

## Irish Murdoch and Existentialism

Iris Murdoch, in her novel, *“The Good Apprentice”* seems to be trying to affirm that existential redemption is possible. In the consequent development of the character of Edward she has tried to effectively portray this stream of thought by substituting divine agency with that of God and making Edward himself find his redemption by learning to take responsibility and toil hard like a ‘slave’. Moreover he learns to care for others and to forgive and he himself is forgiven for his guilt, the murder of his best friend, Mark.

The quest that Murdoch takes up in her novels has been at heart with the whole of the Western world, although subdued more before than now. In taking up this existential quest, she surely has been influenced by Jean Paul Sartre who once, talking about novels opined that, “at the heart of the aesthetic imperative, we discern the moral imperative”. In *“L’Existentialisme est un Humanisme”* (1946), Sartre offers a defense of existentialism against several reproaches that have been laid against it. Moreover this treatise of his has been taken as the manifesto for existential theorizing. Giving emphasis to man rather than God and thereby putting human actions solely responsible for the progress of mankind, Sartre goes on to elaborate on the central themes of existentialism. In this treatise of his, Sartre focuses on the factors like contingency and abandonment and the anguish and despair they cause in the existence of individuals. He also emphasizes on the atheistic feature of the humanist existentialism and says, “if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality (16). In further sentences Sartre goes on to clarify what he means by saying that in man’s case “existence precedes essence” and says that, ...that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world- and defines himself afterwards. If man, as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of him...Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he

conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills and as he conceives himself after already existing (16). His intention is all clear; he wants to free man from the guardianship of God.

Existentialism thus sees human reality as an accident that has occurred in an uncaring and free world. To make something out of this accident, man has to act himself and is free to make his own choices as “he wills to be after that leap towards existence”. He goes on to say that “man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself”. And he began the search. Four back to back novels came, the most promising one, “Nausea” (1938). The novel too tried to paint the existential picture. The structure was existential to the tee and the objective was known beforehand but it couldn’t satisfy the existential adequateness or palate should we say of the critics and even the followers of Existentialism.

Murdoch took up the same quest after a thorough analysis of Sartre and his works and got it published in 1953. The book was “*Sartre, a Romantic Rationalist*” wherein she declared that, “Sartre’s inability to write a great novel is a tragic symptom of a situation which afflicts us all” (quoted in Bloom). So, she takes up the quest from her guru and sets out in the path of giving existential adequacy to her characters. The effect which she develops thus takes her readers along on her private as well as her professional quest. On the base of this atheistic existential philosophy, “*The Good Apprentice*”, the twenty second novel of Iris Murdoch shall be scrutinized.

An accident gives the start to the novel and the accident results on a death. Usually, deaths and other violent forms of events come at the climactic point when the characters are surreptitiously led to that event and then start the story’s rinsing through or the denouement thereby resulting on a happy or sad ending. But here the climax comes, so to say, immediately at the start and it shoots off the story. So technically it could be said that the most of the total pages are actually that, what comprises a big bulky denouement in more than five hundred pages.

The relationships here are even more within, as if inside a box – more coincidental than usual. Everybody knows everybody else and it seems like there are only a dozen people in the world. Edward loves Brownie who loves Giles who is the son of Edward's tutor and until recently loved Edward's brother Stuart. Harry loves Midge who is the sister of his deceased wife and Edward's mother Chloe. Sarah seduces Edward which figures in the death of Brownie's brother Mark; Sarah, Brownie and their mothers are all friends whom Edward accidentally discovers living near his father's country home. Edward's stepmother May writes her memoirs, which are critically reviewed by Sarah's mother Elspeth; you get the idea.

In this novel, characters in action seem to be leading an easy and financially sound life. They are also made as special creatures who know how to use their leisure fruitfully in their social life full of family get-togethers, dinner parties and personal calls. They express concern and care for each other and exchange personalized gifts. They pursue active professional careers at the same time and to which they devote remarkably little time... Like in any other such height of storytelling, here too, the theme of the role and place of the artist in the late twentieth century is equally peeped into. There also is the doubling and pairing of characters and the switching about of lovers and relationships as in any seriously serious or otherwise novel, in vogue in the latter years of the twentieth century.

But here, there is also the debate and dramatization of the ethical problem of the “good”. And, with this, Murdoch tries to travel - the otherwise not easily ushered into - path of heavy theology. Writing the novel in the post modern viscous terrain of world literature when literally, God and religion are not in vogue she tries and constructs a unique style and standard of her own. In “good” she tries and finds the answers for a non believer, to the “spiritual question” as is answered by the word “God” for the believer.

Finally, after a lot of accidents and incidents which connect together in a spiritual quest, there is the qualified happy ending of this brilliant and typical product from its author.

Murdoch's novelistic world is Sartrean all the way. It is an existential world where man keeping a 'faith' that there is no God and it's all up to his own "condemned to be free" self to guide his way through what is called life, where endings are never there. In more concrete words, they are open ended just like life where the future always has endless possibilities. It is always there waiting with hope and the coming progress. The story of life is never complete, if that is what any true literature aspires to fathom.

What she does is, brings into play an array of mish –mash characters into an existential world and thereafter tries to develop them by giving each of them a motive to grow or /either adapt to the existential atmosphere around, giving each one of them the perfect existential platform to make their own choices. By employing characters in an existential plot and setting, and narrating multiple stories overlapping each other she wants her readers as well as her critics to arrive at the existential truth i.e. to understand that each being is bound and thus mould by existential contingency and the choices he/she makes and always try emphasizing the fact that God and religion have nothing to do with the life people lead.

Characters in *The Good Apprentice* live in a free world and lead an uncertain existence. It is such a world where their birth, coming of age and ultimately death just don't have a meaning. They are pointless and are just accidents. They are living an existence, parameters of which were already there before them. Life choices, actions and industry are all upto themselves. They won't be guided by the non existent God personality in their life and they themselves have to find the answers, to the question called life. Despite this fact being harrowingly true equally to the two central characters in the novel, they try and find solutions to the anguish which makes

them suffer because of the uncertainty about their existence or, the contingency about their existence. And they try to find their solutions by being “good” and thus the title of the novel.

These characters, strangely, are brothers in the novel, but, just because they are reared by the same father, Harry. In fact, Edward the younger of the two is the son of Chloe and Jesse and Stuart is the son of Harry and Teresa. Like their existence, they too are accidental brothers. Of them, Edward is guilt stricken and Stuart is plainly confused about existence. Anguish and a sense of agony and nothingness haunt them day in and day out because of this. They want to get rid of this anguish and thus, the novel moves forward.

With the start of the novel, Edward tricks his friend Mark into taking a drug laden sandwich, something Mark would never knowingly do. In the resultant trip, Mark’s face turns radiant, “glowing as if from within. In ecstasy, Mark envisions the world as “one ... big ... fish “, sees god descending “like a lift” and falls happily asleep.

Thinking that Mark would be asleep for a long time, Edward leaves the room, free to heed the sexual summons of Sarah. When he returns, he finds the room empty and the window wide open. He looks out fearing the worst and sees Mark’s body down in the basement, “stretched out and broken, a blood-stained sack” (8).

At the inquest, Edward submits to giving the drug to Mark but only at his request – a lie. The authorities were lenient enough though Mark’s mother accused Edward of murdering her son. He is suspended from college until the next academic year. He was let off on condition that he gave up drugs and agreed to receive regular psychiatric treatment. The newspapers slowly lose interest on the incident and Edward “passed out of the public eye into his private hell”(8). His guilt and agony were further compounded by the accusing letters that Mark’s mother sends him, who knows that Edward has lied to the police to conceal his own culpability. Thus, Edward’s misery threatens, if not to drive him to suicide, at least to precipitate a nervous

breakdown. He cannot help but get immersed in despair in this sorry state of his going into imaginary conversations with Mark, trying to explain that he had nothing to do with Mark's death and that it was just an accident. To Stuart who comes visiting to give solace, he says, "It's no good talking to me,"... Just let me alone, will you? I'm a machine. I say the same things to myself a thousand times a day, I see the same things, and I enact the same things. Nothing can help me, nothing... I'm there already burning in hell. My soul is gone, I've no inward soul, and it'll all burn away"(49). Such is the extent of Edward's problems, his agony brought about by that one unintended guilt that of killing his best friend.

Thus starts Edward's quest for redemption or absolution from this ever present agony. As the novel takes its course, he is reunited with his biological father, courtesy of Thomas and which is revealed to Edward much later in novel, writing to May Baltram asking her to invite Edward to Seegard.

In visiting Seegard, Edward is simply answering a summons which may lead to his redemption. At Seegard the young man finds that Jesse is "away but will soon return. Meanwhile, he is made to take his share of the household's chores: "it suited him to be told what to do, to be so much employed that he could exist unthinkingly like a slave, like a working animal" (136). The non living "machine" which he thought of himself had now changed to something now living and breathing –a slave, an animal. Hope had started coming on to him. He was changing.

Eventually, accidentally, Edward discovers that Jesse has never left the house, but is locked up in his bedroom in the tower and now is in a decrepit state – old, ill and bedridden and who seemed to have been waiting for him.

Upon meeting him, Edward had wanted to tell his father about Mark, "but of course that's impossible, it doesn't matter. I must keep him talking; I must keep this going on". (207) As

if he has found his route to redemption, he is determined to stay on at Seegard and look after his father, the more so he distrust the women who claim to be taking good care of him even though he is locked up at the tower as a prisoner and no medical aid is provided to him except those which Mother May herself prepares. What keeps him at Seegard is Jesse, “love for him, pity, and duty” (217), and he wonders:

Was I brought here to help, to liberate him by talking to him, to be his guardian in his last days – brought here by them [viz. the women], by him, by fate? ... I thought I was mad because I was in love with Mark and could not go on living. Wasn't that why I came here? to lose the old hated self and begin a new one by magic? I was in love with Mark – and now I am in love with Jesse. Is that my cure, my healing, my longed for absolution? (218)

Stuart on the other hand is not afflicted by any such agony as his brother suffers from. His anguish comes from his knowledge. He has just finished his graduation with flying colours but doesn't see a point in advancing his education further. He has vowed celibacy and says he wants to do social work rather than pursuing knowledge and earn wealth. He actually has already understood the inherent meaninglessness and contingency of existence. The brutal and oppressive present is always there to give him agony. So, he is confused as to how to find the answers for his anguish and thus goes forward in a quest of his own, that of being “good” and helping the needy. But, his quest is oftentimes misunderstood by other characters in the novel and thus, is laughed at for his antics. It's altogether a different matter but, the writer while procreating him didn't perhaps maintained such a view or perhaps she didn't actually create him as the “fool” archetype but actually as her existential mouthpiece. While solacing Edward, he says:

... All this repetitive misery is bad, its not truth. I am not suggesting you just try to jump out of it all, you can't. It's not like a riddle with a magic solution. You've got to think about what happened, but try to think about it in a bit of clear light. The burning has to go on, but hold onto something else too, find something good, somewhere, anywhere, keep it close to you, draw it into the fire \_ (49)

The way the author has developed him and the way he is actually kept aloof from the lives of other characters certainly point out about that way. The ways he handles that "love in the air" episode in the novel and also at the same time reworks the personal life of Midge who apparently is cheating on her husband and keep's Harry, Stuart's father as a lover, certainly point out the same way. And, that he is just in his early twenties means that he is a genius in the making. You may ask why "genius" to him whom others have termed him a fool. Look what he has to say to Midge when she professes love to him, who is also her lover, Harry's son:

Stop it, said Stuart. You don't really believe or feel any of this, you don't even understand it, it's just emotional babbling – you're having a nervous crisis, you're suffering from shock,...you'll see that tomorrow, you'll feel different ... All this stuff is false, what you speak of isn't there. If you want to change your life go back to Thomas, if you want a miracle and a renewal look for it there (398)

As seen in the dialogue he blurts out to Midge or Edward, he just doesn't give outright solutions to the problems in them but rather he asks them to find the answers for themselves, echoing the central idea of existentialism, that of 'choice' which individuals have to make for themselves. His most remarkable feature is that, that he asks questions to himself. He just doesn't go to others for his answers. So, he experiments with his thoughts till he is satisfied with the results he gets. And oftentimes the young and immature self comes to think of sex as a barrier towards knowledge of the self or "being" as termed by the existentialists. His foolhardy antics



regarding sex must have been used by the writer for comic relief or perhaps to make readers realize that the Freudian dogma is out there capable of deriding even a genius-to-be off the track in early adulthood. Every one of us has memories of such foolhardiness in our time. For sex is a thing to be celebrated for the author; she must have used that experiment. He broods and tries to find answers all over by himself, the Kantian student archetype who doesn't want to fall under tutelage and to which Kant warns against in his transcendental treatise. Stuart personally may or may not have read Kant but anyways, he is created such by his author who certainly has read both Kant and or any such stalwarts of the same stature. It's only that in this case too he is a student but of the existential type.

