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Artist-saint relationships

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5. ARTIST-SAINT RELATIONSHIPS

Among the many relationships recurring in Murdoch's novels that between the artist and the saint appears to be the most prominent. The recognised artist-saint contrast has been much discussed by the author and her critics particularly in connection with Murdoch's philosophical conception of the Good and her interest in the form of the novel and it may also be directly traced to Plato's thought. The saint-figure is the Platonic man questing for the Good, the embodiment of the pursuit for the real and the truth. His opposite is the artist, condemned by Plato as the harmful living image of fantasy, magic and illusion, a view contested by Murdoch. Murdoch's artist is also a questing hero forever trying to come to grips with the role of art and its form in the contingent world around him, often fighting Murdoch's own battles.

Critical assessment of these two characters invariably refers to binary oppositions to set off the differences in the two respective arguments. The structuralist concept of binary oppositions contrasting two mutually irreconcilable opposites was inherited by post-structuralists, who have dissolved it by subverting the hierarchies within the binary structures. Dissolving rather than upholding the opposites seems to me to be the case in all Murdoch's novels that employ the contrast.

A variety of this is also the teacher-pupil relationship, where the teacher usually corresponds to the saint-figure while the pupil, despite displaying some resemblances to his artistic counterpart, is not an artist. The relationship in one or the other of its varieties is already present in Murdoch's very first novel and continues to appear at intervals with more or less prominence, but always with new development until it truly culminates in her latest novel *The Message to the Planet*. Development may be followed not only in the discourse of the opposites but also in the relationship of the actors, the two interwoven into a complex whole.

In Murdoch's first novel *Under the Net*, the artist-saint relationship is not the main theme, which is the existentialist man/artist himself. Jake Donaghue, a would be artist rather than the serious artist he perceives himself to be, in the interim a translator of second-rate French novels by occupation, is living the care-free life of the free existentialist man with adventures worthy of a picaresque hero. His inability to write the great book he hopes to produce one day is linked with his inability to find a connection between reality and fantasy, between concepts, form and contingency and, in his everyday reality, between really seeing his friends and illusion. Jake is obsessed with Hugo Belfounder, a prototype of the many saint-figures to follow. Hugo is one of the irritating characters who, contrary to all

common sense, gives up everything whenever success begins to impose a pattern on his life, driven on and on by his quest for the Good.

Hugo's ideas intrigue Jake and elude him just like Hugo eludes him physically. The nature of their relationship thus remains elusive as Jake keeps imagining vaguely that Hugo possesses or knows the something that might be the clue to his writing. The urgency to find and talk to Hugo is strengthened by his feeling of guilt for having written and published a philosophical dialogue based on earlier conversations with Hugo without Hugo's consent. The conversations on theorising and conceptualising and how far it is necessary and when it becomes a net over reality become central to Jake's pursuit as an artist and their unresolvedness a strong link to Hugo. Hugo's feelings for Jake are ambiguous and unrevealing as the man himself. He has a natural kindness and goodness but seems to be above ties to people or things. In the few weeks described he hardly seems to be aware of Jake's existence, thus the relationship is rather something in Jake's mind and Hugo with his ideas more like Jake's alter ego than a friend and a real person.

When eventually Jake tracks Hugo down, the solemnity of the occasion undermined by the comical aspects of the situation involving trespassing and flight, their long talk in the dark hospital room becomes a revelation to him of his misconception of people and events. It is as if he emerged from the dark Platonic cave into light where he is absolved from his guilty feelings about Hugo where he can see other people without the haze of his own illusion about them. However, the phenomenon of Hugo and his relationship to him remains unexplained. 'I began thinking about Hugo. He towered in my mind like a monolith: an unshaped and undivided stone which men before history had set up for some human purpose which would remain for ever obscure. His very otherness was to be sought not in himself but in myself or Anna. Yet, herein he recognized nothing of what he had made. He was a man without claims and without reflections. Why had I pursued him? He had nothing to tell me. To have seen him was enough. He was a sign, a portent, a miracle. Yet, no sooner had I thought this than I began to be curious again about him.'¹

The Italian Girl, a novel for the most part ignored by critics as one of Murdoch's less successful ones, only lightly echoes the artist-saint relationship in the narrator Edmund and his brother Otto. The enclosed Gothic setting with its mere seven characters sets the scene for tightly knit relationships ranging from a failed marriage to quasi incest and reveals the darker and most secret side of the human personality. Emotions fly high and hysterical exchanges and physical attacks become the order of the day in this very emotional novel with the plot condensed in a few days and not very many pages. Compared to Murdoch's later novels this is an undiluted melodrama with no digression and hardly any flashbacks. The revelations of deep personal misery, love and passion and subsequent wreckage of all the relationships, old and new, follow in quick succession.

