

**A STUDY IN SUFFERING: THE SAINTS AND  
DEMONS IN THE NOVELS OF IRIS MURDOCH**

---

**DEBBIE MATHIS BROWN**

A STUDY IN SUFFERING: THE SAINTS AND DEMONS  
IN THE NOVELS OF IRIS MURDOCH

---

An Abstract  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

---

by  
Debbie Mathis Brown

---

December, 1978



## ABSTRACT

This study deals with character types in the novels of a contemporary British novelist, Iris Murdoch. Miss Murdoch is a philosopher-novelist, and in her novels are often interweaving moral lessons. This thesis will study: 1) Miss Murdoch's philosophy involving suffering and how certain characters suffer in order to save others; 2) the moral battle involving the two broad categories of characters, called saints and demons (these saints and demons are subdivided further into more specific groups); and 3) the transformational scenes in the novels which indicate a victory for the saints.

Miss Murdoch, a student of such philosophers as Kant, Hegel, and Simone Weil, has developed her own ideas on such concepts as love, freedom and suffering. She uses the characters within her novels as spokesmen for her idea that certain people must suffer in order to "save" others. Her definition of salvation is "a more complete realization of others' needs."

The two basic character types involved in teaching these moral lessons on suffering are the saints and demons. The saints are the sufferers, those who consciously suffer or take punishment in order to save the other characters. Most of the suffering is generated by the demons, those who have been mistreated or who are simply evil, and who feed upon imprisoning or torturing others, especially the saints. There are certain variations on the saints and demons. Mainly, they

are siblings or children of saints and demons. These variations help to illustrate the chaos resulting from saint-demon clashes.

The battles between the saints and demons culminate in transformational scenes, where one or more characters become changed into saints, or at least, better people. These transformational scenes involve water imagery, thus denoting the cleansing ritual symbolized in the Christian baptism. Thus, Miss Murdoch's saints win the ultimate victory, and the novels end optimistically.



A STUDY IN SUFFERING: THE SAINTS AND DEMONS  
IN THE NOVELS OF IRIS MURDOCH

---

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

---

by  
Debbie Mathis Brown

December, 1978

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Debbie Mathis Brown entitled "A Study in Suffering: The Saints and Demons in the Novels of Iris Murdoch." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Clara Alford

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

Lewis C. Tatham

Second Committee Member

Edward E. Irwin

Third Committee Member

Accepted for the  
Graduate Council:

William H. Ellis

Dean of the Graduate School

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Clarence Ikerd for his inspirational guidance and for his interest in Iris Murdoch, which aided in the writing of this paper.

Dr. Lewis Tatham and Dr. Ed Irwin have been invaluable as readers of my paper and as instructors in other areas of literature related to the Murdoch study. I would also like to thank Dr. Frank Baldanza of Bowling Green State University for his helpful book on Iris Murdoch.

Finally, I would like to thank Iris Murdoch herself for being the dynamic writer that she is.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. SAINTS . . . . .	11
III. DEMONS . . . . .	41
IV. VARIATIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND SACRIFICES . . . . .	60
V. CONCLUSION . . . . .	75
IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	77

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Iris Murdoch is a contemporary British philosopher-novelist. Her primary philosophical concerns are with ideas of freedom, suffering, moral and ethical questions, love, and the nature of goodness. Her novels are vehicles for the expression of her philosophies on these subjects. She is a serious novelist interested in coming to terms, by means of her fiction, with real experiential aspects of ideas like power, freedom and love; but she always does so in terms of a totally realized narrative which makes its appeal entirely as narration. To deal in philosophical ideas without turning the novel into a philosophical treatise involves certain compromises. "One of Miss Murdoch's critics, Rubin Rabinovitz, finds himself uneasy about these dodges, which he catalogues as 'to introduce the ideas in subtle forms, to provide alternatives for the ideas, to introduce her own ideas through a minor or unsympathetic character.' But it is these very compromises that keep her devoted readers alert, and what Mr. Rabinovitz sees as bafflement of mystification is to them a challenge."<sup>1</sup> The issue is whether one sees philosophy as a clear-cut systematization or as the

<sup>1</sup>Frank Baldanza, Iris Murdoch (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 13. The quotation is from Rabinovitz, Iris Murdoch (New York: Columbia Press, 1968), pp. 43-44.

excitement of a disturbing and exciting handling of ideas.<sup>2</sup> Through Miss Murdoch's wit and sheer brilliance as a writer, her novels stand as exciting reading, whether philosophical or not.

Miss Murdoch was born in Dublin in 1919, although her "Irishness" only comes across in The Red and the Green, a "historical" novel set in Dublin at the time of the 1916 Easter Rebellion. Her early education was at the Froebel Education Institute, London, and at the progressive Badminton School, Bristol. From 1938 until 1942, she read Classical Moderations and Greats at Somerville College, Oxford, and worked also in ancient history and philosophy. She has said that she might very easily have specialized in archaeology, had the war not interrupted her academic work. But desirous of serving in those pressing times, she worked as Assistant Principal in the Treasury from 1942 until 1944, when she became an Administrative Officer with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, working with refugees in London, Belgium, and Austria from 1944 to 1946.<sup>3</sup>

Following the war, she decided to study philosophy, partly because she was caught up in the excitement which greeted Sartrean Existentialism at the time. She could not accept a proffered scholarship in the United States in 1946

<sup>2</sup>Baldanza, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Baldanza, p. 13



since a student membership in the Communist Party prevented her getting a visa, but she received the Sarah Smithson studentship in philosophy, Newnham College, Cambridge, 1947-48. She was named Honourable Fellow in 1963. In 1956 she married John Bayley, novelist, poet, and literary critic. In addition to her novels and her study of Jean-Paul Sartre, Miss Murdoch has published technical papers on philosophy in the area of her specialty, moral philosophy. But of greater interest to the average reader is a series of less specialized essays, largely about an area in which esthetics overlaps with urgent moral and political concerns in a very broad sense. She has tried to continue her work in philosophy; but since such study is very time-consuming, philosophy loses out when it conflicts with writing.<sup>4</sup>

Miss Murdoch's study of Sartre, and other philosophers and ideas, helped her to develop her own set of ideas which she dramatizes in her novels. Her first published book was not a novel, but a philosophical study, Sartre, Romantic Rationalist (1953). This study, intended as an introduction to Sartre's thought, deals with his novels and political writings as well as with his philosophy. Though she feels that Sartre is a philosopher of great importance, especially because of his influence among contemporary thinkers, the most important parts of Miss Murdoch's book are the objections she puts forward to some aspects of Sartre's philosophy.

<sup>4</sup>Baldanza, p. 14.

Sartre's emphasis on the Cartesian "Cogito Ergo Sum," the factors of isolation and utter dependence on self, according to Miss Murdoch, carries subjectivity to the point of solipsism,<sup>5</sup> a concept which Miss Murdoch crusades against in her novels. A lover, according to Sartre, constantly speculates about his beloved's attitude toward him; the result of this sort of speculation is torment. Each lover demands that he be imaginatively contemplated by the other, but because of human loneliness and the poverty of the human imagination these needs cannot be satisfied, and the result is frustration and preoccupation with oneself. This particular idea denies the day-to-day experience of being in love; it is no more, says Miss Murdoch, "than a battle between two hypnotists in a closed room."<sup>6</sup> Thus, Miss Murdoch rejects Sartre's idea of subjectivity, and her own idea about one of her most prominent themes, love, begins to emerge: that it is in the suppression of subjectivity and through the objective existence of other people that love begins.<sup>7</sup> Another idea of Sartre's, closely related to the love of self and others, is his idea of self-analysis, which he much favored. Miss Murdoch rejects this idea because, according to her, too much self-examination can end in total preoccupation with oneself. This is a recurring theme in her novels. One of her "minor"

<sup>5</sup>Rubin Rabinovitz, Iris Murdoch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 6.

character types, the psychoanalyst, is always bringing harm and even destruction to the other characters in the novels because he encourages them, either consciously or subconsciously, to turn inward and not outward to love one another. Her criticisms of existentialism and linguistic analysis are for the same reasons as her criticism of Sartre: both lead to too much subjectivity, and subjectivity leads to solipsism.<sup>8</sup>

In ethics and moral issues, Miss Murdoch believes that the word "good" is difficult to define. She illustrates this belief by placing her characters in various situations in which they display several different levels of "goodness." The character may be a pleasant, happy person on the casual level, but in the area of personal sacrifice and objectivity, the "pleasant" person may fail. Thus, "goodness" may appear on several levels, and it would not be completely correct to say that this pleasant, happy character is totally good. Other character types who have problems distinguishing good from bad are embodiments of Miss Murdoch's own difficulty at defining good. Her concern for the concept of good is noted in several of her essays: "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," "The Idea of Perfection," and "On 'God' and 'Good'."

Closely related to her ideas on goodness and love is her concern with the concept of freedom. In many instances

<sup>8</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 7.



in her novels, one character may attempt to possess other characters. Often this "possession" involves the possessed person's performing or suffering all for the benefit of another character. This idea of suffering is the basis for this study of Miss Murdoch's character types. The types will be divided into two broad categories: the saints and the demons. In a broad sense, the demons are those who try to possess others and inflict suffering, and the saints are those who suffer so that others will, through them, become "saved" or, at least, "better" people.

Miss Murdoch's use of the saints and demons in her novels stems from her own personal religious theory. She does not care for religion in any formal or organized sense. The function of religion, she feels, is to provide a sort of middle ground between morality and a mystical belief in transcendent goodness. The failure of modern religion lies in its failure to fulfill this role. Theology has been debased in various ways: by those who present an overly mundane and unmystical picture of transcendent reality, and of course by those rationalists who have completely eliminated all traces of mysticism from their theologies. Unlike so many philosophers who believe in a transcendent reality, she stresses this belief without insisting on the existence of God. If there is a God, she has said, He is transcendent, perfect, nonrepresentable, and as the chief source of goodness, a focal point for human attention. "God, if He exists,

is good because he delights in the existence of something other than Himself." The theme of attention for others is a recurring one. She stresses goodness more than religion; the question of God's existence may be left to the individual believer. If God does exist, however, one of his chief functions is to act as an epitome of that sort of goodness which resides in the love of beings outside the self.<sup>9</sup> This achievement of love for others, she feels, is the closest a person may come to salvation.<sup>10</sup> To help some other character in this realization of love for others is the goal of the suffering saints.

Those who have been carefully placed in the novels to "save" others are the characters who will be called saints. Frank Baldanza, in his discussion of Miss Murdoch's character types, has defined the saint as "a person who practices rigorous spiritual disciplines--contemplation, prayer, and perhaps ascetic self-denial--in order to attain communion with some kind of principle of spiritual order. The fruit of his discipline is an incommunicable vision; although one conventionally regards him as made holy through his wisdom, he most generally rewards one, when he speaks at all, with bewildering paradoxes like the Zen Koan, the utterances of the Delphic Oracle, or the poetry of St.