Stuart is on an emotional and existential sojourn of his own kind, a quest of his own, that of the existential experimenter and preacher in the novel. In a way he is the one who still has his feet on the ground and tries to persuade other characters to take note of life's fluidity and beauty and to make them realize life's purpose, though to others' eyes he is but, an ignoramus fool.

A third plot, that concerns the three adult characters – Thomas, Midge and Harry is also intertwined with the central plot. Midge though is introduced as a loving and caring wife of Thomas is actually in a secret physical relationship with Harry who on the other hand is portrayed as a close friend of Thomas. And this adultery, which was going on for two years, when comes into public knowledge following an article written by May Baltram, Jesse's wife, it is Stuart who untangles it and sets things straight again by advising Midge to opt for her husband rather than her lover and thus find peace in her otherwise messed up life.

But life goes on in the novel even after the last page or the last line. At the end Harry, Stuart and Edward are discussing the "good things in the world". But what are they?" worries Edward, "we might all mean different ones". "Never mind," replies Harry, "let's drink to them" (561) –and together they raise their champagne glasses for a toast. This toast was perhaps also

for their life ahead, because for Ms. Murdoch, one should not hesitate in having an incomplete ending for a novel because life itself is never complete.

The acts and the achievements at the end do not promise the characters a sense of salvation, religious redeem or purgation but surely has given them a different perception, a positive one towards life and the freedom it comes with this. Should we call this the existential redemption?

A cliché plot, conventional one, but in Ms. Murdoch's hand such a straight plot gets entangled with other multi-plots. In this novel too the Murdochian entanglement continues with the same existential intensity.

It is actually Ms Murdoch's secret weapon to attain excellence in her field, that of giving an existential motive to each character thereby giving the character ample freedom to choose, the first prerequisite of existentialism. Thereby she takes Edward through different ordeals before he gets his redemption. These ordeals he faces in the frivolously haphazard movement of the story, together with a gloss of mystery and an existential eeriness with a tinge of the supernatural do surely give the spiritual glaze to the whole plot. This spiritual glaze is the "good" that she is searching for throughout her career and perhaps finally with this novel.

Ms Murdoch, it seems, if we analyze each of the principal characters, is literally living a quest in developing each character in existential terms or say on Sartrean terms. Edward is favored as the first choice of the good apprentice by most critics- Bloom, Simone and et all. But, the psychoanalyst McCaskerville, who literally fools Edward into absolutions; the painter Jesse, his biological father, now in illusion and inclined to Eastern mysticism; even Harry, his foster father to some extent and Stuart, who experiments with his sexual persona by prohibiting himself from sex and trying to live a life helping the needy, not the least, have also their complex life at hand and, their existential persona, always on the trot. And so in their stories too we have

elements of the said “good apprentice”. The minor characters in her novel, most of them from the fair sex, even them, they do not escape this quest of hers, though in an ironical manner.

It is all but natural with her; she gathers some technically rare and unique characters in existential phenomena and leaves them all free in a plural world each of them making their own and unique existential choices. It’s not that she is just concerned with her quest and in doing this she kills the natural growth of her characters. Rather it’s just that the growth is so natural and free but always with existential off limits to the less adequate ones.

The novel has been drawing attentions from quite a few prominent critics over the years. The analysis given by them too vary, with many of them focusing on the characterization in the novel, giving the mantle of the good apprentice, most of the times to the guilt ridden Edward Baltram or the psychoanalyst Thomas McCaskerville.

John Updike, himself a religious quester in his fiction, writes that Murdoch, “unable in good conscience to locate depth in the external cosmos where God once reigned, turns, in the paradoxical gesture of Christian Humanism, toward Man himself to supply the depth that man demands... Murdoch’s central male triangle of Harry, Edward and Stuart ... does not illustrate much in the way of depth”. Pearl K. Bell argues that the novel is “peculiarly disjointed and uneven”; Gillian Wilce calls it “a moral soap opera”. The Good Apprentice however in itself is a sensitive portrayal, a social and psychological comedy” (quoted in Turner)

Harold Bloom, one of the prominent theorists of the post-modern era and known otherwise for his theory of belatedness writes in the NY Times:

In a narrative that chronicles Edward’s journey from hell to purgatory[. . .]Edward regards himself as a dead soul, he is nevertheless the book’s only legitimate

representative of the good, in however a guise. His elders all fail him and themselves are exposed as souls deader than he is (2).

“The esthetic puzzle,” Bloom writes, is whether the comic story and the spiritual kernel can be held together by Miss Murdoch’s archaic stance as an authorial will.” Regarding, Stuart he has to say that” he knew there was no supernatural being and did not design to try to attach the concept in any way to his absolutes. If something ‘good’ or something was his ‘master’, it was no personal or reciprocal relation”(4).

Mr. Bloom thus also finds in Edward the sole torch bearer to his writer/creator and that his progress out of an inner hell has no false consolations or illusory images haunting it. He is the only legitimate good apprentice in the novel the writer is searching for. And it is his journey the novel chronicles.

Irene Simon, another critic also chooses Edward as the good apprentice. She studies the novel as a biblical parable especially Luke 15.18,19. This parable which talks about the once estranged and now guilt ridden son, who is absolved when he returns to his father, sorry and repenting, as he is caught up in a famine and faced an impecunious condition, due to his spendthrift ways. The father however welcomes him with a banquet forgiving him and thereby absolving him.

In linking the novel to this parable, Simon writes:

It would seem, then, that there are enough elements to justify the hint given on the first page that this is the study of a prodigal son (Edward). The actual development of the situation deviates from the strict outline of the parable so that Luke 15.18,19 serves as a pattern for the narrative without limiting the significance of

the events nor the freedom of characters. Seldom has Iris Murdoch given her readers such a clear guideline from the outset of the novel. (75)

Jack Turner gives the title of the good apprentice to the psychoanalyst, Thomas McCaskerville. He finds that Thomas is the “wise man figure” who takes care of both the boys’ problems in the novel and says, “Thomas is the saint figure, but although he is presented an almost ideal man (resembling Murdoch’s father in his intelligence, steadiness and success he nonetheless has faults as both man and analyst which are used indirectly to criticize Freudianism (2). Thus, Turner surprisingly enough and in the same sentence first gives the mantle of the good apprentice to Thomas referring to him as ‘wise’ and ‘ideal’ and in a fleeting second takes it away from his hero by asserting that he has faults both as a man and an analyst. In a way Turner loses his hero.

None of the critics cited above focus on the quest that the writer assigns to each character and the effect it produces in the overall development of the novel. Nor do they have anything to say about the process that Edward has to go through to attain his redemption. My study therefore proposes that Edward is led through by the author in the narrative so that he attains absolution from his guilt. In order to research, analyze and prove my hypothesis, the work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction of issues, perspectives and the literature review. The second one contains the research methodology under which it surveys and includes existentialism as the tool for looking at the world and life. The third and the fourth chapter contain the textual analysis and the conclusion respectively.

### **Existentialism as a New Perspective to Look at the World and Life**

Existentialism puts man at the centre of all affairs and addresses the fundamental problems of human existence. The central questions that this stream of philosophy tries to answer are the questions like, what is it to exist and to say that it has a purpose. It also tries to find out if we are free after all and if we are free, what about the contingent factor about existence. In spite of this, this philosophy, tries and studies if there is any objective difference between right and wrong or if we are responsible for our actions or say what would be the right sort of religious, political or sexual commitment, one should take to lead an effective existence. Moreover it also, thus asks persons as to how would they want to face death, as a hero or a clown.

The greater question, that which concerns the presence of God in human affairs is the point of contention for the two opposite branches that are in vogue even now. One class of existentialists, the followers of the Danish protestant theologian Soren Kierkegaard have faith in God but pleads man to act positive and make good choices in life as would God want his children to be, and thus stand on their feet, always hoping that God is there to guide the good in their struggles in life. The other branch, owing its influence to Nietzsche's "God is dead" and consequently Heidegger's phenomenology given the gush of air he gave to the atheistic form of thought, are the followers of the atheistic system of thought which Sartre, its predominant figure, has summarized and extrapolated in his 1946 treatise, "Existentialism is Humanism".

This thought, that puts man at the centre believes that no matter what, but God doesn't come to assist the earthly sojourners in their times of distress and despair and that man is "thrown out in to the world" and is "condemned to be free". His life depends on him and the choices he makes in life. The thought was put into words and subsequently into method in and after the heightened industrialization years in Europe in the latter parts of the nineteenth century. It subsequently came to perfect sense to many more in geometric progression during the two

cataclysmic wars in which humanity was mercilessly fooled into. The inter war period wasn't better either, it saw the rise of Stalin in Russia whose reign saw the same brutal sense at work in killing the Kulaks in millions as Hitler the other political villain did with the Jews with the same and perhaps with a higher ruthlessness. In philosophical terrains, along these years, atheistic existentialism rose into prominence as a full fledged movement as thinkers surmised that the world was totally absurd, and was not governed by the laws of providence but by pure chance and contingency just like an accident. Therefore a different viewpoint, a feeling of an existence without justification, started taking shape. Belief in the traditional concepts like unity, rationality, and even Christianity was thus torn apart. The objective of this study of mine is the extrapolation of the atheistic system prevalent in the novel. So, thereby the historical background of this stream of philosophy that will be discussed hereafter will take into account only the atheistic ones that came into the picture except also Soren Kierkegaard, the "spy" in the higher service of God", as Lowrie Walter describes him.

Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish Protestant theologian, belongs to the spiritual and religious side of the two opposite factions among existential philosophers. His existential attitude is more associated with an atheistic thinker, to whom religious belief is an act of cowardice or as Camus calls it "philosophical suicide". For keeping man at the centre instead of God, thereby rejecting the Hegelian rationalist system technically, he could be taken as the first, existential philosopher in history. Kierkegaard gave the concept of existence and insisted in the importance of the Subjective Truth, which overpowers the Hegelian idea that all choices have a traditional or objective resolution. 'Existence' according to him, "is not just being there but living passionately, choosing one's own existence and committing oneself to a certain way of life" (204) thereby finding meaning in life.

Lowrie Walter relates Kierkegaard with a spy engaged in God's Service and says," in his spying, in learning to know all about conduct and illusions and suspicious characters, all the

while he is making inspection in himself under the closest inspection” (87) thus affirming the subjective existence of man though God is somewhere there high up.

For Kierkegaard, the highest truth is that human beings are God’s creature and can approach God by making a passionate commitment to him and that in making that choice; the individual overcomes the afflictions that life is nothing. He supported the idea that self realization of a human being comes when the individual gets subjective and takes full responsibility for his life. According to Kierkegaard, the individual makes life bearable by choosing one way of life over other especially choosing ‘spiritual’ over ‘aesthete’ or ‘ethical’ life and thereby “provides the life defining decision to individual human being for authentic survival” .(Historical survey of existentialism”(622),thus affirming the actions that man undertakes to run his life.

Thomas Mautner, another critic finds no alternates in Kierkegaard’s views and writes, “in choosing the religious life, there are no alternately rational reasons for doing so, only subjective or personal necessity and passionate commitment.” (Kierkegaard 343) thus undermining the actual and real existence of man.

Robert Audi sees a kind of linear movement in his ‘the aesthetic’, ‘the ethical’ and ‘the religious’ stages for personal salvation. If the said movement is other way round there is eternal perdition instead of salvation. (Kierkegaard 406) “A hidden relationship with God” comes in place as dreaded certainty takes over as his ‘passionate’ commitment is made to the providence.

Lowrie has to add more. She says, “Kirkegaard presents only one great choice: either the aesthetic mode of life, whether it be a life of pleasure, despair or religiosity and metaphysical contemplation or the ethical mode of life culminating in Christianity. People must choose both to make aesthetics and to explain everything in that way or religious” (87 -88) asserting the difference that the presence of God makes in his philosophy.