In all this mostly sexual commotion the more reflective artist-saint conflict appears to be marginal and not very clearly defined. The artist-saint contrast within the narrator persona himself is partly mirrored in his relationship with his brother. At first glance Edmund stands out as the saint-like figure: he is a natural recluse, a bachelor living alone, given to serious thought and his artistic interests, like many other Murdochian characters nostalgic for Christianity. 'I wished, not for the first time, that I had been brought up as a Christian. Christianity was not inside me, for all that I sometimes aped it, and I knew the loss to be terrible. This was yet another thing for which I could not forgive my parents.'² He thinks that again when he painfully realises at his mother's funeral that nothing really has replaced the dignity of a Christian burial. His preoccupation with beauty is more than an artist's admiration and rather like Murdoch's idea of beauty and perfection. 'The extreme beauty of the scene put me into an instant trance. It was always a trick of my nature to be subject to these sudden enchantments of the visible world, when a particular scene would become so radiant with form and reality as to snatch me out of myself and make me oblivious of all my purposes. Beauty is such self-forgetting.'³

Otto, too, is an artist but more dissatisfied with his art, always drunk and his life in a mess. These appearances are misleading, however, because it is Otto who eventually asks all the crucial questions about truth and being in truth, about truth turning into a vice, about suffering as a consolation. He can see Edmund's talking in general terms as imposing patterns upon reality and his idealising Flora, his own daughter and Edmund's niece, as obscuring reality.

So which of them is the artist and which is the saint? They both have the contrast within themselves and in this, although they are so dissimilar, they are identical. There is a very strong bond between them, its roots traceable to their father's artistic and philosophical influence and the artist-saint tension vaguely felt in a Hindu parable whose memory they share. 'You remember the thing Father used always to be quoting, about the two birds on the tree, how one eats the fruit and the other watches and does not eat? Some Hindu thing. Well, you're the one that watches and I'm the one that eats.'⁴

The Time of the Angels, which followed only two years after *The Italian Girl*, displays many similarities of theme, setting and characters with the latter, not the least of them being the artist-saint contrast in the underlying context of the relationship between the two brothers. Development may though be seen in the greater poignancy of both the contrast and the relationship, clearly as a result of the powerful figure of Carel, a fallen priest and one of Murdoch's enchanters. Edmund's nostalgia for Christianity is a very benign version of Carel's loss of God. The picture of the world without God becomes an apocalyptic vision in Carel's mind. 'Theology has been so long a queen, she thinks she can still rule as a queen in disguise. But all is different now, *toto caelo*. Men will soon begin to feel the consequences, though they will not understand them.'⁵ There is no Good outside the

philosopher's childish prattling and truth is probably just a black pit. The concept of Good is dead with the concept of God, they are both empty.

At the time of their long talk into which Marcus had to trap his brother, Carel is already in a state when he is no longer capable of sustaining relationships with other people. They have all broken down and he avoids all contact with the exception of his demonic incestuous relationship with his daughter. Marcus does not know about this evil, he does not even know that Elizabeth is Carel's daughter. To the world and Marcus she is their dead brother Julian's child and Carel and Marcus are her joint guardians. The shock of being let into the darkest part of his brother's mind has a salutary effect on Marcus. And that Carel actually struck him, 'it was in fact a blow designed to produce enlightenment. It was more than that, it seemed to Marcus in his later thoughts. It was a mark of love. His brother had made him exist, had wanted him to exist, for a moment in an intense presence of each to other. Love was the name of such a presence.'⁶

Love in all its guises and manifestations pervades all the relationships in Murdoch's novels and will be dealt with separately further. For Marcus the realization is a kind of consolation, however incomplete. After Carel's suicide Marcus' affection turns into suffering. Should he not have done more for Carel? Could he have saved him? Love is not able to answer those questions or the mystery of his brother. Ever since their childhood Carel has been for him a man of power and although he, Marcus, condemns it, he lives on that power and cannot bear the idea of Carel being defeated. Carel's quest for truth was an agony that he may have died of. Only a faint glimpse of it through Carel's passion makes Marcus see the shortcomings of the book on theology he is writing. But in the face of death, is it not all futile? The questions are asked again and elaborated to much greater detail and higher pitch in Murdoch's latest novel *The Message to the Planet*, where a different Marcus is the saint and a teacher and, uncannily, the very same questions are asked by his pupil again at the end of the novel.

