

Franková, Milada

Attention to otherness - love

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9. ATTENTION TO OTHERNESS – LOVE

‘Plato gives sexual love and transformed sexual energy a central place in his philosophy ...Plato’s Eros is a principle which connects the commonest human desire to the highest morality and to the pattern of divine creativity of the universe.’¹

In agreement with Plato Iris Murdoch’s philosophy places love high in the hierarchy of concepts, of which Good is the highest. ‘The direction of attention is, contrary to nature, outward, away from self which reduces all to false unity, towards the great surprising variety of the world, and the ability so to direct attention is love.’²

Love thus defined as seeing the other is also necessary for freedom, which Murdoch understands as the experience of accurate vision free from fantasy rather than exercise of will. Attention for Murdoch means unselfing, while attention to self in order to gain self-knowledge is indulging in a delusion.

These concepts of Murdoch’s moral philosophy are easily translatable into human relationships, because moral philosophy is about human relationships. This is where philosophy and novel writing are closely linked and although Murdoch is not, as she herself claims, a philosophical novelist, the concerns of moral philosophy are also what she has to say as an artist. The ideas of attention, unselfing, otherness and the real that make up Murdoch’s conception of love are to be encountered in all her novels and are not so much contrasted with as shown alongside self-absorption, fantasy and illusion resulting from and resulting in a failure to see.

Murdoch’s first existentialist hero Jake in *Under the Net* is guilty of self-absorption and the inability to see others as separate from himself. He has no idea of what his friend and room-mate Finn might be thinking and he is unashamedly uninterested. ‘I count Finn as an inhabitant of my universe, and cannot conceive that he has one containing me; this arrangement seems restful for both of us.’³ Jake’s failure to give Finn the benefit of having a universe of his own is common enough as Murdoch knows only too well and we cannot but agree.

The extreme manifestation of self-absorption is blindness to what there is resulting in fantasy, in our case creating ghost relationships in the mind of the actor. In *The Philosopher’s Pupil* Alex rekindles her old infatuation for Rozanov when he appears on the scene. She believes that he feels or felt the same for her, which he does not and did not. Alex’s son George also keeps pestering him hoping to renew a non-existent bond between them which he alone has been obsessed with for years.

The longest and the most intense fantasy relationship is Charles' in *The Sea, the Sea*. When he meets Hartley and later keeps her imprisoned in his house after a lifetime of reliving their adolescent love, he cannot conceive of Hartley not having done the same and of not wanting to leave her husband. It takes Charles a long time to give up his stubborn insistence on his dream and to admit 'what a "fantasist" I have been myself. I was the dreamer, I the magician. How much, I see as I look back, I read into it all, reading my own dream text and not looking at the reality.'⁴

This lack of attention outward comes as a shock to Edmund in *The Italian Girl* after he decides to emerge from his self-imposed seclusion to find a new relationship to Maggie, the family's maid, also emerging from the seclusion of her invisibility in the servant's position. Maggie, one of the long row of Vittorias, Charlottas and Julias who followed one another throughout Edmund's childhood and adolescence, has merged with all the others to become the impersonal, almost invisible, eponymous Italian girl. Several jolts are needed, probably the most effective one being the will in which Edmund's mother bequeathed everything to Maggie, to make him see her as an independent person, separate from the family, an attractive woman he could love.

There are countless other examples, perhaps of less obvious kind, of how little willing on the whole we are to look outside the self. In *The Good Apprentice* Midge is pressed by her lover Harry to leave her husband. Both she and Harry believe that Thomas is a cold old man, incapable of much emotion and therefore not much of a problem. A common enough delusion on their part that other people cannot love or hate or feel as strongly as we can. The author reveals what the two do not suspect, or rather want to be blind to: that the cold psychiatrist is 'a raw mass of suffering. His mind, unable to sustain coherent understanding, fell apart into craven incredulity, bleeding deprivation, sobbing childish misery, tragic attitudinising, cold cruel curiosity, and rage.'⁵

The idea of the importance of attention finds its way into Murdoch's funny scenes as well. Simon and Axel, the homosexual couple in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, have to go through endless trials and tribulations to find a modus vivendi together. Simon knows Axel to be difficult to please, but keeps on trying. 'Like someone studying an animal on a new diet, Simon watched Axel's tie behaviour. After a considerable repertoire had been built up Simon was even able to compile statistics and thus to discover the point at which his own taste and Axel's tended to converge. The birthday tie was, in Simon's opinion, bang on.'⁶ At least in the matter of taste Simon is aware of Axel's otherness, a realisation which occurs to Hilda about Rupert comparatively late, but all the more emphatically. 'What an absurd cruel strange *mad* thing to do, to take away his old letters without telling her. The action made her with a shudder intuit a whole dimension of otherness. Rupert's otherness. Rupert had all kinds of thoughts and needs and impulses of which she knew nothing, of which she could not conceive.'⁷ How attention to

other people's otherness, in other words the basis of human relationships, is linked with novel writing is what Gildas argues in *The Message to the Planet*: 'In order to write a novel you have to notice a few human beings'⁸, which sounds very much like Murdoch's own argument.