Supporting Lowrie’s views, Ellman and Fiedelson give their analysis as “in a deeper



sense there could be no question of a choice. The choice itself is decisive for, the content of the personality, through the choice the personality immerses itself in the thing chosen..." (Choice 829). In doing so, he takes responsibility over his immediate and yet neglected affairs, perhaps at the altar. Blackburn also seems to be keeping the same principals as Kirkegaard in saying "it is necessary to passionately commit oneself, to make a leap of 'faith' in the face of an objective uncertainty. One cannot know or prove that there is a God. One must simply choose to believe" (Kierkegaard 224) Glickesberg comments, "the truth apprehended in inwardness chooses an objective uncertainty with what Kierkegaard calls the passions of the infinite.

Emphasizing subjective truth Kierkegaard writes: "the important thing is to understand what I am destined for, to perceive what the 'deity' wants me to do. The point is to find the truth which I am ready to live and die. He defines human existence as an unfinished process in which an individual must choose passionately. The passion that shapes a person's self are referred to by him as "the individuals' inwardness or subjectivity" or what he calls "subjective truth" (Kierkegaard 408) making him entirely and objectively different from the other Existential philosophers, who drive God away from their system of thought and place man at the centre of all affairs, and the pioneer amongst all these was perhaps Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche too negates the Hegelian and the Kantian rationalistic idea that proposes the traditional optimistic viewpoint. On giving the theory of historiography he came as a serious challenge to the Western idealistic philosophers of the time. He opposes their thought and celebrates everything, including what we generally understand as evil irrational, immoral and so on. He doesn't believe in what we commonly call 'history' nor does he regard it as unquestioningly true. He says in *Untimely Meditations*, that "history is a human construct that evolves from interpretation, theorizing, inference from data and records and subjective biases of the individual who makes it up." (158) Going radically against these established notions and thereby ignoring and terming the teleological view point as abstract, he points out that the human

creature is instinctively animalistic and lives basically on impulses. He goes on to add that human beings can make the best possible progress when all their potentials (evil and good) are exploited. The balance of all potentials brings out the best in the human individual as well as the society and culture as well as art literature and music etc.

Nietzsche's historiography is a threefold division of the kinds of concepts about history basically into unhistorical, historical and supra historical modes. The first mode is very creative, great actions are possible at such moments. In the second mode, historical mode, one becomes conscious of history here and thus helps in preserving history. The third one epitomizes the artistic situations when creation of tragedies in the likes of the ancient Greek types could be created, when history itself is created along those moments.

He also hits out at the empiricists who believe in sense experience. He says that their past is full of guilt. For him, history is a dynamic moving present from which we cannot detach ourselves nor can we leave it. Nothing is ahistorical; we are actively participating in the creation of whatever kind of history. We create some kind of history even if we do not act. The history which we consciously and actively create ourselves is only the genuine history. Such a history is best created by producing or becoming what he calls "superman".

Nietzsche is defined as the "prophet of a non-religious religion and an unphilosophical philosophy" (535) in *Encyclopedia of Religion* by Moellendorf and as "the transvaluator of all values" (34) as O. Levy calls him in Chambers Encyclopedia. Nevertheless he did shake the foundations of the traditional Western thought and did attempt to unveil the root motives which for him were obstacles to authentic existence. Moreover, he attacks the Christian religious morality and proclaims the absence of God in human affairs.

Persuaded by the non-rational character of worldly affairs, Nietzsche tells that life is not governed by any rational principal. There is no readymade meaning in life except that which man himself gives. He denies the absolute standards of good and evil, whose truth can be evaluated

and demonstrated by reason. Thus “there is only the naked man” as Perry and his co-writer assess, who is “living in the godless and absurd world (Irrationalism 634). They also opine that to overcome Nietzschean nothingness and the absurd play, individuals must define life for themselves and celebrate it heroically (Irrationalism 634). They also opine that to overcome Nietzschean nothingness and the absurd play, individuals must define life for themselves and celebrate it heroically (Irrationalism 634)

Nietzsche denounces Christian morality for Colli and Montinari. They write, “The Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, made suffering tolerable by interpreting it as God’s intention and as an occasion for atonement ... Christianity, accordingly, owed its triumph to the flattering doctrine of personal immortality that is to the conceit that is individual’s life and death has cosmic significance ... Christianity promised salvation for the sinners’ who repent” (Georgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari 898) thereby hindering the progress of man.

From the Nietzschean perspective, the idea of God is the projection of man’s unhealthy conscience, and as a result he has developed a desire for self-torture. God actually is man’s own creation. He maintains that “God is dead, killed by the uncompromising will of man himself to discover the facts” (Marvin Perry 634) and thus discards God in his philosophy.

Since God is dead, we must be able to live with other alternatives, create new values and achieve self-mastery. Nietzsche’s hero, Zarathustra, sought to direct our efforts to the emergence of higher humanity called by him as “Superman”. Zarathustra however says that to be a superman is not an easy task as the distance between the superman and the ordinary man is greater than that between an ordinary man and an ape.

In Thomas Mautner’s views, Superman is:

... a new atheistic gospel and an aspiration towards greatness. This aspiration is embodied in the figure of the superman, a new and superior type of human being; who rejects existing morality, who overturns existing values by

affirming the positive value of earthly life and of active, creative individual who undertakes the creation of his own life in the way an artist creates his work (Nietzsche 293)

A Superman lives dangerously and according to Marvin Perry (635), is the goal of every human being. Nietzsche does not preach, paradoxically enough that one must abstain the evil and pursue the path of virtue in order to be a higher Superman. Instead he preaches that whether fair or fault one should act and strive for power, Russell Bertrand makes it clear by endowing the negative emotion to his Superman: “his noble man is a being wholly devoid of sympathy, ruthless, cunning, cruel, concerned only with his power” (Hist. of Western Philosophy 739). Russell, quoting Nietzsche, says “Trivial people suffer trivially, great men suffer greatly, and sufferings are not to be regretted because they are noble” (739). The qualities that Nietzsche gives his “Superman” are: “He will be a person of high integrity, without prejudice, appropriately proud, intellectual, great solid, considerate towards those who are inferiors and a lover of solitude as one of the conditions of creation” (392).

Nietzsche’s concept however is not like that of the religious thinker’s concept regarding evolution or “Nirvana”, rather he accepts that such qualities are inherited by the offspring from their parents. Russell supporting this idea writes, “Individuals of the superior race and their descendents are more likely to be noble in Nietzsche’s sense. They will have more strength of will, more courage, more impulse towards power, less sympathy, less bear and less gentleness (737) pointing out that Nietzsche also gives importance to heredity or genetics. To become a Superman, the man must be able to transvalue all accepted values of society and innovate with “master morality” as opposed to the Christian morality that Nietzsche condemns as “slave morality” (Russell 732) and condemns the regular and thus ordinary existence mired in the religious illusion.

All of these anti religious, anti Christian ideas that Nietzsche proposes are equally

espoused by another German philosopher, Martin Heidegger also. In his theory, he starts by introducing the problem of “being and “existence”. Saying that there is no pre-given human essence and goes on to elaborate that man himself is the author as well as the reader of his own life. James R Jacob compares his philosophy with Sartre and writes, “like Sartre, Heidegger insists that human ‘self interpreting being’ just are what they make themselves in the course of their life” (757). Heidegger separates “being “from ‘beings’ and says that “man stands out from things (801). Man is not completely captivated and defined by things but is apart from them because he is “no thing”. Man dwells in a world and continues to be there until his death. Being thrown into things, he falls away and is on the point of being drowned into things.

*Encyclopedia Britannica* evaluating human behavior in Heideggerian world writes, “Man is continually a pro-ject (*Ent-wurt*), submerged in things to such a degree that he is temporarily absorbed (*Aufgehen in*). He is then nobody in particular; and a structure that Heidegger calls (*das man*). The “they” is revealed, which ... stresses man’s “other directedness”, his tendency to measure himself in terms of his peers (800-801)

‘The *desein*’ his term for ‘existence’ or ‘being there’ is not a constant phenomenon but is rather the happening’ of a life course stretched out between birth and death. As is recorded in *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, “The being of entities in the world is constituted by the framework of intelligibility or disclosedness opened by *Desein*’s practices. Our own being as agents of specific types is defined by the world into which we are thrown” (317-19). Glicksberg feels that Heidegger’s ‘*Desein*’ in *Existentialism and Tragic Vision is* connected with death because “every moment of life is dying everything man does is but a vain effort to escape from the ignominious destiny of death” (8901). He pronounces that ‘*Desein*’ is revealed by the deep engagement with the world. Marvin Perry and his co-writers affirm that the individual in Heideggerian terms has to face the problems of ‘Being’ to determine one’s own existence. He further proclaims that man characterizes his existence authentically when he faces the world in

all its particularities and concreteness (“Twentieth Century Existentialism” 757). The painful human condition in which accomplishment is a mere illusion and happiness an evasion, permits the chance to face the human existence and there by feeling of dread or angst in reality is the priori form of human personality because “this constitutes the subjective being of man” (Rosenthal 186). According to Heidegger, the angst manifests the freedom of man to make choices himself and take hold. In anxiety all entities (Siendes) sink away into a ‘nothing and nowhere’, man hovers in himself, existing being nowhere at home. He faces nothingness (das nichts); and all average, obvious everydayness disappears and this is good, since he now faces the potentiality of authentic being (Heidegger, Martin 801). Thus it is clear from the above statement that the feeling of anxiety and the confrontation with death leads man to real ‘Being’. People struggle to transcend the feeling of dread or angst in existential crisis for authentic living. The opinion about the outcome of that struggle varies from person to person and from philosophy to philosophy.

Gin-Inari Lake in *Everyman’s Encyclopedia* sees the possibility of both victory and defeat in the struggle against dread. Says, “The problem whether a man shall be or shall not be is an event that takes place in the experience of the dread. The struggle with this dread determines whether man shall annihilate nothingness and thus perceive its other side that is being; or whether nothingness shall annihilate man. (Vol. 6:394) thus it could be easily surmised that Heidegger puts emphasis on actions and abilities of man.

Human being, Heidegger finds, displays three fundamental aspects, all however constituting one internally unified structure. These aspects as expressed in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy are “Facticity”, “Existentiality” and “Forfeiture” (450). Facticity, for him, means that human being is always already in the world. “I am always already in a world, in a sense in which my world is my world, it could no more be a world without me than I could be myself without it” (“Being and Time”). The term Existentiality refers again not to existence in the sense in which

the stone or house exists, but to the personal existence, the existence of Being. The process of existing is always dynamic not static. Human situation is a succession of unique response. In the process of being in the world the individual cannot itself cross the boundaries. So, the projection of the being is “projection in and of and with the world” (Paul Edwards 460). ‘Existentiality’ is thus the understanding of the world completely in its real sense. “Forfeiture”, the third fundamental attribute to human being means that we forget “being” for particular beings. In other words, the scattering of the essential forward drive through attention to the distracting and disturbing cares of everyday, and of the things and people that surround us everyday (Vol. 3&4:54-59). The Encyclopedia concludes, “Human beings in its everyday mode are promiscuously public, it is life with others and for others in alienation from the central task of becoming itself” (460) that helps man understand his situation.

And understanding the situation of man was exactly what French novelist, essayist and an iconic exponent of Existentialism, Jean – Paul Sartre sought to do, through his polemical writings which acclaimed the freedom of the human being. He is of the opinion that the ‘forlorn’ individual, in the threat of ‘anguish’ and ‘despair’, learns to confront his existence in the world without God. His philosophy, for Honderich, was sharpened by the confrontation with the terrors and torture of the Second World War. Honderich further justifies by adding “war which changed him from an academic philosopher and avant-garde writer into an intellectual, deeply committed to the fate of the ‘the wretched earth’” (Sartre, 791)

In “*L’Existentialisme est un Humanisme*” (1946), Sartre offers a defense of existentialism against several reproaches that have been laid against it. Moreover this treatise of his has been taken as the manifesto for existential theorizing. Giving emphasis to man rather than god and thereby putting human actions solely responsible for the progress of mankind, Sartre goes on to elaborate on the central themes of existentialism in this masterly treatise of his. He focuses on the factors like contingency and abandonment and the angst, anguish and despair they cause in

the day to day existence of individuals. He emphasizes on the atheistic feature of the humanist existentialism and at the same time gives credit to Heidegger and says, “if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it .That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality” (Sartre, 15).

In further sentences Sartre goes on to clarify what he means by saying that in man’s case “existence precedes essence” and says that:

...that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world- and defines himself afterwards. If man, as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of him...Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills and as he conceives himself after already existing (Sartre, 15).

Sartrean Existentialism thus sees human reality as an accident that has occurred in an uncaring and free world. To make something out of this accident, man has to act himself and is free to make his own choices as “he wills to be after that leap towards existence”. He goes on to say that “man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself” (Sartre, 25) giving emphasis to man over God.

