CHAPTER - VII

An Unofficial Rose

The title itself is suggestive of the theme of the novel. It refers to the dog-rose of Rupert Brooke's 1913 poem, which, unlike the orderly flowers of Berlin, is 'unkempt' : 'Unkempt about those hedges blows/An English unofficial rose'. But 'unkemptness' for Murdoch does not carry any pejorative sense. On the contrary, it refers to important categories in her ethics and aesthetics. In both ethics and aesthetics she resists the Romantic-Kantian attempt to collapse reality in the self and its consequent ills. The extreme example of this Romantic-Kantian standpoint is the Sartrean Totalitarian Man who succumbs to neurosis and 'seeks to cure himself by unfolding a myth about himself'[1]. The result in literature is the 'triumph of myth as a solipsistic form'[2]. Form is used as a temptation, 'making the work of art into a small myth which is a self-contained and indeed self-satisfied individual'[3]. Murdoch reacts against this situation and vigorously insists on a return 'from the self-centred concept of sincerity to the other-centred concept of truth'[4]. Similarly, in art she exhorts us to turn our attention away from 'the consoling dream necessity of Romanticism, away from the dry symbol, the bogus individual, the false whole, towards the real impenetrable human person'[5].

Murdoch's sense of 'unkemptness' of the 'Unofficial rose' is meant to turn our attention to this 'impenetrable human person'

in life, or to the 'naturalistic idea of character' in literature. It requires a change of attitude. Narrow self-centredness must be replaced by 'attention' or 'love'. Correspondingly, in literature, fantasy must be replaced by imagination. But Murdoch is also conscious of still another enemy of love or reality. It is convention. If the neurotic man is a prisoner of extreme solipsism, 'the centre of an extreme decision', the conventional man is a prisoner of fossilized social and moral conventions. He too fails to enter the realms of reality and freedom. Murdoch calls him the Ordinary Language Man, and thinks that, compared with the Totalitarian Man, he is not absolutely impervious to outer realms : he is 'at least surrounded by something which is not of his own creation, viz. ordinary language'[6]. In the present novel Murdoch introduces mainly these two types of characters as if by way of admitting that it is difficult in the modern world 'to escape from one without invoking the help of the other'[7]. She, however, shows that it is yet the conventional man who has some 'unkemptness' and can have moments of self-realization through the cognition of others outside himself.

The book is mainly about Hugh and his son, Randall. The former can be seen as the Ordinary Language Man and the latter as the Sartrean Totalitarian Man. The theme traces their progress from a state of self-involvement to that of an ironic consciousness of its limitation through a recognition of the contingent reality outside them. The self-realization that follows this recognition gives them a certain measure of freedom at the end of their pursuit.

Indeed, both Hugh and Randall are projected as self-centred and self-deluded men. While the former is conventional, the latter is violent, never recognizing the existence and demands of others. He never looks upon his wife, Ann, as a separate person, but considers her merely in terms of his own requirement as an aspiring 'artist'. His chief charge against her is that she holds him back from growing into an 'artist', a writer, that he has decided to be. Her piety, her openness and her great labour and income all have lost their particular significance for him. He even resists in his mind the sight of an unloved Ann that might rouse his pity and restrict his freedom. He puts on the airs of an aggrieved person and shuts himself up in his room, awaiting the desired moment of freedom.

Hugh is not violent like his son but he was not much different in his treatment of his late wife. He is still confused if he married Fanny for love or for the Tintoretto which she inherited from her art-dealer father:

> Perhaps indeed he had married her for the Tintoretoo, as in a curious muddled way it had sometimes seemed to him in his dreams when his poor wife and the picture became strangely identified with each other[8].

He could consider her no more than a 'thing'. Not did he have the required courage and passion to break away from her and seek freedom and fulfilment in Emma whom he loved. Though fairly successful and distinguished as an erstwhile civil servant, he was a slow and conventional man and accepted calmly his wedded life with Fanny in spite of his strong passion for Emma. Yet at Fanny's death now the old question why he did not allow things to rip between himself and his wife to be united with Emma comes surging back to plague him:

> Was it for pure convention that he had sacrificed that Marvel? Perhaps. Was it because of the department. Was it because he had had no money of his own? Perhaps. Or was it for some demon of morality which, he knew, would have given him later, no peace? (p. 16)

But he realizes now that no 'great store of spiritual energy' has been liberated by his sacrifice and his action appears to have had 'merely a destructive effect' :

> He had passed years in a resentment against his wife which had gradually deadened his tenderness into pity and his pity into a dull resigned companionship. Their marriage had become a hollow frame (p. 16)

In other words, his submission to convention was good neither for him nor for Fanny. He still fondly remembers the little time he happened to spend in Emma's company in the past. It constitutes for him

is 'only real life', 'his only real actions'; the rest is hollow, without any growth.