The current obsession with freedom, which is existentialist freedom, is shown by Murdoch as hardly compatible with good human relationships. Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, the Sea* is portrayed as a hedonist, savouring his food and relishing his solitude, boasting about his past successes as a lover on his own terms. He is an incarnation of the ideal of freedom of the self, unencumbered by ties of any permanent character. For him 'marriage is a sort of brainwashing which breaks the mind into the acceptance of so many horrors.'⁹ Similarly Jake in *Under the Net*, though less blatantly egotistically, wants to keep his freedom not so much for freedom's sake, but because he is afraid of intimacy. He does not need 'a communion of souls' because 'the substance of his life is a private conversation with himself.'¹⁰

In *The Unicorn*, all those who want to rescue Hannah from the prison-like Gaze despair of her lacking the concept of freedom. Only Max Lejour, an old Platonist philosopher, who too agrees that something should be done to change Hannah's appalling situation, does not think freedom is the answer. 'That rag freedom! Freedom may be a value in politics, but it's not a value in morals. Truth, yes. But not freedom. That's a flimsy idea, like happiness. In morals, we are all prisoners, but the name of our cure is not freedom.'¹¹ They are unable to penetrate the mystery of Hannah, for years an unrebelling prisoner of her absent husband, who she had crippled by a murderous attack.

In a much later novel, *The Book and the Brotherhood*, Murdoch has Father McAlister contrast freedom with love. He ponders the issue after he succeeded to free Tamar from her guilt over an abortion and from her mother's dominance. In the end he sighs that 'it was easier to set people free, as the world knows it, than to teach them to love.'¹² Like Max Lejour, Father McAlister has doubts about freedom in human relations. 'Had all that travail simply provided her with the strength required to leave her mother? Was there in the end nothing but breakage, liberty from obsession, nothing enduring of the spirit?'¹³

Tamar's suffering was a cry for attention and help and it was heard. Murdoch's opinions on suffering are linked with Simone Weil, who points out that intense suffering is aesthetically repulsive. Here again we are in the world of human relationships rather than ideas and Murdoch develops the theme at both levels. In the symbolic and almost allegorical *The Unicorn* Hannah is for everybody the 'image of the significance of suffering'¹⁴ and therefore attractive for them. In other novels suffering is more real and the reactions vary from compassion to revulsion. In both *The Flight from the Enchanter* and *The Bell* Nina's and Nick's suffering is recognised only too late when both are beyond help with the result of remorse and guilt of withheld attention. In *An Unofficial Rose* Hugh avoids his

daughter-in-law because he feels guilty towards her for having supplied the money for his son's love affair. But mainly he is too self-absorbed to see Ann's suffering and has completely misconceived her character. The sufferers in *The Red and the Green*, *The Nice and the Good* and *An Accidental Man* suffer from their own demons and they all sooner or later find themselves shunned, because they baffle approach and cannot be helped. Particularly so the striking figure of suffering, the tragic fairy-like Dorina, who cannot communicate with anybody, completely shut in her private horrors, is despaired of by her well-wishers in the end.

Suffering of a different kind and differently related to attention is the theme of *A Word Child* and *The Good Apprentice*. Both Hilary and Edward suffer from intense guilt for having caused the death of a beloved person. It is not attention they need or want, they are fighting a losing battle with the conscience which they choose to fight alone. They only achieve a partial peace of mind, though not consolation, when they manage to turn their attention away from the self, to other people and things.

In *The Message to the Planet* Franca's suffering is a complicated knot of jealousy, pain, guilt of deception and hate the working of which she likens to a machine inside her. 'The psychological edifice, to the creation and maintenance of which she now devoted her energy, she pictured as a kind of large machine erected inside her body stretching it out and making her tall and rigid like a hard glistening monument.'¹⁵ Entirely absorbed by the machine of her suffering Franca is driven into spiritual isolation.