Unlike Kierkegaard, and other theistic existentialists, Sartre insists that atheistic existentialism begins with the treatment of an individual and not God, a pre-established ethic or a universal conception of divine nature that Nietzsche called ‘god hypotheses’. Preferring existence rather than essence of an individual, Sartre writes “first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards defines himself”(15). God no longer exists and therefore, man comes from nothing. There is no God’s will from which man discovers the appropriate value and principle for his life. If we suppose the material object (being - in itself),



the production precedes existence” (15), then it is not living soundly rather it is “bad faith”. Since the world is empty and devoid of any ethical values, we must choose our own ethics, define ourselves and create ourselves. “You are free to choose, that is invent. No general ethics can show you what is to be done; there are no omens in the world” (15). Man’s freedom thus is inescapable and manifests itself in each of the choices he makes.

Freedom plays central role in a Sartrean world and there, people are found to be characterized by an awesome degree of liberty. Paradoxically however, but for Sartre, man’s freedom is a kind of condemnation because he writes, “he didn’t create himself yet, in other respects, he is free, because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does (Sartre, 23). Freedom is thus what one is, even though it functions always within the given situation.

As is the case with other existentialists, Sartre also stresses upon the subjectivity of the individual and differentiates that subjectivity with that of the inanimate objects and says “Man is at the start a plan which is aware of itself rather than a patch of moss, a piece of garbage, or a cauliflower; nothing exists prior to this plan, there is nothing in the heaven, man will be what he will have planned to be ... he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts (Sartre, 16 – 32). Man should plan his acts and do accordingly is what he wants to reaffirm.

Everything in the human condition remains problematic, the existential hero, in the pursuit of freedom, is doomed to failure. But, the remarkable thing here is that the failure justifies his struggle if not compensates. If the external world offers no consolation, then the people must be able to make a decisive choice in order to make their existence authentic. Thus man’s freedom is absolute, but one cannot escape responsibility and anguish. Since people are not determined by anything else, the responsibility of their being and deeds rest highly on their shoulders. People’s responsibility is very great, because in making any kind of choice, they are

choosing for the whole world (Sartre 16-17). Man is nothing else than the sum total of his undertakings. Glicksberg, on the same note, evaluates man in terms of his action and asserts, “The Existentialist hero has definite possibilities to choose from, but his range of freedom is cruelly curtailed by his vision of nothingness and the dread that this vision calls for. If the existentialist hero is to exhibit any greatness of soul in his encounter with nothingness, he must judge himself in terms of what he does” (100). Man’s action is responsible thus for giving real existence to him.

Sartre makes a clear distinction between being in itself (en-soi) and being-for-itself (pour-soi). En-soi applies to things, a thing exists in itself. This means a thing is basically what it is. If this is the case, then the axiom about existence preceding essence cannot be applied to inanimate objects. In case of man, existence precedes essence, so man is ‘pour-soi’ not ‘en-soi’. Man projects himself to the distant goals and values and “the best way is to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God” (*Desire to be God* 63). His life is the movement to become some thing that he is not.

Sartre states that through out our life we are free to face new possibilities to reform ourselves and to reinterpret our relation to the world outside us. This indeterminacy in human life results in the subjective analysis that we can never be anything, and when we try to establish ourselves as something particular, we are in bad faith. “Bad faith, is erroneously viewing ourselves as something fixed and settled, but it is also bad faith to view ourselves as a being of infinite possibilities and ignore the always restrictive facts and circumstances within which all choices must be made” (Rosenthal and Yudin 379). Glicksberg, forbidding Sartrean individual from plunging into bad faith writes, “By accepting this hard condition, by living dangerously, Sartre’s heroes save themselves from falling into bad faith” (*The Tragic Vision* 109) thereby leading a sound and full existence.

The hard condition that man has to encounter is somewhat similar to the punishment that Sisyphus, Camus' hero has to face laughing, when he defies the gods. The contribution of Camus was the other great contribution in the field of atheistic form of Existentialism. According to Frederick A. Olafson, Camus overlooked the traditional idea that many speculative and religious systems could provide positive guidance for human life or any guarantee of the validity of human values. This feeling in modern man came because of his confrontation with the devastations of the two world wars which, resulted in an age of anxiety, despair and meaninglessness. Olafson further adds that Camus found the human situation synonymous to that of Sisyphus. Camus evaluated the condition of modern man as an insane crying inside the closed glass vessel. Modern man and his situation for Camus is as given in *The Myth of Sisyphus*,

a world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world.

But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. (13)

Man lives with certain aims or plans for future before encountering the absurd situation but after that freedom to be does not exist at all. Death is there as the only reality. Camus argues that the transcendence of the absurd is achieved only through an intense struggle not through the passive acceptance of the situation. The existents have to discover some principles of justification of life. He writes, "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" (111). "Sisyphus is happy by virtue of his scorn and defiance of the gods and by virtue of a rebellion that refuses to give into despair" (Robert Audi 102). The life is devoid of meaning in this world but Camus insists strongly that man at least makes sense through his own attempt. He adds, "I continue to believe

that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one. This world has at least the truth of man, and our task is to provide its justification against the fate itself" (*The Rebel* 18) by going against religious fallacies.

Camus believed that rebellion is one of the essential dimensions of mankind. He found the possibility and principle of authentic existence in rebellion. Distinguishing rebellion with revenge he further writes in *The Rebel*,

Actually, rebellion is more than an act of revenge, in the strongest sense of the word. Resentment is very well defined by Scheler as auto intoxication - the evil secretion, in a sealed vessel, of prolonged impotence. Rebellion on the other hand, removes the seal and allows the whole being to come into play. It liberates stagnant waters and turns them into a raging torrent. (23)

Rebellion is a philosophical process and it has a different meaning than that of revenge. Revenge is a personal human emotion whereas the rebellion or the revolt is universal. Knowing the valuelessness of life, man must root himself in the life of this earth and accept the challenges of the absurd. Man himself, not the God, bears the full responsibility of his destiny in a universe, which offers no justification for his aspirations or his commitments. Man is alone in the world and is always in the mode of becoming "what he is not" according to Sartre. Camus insists that the realization of the freedom itself is God in which man can choose and create his own values.

From the consciousness of freedom, he argues, begins everything and nothing counts except through it (Camus, 823). The tragedy of modern man is not due to the absurdity or the feeling of it but with the awareness of oncoming death. "it is the intrusion of death that transforms the garden of Eden into a Charnel-house of horror, so that the human quest for happiness turns into a curse" ("Camus and the Revolt" 54). When a man has a consciousness that he will die, he begins to feel the pang of the consciousness until his death; he will be helpless in

front of death, more miserable than Dr. Faustus in front of Mephistopheles towards the end. Therefore, the present that is precarious is all a man can hope and enjoy.

The transcendence of the absurd, according to Camus, is not achieved without intense struggle. This is what Sisyphus does in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The human being expects the world to be governed by rational principles. But, if existence is entirely without reason, then the sustaining pattern of justice is also impossible. Life can neither be explained nor justified. The reality is mysterious and utterly unknowable. The only way to make life meaningful is to revolt against meaninglessness. This attempt at least helps man to recognize his situation. Man is free to choose, but he meets the obstacles of an external order that is indifferent to his needs, and these warring forces cannot be easily reconciled. In such a condition of unfulfillment, the fact of purposelessness emerges. If the demands are not fulfilled and life is incomprehensible, then it is necessary to bring meaning into the world and thus affirm the birth right of human freedom. He must take upon himself responsibility for creating values in the absurd universe. In this sense, Glicksberg comments in *Camus and the Revolt*, “the absurdist hero is thus transformed into a metaphysical rebel who dedicates himself to life not death, to affirmation not denial” ( 61).

Camus develops the idea of the rebellion against meaninglessness in his book, *The Rebel* which goes as follows:

I proclaim that I believe in nothing and that everything is absurd, but I cannot doubt the validity of my own proclamation and I am compelled to believe, at least, in my own protest. The first and only datum that is furnished in me, within absurdist experience is rebellion. Stripped of all knowledge, driven to commit murder or to consent to it , I possess this single datum which gains great strength from the anguish I suffer. Rebellion arises from the spectacle of the irrational coupled with an unjust and incomprehensible condition. (16)

In the opinion of Camus, to rebel is to exist. Sisyphus rebelled against the absurdity of the situation, so he existed but existed happily because he writes “one must imagine Sisyphus happy [...] by virtue of his scorn and defiance of the gods” (111) and from Sisyphus, we learn to be happy in spite of the trial and tribulations , he has to keep up with.

### **Representation of the Various Forms, Levels and the Limitations of Redemption**

Murdoch is primarily dictated by her morals and accordingly her objective is laid out with the title itself. By searching goodness in her characters, she tries to substitute the divine agency with that of human. Taking the case of Edward in the narrative he can be said to have attained a sense of absolution from his guilt, of killing accidentally, his friend Mark. He gets this sense of redemption by learning to be 'good' and be responsible. He even gets forgiveness not from God but from the one's that mattered, real people, the sister and mother of Mark, further emphasizing the human agency in place of the divine agency.

Life is just a series of random accidents connected together. This is what Murdoch tries to demonstrate in "*The Good Apprentice*". An accident gives the start to the novel and the accident results on a death. Usually, deaths and other violent forms of events come at the climactic point when the characters are surreptitiously led to that event and then start the story's rinsing through or the denouement thereby resulting on a happy or sad ending. But here the climax comes, so to say, immediately at the start and it shoots off the story. The relationships here are even more within, as if inside a box – more coincidental than usual. Everybody knows everybody else and it seems like there are only a dozen people in the world. Edward loves Brownie who loves Giles who is the son of Edward's tutor and until recently loved Edward's brother Stuart. Harry loves Midge who is the sister of his deceased wife and Edward's mother Chloe. Sarah seduces Edward which figures in the death of Brownie's brother Mark; Sarah, Brownie and their mothers are all friends whom Edward accidentally discovers living near his father's country home. Edward's stepmother May writes her memoirs, which are critically reviewed by Sarah's mother Elspeth; you get the idea.

In this novel, characters in action seem to be leading an easy and financially sound life. They are also made as special creatures who know how to use their leisure fruitfully in their

social life full of family get-togethers, dinner parties and personal calls. They express concern and care for each other and exchange personalized gifts. They pursue active professional careers at the same time and to which they devote remarkably little time... Like in any other such height of storytelling, here too, the theme of the role and place of the artist in the late twentieth century is equally peeped into. There also is the doubling and pairing of characters and the switching about of lovers and relationships as in any seriously serious or otherwise novel, in vogue in the later years of the twentieth century. But here, there is the debate and dramatization of the ethical problem of the “good”. And with this Murdoch tries to travel - the otherwise not easily ushered into - path of heavy theology. Writing the novel in the post modern viscous terrain of world literature when literally, God and religion are not in vogue she tries and constructs a unique style and standard of her own. In “good”, her central idea she tries and finds the answers for a non believer, to the “spiritual question” as is answered by the word “God” for the believer.

Finally, after a lot of accidents and incidents which connect together in a spiritual quest, there is the qualified happy ending of this brilliant and typical product from its author. Murdoch’s novelistic world is Sartrean all the way. It is an existential world where man keeping a ‘faith’ that there is no God and it’s all up to his own “condemned to be free” self to guide his way through is what is called life, where endings are never there. In more concrete words, they are open ended just like life where the future always has endless possibilities. It is always there waiting with hope and the coming progress. The story of life is never complete, if that is what any true literature aspires to fathom.

For the purpose of delineation of the themes and thus the movement of the story, the novel is divided into three sections, “The Prodigal Son”, “Seegard”, and “Life After Death” by its author. Like wise, this little summary or rather a short textual analysis will also be divided into the same three chapters as devised by Murdoch. The story, though will be moving in a chronological order will also be partnered by an analytical study which will make its reference the happenings and the dialogues at each point in the



narration and what impact do they have on the redemption of Edward. The parallel relation this has with Sartrean Existential Philosophy will also be tried and elaborated here and there..

