the tragedy and of their part in it. Only Denis Nolan (the saint figure) sees his guilt and accepts his role of suffering for Hannah. The protagonist, Marion, recognizes that the two families of the story never understand one another and consequently create their own illusions around the unicorn of the title, Hannah, and are unable to

gain a degree of freedom for her or themselves. As in The Flight from the Enchanter, power is an important theme, but the main moral theme concerns good and God. Most obvious is an argument on the failure of religious belief in God, centering around the unicorn imagery, to provide freedom from power and guilt. The novel succeeds in illustrating Murdoch's concept of freedom defined in the essay "The Idea of Perfection", as "a function of the progressive attempt to see an object clearly" and consequently, as an active pursuit which is "essentially something progressive, something infinitely perfectible."[3] Since the novel is a tragedy, it is the failure to work this concept out which dominates.

In contrast to The Unicorn's failings is the success of A Fairly Honourable Defeat. It is a tragedy on a scale which is more comprehensible, because it uses a less fantastic setting and characters. In many ways it is a re-working of both The Flight from the Enchanter and A Severed Head. The enchanter and liberator is a magnetic man named Julius. Julius is a biochemist, an independently wealthy professor who has given up a job developing weapons of biological warfare. Allusions are made to his international fame gained by his leaving his former job, and to his experience at Dachau. He is at home in neither "impoverished Europe" nor prosperous America, and like Mischa Fox he derives power from manipulating others. He is unable to love others as separate unique beings,

[3]Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," The Yale Review,53,(March,1964),p.361.

but only in an incidental fashion. He amuses himself by confronting others with the truth of their moral weakness and he destroys Rupert by this method. Like Honor and Mischa he is referred to as an "exotic foreign object".[4] The undercurrent of violence, present in all Murdoch's novels, blends well with the action and highlights the failure of rational control over evil or power, and the intrinsic qualities of what is morally good. Gentle, selfless Tallis, who understands the real human needs of others, is able to act against evil and violence where the others cannot or will not. Characterization in the novel is especially well worked out so that the actions and decisions taken, although unpredictable, seem to be the result of real people confronting contingency. A.S. Byatt states that "both reader and characters are drawn through the experience of attention to the being of others which Miss Murdoch sees as the heart of morality."[5] This pertains to the treatment of love in various relationships in the novel. It is especially evident in the relationship between the homosexual couple in the work.

Another fairly recent and successful work is The Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974). As the title indicates, its major concern is with the mechanical aspects of love which can dominate and destroy people if they are unable to understand them. The same may be said for the concept of goodness or

[4]Iris Murdoch, A Fairly Honourable Defeat, Harmondsworth,1972,p.15.
[5]A.S. Byatt, Iris Murdoch, Harlow,1976,p.31.

virtue in the novel. The idea of a virtuous and loving net is given another dimension here. Harriet is a kind, loving and virtuous wife and mother. She throws a loving net around her husband, Blaise, and her son, David, which in the first case allows Blaise to deceive her and avoid confronting reality, and in the second case protects David from the realities of mature love and sex. By forgiving his past infidelity and condoning her husband's extra-marital relationship, actually encouraging it, Harriet is behaving in an unacceptable way. For Harriet, virtue lies in sustaining loving thoughts and a loving attitude toward her husband and son rather than in accepting them for the flesh and blood people they are. Their lives are set into roles of loving attitudes but contingency upsets the patterns which all the characters have set out in their relationships. As in The Unicorn most of the characters have based their love of others on illusions they have created about the virtue of their beloved and/or themselves. Guilt and suffering result in violence and, for some, a degree of freedom. The artist of this work is a writer of popular thrillers that have spawned a television series, and he is a forerunner of Charles Arrowby in The Sea, The Sea. Also, like Arrowby, he gains a degree of freedom by liberating himself from a tormenting, unrequited love which, in this case, haunts him from the grave. The real people of this novel destroy myth and the fantasy world they have designed for themselves. As in most of Murdoch's novels,

the female characters dominate the action. They are the manipulators, as well as the ones who define their place in the world in accordance with relationships with others, while the male characters are concerned with themselves. The two children in the novel play an interesting role as victims. Their innocence and virtue have intrinsic power affecting the morality of the adults.