In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* there is little of a real relationship between the artist Julius and the apparent saint Rupert save a vague reference to their long-standing friendship dating back to their student days. Nevertheless, the artist-saint contrast is acted out on human relationships in a drama devised by Julius in which he manipulates people, including Rupert, like puppets in a predictable show. When he sets the scene at the Prince Regent Museum for his puppet show to start, he promises to Simon that this is 'just a midsummer enchantment', casting himself in the part of an all-powerful magician or King Oberon, who can make people fall in love and out of love at will.

Julius has a poor opinion of the lasting value of human relationships. 'Human beings are roughly constructed entities full of indeterminacies and vagueness and empty spaces. Driven along by their own private needs they latch blindly onto each other, then pull away, then clutch again ... They never really see each other at all. There is no relationship ... which cannot quite easily be broken ...'⁷ His plan to

demonstrate it becomes a devilish farce in which he orchestrates his actors like pawns on the chessboard, destroying the pattern of their lives and imposing a new one of his own invention. He, the evil magus, believes that he can take over the role of contingency.

Rupert is the saint-figure who, very much like Guy Openshaw in *Nuns and Soldiers*, invigilates over the happiness and well-being of his extended family. He has just finished writing a philosophical book on goodness. In his argument with Julius he accuses him of being a mere theorist. 'I think you are the theorist. You seem to hold some general view which makes you blind to obvious immediate things in human life. We *experience* the difference between good and evil, the dreariness of wickedness, the life-givingness of good.'⁸

Julius does not believe in Rupert's concept of good, he does not believe Rupert to be genuinely good, the kind of saint he projects himself to be and is duly accepted in the role by others. He sets about his task of eroding Rupert's marriage and self-esteem with creative enthusiasm and succeeds. The evil defeats the good, the artist subverts the saint. Only the characters in Julius' farce become free and break down the pattern he so confidently imposed on them. The result is Rupert's accidental death or maybe even suicide. As the novel ends, Julius admits his defeat, although with little regret, to Tallis and by humbly cleaning up his messy kitchen recognises him as the saint. For Tallis can do what he, Julius, is not capable of: he can sustain relationships to people by respecting their otherness and seeing them as independent of himself.

The Black Prince is the clearest example of the artist-saint contrast personified by Bradley Pearson and echoed in his argument with Arnol Baffin, a prolific writer of popular fiction and usually interpreted as a parody of the features criticised in Iris Murdoch's writing. Bradley Pearson, also a writer, is suffering from an artist's block caused by his too serious artistic mind. If the two represent Murdoch's own artistic dilemmas, the almost post-modern questioning of the reliability of texts in this novel allows the author to hide her allegiances effectively.

Arnold and Bradley are involved in a complex relationship of friendship and rivalry, both artistic and sexual, the latter involving Arnold's wife and daughter. One of the few similarities between them is the final one – they both perish by the hand of the wife: Arnold killed by her and Bradley sent to prison by her perjury. Bradley 'discovered' Arnold and helped him to have his first book published and even now he sees himself as his 'spiritual father'. He criticises Arnold for the garrulity of his writing and settling for easy mediocrity. Arnold, on the other hand, has the power to hurt him when calling him a 'devotee of silence'. Their artistic argument broke up over the years, but their friendship survives, apparently against all odds. 'Dislike of another's work is a deep source of enmity in artists. We are a vain crew and can be irrevocably estranged by criticism. It is a tribute to Arnold and myself, two demonic men, that we ingeniously preserved, for whatever reason, our affection for each other.'⁹ So Bradley continues the artist-saint debate

alone and comes to realise that something like a fusion of Arnold and himself might produce the longed-for result. 'One's sense of one's own excellence is un-invidious, imprecise, probably healthy, perhaps essential. Equally important is that humility, that sense of unavoidable limitation, which the artist must also feel when he sees, huge behind his own puny effort, the glimmering shade of perfection.'¹⁰