<sup>9</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup>Gail Kmetz, "People Don't Do Such Things: Business As Usual in the Novels of Iris Murdoch," Ms., 1976, p. 72.

John of the Cross.<sup>11</sup> The saints of this study will be, in a sense, a simplification of Baldanza's definition of the saint, with more emphasis placed on the suffering in order to help others. The saints will be categorized according to their effectiveness at suffering for others' benefit and according to the specific philosophy that each saint is illustrating. The categories of saints will be as follows: 1) the Innocents, those who possess a certain amount of goodness; 2) the Agents, those who have suffered because of ill-treatment, and who unwittingly pass the suffering on to others; and 3) the Sufferers, who are the true saints, suffering so that others may be made better. These saints are typed according to their progressive degrees of goodness, as well as according to the philosophies they illustrate.

Those who cause most of the saints' suffering are, of course, the demons. Corresponding to the three types of saints, there are three categories of demons, who are typed according to their progressing degrees of evil. The categories of demons are: 1) the bad, those who, because of their sinister appearance or evil intent, are called demons by the author. They, like the innocents in their attempt at sainthood, do not succeed in being true demons; 2) the power-seekers, those who, through their occupations, imprison others and begin a chain of suffering; and 3) the

<sup>11</sup>Baldanza, p. 22.



possessors, the true demons who possess other characters in the novels, mainly the sufferers, as if they were objects. The demons, like the saints, are categorized according to their degrees of evil as well as according to the ideas they illustrate.

Resulting from the conflicts between the saints and demons are certain variations on the two character types. The variation characters are those who, because of their relationships with the true saints and demons, develop characteristics of both types. These variations help to illustrate Miss Murdoch's idea that there are varying degrees of goodness and evil. These characters are pulled alternately by the power of the demons and saints until, in the actions called "transformations," certain of the variant characters are cleansed of their demoniac tendencies by the ultimate sacrifice and victory of the saints. These transformations involve the characters' changing into better or happier people and their concentration on others' happiness or salvation.

Although the basic element in the Murdoch novel is the moral lesson, the author manages to combine this moral lesson with other, purely enjoyable elements. One of the devices she uses to the reader's delight is a very intellectual, upper-class sense of humor. She places her characters in very unpredictable, embarrassing situations, and

the enjoyment begins when the characters try to maintain their stuffy "Britishness" under these circumstances. Her plotting is a constant source of surprise. The plot twists involve everything from sexual "progressive dinners" to weird, bizarre "spiritual" happenings. Her settings vary from inner-city London, to barren north England shores, to convents. Her characters range from strange, "problem" adolescents, to homosexual priests, to middle aged professors having their last flings. She has acknowledged in an interview with Mr. Frank Kermode her interest in technical excursions as "completely theoretical amateur mechanics." She delights in scenes describing, in minute detail, how a car slowly slides and falls into a stream or how two unskilled persons pull an old bell out of the lake.<sup>12</sup> In short, she offers variety which makes her philosophical and moral lessons involving the saints and demons more exciting reading.

<sup>12</sup>Frank Kermode, "House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven English Novelists," Partisan Review, XXX (1963), p. 65.

## CHAPTER II

### SAINTS

The first group of characters, the saints, may be sub-divided into three groups according to the Murdochian philosophies which they illustrate and the degrees of saintliness which they possess. Group I consists of those characters who are referred to as saints by the author, not because they have suffered, but because they possess a certain niceness, conventionality, or innate goodness which has the potential of becoming saintly. The Group I saints illustrate Miss Murdoch's idea that the concept of "good" is difficult to define, and that there are different levels or degrees of "goodness." The innocents are the young, those who have not been corrupted by suffering, the philosophers and priests who mean well but who really have no effect on the salvation of others, and the narrators or sympathetic characters who have been initiated into bizarre situations of the suffering of their fellow man and who have become "better" people (again showing the difficulty of defining "good"). Group II includes characters who have endured a certain amount of suffering through being uprooted or stepped on by others. They are easily pushed around by others because of their ignorance or their being "foreign." They are

refugees who are coming into the setting of the novels, or they are locals who move out (usually to America) during the course of the novel. These characters are illustrative of Miss Murdoch's theory that suffering forms a chain, and that even though a person is a "saint," he may still be incapable of preventing the transference of the suffering he had undergone to someone else. Thus, they are the agents. Group III saints represent the height of Murdochian goodness. With these true sufferers, "the suffering stops here." Through conscious effort these characters absorb all the suffering caused by demons or transferred by the agents. These characters illustrate the heart of the Murdoch philosophy of salvation: "that the most a character (a person) can hope for is a greater degree of awareness of others."<sup>13</sup> Calling herself a Christian fellow-traveller,<sup>14</sup> Miss Murdoch is not particularly concerned with the Christian connotation of the word "salvation." The suffering saints "save" the other characters by making them more aware of the needs of others in the novels.

The "young innocents" of Group I are female adolescents who have not been made aware of suffering because of their inexperience. Each of the examples is "nice" to a degree, until they become initiated into the suffering in the novels.

<sup>13</sup>Gail Kmetz, p. 72.

<sup>14</sup>Gail Kmetz, p. 72.



What they do with that suffering determines how "good" they really are. The first example of the young innocent is Catherine Fawley (The Bell), a young girl who feels guilty for having fallen in love with a priest. To combat her feelings of guilt, she decides to become a nun. Her repressed sexual feelings blossom into religious hysteria.<sup>15</sup> The tolling of the bell in the novel reminds Catherine of the legend of an impure nun; the ringing bell is a signal to Catherine that her buried sexual feelings have been discovered.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, at the tolling of the bell, she hysterically jumps into a body of water near the abbey, and at the end of the novel, she is recuperating in a mental hospital. Catherine was not totally responsible for her behavior. Being a victim of religious fanaticism (another concept Miss Murdoch is attacking), she felt that falling in love with and having sexual feelings for a man were wrong. Instead of wasting her youth in a convent, giving her life to prayers and meditation, she could have "saved" Michael, the erring priest, by simply loving him. Although the reader can admire Catherine for her "goodness," she does not handle her situation very well and does not achieve level III of sainthood. Even though the other characters in the novel refer to her as

<sup>15</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 28.

"our little saint,"<sup>17</sup> the best we can hope to call her in relation to her potential for saving others is "saint-ette."

Another character who, through her naivete, qualifies to be a saint-ette is Ann-ette Cokeyne, the ingenue of Flight From the Enchanter. Our first impression of Annette is that of a "nice" girl in a private girls' school, who will probably grow up to be a "nice" lady with "nice" children. Her naivete is demonstrated by her response to the reading of Dante's Inferno. She feels sorry for the Minotaur and wonders why he should be suffering in hell. She reasons that it was not the Minotaur's fault that it had been born a monster, but rather, it was God's fault. What she obviously evades is the fact that the Minotaur was not "born a monster," but was used as a monster by his master, Minor. Annette's response to the Minotaur is significant not only for its typical naivete, but as the first of many responses to figures that are instruments of destruction, either in their own power or in their function as machines controlled by a demonic power.<sup>18</sup> It is Annette's inability to recognize "whose fault it is" and her inability to perceive reality which prevent her from a higher level of sainthood. She is a spoiled rich girl in whose world

<sup>17</sup>Iris Murdoch, The Bell (New York: Viking Press, 1956), p. 139.

<sup>18</sup>Zohreh Tawa Kuli Sullivan, "Enchantment and the Demonic in Iris Murdoch: The Flight From the Enchanter," Midwest Quarterly, 16: 276-97, p. 283.

everything is "enchanted." She has had no opportunity to save anyone. Even Mischa Fox, the brute enchanter of the title, who collects young girls' souls the way primitive tribes in Bora-Bora collect skulls, warns the waif-adventuress against thinking that everything is lovely and that she can have the world:

Young girls are so full of dreams. . . . That is what makes them so touching and so dangerous. Every young girl dreams of dominating the forces of evil. She thinks she has that in her that can conquer anything . . . That is what leads her to the dragon, imagining that she will be protected (p. 142).<sup>19</sup>

With Mischa as the dragon, she becomes enchanted by him. She has good intentions toward him: "She felt, and with it a deep joy, the desire and the power to enfold him, to comfort him, to save him."<sup>20</sup> It requires the cynicism of a Calvin Blick (Mischa's henchman) to make her recognize, temporarily at least, that the "notion that one can liberate another's soul from captivity is an illusion of the very young."<sup>21</sup>

As the perfectly enchanted product of her society, Annette never really knows who the enchanter is and can

<sup>19</sup> Sullivan, p. 284, quoting from Iris Murdoch's The Flight From the Enchanter.

<sup>20</sup> Iris Murdoch, The Flight From the Enchanter (New York: Viking Press, 1956), p. 240.

<sup>21</sup> Flight From the Enchanter, p. 240.



never flee from him.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, her naivete and her lack of perception of reality and suffering prevent her from "saving him." Peter Wolfe refers to Annette as "an exuberant, somewhat pampered sprite whose graceful innocence cannot be expected to survive intact in the modern world."<sup>23</sup> A. S. Byatt feels that the novel's last glimpse of Annette shows a regenerated and wiser person.<sup>24</sup> Zohreh Tawakuli Sullivan is convinced that "Miss Murdoch sees her ingenue as among the permanently enchanted, always to remain an unscarred mermaid murmuring 'Enchantee' through the ballrooms of Europe, ever enchanted by her temporarily sustained glimpses of real life out of trains."<sup>25</sup> All of these critics have agreed that Annette is a naive, nice girl who is easily enchanted and is charming for her innocence; the fact remains that because of her pampered lifestyle and her failure to perceive reality, she will never be a saint, but will be a decoration, a saint-ette, an enchant-ee.

Another example of the young innocent is Julian Baffin, the candidate for sainthood in The Black Prince.

<sup>22</sup>Sullivan, p. 285.

<sup>23</sup>Peter Wolfe, The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and Her Novels (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966), p.72.

<sup>24</sup>A. S. Byatt, p. 42.

<sup>25</sup>Sullivan, p. 286.



Julian's misfortune is to fall in love with one Bradley Pearson, a middle-aged second-rate writer who stands in the shadow of Julian's father, Arnold Baffin, who, like Miss Murdoch, puts out a novel a year. Julian, like Catherine and Annette, has not suffered enough to become a full-fledged Murdoch saint. Other characters in the novel constantly remind her that she is too young, too inexperienced, to be anything but ineffectual decoration. After Bradley's sister's attempted suicide, Julian says to Bradley: "A saintly person could have comforted her." Bradley replies: "There aren't any, Julian. Anyway you're too young to be a saint."<sup>26</sup> At another point in the novel Bradley confesses his love for her. In a valiant attempt to be worthy of the older man's love she says, "I'm real. I hear your words. I can suffer." Bradley replies, "Suffer? You?"<sup>27</sup> Julian proclaims to all who will listen that she is grown-up, that she can suffer. She fails to realize, however, what every suffering saint realizes: more than just proclaiming her suffering, she must welcome it and endure it quietly without the desire to be a martyr. If she had really loved Bradley and wanted to save him, she would have stayed with him although he lied to her about his age. There is a further hint at impure motives on her part when her father,

<sup>26</sup> Iris Murdoch, The Black Prince (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 141.