### **The Prodigal Son**

The section begins with a moral and ethical problem: Edward Baltram gives a drug laden sandwich to his best friend, Mark Wilsden without his knowing. After giving a patient ear to Mark's silly blabbering and after watching him go slowly to a sound looking sleep, Edward leaves to attend the sexual summons of Sarah Ploumain . Without attending his tripped friend, he attends the call of his libido. It kills Mark. He jumps out of the window to his death. The law frees Edward seeing his unintentional attitude in the death. And also, he apparently lies about Mark himself asking the drug. But, he cannot free his soul from all this and thus is guilt stricken for good, if I am allowed to use the word here and in this context for "good" is exactly that which he would be longing to be hereafter, the use should naturally have a special meaning to the extrapolation of the storyline. Agony ridden and full of anguish, now his soul wants to rid away with this feeling but without any success. His near ones are alarmed and take pity on him. At the same time they wonder as to when and how he would be able to get away from this agony and the sorry state of his they do not know as he is not keen on brooding over any sort of advice they extend towards him. His soul as if crippled by the evil forces is unable to do away with the wound he has inflicted upon himself. His life has come to a stop in time, exactly at those moments when like a bolt from the blue, "contingency" as Sartre has also defined in his Existential treatise of 1946, took over and he was left with everlasting depression.

Edward spends his time reliving the whole episode, talking to his dead friend and explaining to him how he came to leave him unattended that fateful day. And ironically he takes pleasure in it, apart from the hordes of "coarsest trashiest most violent" thriller novels he reads trying to get away from his endless sorrow. (10)

Within this section, the other characters also are introduced. At first they are introduced in a sequence of dialogues which takes place in Sarah's "little cave-like candle-lit room where a stick of incense was burning in a Chinese vase on the mantelpiece". (4) And they had just copulated. The girl was Sarah Plowmain. The other male present in the pseudo Freudian room was Edward Baltram. It was when Mark died. He had left him alone that night, though just for half an hour, to have this girl.

"You said your mother knew my mother?"

"They were together at the polytechnic. Your mother was doing art and mine was doing sociology. So that was it, was it?"

"What?"

"You just came to talk about your mother!"

"I want to talk about you too."

"And my father used to teach your brother. We are connected. It's fate" (4)

The first sentence in the excerpt is spoken by Edward and the last one where the word "fate" is used rather callously so to say, is by Sarah. This fate can easily be likened to the contingency factor of existence which Sartre also talks about. Little did she know and neither her lover that night, that "fate" was actually taking a drastic turn that night. Life would be a burden for Edward who was listening to her, also casually over pegs of whiskey and cigarettes. It would be the last party that he would enjoy for a long time to come. And ... the conversation was flowing ... which entails ... a brief introduction to the major characters.

Edward is the biological son of Jesse Baltram. Jesse is defined by Sarah as being "horrible" (5) and also as "great" and a little later also introduced as "a painter, an architect, a

sculptor, a socialist, and a Don Juan!”(5). Edward is reared by his stepfather Harry Cuno, who is described during the same conversation a little later by Sarah as “a real adventurer, like an explorer, like a pirate, a buccaneer, fearfully talented, a hero of our time!” Edward and the world don’t “exactly” take him “as a successful one”.

Edward’s mother Chloe, who died shortly after Edward’s birth, had married Harry upon being abandoned by Jesse after impregnation. Harry had a son, Stuart; from his first wife Teresa who also was already dead “before Chloe took over, she came from New Zealand” and is referred to rarely in the whole novel and by name, but, only once in the whole novel.

Stuart, Edward’s accidental brother about whom the latter says “not blood relations but, well, we are brothers” is remarked upon as “he’s given up sex before he’s even tried it” (5) by Sarah. Chloe’s younger sister, Midge, who is married to the psychoanalyst Thomas McCaskerville, about whom “Edward remembers kissing so passionately at a dance when he was seventeen.”(5). She was once a fashion model and Midge was the name acquired then. Her actual name is Margaret. “Not a maternal type”, says Sarah of her. They also talk about Sarah’s mother who writes “Women’s Lib Journalism” and is “a fire eater “but is not named by name per se. (6) they also talk about May Barnes whom Sarah’s mother knew since her youth and who is portrayed as a mysterious Mother May who lives “in that grotesque house in the marsh” with her two daughters and her “prisoner”, Jesse. There are regular coincidences or accidents all over the place, what with Stuart studying math under Sarah’s father, Dirk Ploumain.

The most major characters and their part in the plot are thus introduced within the conversation that takes place in Sarah’s “little cave” just about the time when Mark had jumped off to his death. A random contingent accident or “fate” as Sarah puts it changes Edward’s life for ever. This peculiar style of story telling is what Murdoch marvels at. And she does this deliberately because for her, an individual has to live in contingency and life is after all

uncertain. This feature of life is what Sartre calls “existence” which is mostly common to everybody.

The story takes its pace with Edward moving sluggishly in his quest for redemption. Other characters come to him advising, but he doesn't understand them at all. In fact, he hates these sessions; hates everybody; everything; himself. He is bent on destroying himself, if it does not drive him to a suicide than probably a nervous breakdown. “One momentary act of folly and treachery had destroyed all his time” (11)

To make the matter more tedious for Edward and his sufferings, he starts receiving accusing letters from Mark's mother Jennifer. Here's an excerpt from the first letter that she writes.

....may you pay for this with your life's happiness. I hope that you will never be forgiven and that your people will turn from you with horror, I hope and pray that you will never be happy again. My only consolation is that you will never recover from the drugs to which you are addicted, their effects are irreversible, and you have destroyed your mind and will live the life of an idiot, tormented by fantasies. I wish my hatred could kill you. I curse you condemn you to a miserable haunted life. The claws which I drive into you now will never release their hold. (9)

So, Edward lives in his self created private hell, nursing his guilt ridden soul. Side by side another plot is intertwined with this central plot concerned with Edward's redemption. The other plot concerns Stuart, Edward's step brother, defined subtly earlier from the mouth of Sarah, who had made a sarcastic introduction in focusing on his giving up of sex. But, Harry, Stuart's father sounds a concerned and a distressed father in thinking:

... both my boys have lost their senses at the same time, and just when they were doing so well, they seem to want to destroy themselves, Edward with this depression and Stuart with religious mania. They are both in love with death. (14)

Stuart has just graduated in mathematics. He is considered brilliant in his academic pursuits. He has such an environment where he can hone his skills more. But, he opts to leave his academic pursuit once and for all for a more chaste life that of helping the needy and the distressed. And yes, he doesn't believe in God in spite of the fact that his portrayal can be termed "religious" to a large extent because of the moral self he keeps and also opts for celibacy "even before he has tried it". To the best this humorous element can be taken as being projected against and making fun of Freudian psychoanalysis of which Murdoch is a serious critic. Otherwise he is a shadow mouthpiece for Murdoch's philosophy of "good" hugely inspired by Sartrean existentialism. As Sartre puts it,

Everything in the human condition remains problematic, the existential hero, in the quest of freedom, is doomed to failure. But, the remarkable thing here is that the failure justifies his struggle if not compensates. If the external world offers no consolation, then the people must be able to make a decisive choice in order to make an authentic existence. Thus, man's freedom is absolute, but one cannot escape responsibility and anguish. Since, people are not determined by anything else, the responsibility is very great, because in making any kind of choice, they are choosing for the whole world (Sartre 16-17)

In the same existential tone, look at what Stuart has to say to Ursula upon being asked if religion was the answer to human predicaments:

... something that keeps love of goodness in people's lives, that shows goodness as the most important thing, some sort of spiritual ideal and discipline, like – it's

so hard to see it – it’s got to be religion without God, without supernatural dogmas, and we may not have time to change what we have into something we can believe in – that’s what I think anyway – but I’m just a beginner -.... (34)

Stuart is not afflicted by any such guilt as his brother. His anguish comes from his knowledge and the happenings he sees around him. He likes to remain aloof from others in the novel. He doesn’t want to interfere in others’ life. What bothers him is the pointlessness of being a part of the so called civilized society; leading a regular life and becoming a part of the big mob which practices hypocrisy in the name of religion. Therefore he doesn’t align himself to any religion as no God satisfies his spiritual quest. He is thus on a quest by himself and believes that no supernatural heavenly force is there to guide him in this quest of his. All the moral dilemmas, angst and anguish are to be overcome by him alone. The decision and choices he makes has to be his and only his. As for taking up celibacy, it could be simply described as his being foolhardy but, in confusion. He is sure to discard this idea later if not sooner. Perhaps, Ursula senses this when she says:

“I’m not worried about Stuart,”...“he’ll be back a little battered in a year or two, sadder and wiser, knocking at the door of the university. Anyway why shouldn’t he want to help poor unhappy people, no one seems to give him any credit.”(37)

Observing Stuart, one could thus say that he is an existentialist in the making and the quest that he takes up is the quest for “good” and the acts he performs and the conversations he makes with others in the novel, are like that of an immature existential mouthpiece.

Both of these boys however are in total dispensation to the professional service as well as find a sense of openness in any serious discussion with their uncle, Thomas McCaskerville, a practicing psychoanalyst. Thomas too tries to help both of these boys in the best way he can. Giving them a sense of energy, he tries to arouse a sense of purpose in them when talking with

both the boys. Thomas had studied literature at Edinburgh and wanted to be an art historian. To please his grandfather, he had taken a medical degree and became a general practitioner. But he hated his job. He returned to medical school to study mental illness and soon established himself as a psychiatrist. He loved his wife and son “blindly an exceedingly” and was proud of them. But, now as he felt he was beginning to need his patients and by now coming too close to them, especially his long time patient, Mr. Blinnet, he wanted to make a change. So, he is now thinking of taking an interval, “which might prove to be long one” and living in the country after he has sent his son to a boarding house. He wanted time to think, perhaps to write, to be more alone from his hectic London life. He is fond of both Edward and Stuart and now as they had become his patients, he feared for them, worried for them.”They were both, in different ways, in pledge to death”. “Was he to redeem them?” he thought. (90)

Stuart has “a talk” (47) with Edward after coming back from the dinner party at the McCaskerville house. But his advice is not taken seriously. At the end of this talk Edward is left with the “whole face [...] wrinkled now into a reddened grimace of hate and fury, like a primitive mask in a museum”.(52) He even flings the bible that Stuart had taken out of the bookshelves and placed on the chair beside Edward’s bed. When looking for the thriller he had been reading, he accidentally finds the visiting card of a séance run by one Mrs. D. M. Quaid which was slipped into his pocket by Sarah that fateful night.

Edward goes to the séance wondering if he could really talk to the dead as written on Mrs. Quaid’s card. He wanted to talk to Mark. In the séance however, he hears a different voice calling unto him. It said, “Come to your father. Come home, my son.”(68)

The incident at the séance, wherein Edward is called by his father, is discussed by him with Thomas. He is also advised by Thomas to do the same that of seeking his biological father

Jesse, whom he hasn't seen since early childhood. About that time he also receives a letter from May Baltram, Jesse's wife, asking him to visit them at Seegard.

Other minor characters are also introduced in this section. Meredith McCaskerville is introduced. He is thirteen and is the son of Thomas and Midge. He has a special bonding with, in that; he gets along well with Stuart. He looks up to Stuart for sharing and discussing personal angst and issues. For a boy in his early teens, he is shown as a sharp boy who gives smart and casual answers when in conversation with adults. He is even prophesized to be a prime minister one day by Ursula in the story. (23)

Willy and Ursula Brightwalton are also introduced. Willy teaches at college and is a Proust expert and Ursula is a general practitioner, who does not agree with Thomas on medical matters. Mention is also made of Giles, their brilliant son, "who was away winning extra laurels at an American university, where Willy was about to visit him."(23)

Now, to make the matters more complex, a sleazy affair, that is going on for two years is unveiled to the reader. Thomas' wife Midge is having a secret relationship with Harry. Thomas and Harry are friends. Moreover Thomas' and Harry's family are also shown to be in some sort of social bonding as Midge, is Chloe's sister. They visit each others' place at will with families. The bond could be easily interpreted as being a mutual one, one that is built on trust and care and yet the debacle. Most of Murdoch's creation are rife with such complex relation issues in otherwise a calm society at the high echelons.

The novel has now gone complex so has the lives of its principal characters. Free they are, as Sartre talks about in his philosophy, "condemned to be free" and it is now totally up to them to get out of this "contingent rubble" which they are a part of, as Murdoch says is the awkward definition of human existence in her famous book, "Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals" Harry is living his life despicably and Thomas still doesn't know it all. Stuart has to get out from



his confusion and give a head start to his life and career and Midge should come clear out of the quagmire, she has herself led her way into. And above all, Edward has to get out of his depression and seek forgiveness and thus a sense of absolution from Jesse, who lives like “God” there in his castle, his Seegard. Redeeming oneself or the quest for the “good” thus becomes a necessity for each character in the story or to put it otherwise it becomes preconditions for a rational enough ending or say happy ending of the story.