Indeed, the complex plot of the novel is 'an innate comparison between the destinies of Hugh and Randall'[9]. What Hugh has failed to achieve is counterbalanced by Randall. If his father submitted to a life of enslavement, he cannot allow himself to do the same. His married life is finished for him long ago. He feels himself meaninglessly tied to a wife who only saps his energy and his artistic potentiality:

> For someone else she may be a bloody little angel. But for me she's the destroyer, and the destroyer is the devil. She's got a kind of openness which makes whatever I do meaningless (p. 36).

An ego-centred man as he is, he values his wife only in terms of his own obsessive self-interest, and her brighter qualities like 'openness' seem to him only oppressive and even destructive. He incarnates the Kantian individual who dislikes contingency or the messy phenomenal world and yearns for some perfect and necessary form or myth for the proliferation of his fantasy. In contact with real life and real beings, everything for him loses form and meaning. He feels secure only in the self-containedness of form:

> I need a different world, a formal world. I need form .... Yes, yes, form, structure, will, something to encounter, something to make me be. Form, as this rose has it. That's what Ann hasn't got. She's as messy and flabby and open as a bloody dogrose. That's what gets me down. That's what destroys all my imagination, all the bloody footholds (p. 37).

He is Murdoch's lonely Totalitarian Man who fears 'history, real beings, and change', fears 'whatever is concingent, messy, boundless, infinitely particular'. What he desires is 'the timeless non-discursive whole which has its significance completely contained in itself'[10]. But form for him is a mode of self proliferation, just as the Tintoretto is for Hugh a source of consolation. For both of them neither art nor love provides a mode of freedom. Art is reduced to mere form, a source of consolation, and love to a travesty of self-love. Their self-involved actions, therefore, open up for them no realms of freedom, but increasingly subject them to a slavery either to neurosis or to convention. It is furthermore signalized by their most abject decision to sell the Tintoretto. Randall forces his father to sell this highly treasured art object to help him run off with Lindsay, his mistress. He envisions his life with Lindsay as bringing him a new freedom, but actually it brings him further slavery and enchantment.

Indeed, freedom is Randall's chief pursuit. But two things tightened Anna's hold on him. The first was pity for unloved Ann that

haunted him 'like a demon, preventing him from rising' (p. 73) and the second was his mother's inviolable faith in his marriage:

> Fanny had believed in Randall's marriage, had believed in it right up to the end, seeing no danger signs and noticing no deterioration; and perhaps that very belief had helped to keep Ann and Randall together (p. 11).

Herein lies the strength of the conventional characters of unconscious goodness. Both Ann and Fanny are such a type of characters, the unkempt roses of the book, the positive <u>others</u> to Hugh and Randall.

But after his mother's death, something new seems possible, some new pattern promises to emerge from 'the solitary vigil' that he has imposed upon himself, 'some fresh strength', to break the spell. He exults at the prospect of a higher form that would surely emerge from his new love for Lindsay. A movement from Ann to Lindsay would mean for him a passage, as it were, from a real, messy, moral life to the free aestheticized life of exhilarating holiday from morals:

> She was his angel of unrighteousness, so he often told her, and through her he enjoyed a most exhilarating holiday from morals. She was, he delighted to tell her, a demon, but an angel for him, heartless, but warm for him, a natural tyrant but for him a liberator, evil, but for him good. She was indeed his good, that toward which his whole being magnetically swung. The madness, the fine fury, had come at last (p. 70).

But when the first flush of his excitement subsides, he finds himself confronted not with Lindsay alone but with Emma as well. By some chemistry of the situation, he has to be in love with both. The love-relation is turned into a play-relation. He is enslaved to their pattern and yet so playfully that he is completely disarmed. He is 'petted, permitted, indulged and ultimately bullied' into accepting their enchanted imprisonment. He gradually starts idolizing 'the serene quality of their egoism'. The dark, demonic and obscure Emma is the centre-piece of their relationship, held by an appeal to cleverness and a sense of form. Indeed, cleverness is here love and only through cleverness could such a structure remain rigid. With the passion of the artist which he now increasingly feels himself to be, he adores Lindsay's 'exquisite sense of form'. He feels himself to be transported to an airy world of the imagination and freedom:

> She was shapely and complete; and like a Kaleidoscope, like a complex rose, her polycrome being fell into an authoritative pattern which proclaimed her free. With exhilaration Randall felt himself become light, light, able to rise at last into the airy world of the imagination, the world above the mess of morality, the world inhabited by those two angelic beings (p. 73).

She is his 'complex rose' that incarnates form and order, and delights him. But his happiness is not unsullied. Already he is aware that he is being slowly 'organized' and 'swallowed' by his

liberators'. His surrender is further marked by his financial helplessness; he cannot run off with Lindsay. Thus his enslavement to his own fantasy, in the first instance, and to that of his liberators, next, are ultimately identified.

A parallel movement on the part of Hugh also begins after Fanny's death with a renewed hope to take up and complete his interrupted pre-marital love-affair with Emma. 'There's something strangely timeless about one's affection for people', observes Hugh, thinking of his desperate, resurgent love for Emma. 'It's odd', he confesses to Mildred, 'to keep love for someone stored up so long and then to find it fresh and alive at the end. I thought I had quite sealed up that tomb, but no-no' (p. 102). Mildred's feeling about her own stored-up love for Hugh is exactly similar so that it is difficult not to notice the implied irony in it. Indeed, Hugh and Randall too acting exactly alike under the influence of passion appear to be the travesty of each other and produce the irony in the novel, with which it is really structured. This inner structure of irony, again, subserves the development of the theme through a clash of opposites like fantasy and contingency, enslavement and freedom.