The novel provides a broader range of relationships than The Unicorn which deals with similar moral ideas. The imagery and descriptive passages have a sensuous quality that are only hinted at in most of the earlier works. The action, which often has a bizarre quality in Murdoch's work, seems more natural here because of the exposure of the mechanical aspects of human relationships.

Iris Murdoch has been persistent and prolific in presenting a similar theme and idea of morality from many angles. She is not a dabbler in novel writing and has been taken seriously by literary critics. Some of the authors hold similar views but provide fresh ways of looking at the same aspects of the novels. The critics selected give a good cross-section of Murdoch criticism.

In her most recent study of Murdoch's work, A.S. Byatt provides a concise analysis of Murdoch's novels in relation to the philosophers and writers from whom she takes her inspiration, with special consideration given to Shakespeare, as well as those from whom she differs. The study also deals with the

continuing problem presented by Murdoch's work, which is, where does it fit in with recent British literature, how can it be classified? The controversy, as Byatt presents it, centres on the split in opinion of those who describe Murdoch as "the heir to liberal humanism and technical subtlety of E.M. Forster," and the others who compare her novels to "best-selling writers of melodrama (Daphne du Maurier), or detective stories for lady dons."[6] After introducing her study by raising the problems critics have in accepting Murdoch's world and categorizing her work, Byatt goes on "to elucidate some of the ideas, about life and about fiction, behind the construction of this world."[7] She points out the fact that Murdoch, as a philosopher, is concerned with issues such as the relationship between art and morals, and their "attempts to distinguish truth from fantasy" especially "in the presentation of a sufficiently complex image of the human personality," as well as a concern for discerning what humans believe to be "Good".[8] A very clear analysis of the concepts presented in "Against Dryness" follows with references to the philosophers who have provided background material on which Murdoch has based some of her critical concepts, such as Gilbert Ryle, A.J. Ayer and Stuart Hampshire.

The philosophical background of the terms Totalitarian Man and Ordinary Language Man are discussed in relation to

[6] Iris Murdoch, p.5.
[7] Ibid., p.6.
[8] Ibid.

Murdoch's views and the use of these concepts in her work. Also, by referring to essays such as "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," "The Sublime and the Good" and "On 'God' and 'Good'," Byatt is able to elaborate on important aspects of Murdoch's ethics such as truth, virtue and freedom. She deals with one of the basic tenets of Murdoch's aesthetic and moral philosophy, the concept of "attention". It is the word Simone Weil used "to describe the constantly renewed attempt to see things, objects, people, moral situations, truly as they are, uncoloured by our own personal fantasies or needs for consolation."[9] Byatt goes on to link Murdoch's concept of freedom with "attention" and also its relationship to "Kant's concept of Achtung (attention) or respect for moral law."[10] The analysis links Murdoch's aesthetic and moral view to her theories of art and love. Also, a major term presented in both Murdoch's philosophical writing and novels, contingency, is dealt with along with a discussion of her moral view as it relates to modern man and the modern novel. The introductory discussion ends with a helpful look at Murdoch's view of art as it relates to literature, in particular, Shakespearean tragedy.

A discussion using specific novels in relation to the points brought up in the opening section follows. The conclusion of the study returns to the initial problems she

[9] Iris Murdoch, p.9.
[10] Ibid.

touches on. She defines the place and role Murdoch's work takes in modern literature. She sees Murdoch's work as "novels which combine old realist morals, and old realist techniques, with a new kind of literary playfulness of which the reader needs to be aware."[11] Byatt closes with a comparison of Under the Net and The Black Prince in order to highlight Murdoch's view of the artist's role in society, especially the writer, as this is the role she has taken. She points out Murdoch's awareness of "the relations of author and character" which Bradley in The Black Prince states for her. Through Bradley, Murdoch discusses the greatness of Shakespeare's Hamlet. "It is an extraordinary example of one of the high moments of art where there is no contradiction between words and things, between men and the images of men."[12] Byatt concludes:

> Another thing for which one increasingly admires Miss Murdoch is aesthetic courage: knowing, better than most writers, the historical difficulties of writing good novels at all, she continues to produce comic metaphysical adventures of a high order.[13]

In another scholarly book on Murdoch's work, Peter Wolfe draws attention to how she creates moral values through a thematic approach to her first eight novels. First, after a brief introduction, he outlines what he believes to be her philosophical values and her literary approach. This general