### **Seegard**

Seegard is the “castle” of Jesse who until now is the one who Edward has come after. Is he provided his redemption here at this place; such a question could partly be answered in the affirmative if the happenings that take place subsequently hereafter in this den of a place is taken into account. His existential redemption has probably started.

Seegard is somewhere deep in the country side, in a marshy land, by the coastline. “SEEGARD ONLY”, the signpost says, pointing away down a muddy track where the bus had left Edward. Upon setting his eyes on Seegard, it “looked to him, at that first moment, upon that flat land, huge, like a cathedral, or a great ship.”(107) and as such the religiosity of the moment for Edward are clearly amplified. Just then, he thinks about Mark and that fateful evening which changed his life for ever.

... The image of Mark came to him vividly, almost like a ghost, a reminder of his, in all possible scenes, accursed condition; and he felt suddenly that he was the thing which was so frightening, he the figure approaching out of the dark, a bringer to that lonely quite place of some catastrophe or pestilence.”(107)

Edward is welcomed to Seegard by three women, May Baltram and her two daughters, Bettina and Illona. He desperately searches “for a male figure, waiting, but there was none. So,

he doesn't meet Jesse, the sole reason he was there as he "compulsorily" (105) believes is his only source of his redemption. He was not there then, but, would surely come back, Edward is told. He has to wait, more still to meet his biological father. And in waiting he has to be familiar and complying with the other three who were there. The first day he suspects the women if they were his enemies.

At this stage Edward was still uncertain whether or not to regard the women as his enemies. Perhaps his father had wished him to come, while they, under pretend politeness, were jealous and hostile. Must he not seem, e reflected, an interloper, someone who had got on very well without them, now in trouble running to them for a support he did not deserve, featured in the attention of the father as a favored novelty? (112)

In the following days he starts exploring the place and understanding its inhabitants. Especially noticeable are the names of the sections, halls and rooms in Seegard - Atrium, Transition, Selden, Interfactory and Tower. Their strange ways of dividing and completing the chores mysteriously and easily certainly bemused Edward. In running the household of that big den of a place obviously much had to be done and they didn't even have any servants. But, they had devised an ingenious system in doing these chores under the aegis of Jesse, the king of the castle. "Three cloistered princesses in a castle waiting for a knight."(139) living in the extraordinary Seegard world of what Edward thought of as 'Bohemian Puritanism' (139). Especially strange to Edward, a city guy from London was to know that they cultivated their own food and wove their own dresses. "We make our own everything", says Illona (114). They are jewelry and Christmas card makers and sell their products in London; they do embroidery and paint a little; they make their own exquisite wines from fruits and even flowers like dandelions: Mother May prepares all sorts of medicines from herbs; Bettina is a carpenter as well as mends

the beastly old generator; Illona is a good dancer. They are strict vegetarians. They don't use make up but have glowing and beautiful faces. They follow a strict but marvelous routine "of steady ceaseless work punctuated by strictly timed periods of rest and leisure. The routine consists of a Chinese dance for exercise in the early morning. Breakfast was at seven. They worked till lunch at two and it was the rule in the house because Jesse, the formulator of the routine liked long mornings. They then work till three thirty after which they rest till four fifteen. Sleep twice a day and get two days for the price of one, says Jesse. Work is again in the schedule till six thirty and don't have the teatime. Then leisure and a supper at eight and again a leisure till ten thirty and the bed time tasks like washing up supper, laying breakfast, tidying and locking doors. Then they go to sleep. They were strange in other ways too.

'I always do the washing up' said Illona.

'I'll always help you,' said Edward. 'I'll dry.'

'We never dry, we just stack. There's so much to do here, we save every trouble. For instance, there's Carrying About.'

'What's that?'

'You know, in every house there's always things to be moved from one place to another, upstairs and downstairs and so on, like washing and plates and books and things. Well, we have carrying places where things which are on the move are always left, and anyone passing by carries them on to the next place. It makes sense doesn't it? These plates, for example in this big rack. Some are dry, some are not. Someone passing will pick up the dry ones for lunch and put them on the table in the Atrium.'(118)

Slowly, Edward adapts to the ways of Seegard and its people. Its two weeks and he hasn't met Jesse. But, he is already initiated towards his purification. Getting to help the ladies of the house in their daily chores was tiring him and thus he was sleeping well. Besides, he also could go for long walks exploring the place and the woods in the vicinity which gave him a feeling of freshness. On one of these strolls, he accidentally visits the "dromos", where he sees the "lingam stone" as Jesse calls it. He also sees Illona dancing before the "lingam" and placing a flower beside it but she doesn't notice him watching her dance. He is behind a bush, hidden.

Meanwhile days passed but there was no sign of Jesse coming back. But the days filled with hardships in helping the women was slowly such that he feels "it suited him to be told what to do, to be so much employed that he could exist unthinkingly like a slave, like a working animal" (136). The non living machine which he thought of himself had now changed to something living and breathing –a slave, an animal. Hope had started coming on to him. He was changing.

Eventually, accidentally, Edward discovers that Jesse has never left the house, but is locked up in his bedroom in the tower and now is in a decrepit state – old, ill and bedridden and who seemed to have been waiting for him. Upon meeting him, Edward had wanted to tell his father about Mark, "but of course that's impossible, it doesn't matter. I must keep him talking; I must keep this going on". (207)

Jesse talks in sparse, in easily inaudible language with Edward. he seems to be waiting for Edward's arrival in that he says he had written letters to Edward, which 'the women', who he thinks are conspiring against him, '–fancy forgetting that –', had not sent those letters to Edward. He clearly seems to be showing fatherly affection towards Edward, though at one time he had abandoned him before birth and even wanted to have him aborted, as Elspeth tells Edward later in the story.

Jesse also wants Edward to ‘have it all – the house – the paintings – the – the stuff – ‘Edward asks if he could go with him to London for better medical care, but Jesse keeps on talking about his will and pointing towards the wall, says he has hidden it there in a square closet there. Jesse’s relationship with Edward that had established suddenly is that of a father and a son who can also be friends to each other is clearly demonstrated as in the action that follows,

‘I want so much to help you,’ said Edward, ‘to bring you any thing you want.’

‘I’d like – yes –‘

‘Tell me.’

‘A bit of – skirt –‘ As he said this Jesse’s face assumed a cunning almost leering expression. He giggled.

Edward said, ‘Oh dear -!’

‘I know I can’t – you can – I wanted to see you in your – youth -

Jesse however is old and ailing and comes into such rational action only rarely. In his fits he can sleep for days, can turn violent and even can vanish altogether away from Seegard and be back after days. Strangely, but, he fully understands his own condition sometimes. He says, when talking about Chloe, ‘I thought she was (dead). I’ve got time – all mixed up – no one talks to me –‘and little later shows bouts of fear and depression ‘ - I’m a (to the women) –I’m just a load of shit – to be cleared away. Then they’ll clean the room – open the windows –‘ But such moments rarely come and he is but an insane fellow most of the time. Mysteriously and suggestively however, at the end of the conversation and the meeting, Jesse says that he likes Edward to marry Illona. ‘But she’s my sister!’ Edward retorts. ‘Oh yes – of course – I forgot.’(211) Edward is left perplexed.

As if he has found his route to redemption, Edward is determined to stay on at Seegard and look after his father, the more so as he distrusts the women who claim to be taking good care of him even though he is locked up at the tower as a prisoner and no medical aid is provided to him except those which Mother May herself prepares. What keeps him at Seegard is Jesse, “love for him, pity, duty” (217), and he wonders:

Was I brought here to help, to liberate him by talking to him, to be his guardian in his last days – brought here by them [viz. the women], by him, by fate? ... I thought I was mad because I was in love with Mark and could not go on living. Wasn't that why I came here? to lose the old hated self and begin a new one by magic? I was in love with Mark – and now I am in love with Jesse. Is that my cure, my healing, my longed for absolution? (218)

Edward now is stuck in Seegard or should we say, he imagines himself staying longer there for that “longed for absolution”. And till that he may keep on being a slave and an animal. He has added “care” and a sense of “new responsibilities”<sup>231</sup> to the animal prerogatives and another inching towards his so called redemption. A son of an ailing father and because of that a new relationship for him as a brother to two step sisters, were what were added. Apart from the chores he gets to do he also has been exploring the countryside. In one of his sojourns he suddenly sights a girl “apparition” (232) who simply gets vanished after a frightened gesture, there by the fen beside the line of willows and the cherry trees. Meanwhile he finds an old map of Seegard and the nearby coastline along with the railroad track which is now in ruins, most of the track buried under the soil. Besides he also has to meet the girl.

The girl is Brenda Wilson, and if you are perplexed at the surname, wait still there is more in store. Accidents and coincidences of this nature happen time and again throughout the novel. Thus, he finds her in the house of Elspeth Macran who uses her maiden name and is

associated with Women's Lib journalism. Again, she is actually Sarah's mother who is also apparently and obviously there. Elspeth is a dear friend to Mark's mother and Brenda, "always known as Brownie." is there on their initiation. The moment was a comeuppance. Edward was there actually to ask his way to the sea and there he meets the one who was somewhat equally suffering like him as she had too lost her brother and was left to live alone with a weeping mother. The effect of the moment heightens when his first words addressed to Brownie are very much pronounced but are not actually premeditated as Edward himself realizes in the following action.

After a paralyzed moment Edward began to speak, spewing out the sudden unpremeditated words. 'I gave him that stuff, he didn't know, he hated drugs, I gave it to him in a sandwich, I stayed with him, I only left him for twenty minutes –'

'It was more than that, said Sarah.

'When I left him he was fast asleep and I thought –'

'Oh dry up,' said Elspeth Macran.

There was a silence... (237)

Immediately after this Brownie turns and goes back through the door, out of which she was brought there into the living room by Sarah a little earlier. This subtle play with accidents at random to push about the story has been the major feature of the story telling all along and also with almost all of Murdoch's works in fiction. Brownie sends a letter through a tree man, asking him to meet her in the fen where he had first seen her. In the letter, she asks him to relate to her exactly how the accident happened. Edward in turn feels that if only she could absolve him of all guilt he would be saved from hell (249). But, Edward must wait until the absolution comes in the

form of a letter later in the story where she explains why she needed to know all the details and has also asked him to visit her at the railway cottage. Her letter is to him like ‘the order of reprieve’ (301-302). Although he keeps on going back and

“remembering the event, summoning all his guilt , his deepest sense of his crime, all that mess of resentful misery which was still with him, unabated and unhealed... The sense of a return to reality was so strong, like a fast translation, that he felt positively giddy. Here at last was a pure authentic voice, a good voice, speaking to him with authority.” (303)

Meanwhile apart from Thomas, nobody knows the whereabouts of Edward. They have actually assumed that Edward was under the control of Thomas and as such there was nothing to be worried of. But, Stuart seems a little more worried than the others in going over to Thomas’ place and asking about Edward’s whereabouts. Thomas says, he’s fled and quickly changes the conversation into that concerning Stuart. After all, he was a practicing psychoanalyst and also a little more worried for the two boys who grew in front of him. Their family connection because of Midge, who is a sister to Chloe, had certainly played a role in the special affinity he feels for the boys. And, thus he couldn’t obviously see them go into ruins. So, the conversation starts and Thomas seems already startled by Stuart’s genuineness before the formal, psychoanalyst to his client, talk starts. (149) the conversation is modeled on a questionnaire pattern where Thomas asks and Stuart goes on answering.

Stuart seems to have grown up, down the line for he has now realized that he shouldn’t have talked to people about his vow of chastity and Thomas rightly remarks in saying, ‘you don’t have to announce your programmes, only to carry them out’. (149) To Thomas’ question regarding the job he wants to do, Stuart says, he wants to be ‘like a probation officer- or some sort of social work, to do with housing or-’. He says he likes “to take some training course” and



that he has “learnt how to learn” (149) and that he is “just not to enter the machine” (150) of “corruption” (151). Regarding academic learning, Stuart says that he wants to get away from abstract stuff.’(152)

When the conversation leads to the religious front, Stuart says,

It’ll take a long time to stop “God” being the name of someone. I don’t want any god at all, even a modified modernized one. I’ve got to be sure he isn’t in it somewhere hidden away. God is an anti-religious idea. There is no God. (151)

Thomas sees Eastern religious parallelisms in Stuart’s views but Stuart says that he is not concerned with the east; that he was a western and that it should be done differently in the west (151). On being inquired if what he needed was a master or a guru, Stuart replies that he doesn’t need one because,

- That’s sentimentality, it’s masochism, it’s magic –‘

‘You don’t want to be under obedience.’

‘I am under obedience, but not like that –‘

‘You’re dedicated.’