<sup>27</sup> The Black Prince, p. 271.

Arnold Baffin, the successful writer, comes to retrieve her from the corrupt Pearson. She goes with her father rather than staying with her "true love." After Arnold tells her of Bradley's lies, she does not wish to go back to him. There are hints of her being in love with her father and using Bradley as a type of transference.

Arnold is a successful writer; Julian wants to be a writer. Instead of going to her father for advice (on becoming a writer), she goes to Bradley. Her "falling in love" with Bradley, then, seems to be a mixture of admiration, daring, and trying to be grown up. Her failure to be a saint is merely a result of her immaturity. Like Catherine and Annette, she possesses a relative degree of goodness, but she does not save anyone; she is not an Iris Murdoch saint.

Another group of Group I innocents are the philosophers and religious leaders who "mean well" but for one reason or another are not directly able to save others. However, their admonitions to others help the potential saints to achieve sainthood. The ironic fact in the case of these religious and philosophical people is that their occupations (it is often supposed that philosophers and religious leaders have more insight than other people) actually hinder them from becoming the conscious sufferers that the Group III saints are.

The Bell offers the example of well-meaning church

people who, at best, are advisors to or influences on other, less likely but more willing, saints. James Taypor Pace, the leader of the religious community, represents the confusion of convention with holiness and personifies the problem of following all the rules to the letter no matter what the circumstances. For awhile his rules are successful. Finally, however, the rigidity of his rules (necessitated by his position) proves to be a barrier to love; after Michael Meade is involved in a homosexual incident, Pace speaks to him without the compassion which might prevent further mishaps. Meade is an offender; he had broken one of the rules.<sup>28</sup> Even though Meade has that innate goodness which could have been developed with love, he will not develop his good qualities because his superior, the person who has more influence on him than anyone else, fails, through adherence to rules, to reach out and love him.

Meade, also a religious leader at Imber, represents another barrier to love, neurosis. Neurosis, in Iris Murdoch's terms, is an excessive involvement with oneself which heightens any tendency toward inner sickness, and it does this while masquerading as a cure. Michael is given to self-questioning and self-exploration; he nurses his

<sup>28</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 24.



guilty feelings; in a sermon he delivers to the community, he urges the residents of Imber to become more immersed in themselves. This self-involvement prevents Michael from looking outside himself to those who appeal to him for love. Again and again, as Michael is about to make a decision, his destiny seemingly interferes, causing him to choose the more attractive, if morally inferior, alternative. By the end of the novel, Michael finally learns that his sense of pattern and destiny is a product of, as he puts it, his "romantic imagination."<sup>29</sup> His neurosis, an unlikely hindrance for a seemingly spiritual superior, prevents him from saving others.

Even the nuns at Imber do not achieve the martyr-like saintliness of the true suffering saint. They remain in the background, and although there is much suffering in the novel to be taken, the most they are able to do is to repeat their prayers. Because of the rigidity and ceremony of their religion, they lose the humanity which is necessary for the saint-sufferer. At the crucial point in the novel (which will be discussed in detail later) the nuns stand by while the novice, Catherine, tries to drown herself. It is the wayward wife, Dora, who has been brought to Imber to absorb some of its goodness, who attempts the rescue. The nuns' mere presence, however, gives a type of

<sup>29</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 27.



encouragement to Dora, who becomes the real saint, not because she helps to save Catherine's life, but because she learns how to love. The nuns, then, offer a type of encouragement to the real saints, even though they cannot achieve sainthood themselves because of their preoccupation with discipline and ceremony.

Akin to the well-meaning religious are the would-be philosophers. They possess "good qualities," but they do not have the inner capacity for the type of suffering which is necessary to be classified as among the real saints. Like the nuns of The Bell, the philosophers serve as cheerleaders for others who have more potential. Two examples of these side-line philosophers are Max LeJour of The Unicorn and DeMoyte of The Sandcastle. Both of these men encourage adulterous relationships for other characters.<sup>30</sup> These adulterous relationships represent a type of release in the Murdoch novel. In certain cases, it is this freedom in the form of free love which would release a character from being a suffering saint for no reason. Max LeJour encourages a suitor to win the heart of Hannah, the sufferer in that novel whose suffering seems, at times, not to benefit anyone. In LeJour's aged wisdom he sees somehow that such a relationship would free Hannah (whose husband is still alive) from needless pain. DeMoyte has a similar

<sup>30</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 42.

role in The Sandcastle. He encourages Bill Mor, a victim of an impossible marriage, to accept the love of a much younger, liberated woman. Although both of these characters are encouraging immorality, in the Murdoch novel there is a type of salvation in the mere reaching out to another human being. Thus, through their philosophizing, they encourage others to reach out, thus gaining a type of freedom which, because of their aged wisdom, they realize is the most important element in all human beings.

Another philosopher-type who qualifies as an innocent is Marcus Fisher, the secondary school headmaster of The Time of the Angels. He attempts to oppose his brother, Carel Fisher, the demon of the novel. At the beginning of the novel he is working on a book entitled Morality in a World Without God. The title of this book labels him as a philosopher and a Murdoch spokesman. According to Rabinovitz, his failure at true sainthood has to do with his attitude toward his enemy. "'The truly good,' Miss Murdoch has written, 'is not a friendly tyrant to the bad, it is its deadly foe.'" <sup>31</sup> Rabinovitz suggests that Marcus's mistake in the novel was, through his innocence, his attempt to be friendly toward his brother; because of Carel's evil,

<sup>31</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 48.

Marcus should have treated him as a foe. Marcus, nevertheless expresses a number of ideas similar to Murdoch's, and because of his search for philosophical truths, is considered a force for good.<sup>32</sup> Since he is searching, there is hope that he will find answers to questions about saving others.

A third group of these innocents is the group of narrators or focus characters who are initiated into bizarre situations created by the saint-demon conflicts, and who are purified or at least made "better" through the suffering of the saints. These characters are not candidates for sainthood, but like the ingenues, religious leaders, and philosophers, they demonstrate the idea that "goodness" is relative, and that goodness, like suffering, forms a chain and will eventually be absorbed by one or more persons.

The Bell, once again, has the most representative example of this group. The focus here is on Dora, the wayward wife whose husband has brought her to Imber to receive some sort of spirituality. Rubin Rabinovitz says that Dora possesses innate goodness; in rescuing a butterfly trapped in her train carriage, she loses her suitcase. She has forgotten about herself, her possessions; by turning her attention to another living thing, she defies con-

<sup>32</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 42.



vention. Dora, without seeking, is the only character in The Bell to have a true mystical experience.<sup>33</sup> Her transformation changes her from an adulteress and a selfish Becky Sharp-type bitch, to a loving, giving, outreaching person.

Another "innocent" character who becomes subjected to the illusory world is Jake, the narrator of Miss Murdoch's first novel, Under the Net. Jake is a loving person in search of something or someone. He becomes drawn into the world of Hugo Belfounder, a former fireworks magnate and now a successful motion picture producer. In Jake's search for the father figure, he realizes that Hugo is neither the lover nor the philosopher of silence he had invested him as being; instead, Hugo is, like Jake himself, a man struggling to come to terms with his own reality.<sup>34</sup> Having finally been freed by Hugo of his own illusions about others, Jake decides to end his existence as a translator (a type of prostitution of his language talents) and to begin a new life as a writer. In his search for rationality he has found disillusion; thus, the transformation is from the mundane to the creative. Like Dora, after being made aware of the spiritual shallowness of others, he becomes

<sup>33</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 26.

<sup>34</sup>Leonard Kriegel, "Iris Murdoch: Everybody through the Looking Glass", Contemporary British Novelists, ed. Charles Shapiro (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 64.



better in the sense that he feels the freedom to employ his creative talents in the hopes of freeing others.

Another innocent, Edmund Narrowway, the narrator of The Italian Girl, is involved in a search for self, which Miss Murdoch feels is detrimental to the development of a saint. His preoccupation with self prevents him from looking at the others around him and being aware of their needs. Each member of his family suffers from this same type of solipsism. This family trait is exemplified in the title of the novel. "The Italian Girl" refers to a number of servant girls whom the Narrowway family have employed over the years. A demonstration of the Narrowway's uncaring nature is their failure to remember the first names and personalities of the "Italian girl." As one servant replaces the other, they amalgamate the entire series into one figure whom they call "The Italian girl." The events of the novel force the family to look at the present Italian girl; Edmund, especially, becomes better for having known her. This change may be referred to as his humanization. Edmund's betterment involves his attitude toward his brother, especially. This betterment will be discussed more fully in the chapter on variations and transformations.

Another character who is brought closer to sainthood is The Nice and the Good's John Ducane. Ducane is an investigator

trying to find out about a suicide. This investigator role is symbolic of his own personal search for self. This novel, and in particular, Ducane's search, is symbolic of the author's philosophy that terms such as "nice" and "good" are relative and difficult to define. Rabinovitz, in his discussion of Ducane's search, says that Ducane begins a self-examination which leads him to just moral choices. He moves from a plateau of conventional niceness, symbolized by his involvement with "nice" Kate Gray, to a higher plane of goodness when he turns to Mary Clothier, whose concern for other people demonstrates her innate goodness.<sup>35</sup> Ducane's betterment comes through his active reaching out to others, rather than a turning inward, which would have been a destructive search.

These innocents, who are initiated into life, are made better through their involvement with other "good" characters. They demonstrate Miss Murdoch's ideas of 1) the concept of good's being relative and difficult to define, and 2) the idea of betterment coming through a reaching outward. These not-quite saints are brought into a chain of goodness; they possess an innate innocence, and through contact with other forces for "good" in the novels, there is hope that they will pass the chain of goodness on to someone else.

The first group of saints, the innocents, are those

<sup>35</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 43.

who possess qualities of goodness, but because of inexperience, misdirection, associations with demonic characters or concentration on self, are not classified as true suffering saints. There is hope for them, though, if they allow themselves to experience, to learn from others, and to let themselves be loved. It is hoped that contact with the true saints and other "good" characters will help them to save others.

The second category of Murdoch saints qualify for consideration because of their willingness to become enslaved. This group consists of those who have been uprooted before the course of the novel. Frank Baldanza mentions Miss Murdoch's fascination with the refugee type:

A large category is that of East European, often Russian, refugees, who are erotic, suffering types. Miss Murdoch has said that she encountered wartime refugees at school, and of course she worked with them in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. They are frequently, though not always, demonic in their effects on others; when they do not function in this way, they go to the opposite extreme of mute, passive anguish.<sup>36</sup>

In this section, there will be an attempt to show that although they are "demonic," as Baldanza says, in their effects on others, their motives are not demonic. Rather, their actions demonstrate that suffering forms a chain, and that these characters are merely agents, passing on

<sup>36</sup>Baldanza, p.18.



this suffering to others. Thus, their failure at being true saints is in their passing the suffering on, rather than taking it into themselves as the type III saints do. Three examples of the refugees will be used: 1) An Accidental Man's Ludwig Lefferier, a Viet Nam war draftee who has escaped to England; 2) David and Elsa Levkin, the Russian servants in The Italian Girl; and 3) the Lusiewicz brothers, a pair of Poles who suffer through Flight From the Enchanter.