Their curious love-contempt-pity friendship never enters a new phase of literary argument with the exception of one exchange after Bradley's sharply critical review of Arnold's latest book. Arnold's defence sounds very much like Iris Murdoch's own words: 'If one has a thing at all one must do it and keep on and on trying to do it better. And one aspect of this is that any artist has to *decide* how fast to work. I do not believe that I would improve if I wrote less. The only result of that would be that there would be less of whatever there is. And less of me. I could be wrong, but I judge this and stand by the judgement.'¹¹ They come closer to each other in the way they experience love as illuminating through depersonalisation. Arnold writes to Bradley confessing: '... I've been depersonalised and made into somebody else. I feel sure, by the way, that I've been *completely transformed* as a writer. These things connect, they must do. I shall write much better *harder* stuff in future, as a result of this, ...'¹² Later Bradley, too, after making love to Julian, felt the same depersonalisation as if 'I was speaking through her, through the pure echoing emptiness of her being ... But now, empowered, I would be able to create. Though still in the dark, I had come through my ordeal.'¹³ At the same time the love relationships they have sought, Arnold with Bradley's ex-wife Christian and Bradley with Arnold's daughter Julian, intensify the motive of their being each other's alter ego.

Bradley's affair with Julian puts his relationship with her father to a test that no amount of Freudian interpretation can explain away. Whether the Oedipal conflict was at play or not, although Julian's farewell letter to Bradley suggests that it might have been, the parental shocked reaction at their old family friend seducing their daughter hardly requires or is helped by such complex theorising. Neither did it break up the relationship between the two father-figures. Francis Marloe's Postscript claiming that Bradley actually loved Arnold opens up another dimension which suggests that it was Arnold's death that eventually removed Bradley's writer's block and reconciled with its finality the artist-saint conflict.

An entirely different kind of rivalry, love and obsession between the artist and the saint is to be found in *The Sea, the Sea*. Charles Arrowby, a sixty-year-old 'wifeless, childless, brotherless' but famous Shakespearean director and playwright renounces the glittering world of the theatre and wants to become good. His plan is to write his 'philosophy ... against a background of simple descriptions of the weather and other natural phenomena'¹⁴ while his literary form remains undecided although it is a matter of considerable interest to him. 'Yes, already I personify the object, the little book, the libellus, this creature to which I am giv-

ing life and which seems at once to have a will of its own. It wants to live, it wants to survive.'¹⁴ Murdoch's maxims and questions regarding the form transpire in Charles' deliberations.

Charles' wanting to be good after his London life of power and ego may have been inspired by James, his cousin and the saint-figure in the novel. Their relationship does not derive from the artist-saint contrast but from a curious blend of old childhood and family rivalries in the half-conscious inner world of a boy's allegiances, jealousies and longings. The boy Charles felt unequivocal love for his good and kind father, tempered by defensiveness towards him as he thought him to be a failure, a failure at least in comparison to Uncle Abel, James' father, who was rich and successful. At the same time he admired his uncle and even more so his glamorous American wife with mixed feelings of jealousy and despising in defense of his rather ordinary and dull parents. His relations with James are analogous and in many respects also similar to the cousin rivalry in *The Red and the Green*. Outshone by James, Charles, very much like Andrew, is driven by a desire to impress his more successful cousin.

That childhood rivalries and hates between siblings and cousins may persist well into adulthood or even old age is another vast field of relationships that Murdoch finds fascinating. In *An Accidental Man* Austin never becomes reconciled with his brother Matthew. Pat and Andrew in *The Red and the Green* personify the Anglo-Irish conflict, but at the same time theirs is an acute personal drama only ended by their deaths. Charles and James are in their sixties when Charles accepts James' belated, but none the less obscure admission that he had been seeing Charles' ex-mistress as an excuse for banishing him from his life and concludes that 'there was no getting back to my cousin now ever, through the barrier which he and I between us had so ingeniously erected. We were eternally divided. And it somehow seemed strange to me that this had not happened earlier, so dangerous were we to each other.'¹⁵