It’s got to be everything, my whole being, my whole life, not something part-time, not something optional – just to try to be good, to be for others and not oneself. To be nothing, to have nothing, to be a servant – and for that to be one’s whole occupation.

The conversation that takes between Thomas and Stuart points us to the existential quest that the novel has undertaken as well as the individual quest that Stuart is living, being

‘apprenticed to goodness –’(150) as Thomas thinks of him. A little further, he also says to Stuart after a hearty laugh,

‘You wanted to be like the Prodigal Son’s elder brother, the chap who never went away!’

In saying so he is taking allusion from the biblical parable especially that concerns a father and his two sons. Taking his share of wealth from his father, the younger one vanishes to freedom only to return back penniless and after sessions of suffering and sorrow. He is the prodigal son, who is welcomed back by his father with a lavish banquet. And the elder one, he for his part gets to get annoyed by his father’s forgiving attitude to his ill reputed son. Thomas’ exuberance is answered with,

‘Exactly – except that he was cross when his brother was forgiven!’

Similarities thus can be seen in Stuart as the elder brother who has his fair share of experiences in being the nice son, the ‘good’ son as in the parable but as Stuart himself acknowledges and clearly shows his love for Edward in going to him at times and try consoling him, try persuading him to life’s light again from his world of pitch darkness. Ironically, Stuart’s case gets shadowed by the more profound and much heavier case of Edward and he is actually mocked by most characters even in the novel. Nevertheless he serves as the young inexperienced existential mouthpiece to his author, the unaccounted messenger of “good”. This is actually the central philosophy on which the novel is set and Edward by learning to be “good is working towards his existential redemption.

Edward falls terribly ill after coming back from his meeting with Brownie. He lay in bed with fever and dreams about Brownie. He can’t stop thinking about her and even imagines if he has fallen in love with her and ‘the yearning was so great.’ (282) Meanwhile, Stuart turns up at Seegard, being called by Mother May. Edward is annoyed at Stuart’s presence and wants him to

leave the place at once. Stuart stays on however, upon being requested, by the three women of the house. And yes, like they did with Edward, he isn't still been told that Jesse is madly ill and is residing in the Tower. Instead he is told that he is away. Edward spills the beans a little later.

Stuart is there in Seegard with a positive attitude. He is there thinking if he could be of any help to Edward. He was sent a letter by Mother May asking him to come as Edward was unwell. However, his presence is feared by Edward in involuntarily thinking,

‘The presence of Stuart simply made Seegard impossible, it simply ruined everything. Now Stuart would become the longed for boy, he would be loved by the women, he would sit and talk to Jesse. He would probably be able to communicate with Jesse far more deeply.’

Thus Edward acknowledges the intellectual superiority as well as hates the presence of Stuart in his domain, his Seegard, and there arises a clash of the forces that operates centrally in the novel, one wanting to be ‘good’ and looking for redemption and the other already practicing ‘good’ as he himself likes to put it.. He thinks of meeting Brownie the next day while going to sleep that night and dreams of Mark in the feverish and sweaty sleep.

The next day has surprises in store for Edward. It starts with his finding of a book by Proust – *A la Recherche* – in amongst the racks in the Interfectory with Jesse's signature on it. Reading just a few lines at random from it, he experiences ‘extraordinary freshness, like a breath of clear air to a man just out of prison, like a sudden sound of a musical instrument.’(300) He puts the book back in the shelves and goes out towards the woods, where there is another of his surprises waiting. A tree man hands him a letter sent to him by Brownie. In the letter, Brownie has asked Edward to visit her at the cottage the next morning. She would be alone and was leaving for London in the day. Surprises would continue for Edward till late evening that day.

Midge and Harry's clandestine relationship, all this while, has grown further. Apart from them, there are more now who know about the adulterous affair. In fact, Meredith has come to know that his mother is having an affair though he doesn't know with whom. He shares this information with Stuart (272). Earlier the affair was carried on at their homes when the other members were away, when Thomas had gone to his clinic and Meredith to school or when the two boys were not there at Harry's place. But, now Harry has bought, in spite although Midge had protested, a flat for them, their love nest, to have a private place of their own to carry on with the surreptitious affair, in fact for Harry, to give a 'growth' to their 'love'. He has also remade his will, leaving just enough for the two boys and the rest including his house to Midge. He wants to take the relationship to a new level. He wants to make it all open. He wants to make Midge just his, separated from Thomas. He has even thought of buying a house somewhere in France, in Italy perhaps. (274)

And today they are in celebratory mood as Thomas is at a conference in Geneva and Meredith is in Wales with a friend for his vacation in his half term. After the couple 'had already had two days and two nights of their longed-for and indeed wonderful weekend' (292), they have come to a much recommended, carefully chosen restaurant in a country town where Harry had booked a table for lunch after which they will be heading back to London. They have planned to spend the night at their "nest". A hilarious situation awaits them.

Apparently they are late and the booked table has been already given by the head waiter to somebody else and he was not being at all helpful. Then, Harry tries using his charm on a single diner who was occupying a table and who was nearly finishing his meal. He asks if they could sit down there at the same table while he finishes his meal, introducing Midge as his wife which 'came out easily'. The 'whimsical intellectual' doesn't let them share the table with him even on continuous requests and charms that Harry tries using on the man. The man says,

‘I don’t quite see why you should come and join me. When one lunches alone one wants, at least I do, to lunch alone.’ ... ‘You could sit in the bar.’ ... ‘I’m sorry to seem unsympathetic, but I still don’t see why I should agree to your suggestion. I value my table and my solitude. I don’t see the fact that I am a single person has any relevance.’ (293)

So, they don’t get to have their lunch in the restaurant. Instead, they have a picnic, buying food items from a grocery store after which Midge suggests, looking at the map, that they drive somewhere near and see the tower of Seegard as they had come near to that place. But, they lose their way finding that place and it was getting dark. Just then their car gets stuck in a grassy verge (303) and there isn’t a garage nearby.

They leave the car and go looking for help looking for any family who own a car or just a telephone even so that their car could be pulled out of the ditch. Wandering, they reach a cottage which happens to belong to Elspeth Macran. They don’t have a car or a telephone. So, Sarah leads them to Seegard, all the while never uttering Seegard by name. They reach Seegard but which can’t recognize because of the pitch darkness that had by now engulfed the countryside. Sarah just leads them to the door and leaves. The action that follows proves the end of their furtive romance.

Mother May recognizes Midge on a single glance as Mrs. McCaskerville although Harry had introduced themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Bentley to Bettina on entering the house. She doesn’t recognize Harry and he says he is Mr. Weston and his ‘car is a Bentley.’(309) He wants to be in control. But a little later,

The outside door behind them suddenly opened and Edward and Stuart came in. Midge gave a little scream...Edward rushed forward, ‘Harry, Midge, how marvellous, you’ve found me! However did you know? Is Thomas here, did he

tell you where I was? I've been ill but I'm better. Stuart only got here yesterday.

Mother May, look who's here!

Mother May understands the situation, so does Stuart as he was hinted by Meredith earlier. Edward is confused as is Illona. But, Bettina remarks laughing, 'First they were Mr. and Mrs. Bentley. Then he was Mr. Weston. It's an evening for charades.'(311) Suddenly a two year long affair, a secret one, an adulterous one was out in the open.

Just then, Jesse comes into the hall leaning on a stick. He points with his stick towards Stuart and says, 'There's a dead man, you've got a corpse there, it's sitting at the table, I can see it... take him away, I curse him'(314) After that Midge comes to his gaze. Mistaking her for Chloe, Jesse kisses her 'passionately' and 'hungrily, quickly, unable to get enough of the longed for food.'(315) Mother is exasperated obviously and utters, 'Oh what a vile mess!' and tries separating them but without success. Bettina suggests pushing them. Mother May has to use a piercing(315) and an authoritative tone addressed towards Midge and at the same time push her after only which Jesse falls sitting on the floor and the two are separated. Edward helps Mother May in taking Jesse to his lair. The confusing and riotous drama ends here leaving the furtive affair of Harry and Midge all open.

Midge is left 'crying, her face in her handkerchief. Harry goes forward to where Stuart was sitting. While pouring wine, he finally acknowledges his affair to Stuart saying,

'Well, son, sorry for this embarrassment.' Harry reflected that he had never called Stuart 'son' in his life before.

Stuart muttered, 'Oh don't worry, I mean there it is -'

'There, as you say, it is. Must be a bit of a shock.'

Stuart said, 'Meredith told me, only I didn't believe him.'

‘What?’

‘He said she – he didn’t say who –’

Bettina ushers the now no more furtive couple away from Seegard to their rundown car. Stuart also leaves Seegard along with them quickly going to his room and getting his things while the others waited.

Edward and Mother May are in Jesse’s room attending him trying to control his restlessness. Jesse is shaken by the happenings of the evening but also shows a trace of ‘calm, more lucid, and peacefully rational’ (319) behavior in saying, ‘So it wasn’t Chloe – ... She looks so very – so very like Chloe.’ Edward Kisses Jesse’s hands and with emotional outpour says, ‘Oh don’t be sad, dear dear dear Jesse. It matters so much that you shouldn’t be sad. I’m with you, I’ll look after you. I’ve found you forever and ever. I love you.’ Mother May interrupts this exchange of affection between the father and the son in saying, ‘Leave off,’ ... ‘go along now Edward. I want Jesse to rest. I’ll sit with him. He’s had a shock. He’s given us all a shock.’ Edward retreats and goes down to the hall and finds it empty. He wanted to talk that evening with someone and goes looking for Stuart into his room but he’s gone (320). He was completely taken aback by the ‘charades’ of the evening. He was confused at the drama that took place and so wanted to talk to Stuart but, he was gone. Edward for the first time feels lonely and frightened in Seegard. But he had to talk and light, was still coming out from Illona’s room. He goes there.

Illona is asleep. He tiptoes up to her and watches his sister lying there ‘fragile and frail’ and when she awakes, her ‘face, glaring at him, expressed intense fear’ (323). She tells Edward, whispering that he shouldn’t be in her room. They after that discuss about the drama that took place that evening and surmise that the couple was ‘obviously together secretly’ (324). Edward also talks about Brownie to Illona and also says that he was meeting her the next morning. Illona says that she wants to leave Seegard. She wants Edward to take her with him to London. But

Edward does not seem too interested in helping her to get to London. He thinks that she will die if she leaves Seegard. Illona cries a lot that night.

It was already late, past break fast time, when Edward woke up the next morning. He remembered the happenings of the previous night and is disgusted with the secret affair the night had laid bare (328). Then with a flash, he remembers that he has to meet Brownie the very day. He shaves for her though he “felt unwell, a little giddy and hazy in the head” (328). He sneaks away from Seegard after taking with him a map of the area from the Interfactory and having a light breakfast at the Atrium. On his way to the said rendezvous however, Edward experiences something peculiar, “something amazing, something terrible” (330). It was actually an apparition of Jesse, which he sees under water while going across a stream that flowed to the sea from within Seegard’s vicinity. Then,

Edward thought, my God, it’s an hallucination. It’s like something I saw in a dream that night when I was drugged.... He knelt and reached his hand down into the water. As he disturbed the sleek surface the image vanished, but for an instant he could feel the ring, something soft and cold, then a hard band. Then this impression too was gone. (331)

At his meeting with Brownie, she assures him that she can forgive him, she also promises to talk her mother into forgiving him, and they realize that they are the only ones who can help each other (337). Brownie also says that she was soon going to America for her further studies and leaves everything behind. They are about to celebrate the moment with physical consummation however Edward abruptly ends the coming physical union as he must hurry away from Brownie for in a sudden hallucinatory fit, Edward remembers Jesse, and “suddenly nothing in the world was more important than that he should run back to Seegard” (338) as his ailing father and especially after the drastic happenings the night before, he feels that he should be



present there beside Jesse's bed. A defined sense of responsibility is seen in him with this incident in the novel.

He reaches Seegard and the first person he meets is Mother May. The first thing he asks is, 'How's Jesse?' She says he is all right and is asleep. However after lunch that same day, Edward sneaks into the tower. Jesse is not there. He was gone. (342) He is not to be found in the surrounding woods too. When Edward tells this to the women of the house, they take it lightly, saying he will be back by himself adding that he does this oftentimes. They are not as worried as Edward is. Nevertheless he stays on at Seegard for five more days hoping for his father to return any moment as the women had said.