Suffering, lack of attention, secrecy, lack of communication and illusion, they all combine in relationships of unrequited love, a theme of obvious fascination to Murdoch since there is not a single one among her novels where it does not appear. How much difference and how much more reality is there in Murdoch's love-stricken sufferers in comparison with a Renaissance poet-lover of an unattainable ideal? The question may seem a little far-fetched in the context of contemporary love brimming over with sex, but I suggest that there is more idealism than sexual subtext in Murdoch's treatment of these one-sided relationships. In the early novels of the 50s and 60s the unresponding woman, who is never gained, is only partly real in her lover's mind. She is a construct, a fantasy figure that corresponds to a certain need in the man's psyche whereas sexual attraction plays a secondary role.

Jake in *Under the Net* later realises that he has always perceived Anna only as a part of himself, a projection of his thinking, not an independent being. Felix's love for Ann in *An Unofficial Rose* is almost entirely asexual. He pines for his image of her as the English rose 'and he made of this strange friendship with Ann a place of security, a sort of permanent house, an English house for a wandering man, a place where his valued things could be stored in safety.'¹⁶ Effingham's attachment to Hannah, the lovely Unicorn, only has the attributes of a romantic fantasy that could not be transplanted into ordinary life as he is well aware. It is

also psychologically and philosophically interesting for him, he studies himself like a specimen. For Barnaby in *The Red and the Green* Millie has become his lifeline and he is satisfied to worship her in total abjection. The theme reappears in the foreground of *The Sea, the Sea* in the late 70s, where Charles does not see or want Hartley 'the bearded lady' she is now, but is in love with the distant ideal he has erected for his own consolation. The main difference from the earlier novels is in that his frantic suffering and resolve to win Hartley bring some realism into the relationship. However, idealism and sexless detachment of this kind of unrequited love clash with the egotistic lack of attention and the immersion in the self. The total absence of any attempt at unselfing coincides with the easy relinquishing of the ties to the object of love when the time comes.

Murdoch develops the idea of unselfing in unrequited love further in the novels of the 80s. In *Nuns and Soldiers* Veronica loves Manfred, who is in love with Anne, who loves the Count, who has for years hopelessly loved Gertrude. The quality of their love and suffering makes them different from the luckless lovers of the earlier novels because they can see the real persons, themselves being at different stages of unselfing so to speak. The chivalrous Count and the ex-nun Anne sacrifice their selves to a higher principle, but then, as Manfred comments, 'the Count is a moral oddity and so is Anne.'¹⁷ And there are not many rewards. As Murdoch the philosopher claims, 'In the case of morality, although there are sometimes rewards, the idea of a reward is out of place.'¹⁸

In *The Good Apprentice* the sublime relationship between Edward and Brownie, the sister of the boy whose death he caused by giving him a drug, turns into unrequited love for Edward when Brownie chooses to marry somebody else. They were drawn together by their bereavement and the extent to which they were in the roles of substitutes and redeemers for each other or to which they actually saw each other for what they were is elusive. Neither is Ludens' love to Irina in *The Message to the Planet* rewarded after Ludens' patient and dedicated battle with the self to accept Marcus and somehow together with him Irina, unambitiously for them and himself and still love them.

The early novels with small casts of lovers or potential lovers and relatives leave little space for friendships. Relationships between friends become more relevant in the more populous novels, particularly those with the court-like element. It is, however, not until the recent works that Murdoch looks at close friendships in the light of love. *The Book and the Brotherhood* is, besides many other concerns, about friendship and the court Gerald presides over consists largely of his old Oxford friends. Yet, there is something fossilised about their friendship, something joyless and devoid of purpose. Maybe because times have changed as old Professor Levquist sighs: 'I'm glad you've kept your little group together, these friendships formed when you are young men are very precious ... Friendship, friendship, that's what they don't understand these days, they just don't understand it any more.'¹⁹ It is within the context of friendship that Murdoch dares to approach

most closely her ideal of love as unselfing. Jenkin also comes closest to her ideal of the good man as Gerald realises in a moment of despair. 'Jenkin always walked the path with others, wholly engaged in whatever he happened to be, fully existing, fully real at every point, looking about him with friendly curiosity.'²⁰ What Gerald did not know and we only learn through the narrator, Jenkin being too reticent a person to voice any of it himself, was that 'he had loved Gerald all his adult life. [...] Gerald was like a perfect older brother ...pure gold.'²¹ The motif is repeated in *The Message to the Planet*, where in the circle of friends the relationship between Ludens and Gildas, each in his own way seeking for the message, stands out as more than friendship and understanding. Gildas, who is more vocal than Jenkin, reassures his friend that he will not abandon him. 'Don't be silly, Ludens, you are buckled to my heart. I will come *con scarpe o senza scarpe*. You must be feeling pretty feeble even to mention it.'²²