Ludwig Leferrier's uprootedness results from his flight from America in order to evade the Viet Nam War draft. Although An Accidental Man was published before it was fashionable to oppose the Viet Nam War, the reader sympathizes with Ludwig because of a kind of innate goodness and because he evaded the draft as a result of moral objections--not cowardice. Ludwig's suffering stems from a conflict with Gracie, his snobbish fiancée, over his kindness toward two pathetic figures--Dorina, (a true saint to be discussed in the next section) and Charlotte, a spinster aunt who has been used by Gracie's family all her life. Through Gracie's persuasion, Ludwig agrees to leave the two alone, until one day he passes Dorina on the street. Although he knows that she has fled her family nurses and is hiding from the family, he passes her by even though he and Dorina both know that each has seen the other. That same afternoon Dorina dies in a horrible



accident. Ludwig feels responsible because of his ignoring her on the street that same day. Although he passes his suffering on to her, he does not intentionally do so. The suffering is passed because of his own suffering through uprootedness and his willingness to be enslaved by his fiancée. At the denouement, Ludwig breaks the engagement because of this trauma and returns to America to face whatever punishment awaits him because of his draft evasion. Thus, Ludwig is an example of the character in a chain of suffering, helplessly linking another person to the chain. There is hope for him, however, because he is willing to break away from his enslaver and return to the scene of his initial suffering for retribution.

Brother-and-sister David and Elsa Levkin are the Russian immigrant servants in The Italian Girl. Their suffering has been caused by their flight from Russia. Each has a different account of the actual exodus, and according to Elsa's story, there are hints of heroism in their actions. The pair pass their suffering on to their employers, Otto and Isabel Narroway. They are sexually involved with their employers, and David also trifles with Flora, the Narroway's teen-aged daughter. David is more demonic in his effect on others than Elsa; the daughter Flora becomes pregnant by him, thus hurting the family, especially Isabel, who is also sexually involved with David. Elsa approaches full sainthood in

a dramatic sacrificial scene which will be discussed in "Variations and Transformations." Her sacrifice seems to have a positive effect on the other characters, including David.

The foreign refugee is developed more dramatically in Flight From The Enchanter. Rabinovitz says that this novel is Miss Murdoch's reflection on the ideas of Simone Weil, that suffering and "uprootedness do not necessarily ennoble the afflicted person. It takes a Christlike saintliness to rise above one's suffering; most of the victims of affliction sink into spiritual lethargy; afterward they become afflicted with self-hatred and even participate in their own degradation."<sup>37</sup> In this study of the Lusiewicz brothers, it is the intent to show that they, like Ludwig Lefferier and the Levkins, are victims of suffering and unwittingly form a chain by passing that suffering on to others. Even Rabinovitz points out that the word "suffering" is the most recurrent in the novel, followed by the words "master" and "slave."<sup>38</sup>

According to Wolfe, even Murdoch's villains all suffer and frequently damage others without being aware of the implications of their acts. Regardless of motives, Miss Murdoch seems to think that all of us are well-

<sup>37</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 15.

equipped to cause others great pain. The Lusiewicz brothers, through their attractiveness and charm, do cause others great pain:

The brothers had meanwhile been achieving a startling degree of success. They had both had some training in engineering before they arrived, and they rapidly showed a remarkable aptitude with machines. They learnt to speak English with confidence and charm . . . Their appearance improved. At the factory, their beauty, their awkward English, which they soon learnt to make into an instrument of seduction, and their curious resemblance to each other soon commended them to the women. . . . To the men, their mechanical skill and willingness to learn soon commended them just sufficiently to compensate for the irritations caused by their success with the women. They became popular.<sup>39</sup>

Although the brothers are crude, they are to be admired for being so industrious despite their being foreign. They seem to possess an endearing quality reminiscent of Vanity Fair's Becky Sharp. Like Becky, despite their single-minded ambition, they possess a type of honesty which gains the reader's sympathy. The reader feels toward them the same as does Rosa, their employer, whom they alternately seduce. Despite their terrible treatment of her, she is unwilling to give them up. The following assessment is somewhat overstated, but it contains enough truth to support the idea of the brothers' innate goodness and their being agents of suffering rather than initiators:

<sup>39</sup>Wolfe, p. 75.



The Poles are magnificent creations . . . .  
 They are presented with verve,  
 we respond clearly and strongly to them,  
 and the author's sheer pace overrides any  
 objections we might want to make. By a  
 violent but acceptable transition we pass  
 from finding them as harmless and lovable  
 as Rosa did, to feeling them dangerous,  
 cruel and hateful. . . . But they are simple.  
 Being uncivilized, they are not warped. They  
 are so directly and basely self-seeking that  
 in a law-abiding community, with an adequate  
 police force, ordinary people need not fall  
 foul of them, and people who fall in with  
 their wishes can gain from contact with their  
 beauty and vitality.<sup>40</sup>

The refugees, then, are agents in the chain of suffering. Their suffering begins when they are uprooted from their homes and are forced to make their own way in a new society. Ludwig, the Levkins, and the Lusiewiczzes all possess innate goodness, even though they are capable of passing pain on to others. Their motives are not demon-like even though the results often are. They are merely victims who have absorbed a certain amount of suffering but do not possess the ability of the suffering saints to take the suffering into themselves.

The third group of saints are those characters who purify themselves and others through suffering and self-sacrifice. In contrast to groups I and II, these characters have an innate quality of spirituality which allows them to absorb all suffering generated by the demons and the other saints who are links in the suffering chain. The

<sup>40</sup> Olga McDonald Meidner, "Reviewer's Bane: A Study of Iris Murdoch's The Flight From The Enchanter," Essays in Criticism, II(1961), p. 444.



examples used in this section are chosen because of their dramatic effect on the other characters. These examples are female characters; Murdoch women lend themselves to saintly characterization better than men. However, there are some males in Miss Murdoch's novels who could be considered type III saints because of their suffering caused by demonic characters. (Examples are Martin of A Severed Head and Bill Mor of The Sandcastle.) These three women, however, not only seem to take in others' suffering, but they also purify themselves and others in the process. There is much spiritual imagery surrounding these characters, and examples of that imagery will be used to support the idea of their saintliness.

One example of the suffering saint is Dorina, the deranged wife of The Accidental Man. Dorina, because of her qualities of selflessness and an innocent spirituality, serves as an example to the other characters of the type of Murdoch saint that they should all be. Dorina is suffering over her separation from Austin Gibson Grey, a walking hard luck story who has spent his life hating his brother and having accidents. The reason for the separation is not made clear in the novel, but some accusations made by Austin regarding Dorina and Austin's brother Matthew are mentioned in connection with Dorina's mental problems. The reader is made aware that the separation was Dorina's idea, that she

is involved in a conscious effort to make Austin "better" somehow through her absence. The narrator's first description of Dorina indicates an awareness of her efforts:

Dorina was renewal of life, his innocence, his youth. And yet she was also something old, ghost-haunted, touched with sadness, touched with doom. Or was that doom just his own sense of the impossibility, after all, of being saved by her?<sup>41</sup>

Other characters are aware of her strangeness and spirituality: "Mitzi had met Dorina once or twice and thought her frail and affected and a bit unreal."<sup>42</sup>

In addition to Dorina's role as conscious sufferer, she possesses prophetic powers. She has a recurring dream in which she pictures water closing over her head. Whether it is a coincidence or not, Dorina dies when an electric heater topples into her bathtub. Her death is significant not only because of her pure life, but also because of the effects of her death on Austin and others: "She was somehow selfless, somehow good."<sup>43</sup> Almost all of the characters acknowledge her goodness after her death. Ironically, Austin, for whom Dorina has suffered, goes on charming women and having accidents. There are vague references to his love for Dorina, but he does not spend much time grieving. As with most saints, Dorina's suffering affects some, but

<sup>41</sup>Iris Murdoch, An Accidental Man (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 61

<sup>42</sup>An Accidental Man, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup>An Accidental Man, p. 457.

not all, characters positively. At least Austin is happily married at the end of the novel, and knowing Dorina's selflessness, she would have been made happy by that.

Dorina, then, is a type III saint because of her conscious suffering in order to save (in Murdoch terms) others. Although Austin is her primary concern, and she is something of a failure in her efforts toward him, her force for good is felt by other characters in the novel.

An example parallel to Dorina is Ann, the suffering saint of An Unofficial Rose. Ann, like Dorina, is separated from her husband, Randall. Although it repulses Randall even more, Ann continues in her devotion to him. Randall flaunts his affair with a young woman named Lindsay. Randall's father, Hugh Peronett, sells his Tintoretto painting so that Randall can run away with his lover.

Ann is much admired (by the other characters in the novel) for her sweetness and devotion; she even has suitors since Randall is gone. There is not quite the same feeling toward Ann by the narrator as there is toward Dorina. There is an absence of the spiritual, mystical language which described Dorina. There is one interesting relationship involving Ann and Douglas Swann, a well-meaning philosopher type like DeMoyte of The Sandcastle and Max Le Jour



of The Unicorn. Swann, even though he is enamored of Ann, advises her to keep a candle burning for Randall. When she cries to him about the difficulty of the situation, he tells her: "A saint could do it."<sup>44</sup>

Unlike Dorina's, Ann's suffering does get direct results from the absent husband. There is an optimistic attitude in this novel which is not present in An Accidental Man. There is the feeling here that Randall will return to Ann eventually. A symbol of Randall's imminent return is their daughter, Miranda, a "variation" to be discussed in chapter three.

Perhaps a more profound selflessness is noted in the actions of saint Collette Forbes of Henry and Cato. Collette's sacrifice involves the two title characters of the novel, Henry Marshalson and Cato Forbes. Henry and Cato are involved in trying to save themselves by giving up dominating forces in their lives. Henry, with whom Collette is in love, is tormented by his mother's preference for his now deceased brother. In a vengeful state of mind, Henry plans to sell his inherited estate and give the money away. This will force his mother to live in an apartment. To add more fuel to the fire, he plans to marry a mentally unbalanced charwoman. Collette is in active pursuit of Henry, but her

<sup>44</sup>Iris Murdoch, An Unofficial Rose (New York: Viking Press, 1962), p.269.



virginity makes him hesitate.

Cato Forbes, the brother of Collette, is a priest who is under the delusion that he no longer believes in God. He has fallen in love with a young boy at his mission named Beautiful Joe. Cato believes he can save Joe from the street gang life he has known by denouncing the priesthood and simply loving Joe. When he does give up the priesthood, however, this repulses Joe. Joe calls him "a queer in a cord coat." In a perverse kind of rage, Joe kidnaps Collette and attempts to rape her.