They never clarify their mutual feelings. Yet, they have another chance to come closer to each other, to have a new context to share, when James, to help Charles to overcome his feelings of guilt over Titus' accidental drowning, confesses to him his own remorse at having caused a Sherpa's death by overestimating his power. The renunciation of power is what both Charles and James seek after. As James says: 'Goodness is giving up power and acting upon the world negatively.'¹⁶ James' final solution is to will his own death by stopping his heart according to the Buddhist belief in the destruction of the ego and achieving fulfilment at death. (The motive is further developed in *The Message to the Planet* with much more centrality and emphasis.) Charles does not reach for an extreme solution, but he is capable of improvement. He learns his lesson in self-delusion and in the book he is writing he comes to see the difference between life and art: the formlessness of life, 'which has an irritating way of bumping and limping on'¹⁷ and the illusion and myth, which are the dangers of art. It is only after

James' death that the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle of their relationship fall into place. Now Charles living in James' flat does not actually 'become' James, but his constant awareness of James' existence and thought is suggestive of the same fusion of the artist-saint contrast as in the preceding novels.

The teacher-pupil relationships in Murdoch's later novels seem to be an extension of those between the artist and the saint also because the preoccupations and the tensions between the protagonists run along very similar lines. The obsessional character of the relationship is also shared by both. However, Murdoch is obviously interested here in the teacher-pupil relationship per se in the first place. According to her own words in an interview with John Haffenden¹⁸ she has been involved in such relationships all her life, in both roles.

The following four novels are rather extreme examples of the above since they are, though not exceptionally so, concerned with no ordinary characters, enmeshed in very Murdochian plots of passionate quests, emotional turmoil, accident and death. Like the artist and the saint figures, neither do the teacher and his student remain clear-cut opposites as through intense interaction of thought their roles merge. The density of life in these novels with their huge casts and interwoven relationships ranging from friendship to obsessive love and incestuous tendencies may make the teacher-pupil relationship appear as minor, with the exception of *The Message to the Planet*, where it is larger than life.

A Word Child begins two important phases in Hilary Burde's life with two significant teacher-figures. Mr. Osmand discovered Hilary as the word child of the title and thereby saved him from the dreary existence of the delinquent illegitimate boy he had been. 'Mr. Osmand looked at me quietly. He had grey eyes. He gave me his full attention. I suspect that many children are saved by saints and geniuses of this kind. Why are such people not made rich by a grateful society? How exactly the miracle happened is another thing which I cannot very clearly recall. Suddenly my mind woke up. Floods of light came in. I began to learn.'¹⁹

Gunnar's discovery of Hilary as a budding scholar at Oxford was less of a miracle, but a relationship was formed between them whose quality underscored the later life-long obsession with guilt and revenge after the catastrophe of Anne's death. Here the teacher-pupil relationship is only sketched at the beginning, the drama between them already unfolds in a different plane. In the end words fail Hilary in both the relationships where they were always of paramount importance. After 20 years of silence between Hilary and Gunnar, Clifford sums up the situation: 'He is a bogymen to you. And no doubt you are a bogymen to him.'²⁰ But when Hilary decides to try the power of words again, the power of circumstances proves to be stronger. History has a nasty habit of repeating itself. After Hilary causes the death of Gunnar's second wife, there is no more to be said.

A parallel to the final catastrophe is also the sad ending of Hilary's relationship to his first teacher. Here, too, Hilary feels that he has failed him when he learns about Mr. Osmand's suicide. Perhaps a few words from his former star

pupil might have saved Mr. Osmand. But he only found Hilary in a drugged sleep, unable to return to him the attention he now needed. Murdoch does not attempt to drive home any lesson about ungrateful pupils or life-long shining beacons. Hilary's relationship to both Mr. Osmand and Gunnar as his teacher is shown as part of the other accidental events and developments in his life and does not take any unduly significant role.

Robert Rozanov, the eponymous philosopher in *The Philosopher's Pupil* is a very different kind of teacher from Mr. Osmand in *A Word Child* though not so different from Gunnar Jopling, who was also a powerful charismatic character. Rozanov wields the power of Murdoch's enchanters, at the same time wrestling with questions of moral philosophy, which also makes him a saint-figure. His appearance on the scene in Ennistone sets events and people reeling, not least his former student George McCaffrey, an unbalanced, unhappy man, followed by accidents mostly of his own making, but, or perhaps therefore loved by women – a man of similar character and fortunes to Austin in *An Accidental Man*. George has been obsessed with a fixed idea of an intense relationship with Rozanov, which he is now trying to give more substance to by pestering Rozanov to talk to him. Rozanov resolutely spurns his attempts and the desperate George drowns him in his bath.