[11] Iris Murdoch, p.35.
[12] Ibid., p.38.
[13] Ibid.

discussion explains the significance of his title, The Disciplined Heart. Briefly, the title refers to several ideas held by Murdoch which are explained by propositions put forth by Wolfe, one being that "Murdoch takes great care to dramatize the doctrine of love as nonviolent apprehension of another."[14] And he expands this by explaining Murdoch's view of reality in relationship to love and the formation of value systems. Murdoch, he states, is seeking a means for individuals to fulfill themselves as social beings without avoiding reality and not at the expense of jettisoning moral values and ethics. In his view, her "metaphysical charter is largely incomplete. All that she has formulated to date is a body of flexible principles and a direction."[15]

His chapter about The Flight from the Enchanter concerns itself with the theme "The Fragmentation and Fusion of Society". Wolfe sees the focus of the novel as "human freedom and the obstacles we must overcome in order to be free."[16] He views this work as producing a broader social view than previous works in which the philosophical and thematic concerns are integrated into the characterization which is master over the plot. This is contrary to his outlook on the success of A Severed Head. The characterization in this later novel is flat whereas the tone is lively. It is also a novel about personal freedom and society's effect on individuals. However,

[14] Peter Wolfe, The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and Her Novels, Columbia, Missouri, 1966, p.30.
[15] Ibid., p.41.
[16] Ibid., p.68.

specific ideologies are dealt with in the work compared with the general ones found in The Flight from the Enchanter. A Severed Head deals with the pressures and influence of external power on individuals, while the earlier work looks at power related to individuals. Although many of the ideas Wolfe presents in his work are discussed by other critics like Byatt, Baldanza and Rabinovitz, they are given a slightly different presentation and, in some cases, different connotation. The essential difference in his study is its social focus. He always has in mind Murdoch's view of man in relation to society, as well as the broader reality of nature, fate and contingency that man exists in. He concludes by commenting on Murdoch's artistry:

> Her fidelity to certain cultural and aesthetic conventions of the novel--the uniqueness of character, the particularity of time and setting, the authenticated presentation of daily experience--allows her to experiment in literary form while maintaining a uniform attitude toward the question of the individual's life in society.[17]

A contrary opinion to Wolfe's is held by Linda Kuehl, who argues in her essay, "Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Magician/The Magician as Artist," that "her works come through neither as novels of ideas, for they are too obscure, nor as novels of character, for they are just too playful."[18] She sees The Flight from the Enchanter, A Severed Head and The

[17]The Disciplined Heart,p.215.

[18]Linda Kuehl, "Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Magician/The Magician as Artist," Modern Fiction Studies,15,No.3, (Autumn,1969)p.360.

Unicorn as the most skilful portrayals of "a combination of pyrotechnics and philosophy, a design of bizarre effects intended to convey reality as contingent and eccentric."[19] Her essay is interesting and pertinent in relation to the preceding chapters of this study because it concentrates on the three novels mentioned above, which Kuehl, at the time she wrote the essay ten years ago, felt were Murdoch's most effective novels in working out "a combination of pyrotechnics and philosophy." In the first half of her essay Kuehl discusses the pyrotechnics of these works: elements such as the Gothic Gaze Castle, Victorian mansions like the Lynch-Gibbons' Rembers or Mischa Fox's exotic London townhouse, as well as the mysterious key figures in each of the novels (Hannah Crean-Smith, Mischa Fox and Honor Klein). She concentrates on why she thinks these elements, "Gothic setting, flamboyant characterization and melodramatic plots give rise to ornate networks of intrigue", and concludes by asking if these three novels are "legitimately contingent and eccentric or are they random and anomalous?"[20]

In the second part of her essay, Kuehl assesses the artistic success of Murdoch's literary techniques. Essentially, she thinks that she has failed to create characters that are free and separate entities from herself and that she creates "predictable and predetermined types."[21] Especially predict-

[19]"Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Magician/The Magician as Artist,"p.347.
[20]Ibid.,p.353.
[21]Ibid.