In a sacrificial scene Collette saves both men through her own selflessness. Unlike Ann's and Dorina's, her sacrifice is more dramatic, the results more tangible.

Probably the most clearly defined of the type III Murdoch saints is Hannah, the saint of The Unicorn. Although her suffering is misguided, she is the most active of the Murdoch saints in the pursuit of suffering. In Rabinovitz's analysis of Hannah, he says that Hannah is suffering willfully because of her feelings of guilt after attempting to murder her husband. She has locked herself into Gaze Castle, hoping that her suffering will purify her. Rabinovitz says that in delineating Hannah's attempt at self-purification, Miss Murdoch again shows her debt to Simone Weil, who in Gravity and Grace says that suffering usually leads to self-hatred or to violence.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 35.

Echoing this idea, Miss Murdoch has said that suffering, in the context of self-examination, can masquerade as purification. This sort of suffering is in reality a form of self-involvement and leads to more evil. Hannah exemplifies this idea: instead of purification, the fruits of her suffering are at first excessive self-involvement. So, although Hannah is suffering willfully, her suffering causes her to turn inward, rather than to reach outward to others.

The "more evil" which this self-involvement produces is a kind of take-over by servants and outsiders who become wardens at Hannah's self-designed prison. They all seem to recognize Hannah's inward goodness, but they delight in her suffering. Although Hannah is willing to absorb all the evil which exists at Gaze Castle, at the end of the novel there is still some existing evil. Unlike Collette Forbes, whose decision to reach outward rather than inward saves herself and others, Hannah's self-involved attitude proves fruitless in the end.

There is much worshipful imagery describing Hannah. All of the servants, although they are Hannah's wardens, seem to worship her: "Violet looked at her . . . had her hands folded in prayer."<sup>46</sup>

The narrator, Marian's description of Hannah also

<sup>46</sup>Iris Murdoch, The Unicorn (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 153.

reminds the reader of Hannah's role as suffering saint: "Hannah, like a high priestess . . ." <sup>47</sup> "Hannah would swallow it up . . . there was a change in her face now . . . the spiritual haze had been taken." <sup>48</sup>

Hannah's attitude toward herself indicates an awareness of her role as saint, and it also shows that she somehow knew that this constant self-preoccupation, even in the form of martyrdom, would not prove fruitful for all at the end: "I had been . . . like God . . . I, like a false god . . . I had no real suffering." <sup>49</sup>

So, even Hannah, the most clearly defined of the highest level of Murdoch saints, does not totally succeed in her suffering. Even through her death the evil which exists at Gaze Castle is not obliterated. Perhaps Miss Murdoch's point with Hannah is that martyrdom has no practical value if the martyr becomes too self-absorbed in her suffering. Hannah suffered not directly to help others, but to obliterate her own guilt. Perhaps if she had been a follower of Miss Murdoch's philosophy of reaching outward rather than inward, someone else could have helped to make Hannah forget her own guilt.

Even the most clearly defined of the highest order

<sup>47</sup>The Unicorn, p. 197.

<sup>48</sup>The Unicorn, p. 247.

<sup>49</sup>The Unicorn, p. 249.

of Murdoch sainthood is often too preoccupied with self to save others. The other characters' salvation ( a higher realization of others' needs) comes after the transformations and sacrifices of the Murdoch saints, to be discussed in Chapter III.

All of the Iris Murdoch saints, the innocents, the agents, and the true sufferers, illustrate various Murdoch philosophies. The immature saints, philosophers and church people illustrate a favorite point of the author's, that the concept of good is difficult to define and that there are various degrees of goodness. The refugees represent the idea that suffering produces a chain. The refugees are not saintly enough to stop the chain by taking all the suffering into themselves, they unwittingly pass it on to others. The true suffering saints illustrate the Murdoch principle of concentration on self producing evil. Although they are saints, they become carried away with their own martyrdom and thus lose their effectiveness in dealing with the demons of the novels.



## CHAPTER III

### DEMONS

Iris Murdoch uses another character type, the demon, to illustrate certain philosophies as the saints do. Like the saints who are viewed on three levels, the demons may be viewed in progression from not-so-harmful, to harmful, to evil. The three groups of demons correspond in their degrees of evil with the degrees of evil of the philosophies they represent. Group I, the bad, consists of those characters who are shown in an unfavorable light by the author. These characters represent specific philosophical ideas which the author attacks. Group II, the power seekers, like group II saints, show that evil, like suffering, forms a chain, and although these group II characters may not have originated the evil, they are passing it on to others. The characters of group III are the possessors, those who become powerful over the slaves, who are often the type III saints. These group III demons are described with the same intensity of worshipful imagery as the type III saints.

The demons in group one are the psychoanalysts, the corrupt priests and religious leaders, and the gossips and busy-bodies. These characters are classified as demons because of the philosophies they represent.

The author's attack on psychoanalysis is exemplified in the first example of the group I demon. Her feelings on psychoanalysis become evident as she presents Palmer Anderson of A Severed Head as a demon. Rabinovitz discusses Miss Murdoch's feelings about psychoanalysis. Miss Murdoch feels that psychoanalysis is not the solution for neurosis. She believes that the psychoanalyst encourages his patient to undergo self-analysis, thus magnifying the importance of the neurosis. The patient also becomes less willing to look outside himself at other people. Miss Murdoch refers to Stuart Hampshire's use of psychoanalysis as an ultimate arbiter in moral questions; she objects to his setting up of the analyst as god-like figure. Palmer Anderson makes himself the moral arbiter in the life of Martin Lynch-Gibbon, the character in the novel who is fighting neurosis. After stealing Martin's wife, Anderson confirms his God-mortal relationship with Martin by acting as his father-figure. To further point out his inherent evil nature, he is next seen in bed with his own half sister. At the end of the novel, he boards a plane with Martin's old mistress.

Palmer has developed a theory of permissiveness,

as exemplified in his own life. He hopes to free his patients through this permissive attitude. Ultimately Palmer's teaching is summed up in a simple statement: all is permitted. As both his ideas and his actions show, Palmer's version of psychoanalysis leads to moral anarchy.

As a contagious disease, this amoral atmosphere affects the major characters who engage in lying, hypocrisy, adultery, incest, but always with a warm smile and a sincere wish for a speedy recovery of the victim. Eight out of the nine possible heterosexual relationships occur in the novel. (There is even a hint of a homosexual relationship between Palmer and Martin.) Palmer, then, is an advocate of amorality exemplified by his instigation of these sexual partner shifts. If Stuart Hampshire feels that the analyst is largely responsible for determining ethical behavior, the author seems to be saying that here is an example of how this scheme can go wrong.<sup>50</sup> Palmer Anderson is just one of the psychoanalysts who populate the novels of Iris Murdoch. Other psychoanalysts are Max LeJour of The Unicorn and Henry Marshalson's American friends in Henry and Cato.

<sup>50</sup>Rabinovitz, pp. 28-29.



Palmer is the most clearly defined demon of this group of psychoanalysts because of his effect on so many other characters. His "all is permitted" philosophy becomes the demonic standard.

Other members of Group I are those corrupted religious leaders whose hypocrisy the author is attacking. This group is represented by Carel Fisher of The Time of the Angels and Cato Forbes of Henry and Cato. Fisher is labeled a demon at the outset of the novel when he is caught naked in bed with his daughter. Father Carel's amorality is so extreme that Palmer Anderson's "all is permitted" philosophy would represent, as Frank Baldanza says, "a kind of Sunday-School longing for rules." Baldanza explains Carel Fisher's philosophy: "His theory is that good, as it must be conceived, is impossible since it is unitary and since man's only experience is of multiplicity and fragmentation; therefore, evil is the only principle to which man's experience testifies, a nameless, impalpable spiritual malaise. His ultimate conclusion is that 'There is only power and the marvel of power, there is only chance and the terror of chance. And if there is only this there is no God, and the Single Good of the philosophers is an illusion and a fake.'" <sup>51</sup> Carel Fisher is a voice of the then-popular

<sup>51</sup> Baldanza, p. 131, quoting from The Time of the Angels, (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 178.

God-is-dead theory. He is a priest; yet he seduces young girls and commits incest with his daughter. Finally, he breaks under his all-is-permitted philosophy and commits suicide. Miss Murdoch's purpose with him is two-fold: she is attacking his God-is-dead philosophy and his hypocrisy.

The characterization of Cato Forbes is that of a demon. Cato, like Carel, is a wolf in priest's clothing. His extra-curricular activities involve young men rather than young girls. Father Forbes is portrayed a little more sympathetically than Carel Fisher, although the two priests' initials may indicate they are the same person. Cato is not altogether hypocritical, since he is openly in pursuit of leaving the priesthood. He does not say "God is dead," but that he no longer believes in Him. He does believe in a character named Beautiful Joe, however. It is his attraction to Joe which prompts his denunciation of the priesthood. He feels that he can do more practical good for Joe by simply loving him rather than by being his confessor. Cato, unlike Carel, is brought back to his senses by his sister. He returns to the priesthood eventually, but while he is under his delusion, he is a demon corrupting Joe and others. Thus, with the CF (corrupt fathers) characters, Miss Murdoch is attacking the demons of faulty philosophy and hypocrisy.

A third branch of "the bad" is those characters who are demons because of their pretense of an interest in others. They may be called busy-bodies, for they seem to receive a strange kind of pleasure from wielding their power over others through their feigning concern for them. An Accidental Man is populated with an entire group of these gossips who feign concern for one another but who are actually exercising power over the other characters in the novel through their meddling. Matthew Gibson-Grey is the head meddler in the work. He is something of a hero to all the shallow characters in the book because he has had a successful career as a diplomat. (Indeed, he has learned how to handle people.) He has returned to England to straighten out his brother, Austin, the accidental man of the title. One wonders early in the book if the "straightening out" personality of brother Matthew has caused Austin's accident proneness. In addition to wanting to straighten out his brother, Matthew wishes to iron out an old obsession between the brothers: Austin injured his hand in a childhood accident for which he irrationally, or not so irrationally, holds Matthew responsible. Austin has also suspected Matthew of having been in love with both Austin's wives. Matthew, in all his actions, seems to deny all of Austin's accusations, but the reader soon realizes how easy it would be for a meddler like Matthew to rationalize that his "meddling" with his brother's wives could only be good for them. Because



Matthew realizes that his motives in "loving" people are far from pure, he has borne a burden of guilt throughout his diplomatic career. He still enjoys exercising his power over the other characters in the novel, though. He sets up Austin's suffering by bringing with him to London Garth, Austin's son by his first marriage. Through Matthew's handling, Garth has become a self-serving, lazy, would-be socialite, who, rather than help a black man who was killed by a group of Puerto Ricans, writes a book at Matthew's encouragement about the incident. He hopes to sell a million copies. In all probability, Garth will become like Uncle Matthew--a rich, successful godfather-type who will meddle in his nephew's moral decisions. Matthew is revered by other minor characters in the novel who are also busy-bodies. The nothingness of their effectiveness in relating to people is reflected in various party scenes where all the gossips talk to one another about each other without the author's identification of the speakers. Matthew is the busy-bodies' hero; everybody always wants to know his opinion. Miss Murdoch is trying to show how power can be given to people who are not really interested in their fellow man; they are power-seekers through their gossip and meddling.