But, Jesse doesn't return. So, one day Edward sneaks out of Seegard without telling anyone except Illona to whom, he promises that he would return back to Seegard after finding Jesse. He even gives his address in London to Illona asking her to let him know if actually Jesse comes back to Seegard as they had said. He however doesn't heed to Illona's pleadings to take her with him to London

### **Life after Death**

Edward leaves Seegard in search of his father, and reaches London. He goes home to Harry's and learns that Stuart has been kicked out of the house by Harry and is now staying in a rented room. Midge is miserable since the secret affair has been laid open, and because of the psychological reverberations perhaps, she feels that she is in love with Stuart and thus refuses Harry to continue with their adulterous relationship. Stuart, for his part is least interested. He advises Midge to tell her husband the truth so as not to live a lie. Ironically perhaps, but the good- seeking Stuart thus gets trapped in a typically Murdochian comedy of Eros, involving various members of his and Edward's complex family. And while Edward seeks the light of his

father's blessings, Stuart achieves his greatest prominence first as the symbol of love but eventually as the symbol of death in the dreams of the woman his father, Harry intends to marry.

The furtive couple has been laid bare and the ones, who shouldn't have known about the affair, Stuart and Edward have now known about it. In the novel, May Baltram publicizes the affair; in fact she starts a series of columns dedicated to the life and art of Jesse with the said affair (433). It's only then, that, Thomas, the quintessential sage like Psychoanalyst comes to know about the dirty affair his wife is having with his "best friend", Harry.

Edward's search for his father leads him to Max Point, Jesse's homosexual partner and a painter himself. He is living a lonely life in a boat house and strangely, but he also happens to be Illona's biological father. Edward finds this out later in the novel when he meets Illona in London who also has left Seegard and now works as a strip – dancer in a night club. She says that Mother May has been writing a diary over the years which she hasn't shown to anyone. Illona also adds that, in that diary, somewhere, she writes that she also had "consolations" (490), meaning she also had her share of affairs beyond her marriage with Jesse. In fact Max Point was taken away by Mother May from Jesse.

His search for Jesse leads Edward back to the home of Mrs. Quaid where Edward had gone earlier in the novel to a séance the happenings at which i.e. Jesse calling out to his son that made him go to Seegard at the first place. There again, this time in a television screen, Edward sees an old film which is filmed around Seegard's vicinity. In the film,

The camera moved along the beach, showing sand dunes with wispy grass waving in the wind. Now there was an estuary [...] poplar trees, reeds [...] then suddenly the camera became still and there was a man, a tall man in dark clothes. Then he moved and turned around and the camera focused on his face. As the face came closer Edward thought, but that's me. Then he thought, no it isn't, it's Jesse [...]

how awful. Jesse was pushing back his lock of hair with one hand, and now walking toward the river bank. He paused at the bank looming down into the water. Then he turned round again and smiled at Edward (446 - 447).

Edward now knows where to find Jesse, thanks to the film he sees at Mrs. Quaid's. He heads back to Seegard and finds Jesse's body exactly there where, earlier, he had seen an apparition of Jesse in the water, when he was. There, he discovers Jesse's body drowned in the river and with the help of some locals has his father's body brought home. When he later returns to the house, he inspects Jesse's room and discovers his father's will, signed two years before, which left everything to Edward: he is at once elated at this final recognition by his father and horrified at the idea of inheriting; he therefore burns the will before anybody can find it.

Back in London, Edward feels he has performed the rite of a son to a father (482). Even Mrs. Wilsden forgives him after Brownie has explained to her his exact part in Mark's death. And though, his love for Brownie does not materialize as she sends a card from America where she says that she is engaged to Giles, the brilliant son of Willy and Ursula Brightwalton, their family friends, in a sense he is healed as he has learnt to become 'good' in a positive way, by learning to forgive, to take responsibilities for one's actions and by learning to take care of another and thus finally has attained his redemption. This is not so different from what Stuart intended, though his wish to devote his life to others is usually referred to by characters like Harry, who scoff at him. But, Stuart is self righteous from the very beginning of the novel and acts out of principles, just as he invokes principles when he tries to persuade Midge to confess the truth to her husband. But he means well and his aim in life seems to have altered with time: at first he wanted to become a probation officer; at the end he is going to take a teaching diploma. Harry finally accepts Midge's decision to go back to her husband and also invites Stuart to return home. Edward gets his forgiveness and so does Midge from both her husband Thomas

and her lover, Harry. The characters reconcile so that they can resume their life on a better footing. Forgiveness thus is a theme common to the two strands of the story. The novel ends with Harry, Stuart and Edward drinking a toast to the “good” things in life, an image, and one may suppose symbolically, the overall thrust of the novel.

## Conclusion

Edward the pivotal character, the good apprentice in the novel, the manifestation of guilt leads to depression and nothingness. His progressive and positive resurrection from this dark pit of gloom marks the overall movement of the story. His redemption like sensation starts coming after he had learnt the first lessons of life there at Seegard first by grueling himself like a slave at the hands of the three women, a little later by learning to take care of his ailing father and learning to forgive him though his mother had suffered much at his behest and had left her when Edward was in her womb and further later he gets his forgiveness from Mark's mother and sister. His sacrificial action towards the end, that of burning the will his biological father had left for him awarding him ownership of Seegard perhaps aptly gives the much needed spiritual glaze to the morality dictated atheistic existentialism. Her overall storytelling has as its features, the expansion of the domain of ethics beyond the confines of obligatory action; the importance of the inner life and the role of vision and imagination in moral reasoning; and the attempt to retain the idea of a moral absolute at the centre of human existence.

It has often been said that Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy defies easy categorization, and one does not have to look far to see why. Trained in the analytic tradition at Oxford, she nevertheless challenged many of its central premises. A leading figure in the recovery of virtue ethics, she broke from her contemporaries by looking to Plato rather than Aristotle for inspiration. A self-declared atheist, she persisted in defending the importance of religion against the reductive views of her analytic colleagues and proposed that moral philosophy might become a kind of 'Godless theology'. The central idea that tries to take shape about the story is the philosophy of the 'good'. It is just not philosophy rather, but, a form of a quest, for both the young central protagonists whose lives are taken forward in the narration. The younger of them, Edward feeds drug induced sandwich to his best friend, Mark and unwittingly leaves him asleep and alone in the room, himself going out to seduce a girl upon her phone call. After the session

of seduction, when Edward comes back to attend his tripped friend, he finds that Mark has fallen dead off the window which was open. In a quick span, disastrously contingent, his life had changed and an uncalled for and never ever dreamt accident had left his soul guilt stricken, suddenly crippled. The 'good' in him, his energy to excel, his life force had suddenly disappeared. Life now had no meaning at all. His freedom had caged his soul. He had suddenly fallen, losing hope to stand up again. The central existential themes like "nothingness", "meaninglessness" situations, as Sartre and Camus have defined in their philosophy can be thus said to be aptly comparable with Edward's situation. Will he find 'good' again, will he be able to redeem himself and if he does, how, that is what the novel is all about. Most of us do not like to live in guilt. We also want to be forgiven. We also want to resurrect ourselves as Edward seems to have in the story even after such a drastic turn to his life which had caged his soul. Other characters come to him advising, but he doesn't understand them at all. In fact, he hates these sessions; hates everybody; everything; himself. He is bent on destroying himself, if it does not drive him to a suicide than probably a nervous breakdown. "One momentary act of folly and treachery had destroyed all his time" (11) and had left him without any energy to perform and lead a better life. But he rebounded and started living a complete and creative life. We too as human beings can learn from Edward's experience in the story a single lesson, a single all enveloping rule, that of always remaining 'good' and to work hard for it, in order to lead a better existence.

The law of the land leaves him but he himself is left gloomy and guilt stricken. Burdened with guilt, he is like the mythical Sisyphus of Camus doomed for eternity. He of course also could be said to be as the "abandoned" one as defined by Sartre. His redemption comes after another death that occurs at the later part of the novel, that of his biological father Jesse who had after a short fling with Edward's mother (Chloe) impregnated Edward and had ended the relation. He even had wanted Edward to be aborted. The father and the son make peace and

Edward gains the first concrete lessons of life when attending and comforting his ailing father but not before grueling himself, working as a 'slave' in that factory of a place called Seegard which Jesse had himself designed and nurtured. The abstractly natural and disciplined life that its inhabitants live; where they grow and make their 'every thing' from flower to wines to wooden jewelries; where they dance a Chinese dance as the morning as exercise and do expert carpentry during the day. Even the dresses they wear are weaved by themselves. They grow their food including spices and herbs themselves. They are strict vegetarians and also follow an herbal system of medicine. May Baltram, who is Jesse's wife, concoct the medicine herself? There are two daughters in the family Bettina and Illona. Bettina does the manly jobs in the house. She is the in house carpenter cum electrician. The younger Illona, who is also younger than Edward, is described as a 'fragile' girl by him in the story. But, she too has some other skills. She is a good designer of wooden jewelries and is also a good dancer. In these three women, Murdoch tries to exemplify the perfectly, empowered, skilled and brilliant women in a pastoral and natural setting. It may not be a possibility that such diversely multi talented and hardworking ladies or for the question, even gentlemen do exist after all. But the perfectly healthy and the desirously natural life they lead can be of some significance to all in these times of environmental degradation which actually came because of moral degradation.

Seegard, where these three ladies and Jesse live and where Edward learns the lessons of life, is a huge castle near the coastline and boasts of huge area with woods in the vicinity. In one corner within the estate which Jesse owns, there is a mysterious place, the 'dromos,' which was built there by Jesse. This place has a lingam stone upon which flowers are offered. Edward on his first visit to this place sees some wilted and dry flowers in the place. He even sees Illona dancing there albeit hidden behind the bushes during the same visit. It may seem a surface study but eastern way of life and ritual (Illona's dancing) is a form of worship to the Eastern God of dance, namely Shiva. That the inhabitants of Seegard including Jesse may be but practicing or

are simply impressed by the tenets of Hinduism can be the subject of a separate study but the movement of the story surely tries to establish that love, sacrifice, forgiveness, responsibility and moral ethical standards etc. are to be maintained for a peaceful and progressive society. In short one has to learn to be good, has to work hard, has to forgive and forget if he/she wants to lead a full and creative life. Both Edward and Stuart, in a way are competent enough to being called as being apprenticed to goodness in the novel as the title suggests. Although a similar and singular motive, “good” drives Stuart forward, but, he opts to leave his academic pursuit once and for all for a more chaste life that of helping the needy and the distressed though he was considered brilliant and had just graduated in mathematics. Nevertheless, Stuart also is self righteous and acts out of principals just as he invokes principals when persuading Midge to confess the truth to her husband, Thomas. His giving up of sex and practicing abstention can be taken as a spoof perhaps on Freudianism, which along with the other third strand in the novel that involves Harry and Midge and which also involves sex beyond a legal marriage between Thomas and Midge. The wife in the end confesses and is forgiven by Thomas, taking her back, despite the adultery which she had performed and which had lasted a full two years practically under his nose. Stuart too overcomes his confused soul and finally at the end, he is again joining college to take a teaching diploma. So, the story tries and establishes that trying to be “good” is the central theme. Both the brothers, and also the adulterous couple also go through pressures and woe at first, then the realization, confession and the ultimate forgiveness. All also seem to have promised at the end that they would act responsibly thereafter. Redemption or trying to be good, thus is given central emphasis throughout the movement of the story, full of accidents - here and there.

The acts and the achievements at the end do not promise the characters a sense of salvation, religious redeem or purgation but surely has given them a different perception, a positive one, towards life and the freedom it comes with. The redemption that is said to be provided to a believer is also not that specifically defined. An optimistic or positivity at ones’



affairs is the key here too. Or, as Murdoch exemplifies in the novel one should be in a quest of 'good' anyhow. The fathers, the sons, and the psychoanalyst, her major characters in the novel each can thus literally vie for the title of the good apprentice, at least they are modeled so, up to a certain level. The effect which she develops thus takes her readers along on her private as well as her professional quest.

The Spirituality Quotient not present in Existentialism or say the manifestation of "good" over God for the use of the devout atheists and in a way was much needed and thus the search, that started with Sartre's "Nausea" (1938) and perhaps ended with Murdoch's "The Good Apprentice" (1985), in that, that she comes to terms with the complexities of a post existential post modern world and yet with "good" she has perhaps added spirituality to atheism. And the world moves on as life goes on in the novel even at the end when Harry, Stuart and Edward raise their champagne glasses for a toast to "all the good things in the world", though they admit not being sure what those things are. They drink perhaps for the never ending story of life because for Ms. Murdoch, one should not hesitate in having an incomplete ending for a novel because life itself is never complete. Or, do they drink for the unknown Good just like the unknown God.

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