able are the legendary figures such as Mischa, Hannah or Honor. Kuehl sees these figures endowed with "too much significance" by the mythical implications associated with them.[22] She sees the building of characters through the use of allusions as seriously at fault because as "serious allegory... their existence is never justified."[23] At this point Kuehl inserts a footnote referring the reader to a study by Robert Scholes which asserts the opposite opinion which is contrary to statements made by Murdoch in interviews in which she denies any conscious intention to create allusions of the kind discussed in both Kuehl's and Scholes' studies.[24] As well, she thinks Murdoch's main characters are invested with "excessive philosophical connotations" through the use of allusions and insinuations.[25] Murdoch fails to create characters in the 19th-Century mold of Henry James or George Eliot whom she admires as artists. It is Kuehl's contention that "Murdoch's Gothic settings complete the tyranny of form over character."[26] It is her view that Murdoch fails to create fiction that presents a fresh concept of the liberal personality, because she embraces "ideas not her own, and, especially, by appropriating literary devices from conventional fiction."[27] Also, Kuehl's criticism is strongly subjective and is particularly evident

[22] "Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Magician/The Magician as Artist," p.254.
[23] Ibid., p.355
[24] "Iris Murdoch," The Observer Weekend Review, (June 17, 1962).
[25] "Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Magician/..." p.354.
[26] Ibid., p.359
[27] Ibid.

in her assessment of Martin and Honor of A Severed Head:

> ...a romantic relationship between Martin and Honor is unfeasible. As a lovable buffoon, he has not been prepared for such a drastic change, as a hideous Medusa, she is too freakish to excite any man.[28]

The essay does contain a reasonable discussion of some of the major flaws of Murdoch's imagery and plot, while at the same time articulating the strong reaction of many readers to her extraordinary characters and proclivity for unusual sexual relationships. It clearly expresses a certain disdain for Murdoch's playfulness with traditional modes.

The philosophical precepts involved in Murdoch's literature are also assessed and interestingly defined by G.S. Fraser in The Modern Writer and His World (1964). For him, Murdoch's fictional imagination is the synthesis of two ideas: 1) "Everything must happen in accordance with the laws of logic, therefore nothing that happens is intrinsically surprising," and 2) "Everything that happens is contingent, therefore it is free, it involves, or can involve, a total response of the human personality, therefore it is always surprising."[29] He has a response to readers and critics who see Murdoch's fiction as "constructed from her thinking about life rather than a world imitated ...from her observations of it."[30] His brief discussion of Murdoch's work concludes that "something

[28]"Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Magician/The Magician as Artist,"p.358.

[29]G.S. Fraser, The Modern Writer and His World,3rd edition,London,(1964),p.185.

[30]Ibid.

is being shown to us which is quite odd and extraordinary; something is being demonstrated to us which, in some obscure way, we knew already, but now know in a more disturbing way."[31]

Rubin Rabinovitz's monograph on Murdoch provides some comprehensive background on her sources of influence and is a good general study of her first eleven novels. Beginning with what he sees as her main concerns, ethics, moral code and behaviour, he states that "her fictional characters often find themselves in moral dilemmas, hard put to discover a solution because they are believers in faulty ideologies."[32] In examining her philosophical point of view, Rabinovitz compares Murdoch with Sartre and the existentialist movement by discussing her critical work Sartre; Romantic Rationalist (1953). The major focus of the study is the importance of Murdoch's philosophical ideas or ethics as they appear in her novels. He centres on important points of her theory of literature such as the role of love, art and morality in literature. In his discussion of specific works he indicates the significance of the more obvious mythological allusions and imagery.

Of particular interest is his discussion of Simone Weil's influence on Murdoch's views of power as depicted in The Flight from the Enchanter, Weil's view being that the ultimate possession of power is the complete domination of one human being over another. Murdoch has used this idea

[31] The Modern Writer and His World, p.185

[32] Rubin Rabinovitz, Iris Murdoch, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, New York, (1968), p.3.

for the central theme of the novel with Mischa Fox trying to gain this kind of power over Rosa, among others. Rosa's failing in the novel is her inability to love others, especially Mischa, by apprehending him as an equal and by failing to focus her attention on others in order to comprehend them as being of similar complexity to herself. The concept of attention, "The accurate apprehension of another person's reality," is also Weil's.[33] Fantasy is directly opposed to the idea of attention. Rabinovitz points out that the enchanter recognizes the fantasies of a potential slave and tailors himself to these fantasies so that the slave is trapped both by his own fantasies and by the enchanter's spell. This is basically what happens to Rosa in her relationships with the Lusiewicz brothers and Mischa Fox.