A more developed and dangerous Matthew type is Emma Sands of An Unofficial Rose. She has reached perhaps a higher level of the other characters' esteem than Matthew.

Frank Baldanza refers to Emma as an "alien god."<sup>52</sup> Emma is aware of her effectiveness at handling people. She is not particularly interested in their salvation; she enjoys the feeling of power she gets from having others consult her and from passing out advice and meddling in their lives. Emma's charisma is firmly based on her associates' unanimous assumption that she is invulnerably, mysteriously potent. She frequently attempts to force others into courses of action totally adverse to their natures.<sup>53</sup> She takes as a victim Lindsay Rimmer, the mistress of Randall Peronett, previously mentioned in the saint chapter. Emma uses lesbianism to hold power over Lindsay because her meddling is not strong enough to hold the also strong character, Lindsay. Emma is an arranger; everything in her life is orderly. She longs also to arrange people to her liking. Lindsay and others have to consult her in their affairs, everyday and otherwise. She has reached an advanced level of Matthew's busy-bodiness. Emma is an example of the danger of power attained by those who are not concerned with the salvation of other human beings. Other examples of the Murdoch busy-body are Mrs. Marshalson in Henry and Cato and the wealthy socialites in An Accidental Man. These "bad" people are

<sup>52</sup>Baldanza, p. 97.

<sup>53</sup>Baldanza, p. 100.

Perhaps a more harmful group of demons is in a more advantageous position to use their power over others; they are the power-seeking servants. Perhaps their quest for power stems from their being servants; they need to feel more important. These characters are demons in their roles toward their employers. Contrasted with the refugees of the "displaced saint" group, who are often servants, they are not merely victims unwittingly passing on suffering to others; rather they are demons who are originating a device for their victims' suffering.

In Miss Murdoch's one gothic novel, The Unicorn, there is an example of the sinister, power-hungry servant in the character of Violet Evercreech. She is the warden who seems to delight in the suffering of saint Hannah Crean-Smith. One of the first things the reader notices is that Hannah, the owner of Gaze Castle, is referred to by all the characters as "Hannah," while the servant, Violet Evercreech, is referred to by all as "Miss Evercreech." The author's portrayal of Miss Evercreech seems to be purposefully vague, to add to the Gothic ghost-story effect. There is much light and dark imagery which lends a mystical effect to the servant, and when she is with Hannah there is the worshipful imagery as noted previously: "Violet looked at her, had her hands . . . in prayer."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup>The Unicorn, p. 153.



Although Miss Evercreech seems to love Hannah so much, she becomes violently upset when Marian Taylor (the narrator) devises a plan to get Hannah away from her prison. She seems happy only when Hannah is upstairs in her room asleep or in a semi-comatose state, having been made ill by her own guilt feelings. At Hannah's death, Miss Evercreech seems happy, as does her elfin son, Jamesie. It is as if she realizes that Hannah has served her sentence and that she (Evercreech) is no longer her servant. Miss Murdoch seems to be saying with this and other evil servant types that only evil can result from a warden-prisoner relationship. Much like the poet William Blake, she attacks restrictions in all forms, especially human relationships which do not allow one or both parties to grow.

Another vague, mystical power-seeking servant is Nigel of Bruno's Dream. Nigel is first referred to as a "male nurse," and given this close relationship to Bruno, the dying man, he is in a position of potential power. Much like the gossips and busy-bodies previously discussed, he uses what information he has over the other characters so as to manipulate them in a kind of puppet-show for his own amusement. Nigel is a difficult character to analyze because he displays so many different facets. Baldanza

calls Nigel "the major articulate saint of the book"<sup>55</sup> because of his lofty 1960's love child philosophy of "everything is beautiful--all you need is love." It seems that he contradicts what he professes in his actions, however. He calls himself a God, but he engages in various types of demon activities. He is sneaky; he spies on the other characters to gain information about them. He calls his peeping-tom activities "a way of cherishing man in his infinite variety."<sup>56</sup> He sets up a pistol duel between the two people he loves most--Danby, Bruno's son, with whom Nigel later admits being in love, and Will, Nigel's brother. Assuming that Danby will not try to kill Will, Nigel tries to throw himself between the two men when Will fires on Danby, although it is ironically Danby who saves Nigel in this instance. Had he been shot and killed, Nigel would have immolated himself to save his beloved Danby from a danger he himself arranged. Such are the kicks which this "God" enjoys. His most demonic action is tying his brother Will to the bed and telling him that his beloved has been the mistress of someone else for years. In orgasmic delight, he produces a note as proof of his accusations. Although Nigel does not exercise his demonic

<sup>55</sup>Baldanza, p. 155.

<sup>56</sup>Baldanza, p. 154.

power over his master, the dying Bruno, he does enjoy manipulating the other characters in the novel, and such actions definitely do not qualify a Murdoch character for sainthood. Rather, because of Nigel's pretense at being a "God" and his contradictory actions, the implications are definitely demonic.

Another demon-servant type whom Baldanza calls a "henchman"<sup>57</sup> is Calvin Blick, Mischa Fox's man in The Flight From the Enchanter. Blick does Fox's dirty work; however, it is often difficult to tell whether Blick is carrying out Fox's evil wishes or his own. His main function in the novel is that of spy and purveyor of random information. He blackmails with pornographic pictures, also. Somewhat similar to the displaced saints of chapter one, he passes his employer's suffering on to others, but, as Wolfe says, "often Blick does the things which Mischa Fox doesn't even think of."<sup>58</sup> He is certainly capable, in his role of servitude, of devising his own evil and pain upon others, not only for pay, but also for fun. Blick, like Miss Evercreech and Nigel, is a servant who enjoys exercising demonic power over other characters in the novel. These power-seekers are Murdoch demons because they want to possess others. They are not as effective as the true demons who have both the power and the authority to totally possess others.

<sup>57</sup>Baldanza, p. 44.

<sup>58</sup>Wolfe, p. 80.



The most destructive of the Iris Murdoch demons are those who through sex and other trappings totally prevent their prisoner's self-realization. These demons do the most harm in terms of preventing the Murdoch form of salvation, the complete realization of the self and of others' needs. Two of the following examples correspond directly with the suffering of their mates--two of the suffering saints already mentioned in chapter one. These two imprisoning demons are Randall, the wayward husband who causes saint Ann's suffering in An Unofficial Rose, and Gerald Scottow, the head warden in charge of administering Hannah's sentence in The Unicorn. Randall has caused his wife's suffering by running away with a young girl. He is aided by his father, Hugh Peronett, who years earlier had wanted to begin an adulterous relationship with demon Emma Sands but did not have the courage to break up his marriage. Randall is not a forceful masculine type of demon. Rather, he, like Bil Mor of the Sandcastle, is somewhat cowed at the beginning of the book. The cause for Randall's final break from Ann is rooted deep in his profession--he cultivates roses. Baldanza says that Randall literally worships the perfect form of roses. His "recourses to alcohol, his petty sulking, and his desertion of Ann are attributed to his profound disillusionment in finding nothing

in his marriage in any way equivalent to the roses":<sup>59</sup>

Form, as this rose has it. That's  
what Ann hasn't got. She's messy  
and flabby and open as a bloody  
dogrose.<sup>60</sup>

So, Randall begins Ann's suffering by finding her inferior to the more orderly roses. The reader believes at the end of the novel that Randall will eventually return to Ann.

A more conventional Murdoch demon possessor is Gerald Scottow, Hannah's keeper in The Unicorn. Gerald has been left in charge of Hannah by her husband and Gerald's ex-lover, Peter Crean-Smith. Gerald's only motive in keeping Hannah prisoner seems to be a desire simply to show Hannah her total enslavement. Gerald tries to form a sexual liaison with Hannah near the end of the novel. This is an attempt at reaffirming his hold over her. In this mysterious scene, Gerald forces Hannah into a closet, and all the reader learns of this encounter is that a shotgun is fired, and Gerald's body lies on the floor. The reader assumes that Hannah reached the breaking point here because shortly afterwards she ends her own life. Thus, Gerald, the warden, has helped to promote the suffering of the already guilt-ridden saint Hannah. The results here are much more tragic than those caused by Randall in An Unofficial Rose.

Another powerful mystical demon is Honor Klein of

<sup>59</sup>Baldanza, p. 103.

<sup>60</sup>An Unofficial Rose, p. 30.

A Severed Head. The object of her demonizing is Martin Lynch-Gibbon, a not-quite-saint who allows Honor and other characters to use him for no apparent purification purposes. Honor is a large, strangely beautiful woman with oriental-Jewish eyes and a slight mustache. She begins her control of Martin by extracting information from him about his affair with a young girl. She relays this information to her half-brother, Palmer Anderson, the psychoanalyst previously introduced in this chapter. Anderson wants to marry Antonia, Martin's present wife. Baldanza qualifies Honor Klein as the "god figure" of the novel. He says:

She possesses an eerie power and authority that derive at least in part from the oriental exoticism of her appearance and her skill with the samuri sword. As an anthropologist who has made frequent trips to primitive tribes, she is also, as has been noted, associated in Martin's mind with the "dark gods."<sup>61</sup>

She [the author] simply uses the associations of mystery, power, and exoticism to endow the purely human pronouncements of figures like Honor Klein with that quality of non-religious, non-metaphysical, non-totalitarian transcendence of reality that she announced as one of her aims.<sup>62</sup>

After being confronted in a mystical scene involving Honor and a samuri sword, Martin, inspired by sexual desire disguised as hatred, wrestles Honor to the floor where he

<sup>61</sup>Baldanza, p1 88.

<sup>62</sup>Baldanza, p. 131.



strikes her in the face three times. After much contemplation, Martin discovers that he is actually in love with the demon-goddess. Rushing to tell her, he bursts into her room and discovers her in bed with her half-brother, Palmer. Miss Murdoch's purpose for Honor Klein is to teach Martin about the "otherness"<sup>63</sup> of other people--that Honor does not exist only in relation to his dreams "as free, as alone, as waiting in her still slumbering consciousness for me, reserved, separated, sacred."<sup>64</sup> As the demon, Honor is delighted to be able to shock the vulnerable Martin into the learning of this lesson. It is a lesson which causes him much suffering, but after all, it is one which every Murdoch character desiring salvation must learn. Therefore, in spite of possession of another character, since Honor does teach Martin this lesson, we may term her "a demon we can like."

Contrasted with the semi-redeeming motives of Honor Klein are those of the enchanter of Flight From the Enchanter, Mischa Fox. Like Circe, he captures and transforms those whom he enchants. Almost every important character in the novel is in some way in Mischa's power; Nina and Calvin Blick are his absolute slaves.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Baldanza, p. 89.

<sup>64</sup>A Severed Head, p. 166.