This achievement of selfless love in friendship is clearly a new development in Murdoch's relationships as until the above novels friends were regarded rather from the standpoint of the self, somewhat like Charles Arrowby's occasional need of friends of his own sex. 'I confess, I went to Peregrine not only for a drinking bout and a chat with an old friend, but for male company which is like, indeed is, a kind of complicity in crime, in chauvinism, in getting away with things ...'²³ Murdoch's male friendships tend to have an almost medieval quality as if men still depended on each other for life in battle. There is a great deal of reliance on help and moral support. Her female friendships are markedly different and although Deborah Johnson²⁴ managed to trace progress in Murdoch's portrayal of female communication, they never seem to achieve a high degree of unselfing and recognition of otherness which, on the contrary, they appear to be better at in intersexual relationships, in fact better than men.

Marital relations and married love are not treated differently from other human relationships. The institution of marriage does not particularly come into the foreground as most of Murdoch's protagonists are single, but the questions and attitudes concerning it as they have crystallised in the last three decades are present. Peregrine in *The Sea, the Sea* takes a harsh view of marriage. 'Every persisting marriage is based on fear. Fear is fundamental, you dig down in human nature and what's at the bottom? Mean spiteful cruel self-regarding fear, whether it makes you put the boot in or whether it makes you cower. As for marriage, people simply settle into positions of domination and submission.'²⁵ But even those who have elevated their marriage to an ideal of love and perfection may see the edifice collapse when the contingent interferes. The perfect couples in *The Nice and the Good* and in *The Fairly Honourable Defeat* do not prove to be unshakable and the perfect trust Thomas, the psychologist in *The Good Apprentice*, had in his marriage proves to be an illusion. Marriage does not have a special status in Murdoch's novels and there are just as many irretrievably broken up marriages as reconciled or newly wedded couples. In the later novels, particularly since *Nuns*

and *Soldiers*, the shift towards reconciliation and lasting marriages may perhaps be seen as Murdoch's positive attitude towards marriage. An additional example of this may be the parody she subjects Jack's marriage experiment to in *The Message to the Planet*. Jack's 'ménage à trois', where everything is to be in the open to prevent lies, insincerity and jealousy, results in an utter failure. His simple, straightforward path does not take into account the impenetrability of the human psyche whose feelings and reactions cannot be planned. He manipulates the two women into playing a game and when the game is up there is still more to come: 'Franca told herself, I am getting a grip on it again, I must say just the right things, produce just the right words, it's far more complicated than I thought, there's a whole other dimension, a whole other game to be played out. But what is this game, this inevitable necessary move, is it a search for truth or a cunning manoeuvre?'²⁶

Murdoch does not institutionalise marriage in any way though nobody ever rides off into happiness from a broken union either. The marriages in her novels are as open to development as all the other relationships, because no matter how close people are, they remain opaque to each other, they simply cannot read each other's minds – an ever recurring sigh of many of Murdoch's characters. Although impossible, merely wanting it may be regarded as a step in the right direction, the recognition of the other person's mind as different, existing as other.

The impossibility of seeing inside one another's mind is not improved by people's general unwillingness to reveal at least some of it by means of words. Murdoch's characters, too, prefer to go by signs and conjecture, more ephemeral than the play of signifiers and the signified. The unwillingness to communicate causes a gamut of misunderstandings and misinterpretation of intentions. In *The Time of the Angels* Muriel has never really communicated with the elderly Russian refugee who lives in the house. She now suddenly believes herself to be in love with him while Eugene has never even liked her, classifying her as hard, superior and patronising. Muriel is estranged from her father through jealousy of Pattie and another barrier to communication is erected when she sees her father making love to their joint charge Elizabeth. In Rupert in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* his inability to communicate his love to his teenage son is the outcome of 'his whole training, the whole of the society which kept him so stiffly upright ...when he needed gestures, strong impetuous movements to overturn barriers, he found himself paralysed and cold.'²⁷