Uncharacteristic of and dissimilar to Murdoch's other teacher-pupil relationships as it may be, it is central to the narrative and slightly echoed by the other two teacher-pupil pairs in the novel. George's inexplicable actions, the uncanny murder scene, the many Murdochian opaque symbolic elements and obscure characters and, not least, the eerie setting of the fictitious spa town enhance the enigma of the philosopher-saint-enchanter. This led some critics to look for a ready explanation in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, liking Rozanov to Prospero and George to Caliban.

As elsewhere, Murdoch refutes all critical attempts to pattern *The Philosopher's Pupil* on *The Tempest* and talking to Haffenden about the then latest of her novels offers her own point of view: 'The teacher is a powerful and potentially destructive person. Of course Rozanov acts wrongly towards George. He should let George off, be nice to him, and become a bit less absolute; but a certain kind of philosophical mind is very absolute in relation to philosophy. This could spill over into real life, as it were, the feeling that you must have perfect truth and never fudge things. John Roberts hates messy and emotional situations. George behaves in exactly the way to enrage him, which is what George partly wants: he wants the emotional drama which will make a bond between them.'²¹

Extreme obsession and indisputable rejection as two clearly defined poles is unusual in Murdoch's artist-saint or teacher-pupil relationships where a lot of interface and movement towards synthesis is usually discernible. The motive of obsession and rejection recurs in general outlines in *The Message to the Planet*, nevertheless, as we will note, with a different outcome.

The Book and the Brotherhood employs the teacher-pupil relationship in a more conventional manner than all the other novels where it occurs. In this novel of otherwise passionate loves and hates it has a stabilising effect and an old-world-like flavour. Here Murdoch shuts out the surrounding world almost entirely and has her characters encapsulated in a closely knit circle of friends with ties running back three decades to their student days at Oxford. What is new here is a kind of shared, group relationship towards two people from their past. Their veneration of Levquist, their Oxford Professor, has remained a solid pillar of admiration for learning, thought and dignity, somewhat larger than life, symbolic of what they wanted to achieve and somehow have not. Crimond, too, was the object of their admiration when they were all, to various degrees, left-wing students. Their relationship to him has, in complete contrast to that towards Levquist, undergone a change in the course of decades and may be seen as a good example of what Murdoch describes as 'the active "reassessing" and "redefining" which is a main characteristic of live personality...'²²

The brief scene when Levquist holds court for his old students on the Commem Ball night and bemoans the loss of Socratic friendship from present-day Oxford sets the tenor of the central theme of the novel. Levquist is the saint and the influence he still exerts over Gerald is like an invisible cord feeding Gerald's saintly role in the 'brotherhood' with solid substance and direction. The old teacher's presence is still palpable, when, all the disasters and trials and tribulations being over and Levquist already dead, Gerald is ready to renew his quest for the Good. 'It is up there, solemn and changeless and alone, indifferent and pure, and, yes, I feel its magnetism more strongly at this sense of distance, of how high and unattainable it is, how alien, how separated from my corrupt being.'²³

The teacher cum saint – pupil relationship reappears and culminates in *The Message to the Planet*, Murdoch's latest novel to date. It culminates both in the sense of becoming the central theme of the novel and the sum of the ideas highlighted in the previous teacher-pupil relationships. The teacher-saint figure is given unprecedented prominence, but, simultaneously, his role is subverted by that of his pupil.

Verisimilitude is rather strained by the setting in eerie places like Fontellen and Bellmain and the notion of a formula which is to save the world. Nevertheless, the relationships, however unusual, have human dimensions. In pre-history, before the book's beginning, the relationship of Ludens and the others to Marcus was that of fascination and awe. Latent for years, the spell is broken for Jack and Gildas but revived to a new intensity in Ludens and, inevitably, in Patric, who believes he must die of Marcus' curse and is 'raised from the dead' by him.