In his analysis of A Severed Head, he states Murdoch's view that "psychoanalysis is a muddled embryonic science."[34] This is to counter Stuart Hampshire's view that a psychoanalyst can be used as an ultimate arbiter in moral questions. In the novel she sets up the analyst, Palmer Anderson, as moral arbiter to show how his attitude of permissiveness leads to moral anarchy. Rabinovitz also discusses Murdoch's use of Freudian ideas. More objectively than Kuehl, he acknowledges the difficulties in accepting the love relationship between Honor and Martin.

[33]Rubin Rabinovitz, Iris Murdoch,p.33.
[34]Ibid.,p.29.

His conclusion is an assessment of Murdoch's work as a whole. Several weaknesses are elaborated upon. He suggests that the philosophically uninformed reader often finds her work mystifying. He asserts that despite her denials in interviews that she is a philosophical novelist, it is obvious to readers who have read the background material that her books are essentially about ideas. As well, he points up weaknesses in other areas of her theory of literature, such as the problem of subjectivity and solipsism, and authorial anonymity. This study is helpful for readers who wish to understand the complexities of her novels.

A critic who has written widely on Murdoch's work is Frank Baldanza. His essay "Iris Murdoch and the Theory of Personality" is most helpful in placing her theories and work into focus in relation to English literary tradition. He discusses the problem facing Murdoch in putting her theories into practice. Baldanza believes elucidation of her literary views is necessary because of the difficulty she faces as a fiction writer, namely, that clearly defined philosophical ideas lead to a clear novel and that when the philosophical path becomes cluttered the novels grow more complex.

Following his general discussion of Murdoch's purpose, based on her Bergen lecture at Yale University in 1959 and "a polemical sketch" in Encounter (1961) as well as her place in philosophical thought and modern literature, Baldanza turns to a discussion of A Severed Head to see how she puts into

operation her views developed in her academic writings and with the experience of four published novels behind her. The discussion is well developed, making solid use of her philosophical writings, outlining her literary analysis and views. He shows how the novel as a whole details Murdoch's moral, artistic and philosophical idea of personality in development toward freer, more integrated beings. This essay deals with how she succeeds in presenting her philosophical ideas on literature and is extremely helpful to students of Iris Murdoch's work.

To date, there is a large body of critical work, reviews and interviews with Murdoch, dealing with both her theory and practice. From the sampling above one is able to see the wide scope of this criticism. Even popular magazines have had articles analyzing her work, some of which do more to confuse a would-be reader than offer any valuable insights. It would appear that, to date, Murdoch has provided provocative invention and theoretical fuel for literary experimentation which has borne some fruit, but as yet, has not reached the mark she has set for the modern novel. The greatest problem she has to overcome is the feeling conveyed to the reader that her novels are artfully contrived moral messages. As a philosopher, interested in concepts of morality, she has been trained to manipulate ideas into word pictures. The transformation of this craft into literature can result in a sophisticated form of trickery. Murdoch does tread a fine line, at

times, between trickery and art in her novels. The way in which we understand her art depends on the way we see art, and according to her it "will reveal what we hold to be valuable and (the same thing) what we take the world to be fundamentally like."[35] Certainly this depends on the reader's literary, philosophical and moral experience, so that it is not surprising to find such a wide variety of critical interpretation and response to her work.

Finally, during an interview on television which was one of a series titled "Men of Ideas", later documented in a book of the same title, Murdoch answered the question, "When you are writing a novel on the one hand and philosophy on the other, are you conscious that these are two radically different kinds of writing?"[36] She states that she is aware of the difference and explains further that "philosophical writing is not self-expression, it involves a disciplined removal of the personal voice. But there is a kind of self-expression which remains in literature, together with all the playfulness and mystification of art. The literary writer deliberately leaves a space for his reader to play in."[37] These aspects of playfulness and mystification of art, which allow the reader room to play in, are the very things that make Murdoch's novels successful art, despite the weaknesses already pointed out.

[35]Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," Chicago Review,13,(Autumn,1959),p.43.
[36]Bryan Magee, ed., Men of Ideas, London,(1978),p.264.
[37]Ibid.,p.265.

The playful aspect of her work gives the reader's imagination exercise, enabling it to reach beyond personal experience of daily life. Even the element of mystification adds a kind of realism to her novels since, in reality, not everything is revealed or made clear to us in our daily lives.

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