The tragicomical conversation that Charles has with Hartley in *The Sea, the Sea*, when they meet after forty years, battles with the barrier of the lack of common context. They have grown worlds apart and their minds work in different planes. The intervening history and the nervous frenzy of the encounter with each of them intent on their divergent trains of thought, leave them unable to communicate. The lack of common context is what defines the relationship between Rose and Lily Boyne in *The Book and the Brotherhood*. It makes them cagey and

wrong in assessing each other. Rose senses this kind of impediment to understanding and when later Crimond proposes to her, her disbelieving, outraged reply reflects her awareness of it. 'I cannot interpret you except as false and wicked – there isn't any – any context – which would make what you say otherwise.'²⁸

In *A Word Child*, more than anywhere else, Murdoch is trying to probe into how much human relationships depend on words. She juxtaposes people who believe that talking automatically solves problems with those who prefer the barrier of silence. 'Oh if I could only get you *talking!* ... You use words as a hiding place. You're always *hiding*.'²⁹ This is Laura, once again urging Hilary to disclose his past to her, Hilary being the eponymous word child, paradoxically a word child without any need to communicate. He has sacrificed his talent and love for words and languages to his guilt, which he is hiding from the world.

On the contrary, Stuart in *The Good Apprentice* is worried that his mission of being good might break against a possibly insufficient talent for words. 'Suppose it should turn out that he could never really communicate with other human beings at all? He had so far communicated very little. So did he now envisage himself *talking* to people in the future, *advising* them? Could something like this be learnt or did it have to be a natural endowment? Supposing he were *dumb*, would it be different or the same?'³⁰

Unsaid words become a poignant hiatus which fills with remorse if the person to whom they were not communicated dies. Acute regret at not having done enough or said enough, in short, not having attended to somebody now dead, features in all Murdoch's novels where somebody dies. In her second novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Rosa blames herself for not having given more attention to Nina and thus perhaps prevented her suicide. In *The Bell* Michael is devastated by guilt for not having talked to Nick and shown him his love however imperfect it might have been. It comes only now to the dying Bruno in *Bruno's Dream* that his wife may have wanted to forgive him and not curse him as he has imagined all the years since the scene at her deathbed. History is now repeating itself. He is dying and unable to exchange the words of reconciliation with his son.

Murdoch returns to the theme with great poignancy in *The Book and the Brotherhood*. Gerald's father dies at the very beginning of the novel, but Gerald's pain at the loss accentuated by the remorse at what has remained unsaid between them does not diminish. 'The pity and love which Gerald felt for the parrot, the tender sad guilt, were very like the feelings which he had when he thought about his father, about the things which ought to have been said and the affection which ought to have been more openly expressed. Do the dead know how much we loved them, *did* they know ...'³¹ Ludens' grief after Marcus' suicide in *The Message to the Planet* goes far beyond blaming himself that he was not able to prevent Marcus from taking his life. Countless dilemmas arise from the unfinished conversations, unanswered questions and unshown emotions: Should or should not Ludens obey the command he received as the literary executor to burn all Marcus' notes?

Is that what he is meant to do? These practical considerations encompass the wider dimension that still eludes him: the essence of Marcus' personality and the discovery he had been striving for.

The seamy side to communication and attention is interfering unless it is genuine and helpful. But where the boundary between good and harmful interfering lies is as difficult to establish as to draw the line where good may turn into evil. Murdoch studies the fine and rather elastic borderline between human concern for others and interference or downright I-know-the-best meddling. Should we or should we not show interest in others, are we cold egoists if we do not or interfering busybodies if we do? These simple questions of human connection are moral issues.

When the honest and well-intentioned James in *The Bell* steps in to protect Toby from Michael's homosexual attentions, he is completely deaf and blind to the damage he is doing to Michael. In his righteous anger he does not even try to understand Michael's torment of coming to terms with his homosexuality. Ann in *An Unofficial Rose* is surrounded by do-gooders who rally around when her marriage breaks up. Mildred wants to win her for her brother Felix and Douglas Swann urges her to purify her image of her husband Randall. But the real Ann is invisible to them through their conflicting advice and she arrives at a point where she fears Douglas' good might turn in her into evil. 'His words, which in him were good words, were at her side of the picture temptation, almost corruption. Whatever she could do for Randall she could not do *that*. A saint might do it, but she could not. She could not thus hold him; as she imagined this "holding" she saw it almost as vindictive, revengeful, something to do with death. No, she must let Randall go, she must let him go *properly*, she must cut the painter.'³² In the end Miranda's savage, reckless interference solves Ann's dilemma against Felix, but to what extent the decision was her own continues to puzzle her: 'She had had no act at all of her own, she had been part of someone else's scheme, a thought almost, in someone else's mind. And yet surely this was not right either ... Had she acted, or had her act been stolen from her?'³³ Ann is grateful to Douglas for his concern and support and she does not have it in her to be angry with Miranda for having manipulated her. But not always is an extended hand received well, as Eugene Peshkov's refugee experience has made him wary of 'that thin brusque efficient type of Englishwoman who has good intentions but cannot help being patronizing.'³³ Thus help, though necessary and welcome, may be resented.