The incredibly powerful healing scene is the beginning of further development of the theme of obsession and rejection of *The Philosopher's Pupil*. Rejected by Marcus on a whim earlier on, Ludens earns his new acceptance by clinging to him with a fixed idea that Marcus' genius will make a great discovery about the

world. Obsessed with it, he urges Marcus on until their teacher-and-his-disciple roles are reversed. 'He must think, and think hard, about the next *real* task, how to persuade Marcus to write, how to help him to *collect his wits*, in fact how to make him *work*. No wonder he, Ludens, must appear to them all as a schoolmaster. He was, as it were, a teacher who has a pupil, an idle and confused pupil, who is far more brilliant than himself and must be coaxed, encouraged, if necessary, scolded, beaten.'²⁴

But at this point Ludens already attends more to Marcus the man and suffers doubts about his sanity and about the narrow margin between good and evil. Why and what thoughts Marcus thinks about the Holocaust, which, incidentally, Clive Sinclair in his scathing TLS review of the book feels we already know all about and need not be told again.²⁵ In 'Against Dryness' Murdoch says that 'we have not recovered from two wars and the experience of Hitler' and that 'our inability to imagine evil is a consequence of the facile, dramatic and, in spite of Hitler, optimistic picture of ourselves with which we work.'²⁶ Marcus is Jewish and although, or perhaps because, he had no direct personal experience with the suffering of Jews during the war, the Holocaust burdens his mind. His death later on, with his head in the gass oven, is explained by some as symbolic of it. He is also closely linked to Murdoch's concept of 'inner struggle' as moral activity. Shared Jewishness is of comparatively little consequence as a bond between Marcus and Ludens, who always plays it down and resolutely avoids the approaches of the local rabbi Daniel Most lest he should inspire Marcus to become religious. However, Ludens' conviction that he must protect Marcus from outside influences still comes from his intense possessiveness of Marcus and jealousy.

When Marcus exchanges communication with Ludens (mainly discussing his ideas for the book which was never written in the end) for mute communication with the crowd, it may be a qualitative step forward in spite of Ludens' misgivings. Marcus almost becomes an artist manipulating his audience. To Ludens 'this "facing the crowd" seemed ...not like an instant act of triumph but more like an ordeal or "work", whereby Marcus on every occasion transformed a potentially hostile mob so as actually to commune with a number of individuals, leaving no one out.'²⁷ Ludens' acceptance of these public sessions, of failed hopes for Marcus' discovery, of cooperation with Dr. Marzillian for Marcus' good is the development of his 'inner struggle'. 'Some curtain between himself and Marcus had this day been torn, partly by way of prelude, in their conversation, later more dramatically in the dreadful crowd scene. Was it possible that, by so undoing himself, Marcus had damaged, perhaps forever, some precious tension of awe and fear which had always existed between him and Ludens? Ludens chided himself for this thought.'²⁸

Marcus' mysterious death veiled in symbolic meanings and Ludens' precipitous burning of all Marcus' papers is not a finale with a solution beyond the stages when their struggle converged, when they were able to communicate and

accept each other. Later Ludens tries to summarise Marcus' tragedy as the eternal Faustian quest: 'Somehow he acted out the whole pilgrimage of modern man – to know almost everything, and then to want that one thing more, and perish trying to find it.'²⁹

The Message to the Planet has a parallel story of an artist's quest. The artist and the saint never meet after the healing scene and the influence one may have had on the other in the past when Jack adopted Marcus' style of painting and became famous has long since gone. Jack is trying to impose the pattern of his fantasy of freedom and truthfulness on two women, forcing his wife and his mistress to live in a 'ménage a trois'. The inevitability of his failure through his refusal to see the two women as independent human beings parallels Marcus' unattainable goal. The parallel lines may only converge in a different plane, a plane where people meet.

The artist-saint and teacher-pupil relationships, stripped of their background and purpose which make each of them different and in its quality unique do reveal some common features. Most importantly it seems to have become a rule that one in the relationship, predominantly the saint, dies or otherwise irrevocably disappears from the scene. The question may well be asked why. The death is not redeemed by a revelation as full revelation is never achieved. The sign of synthesis of contrasts, at most some reconciliation of the initially irreconcilable cannot be worth a human life. That it appears to cost a life is illustrative of there being no easy goals and no easy solutions, that the moral tasks are truly endless. Murdoch succeeds here at both philosophical and human levels where the development of thought is paralleled by the development of the relationship. The fusion of the contrasts is not enlightenment or reconciliation but one, albeit small, step towards it.

The theme of the artist-saint contrast is so typically and uniquely Murdoch that to look for comparisons in contemporary writers would prove futile although the moral issues it raises find parallels in Golding and particularly in Burgess' *Earthly Powers*. The teacher-pupil relationship is not so difficult to find elsewhere, the campus novel, notably Bradbury's *The History Man* or David Lodge's novels being the obvious examples. Nevertheless, the scope of concerns involved in Murdoch's relationships makes comparison even here difficult.