<sup>65</sup>Rabinovitz, p. 15.

Rabinovitz says that Mischa, in Simone Weil's sense, is the master who suffers as well as the slave. Weil's theory is that the man with a lust for power can never achieve that for which he longs the most: to dominate others completely. The knowledge that his domination is only partial causes him to seek to extend his power and increase the number of people he has enslaved; but "since the master cannot wholly dominate his new slaves, he is again frustrated, setting up a destructive cycle in which master and slave are both victims. In the study of a power struggle the true villain is power itself."<sup>66</sup> In this sense, Mischa is like the uprooted refugees who unwittingly pass the suffering on to others. Mischa seems to enjoy the role as demon, though; he realizes what he is doing at all times. He is aware of his charm, and he puts it to good use. Wolfe is a little more sympathetic to Mischa Fox. He says,

The motive force behind all of his conscious acts is a terrified pity for the finite world. Mischa unconsciously transforms his obsessive compassion for the fragility and evanescence of contingent life into sadistic cruelty. His outward display of mildness and affectionate charity is a ruse for his frankly morbid psychic impulses; . . . .<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup>Rabinobitz, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup>Wolfe, p. 78.

The most dangerous aspect of Mischa's character, however, is his intent to produce other demons out of his victims. This vampiristic attitude is exemplified in his relationships with young girls. He ascribes to them a three-phase development:

In the first, the young girl's passion for reforming men leads her to the most wicked, who is forced to demolish her; for every destroyer, Mischa insists, there is someone who courts destruction. The battered unicorn-girl then recovers from her bruises to become the siren and sets out to devastate men herself. If she can survive her own heart's destruction a second time and still have the capacity to love, she is a suitable life's mate.<sup>68</sup>

The obstacles and degradations that Mischa throws in the path of Rosa Keepe indicate that Fox is a Murdoch demon, perhaps the worst of all. Like Gerald Scottow and others, he seems to relish this demon role--all the more reason to attribute it to him.

All three levels of the Murdoch demons, like the three groups of saints, show that there are varying degrees of evil as well as good. These demons have been grouped according to their potential destructiveness. They, like the saints, seem to illustrate the Murdoch idea that there are forces of good and evil, of suffering and oppression.

<sup>68</sup>Wolfe, p. 78.



Involving the ultimate salvation (in the Murdoch sense) of her characters, there also exist variations on these saints and demons and a kind of armageddon between the two types, which will be referred to as transformations in the following chapter. .

## CHAPTER IV

### VARIATIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND SACRIFICES

The variations on the saint and demon character types are those characters who, at times, manifest characteristics of both the saints and demons, or, in the case of the sibling variations, one displays characteristics of the saint and the other displays demon tendencies. The variations are of two types: 1) the siblings, brother or sister pairs who each represent saint or demon characteristics, and 2) the children of one saint parent and one demon parent. These variations seem to represent the Murdoch idea that suffering or goodness may be passed on from one person to another. In the case of the siblings and children, it seems that she is saying that the tendency to be a saint or demon could be genetic, and that there are combinations and mutations involved when one parent is a saint and one is a demon.

In the sibling study, two sets emerge as the most interesting out of the forty-plus sets of siblings in the concentrated Murdoch study. They are brothers Matthew and Austin Gibson-Grey of An Accidental Man and brother-and-sister Cato and Collette Forbes of Henry and Cato. Discussed previously in chapters one and two, Austin

Gibson-Grey and his brother Matthew have been at odds since their childhood. They represent a type of rich man-poor man relationship. Although Matthew is the wealthy, successful diplomat whom all his relatives and friends adore, it is Austin, the accidental man, who comes closest to Murdoch salvation at the novel's denouement. Matthew is more nearly a demon because of the enjoyment he receives from gossip and a degree of control he has over the lives of his family and friends. Austin is more nearly a saint because of the love of Dorina, this novel's suffering saint. After Dorina's death, Austin reaches out to another person (Mavis, Matthew's ex-mistress), and having been shown the meaning of love by Dorina, he is able to share his feelings with someone else, which is Murdoch salvation. There is no discussion in the novel of these brothers' parents, so the reader does not know their moral status in Murdoch terms. There is a hint of the fact that Matthew's demon personality was developed at an early age when he half-purposefully caused Austin's hand injury and thereby began Austin's career of accidental-ness. Although the two are brothers, they exhibit opposite saint-demon tendencies.

In extreme ironic contrast are Cato and Collette Forbes of Henry and Cato. Both characters have been discussed in chapters one and two. Cato is the corrupt homo-



sexual demon priest; Collette is the sacrificial saint who saves her brother by reaching out to him rather than suffering alone. The irony is that Cato, the priest, who would normally be considered the saint, is the demon because he tries to possess Beautiful Joe. He is also under the delusion that he no longer wants to be a priest. It is Collette who brings him back to his senses by reaching out to him.

There are many other interesting brother-and-sister relationships. The most interesting are those who, like the Gibson-Greys and the Forbes, present an irony in which one is the saint and which one the demon. Other interesting examples are Edmund and Otto of The Italian Girl and Lisa and Diana of Bruno's Dream. The siblings further illustrate that even though they may be as close as brothers and sisters, there is always a battle between saints and demons. Miss Murdoch is interested in whether or not the saints can help to save the demons.

The variations on the demon-saint parents are their children. The most interesting children in the novels are those of whom one of the parents is a saint and one a demon. The author's point here is that demonism or sainthood or a combination of both may be passed from parent to child, if not genetically, then through their environment. The two examples used in this study are chosen because of their

grotesque, bizarre behavior, which is caused by the struggle between their parents.

An interesting pair of children of demon-saint parentage are Donald and Felicity Mor of The Sandcastle. Their parents are Bill Mor, the saint, and Nan Mor, the demon. The Mors' struggle involves the aspirations of Bill, the middle-aged college professor. He expresses the desire to run for parliament. A kindly person, he has always had high hopes for Nan's and the children's intellectual development. Nan is a very conservative, realistic person who thinks Bill's political aspirations are unrealistic. She bullies Bill because of his gentleness, and she seems always to have her way. At the beginning of the novel, Bill has won one of his rare victories in insisting that their son Donald attempt Cambridge, although practical Nan insists upon secretarial school for their daughter, Felicity.

Frank Baldanza has analyzed the problems of the Mor children resulting from their parents' saint-demon struggles. Donald's futile preparations in chemistry for the scholarship examination increase his nervous tension to the breaking point. He is involved, too, in a relationship with Jimmy Carde, a fellow student, which has all the appearances of quasi-homosexual attachment. When he and Jimmy develop a plan to climb the neo-Gothic steeple of St. Bride's--a

feat that has been executed only once before--his sister Felicity makes a monumental, but unsuccessful, attempt to dissuade him.

Felicity has her own problems. A lonely girl, she has relied on the imagined companionship of Liffey, a family dog long since dead and buried, and of Angus, a wholly imaginary spirit who manifests himself in a variety of mysterious, omen-rich appearances. In order to prevent her brother from climbing the steeple, she revives the "Power Game," something Donald has already grown out of; it consists of a dare to procure some object intimately associated with an adult who is to be bewitched. In this case, the stockings of Rain Carter, the young girl who is in love with their father, are to be purloined. Even though he no longer believes in the game, Donald is caught up in it once he begins to accompany his sister; on the way, Felicity catches sight of a gypsy, but she assumes it to be Angus. After they have successfully entered Rain's room, the children, who have already heard rumors about her attachment to their father, discover a compromising letter from Mor in her effects, and this confirmation of their worst fears probably leads to Donald's decision to proceed with the planned climb anyway.

Shortly thereafter, Felicity and her mother leave for a vacation in Dorset, an absence which encourages the growing



love between Mor and Rain. At the seaside, Felicity, in acute mystery, plans and executes an elaborate magic rite at twilight which involves, among other observances such as Tarot symbols, the burning of a doll representing Rain, made from the stolen stockings. Performed on slippery rocks as the sun disappears and the tide comes in, the ritual scene is one of haunting melancholy.<sup>69</sup> Felicity's involvement with magic helps to make her more self-involved and unloving.

The Mor children's bizarre behavior seems to be a result of the struggle between their saint-demon parents. With children of such parentage, Miss Murdoch is commenting once again on suffering or goodness forming a chain and the fact that inheriting such a mixture of tendencies, as well as being exposed to them, produces unhealthy individuals.

Another example of the mixed-up child caused by demon-saint parents is Miranda, the adolescent enchantress, daughter of saint Ann and demon Randall of An Unofficial Rose. Their demon-saint struggle, which has been discussed previously, involves Ann's orderliness and her failure to measure up, in Randall's eyes, to the beauty of the roses he cultivates. Randall causes Ann's suffering when he runs away with a young girl. Miranda seems to have more than daughterly love for her father, and she fancies herself in love with Felix Meecham, who is in love with her mother.

<sup>69</sup>Baldanza, p. 63.

She is determined to prevent a marriage between them because having Felix for a stepfather would cause double suffering for her; she would be reminded that he and her mother are lovers, and because of him, her father would probably never return. An important point of studying Miranda's and other Murdoch children's enchanting power is that because they are all "innocent" children, their powers are taken too lightly by the adults of the novels. Therefore Miranda, Donald, Felicity and others gain, behind their masks of innocence, far more power than the nakedly acknowledged tyrant. "But the really fine irony of the Miranda situation is that Miranda forces Ann to a passive, patient waiting for the errant Randall's return."<sup>70</sup> She perpetuates her mother's suffering in this way. The reader wonders if Miranda is not more the cause of Ann's suffering than Randall. With all her many suitors, it seems likely that Ann could forget her husband, especially since he makes it clear now that he is utterly repulsed by her. Miranda's role, then, seems to be that of demon (with her stabbing of her dolls and trying to fly out of trees) and moral reminder (similar to Pearl in The Scarlet Letter) to her mother that she should suffer, in this case because she could not keep a family unit

<sup>70</sup>Baldanza, p. 100.

together for the sake of the child. Miranda, like the Mor children, has been forced (by the demon-saint struggle of her parents) to resort to her own sense of power and attention-getting devices. All of the children variations are deeply disturbed reflections of the demon-saint struggles in their homes. Other examples of the demon-saint child are Pierce of The Nice and the Good and Flora of The Italian Girl. The Murdoch child of demon-saint parents, with all of his sorcery and mystical implications, seems to suggest that the actions of these demon-saint children are more honest than those of their parents: while one of the parents will subtly kill the other through mental suffering, the child will simply do away with his enemy by sticking a pin in a voodoo doll of that enemy. In the Murdoch world, the hope for the future, as reflected by these children, is dim because if they are sticking pins in dolls now, what horrors will they activate as Murdoch adults?

These children variations, like the sibling variations, show that both demons and saints may exist within the same family units, and that when there is a demon-saint struggle, the suffering is passed on to the children. The Murdoch child of demon-saint parents, with all his sorcery and mystical powers, is a symbol of what can happen when a saint is mated with a demon.