In *Nuns and Soldiers* when Gertrude's hasty marriage with Tim appears to have crumbled, all of the court of '*les cousins et les tantes*' feel justified in their meddling. Gertrude's close ex-nun friend, too, embarks on the precarious path of the do-gooder who can do more harm than good by meddling. Through her own complicated emotional involvement her action amounts to calculation in spite of self-sacrifice. 'Anna did her part, day by day, hour by hour, in helping to complete Gertrude's disillusion. It was a proper part, though such a painful one. Bet-

ter that Gertrude should harden her heart quickly. Better for Gertrude, and better in a way for Anne.³⁴

In *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch points out the paradox between the highest love, which is impersonal, and the love, often selfish and imperfect, that we encounter in the relationships of human beings.³⁵ Hannah and Marian in *The Unicorn*, touch upon the paradox when talking about God and love. 'But suppose you're loving – something that isn't there?' 'In a way you can't love something that isn't there. I think if you really love, then something *is* there.'³⁶ Effingham has a glimpse of perfect love when he is sinking in the bog, believing this is the end of his life. 'This then was love, to look and look until one exists no more, this was the love which was the same as death. He looked and knew with a clarity which was one with the increasing light, that with the death of the self the world becomes quite automatically the object of a perfect love.'³⁶ In *The Red and the Green* Barnaby, thinking about his love for his stepsons, contemplates 'the contrast between the purity and perfection of his inward love and the meanness and absurdity of his outward performance.'³⁷ For his stepson Pat Dumay love for Ireland is an absolute, while he believes his love for his younger brother to be his weakness though not a weakness to be fought.

The death of the self that Murdoch hints at as the ultimate goal is at the same time shown as an impossibility, as yet another of the endless moral tasks that elude one's grasp. The ever repeated striving for improvement, for more attention to the outside and less to self defeats the notion that Murdoch settles for imperfection. Imperfection is a part of Murdoch's realism, but nevertheless not its boundary.

Murdoch often uses the image of people coming a long way to meet each other. In *The Good Apprentice* Stuart and Meredith have made it their tradition to meet at the British Museum or a gallery, a long way from each other's homes. Brownie suggests meeting Edward in a pub and Edward cannot help thinking 'there was a soothing charm in the idea of their both making their way through big indifferent anonymous London to that meeting place...'³⁸ There is a great deal of symbolism in the image suggestive of both the difficulty and expectant hope of people meeting where good human relationships can start from.

While Murdoch describes power relationships and incestuous relationships as a phase, the love relationships constitute a process. It is a process where it is a long way from falling in love or feeling love, through overcoming the ego's natural desire to dominate or absorb, to respecting the other as a separate being and still loving them. Achieving this is an ideal, like being good, and Murdoch is not an idealist. The relationships never emerge into some sort of harmonious bliss, but they go on developing.

Murdoch generously embraces all possible kinds of love relationships leaving nothing out, which would require a long list to enumerate them and take statistical evaluation to ascertain their frequencies. They range from sexual love, including

married love and homosexual love, through love between parents and children, siblings or friends to the more poignant love for a dying or dead person. The last mentioned always revolves around remorse at not having done enough or said enough to impart one's love. This intense remorse reminds of Freud's study of the ambivalence of human emotions where obsessive self-reproaches of the mourner are seen as a result of the unconscious wish for the death which Freud connects with the archetypal fear of death and fear of the malevolence of spirits.³⁹

Central to all human relationships, and to love relationships in particular, is communication. Murdoch poses the problem as an acute lack of communication which partly stems from a natural secrecy in people, partly from a lack of common context, and partly, and most importantly, from the inadequacy of the means at our disposal – the inadequacy of words.

The crucial question of morality is best explained by Murdoch herself: 'Good art can't help teaching you things, but it mustn't aim at teaching. The artist's task is to make good works of art. A novel is a mode of explanation: you can't help explaining characters and scrutinizing their motives. The novelist is the judge of these people – that can't help emerging – and it is most difficult for the novelist to be a just judge. In the traditional novel, which is what I'm talking about, the novelist is *ipso facto* revealing his own morality, and he should be doing so.'⁴⁰