The children, the siblings, and other minor characters often become involved in a type of armageddon, a show-down between the saints and demons. There is an optimistic tone in most of these final battles in which one or more characters becomes changed for good through the influence of a true saint, a lesser saint, or a similar force for good in the novels. These changes come about in dramatic scenes which will be called transformations.

The transformations are instances of change noted in a character or characters after some sacrifice has been made by another. These scenes of transformation and sacrifice, which Miss Murdoch calls "technical excursions,"<sup>71</sup> are dramatic climaxes to one or more saint-demon struggles which have occurred in the novel. Often, these scenes involve water as a kind of baptismal, purifying symbol. Gail Kmetz comments on the transformation scenes: "She often uses water as a symbol of the nonrational--Conrad's 'destructive element' in which one must immerse oneself if one is not to drown."<sup>72</sup> Those characters who, by accident or on purpose, plunge into this "symbol of the nonrational" are losing themselves symbolically; they are saints because they do not con-

<sup>71</sup>Kermode, p. 65.

<sup>72</sup>Kmetz, p. 86.

concentrate on themselves so much that they lose a sense of others' needs. It is these saints' sacrificial acts and their positive effects, if any, on the demons which is the purpose of Miss Murdoch's scenes of transformation and sacrifice.

There are many examples of transformation scenes in the Murdoch novels. Three of the most dramatic are those involving 1) Dorina's death in An Accidental Man, 2) Dora's near-drowning in The Bell, and 3) the deluge in Bruno's Dream. In each of these examples, there is a transformation involving other characters in the novel following the dramatic, baptismal-like water scenes.

Dorina's death in An Accidental Man was, like so many other things in that novel, accidental, although the reader senses a kind of prophetic deliberateness in Dorina. She has dreams in which she sees herself drowning, and she wakes up screaming in the morning. She appears to the other characters, as well as to the reader, a mystical, frail, ethereal creature, who is somehow more spiritual than they. When she does die in a horrible accident involving an electric heater falling into her bathtub, she becomes even more revered by the other characters. There are two characters, especially, who become transformed following Dorina's death. Austin, her estranged husband, seems to follow Dorina's example of bravery. The "Accidental Man" of the title, he is not

mentioned as having any more accidents following Dorina's death. He was Dorina's primary source of suffering because of his mental problems involving his brother. Because of Dorina's example, he finds new courage, falls in love again (thus becoming a Murdoch saint by reaching outward), and is no longer the "accidental man." Ludwig, the American draft-dodger, also receives moral and spiritual benefits from Dorina's death. He feels partially responsible for her accident because he met her on the street the night of her death and ignored her. Gracie, his selfish, snobbish, busy-body fiancée, did not want him to reach out to Dorina, and going against his moral conscience, he complied with Gracie's wishes. Following Dorina's death, not only does Ludwig decide that he was wrong not to help Dorina, but he also decides not to marry Gracie and to return to America to face punishment for his draft-dodging. This transformation of Ludwig does not atone for his treatment of Dorina, but it helps to rid him of guilt, a destructive, inhibiting force. He, like Dorina, can now plunge into the "nonrational destructive element," whatever that may be for him.

The transformation of Dora in The Bell is more of a personal one, but its effects do reach other characters in the novel. Dora does not die as Dorina did; she nearly drowns trying to save a young girl. This act initiates



the change in Dora. Dora, a wayward wife, was brought to Imber Court, a lay religious community, by her husband. He hoped that the religious surroundings would produce a subduing effect on his wife. Instead, Dora learns that the cloistered existence is an unhealthy way of life. She, not the nuns who practice their daily prayers, is the Murdoch saint of the book because she realizes that one must reach out to others. The lay religious community is a symbol of reaching inward. There are no motivations for real spiritual growth here. Dora learns to reach out in spite of the stifling surroundings. Without thinking, she plunges into the lake to help Catherine Fawley, the misguided innocent who wants to commit suicide because she has fallen in love. By Dora's selfless act of plunging into the water when she does not know how to swim, she teaches the nuns and other religious leaders, who are standing by watching, the real meaning of selflessness. Her message comes through to one of the nuns, who jumps in to rescue her. Following this dramatic scene are definite and immediate changes in Dora. Once a bitter, cynical bitch, she now glows with love. She stays on at Imber (although just about everyone else, including her smug husband, leaves) to help Michael, the one religious leader who has the potential, along with the aquatic nun, of becoming a saint. Catherine Fawley, set free by Dora's show of bravery, leaves Imber, no

longer stifled by its pervasive forces. Dora's transformation, a personal one, does have positive effects on other characters.

In Bruno's Dream, the transformation is more general, involving many characters. The problems of the characters in Bruno's Dream involve, according to Baldanza, the character of love: "Is it [love] a solipsistic spasm inside one's own head? How does one break out of erotic reverie to encounter and engage the attention of another human being who reciprocates the same intensity of feeling?"<sup>73</sup> Most of the characters in the novel are launching on at least the second, or third, major emotional and erotic entanglement of their lives. Bruno, the ninety-year-old dying man, who has had his share of these entanglements, lies on his death bed watching those around him make the same mistakes--mainly involving what they think is love--as he did. He becomes a Noah figure who tries symbolically, through his suffering, to show the younger characters, made up mostly of his children and servants, that they are confusing these "erotic reveries" for real love. Miss Murdoch, as the old Testament Jehovah, sends a deluge of rain to destroy this solipsistic view of love and to provide a more universal definition of the word "love." All of the characters are transformed, in one way or another, by the flood. Bruno's

<sup>73</sup>Baldanza, p. 148.

stamp collection, a symbol of his self-involvement, is destroyed by water. The servant girl Adelaide, who barely survives drowning, ends her involvement with her "master" Danby and forms a successful marriage with a more suitable mate, fellow-servant Will. Probably the most involved psychological transformation is noted in the character of Lisa, the sister of Bruno's daughter-in-law, Diana. Before the flood, Lisa had floundered from the Communist party to a false vocation as a nun to a teaching position, and during the course of her stay at Diana and Miles', three out of the four leading males in the novel think they are in love with her. Although she possesses potentially saintly qualities, she seems to enjoy the attention she receives from her would-be suitors. Her biggest ego involvement involves Miles, her sister's husband. Although they have confessed their love for each other, she declares that she cannot break up her sister's marriage. She seems delighted at Miles' mental and physical suffering on her account. After the flood, she realizes that these tantalizations are nothing but mental excursions, and so she decides to settle down to a "practical" love for Danby, who has loved her all along. Thus, she comes closer to true sainthood than she has ever been before. Her sister Diana's transformation is even more dramatic. Heretofore smart and superficial, Diana, having seen through to the emptiness at



the heart of her marriage to Miles, learns by sitting at Bruno's deathbed the true character of nonegoistic, reconciling spiritual love. With Diana's transformation, Bruno sees, like Noah, the hope for the new generation whose individuals will understand the practical, universal love that he and Diana have come to understand.

There are other examples of transformation and sacrifice in the Murdoch novels: 1) Hannah's saintly sacrifice to atone for her and others' guilt in The Unicorn, 2) Collette Forbes' selflessly screaming for her brother Cato, thus teaching him to reach out to others, and 3) Elsa Levkin's burning of herself to end the suffering brought about by her family in The Italian Girl are all examples of the selfless, sacrificial saints in the act of trying to save the other characters. There are various transformations which take place following these sacrifices. They are not as dramatic, perhaps, as those described in detail, but they do serve the same purpose, to show that in the Murdoch world it takes some sacrifice on the part of the true saints to redeem the near saints and demons. It is only in these dramatic, transformational scenes that the reader sees any optimism in the Murdoch novels. In the transformations, "goodness," in the forms of the saints and the changes brought about in others, seems to prevail over evil.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Miss Murdoch's ability to blend lesson and technique is the key to her dynamic hold on the reader. Wolfe summarizes Miss Murdoch's importance as a philosopher and a novelist:

Iris Murdoch merits the label philosophical novelist not only because her fiction expresses a discernible attitude toward human contact, but also because her driving principle is a descriptive inquiry into moral values as they occur in daily human life. Myth and philosophy, she believes, are not secondary interests: we live in them all the time and must perpetually clarify and reconstruct them to illuminate our changing predicament. The role of the perceiving self as an active moral agent prevents the surrounding social frame from chilling into lifeless materialism. At the same time, the reality that the perceiver confers upon external objects and selves safeguards the solidity of individual substances and staves off the dead hand of solipsism.<sup>74</sup>

The novels of Iris Murdoch are very complex statements of philosophy and morals. Her character types, the saints, demons, and variations, are spokesmen for her philosophical ideas. The saints represent goodness and the hope for salvation. They help to illustrate her idea that the concept of good is very difficult to define and that there are varying degrees of goodness, from the in-

<sup>74</sup>Wolfe, p. 209.

nocents to the agents to the suffering saints. The demons make similar statements about the concept of evil. Through the "bad," the power seekers, and the possessors, Miss Murdoch gets a chance to attack such ideas as solipsism, the corruption in organized religion, and hypocrisy. The variations, the siblings and children, reflect the chaos which exists when the saints and demons collide, and finally, through the transformations, optimism is projected when the suffering of the saints wins out over the possession of the demons.

The philosophical and moral lessons which her characters teach are palatable because, as in studying the characters of Charles Dickens, the reader becomes involved with the sheer interest of the characters themselves and tends to forget that the author had a philosophical or moral message. Her facility with the "technical excursions" aids in producing the dramatic transformational scenes, which are so necessary for the reader's realization that good will, in one form or another, triumphs over evil.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baldanza, Frank. Iris Murdoch. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974.
- Kmetz, Gail. "People Don't Do Such Things--Business As Usual in the Novels of Iris Murdoch," Ms., 1976, pp. 70-73.
- Kriegel, Leonard. "Iris Murdoch: Everybody through the Looking Glass," Contemporary British Novelists, ed. Charles Shapiro. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965.
- Murdoch, Iris. An Accidental Man. London: Chatto and Windus, 1964. New York: Viking Press, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Bell. London: Chatto and Windus, 1956. New York: Viking Press, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Black Prince. London: Chatto and Windus, 1973. New York: Viking Press, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Flight From the Enchanter. London: Chatto and Windus, 1956. New York: Viking Press, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Italian Girl. London: Chatto and Windus, 1964. New York: Viking Press, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A Severed Head. London: Chatto and Windus, 1963. New York: Viking Press, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Unicorn. London: Chatto and Windus, 1963. New York: Viking Press, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. An Unofficial Rose. London: Chatto and Windus, 1962. New York: Viking Press, 1962.
- Meidner, Olga McDonald. "Reviewer's Bane: A Study of Iris Murdoch's The Flight From the Enchanter," Essays in Criticism, II (1961), p. 444.
- Rabinobitz, Rubin. Iris Murdoch, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.
- Sullivan, Zohreh Tawa Kuli. "Enchantment and the Demonic in Iris Murdoch: The Flight From the Enchanter," Midwest Quarterly, 16: 276-97.
- Wolfe, Peter. The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and Her Novels. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966.