As Randall put off his holiday till Fanny's death, so did Hugh. He 'quite childishly looked forward to having a holiday when poor Fanny was dead' (P. 106). Mildred, in her turn, was waiting too: 'When it was known that poor Fanny was dying she had again vaguely and a little guiltily, expected that, somehow or other, she would

now "inherit" Hugh' (p. 95). They act so obsessively that even an apprehension of a baffling opacity on the part of their counterparts annot restrain them. The situation is especially difficult for Hugh who finds himself caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, he is vaguely aware that his present move to re-establish any sort of relationship with Emma would be an act of gratuitous folly and might cause only pain and confusion and nothing else. On the other hand, there is the attractive prospect, held out to him by the solid and sensible Mildred, to 're-join his freedom' in a trip to the far-off lands of India which in his fancy and excitement he can even visualize : 'Two days out from Southampton and he would be in another universe.... A long time away, packed with unforeseeable experiences which would compel thought and fancy, filling his mind with bright new images, would quite cleanse him of these weird cobwebs' (p. 107). But one has to grapple with one's darkness, illusion, before one is ready for freedom. Hugh, too, needs a 'good shake' as he himself is aware:

> I was exaggerating of course just now. I'm not in love, I can't be, one isn't at my age. I can overcome this — obsession — just by giving myself a good shake (p. 103).

But as he goes to see her, he confronts a world completely different from what he expected. Everything happens differently. He imagined loss of consciousness, tears and all sorts of embarrassments. But the sense of being at last in her presence, the occurrence of something impossible, leaves Hugh paralysed and absolutely speechless

It is a terribly silent confrontation that has a quality of the real that strips him:

> It was not Emma related to him but Emma existing which was the shock which so almost threw him back into a greater solitude. It was more like the snapping of a chord than like a reunion (p. 109).

He comes to see reality as other, something outside his fantasy. He has not imagined her ageing. He has 'an eerie apprehension of her whole body as older. It was as if her body and his sniffed each other like two old dogs while their owners looked on. Her hand rested on the arm of the chair like a wary lizard' (p. 110). It is a meeting in Hades, as it were, and what bewilders him most is the moral otherness of Emma's world, 'a world which seemed to have its own seriousness, even its own rules' (p. 113), its fullness, where he remains only an outsider. An added reason for his shock is his discovery that Randall frequents the same place. It projects a mirror image of his own 'escapades', as it were. This self-exposure through a play of irony is further instanced in the sale of the Tintoretto. He knows that by agreeing to sell the art object he wrongs both Ann and Fanny. But apart from helping Randall with money, he has his own self-interest in the deal. If Randall wants to take Lindsay away, Hugh looks forward to getting Emma alone and helpless. Mildred, in her turn, wants to have Ann as her brother's wife when Randall goes. But the lurking contingency that bears him down is that, far from feeling alone and helpless as he expected, Emma simply takes another secretary and absolutely

refuses to yield to him. Most notoriously, he could only take Randall's vacant place and his enslavement too.

This moral chastisement in the end helps Hugh to see and accept the world objectively. He also comes to recognize Emma's own calm resignation as befitting her own dignity. It is impossible, he admits, to remake the past. They have fashioned their own destinies and have of necessity become dream figures to each other. This new awareness of reality initiates a movement back to the thought of his dead wife, initiating really the process of his freedom which culminates in a rediscovery of her worth and dignity, which in Murdoch means real love:

> Fanny had had her life, she had been something. He saw her life behind him, remoter now, like a pastel-shaded ellipse .... It was as if at the end he had recognized in her a dignity which she had had all along, but had kept humbly lowered like a dipped flag or a crumpled crest. He was glad, after all, that he had stayed with her. He was glad that he had been good to her (p. 333).

Hugh moved away from Fanny to Emma in quest of freedom, but his encounter with Emma was an encounter with the contingent that demolishes illusion. His movement back to Fanny signalizes his newly attained freedom and self-realization. They represent the two interrelated poles : one, the moral and the messy, the other, form and intellect. Both prove necessary to initiate his process of enlightenment and freedom. Randall, too, has the same movement between Ann and

Lindsay. But, as already observed, compared with the Ordinary Language Man, the situation of the Totalitarian Man is more difficult. He has not been able to discover a centre of reality outside himself. He still pursues his own myth, his rapacity, his perpetual love-making and 'perpetual flight, from Rome to Paris, from Paris to Madrid, from Madrid to New York, from New York to .... (p. 305). But already he is disturbed by thoughts like 'where reality lay', or why he is only a mediocrity in art. The reason that he himself can assign is a moral one : 'The great artist is not rapacious' (p. 305). It also answers the first question : rapacity bars the way to reality; reality is outside oneself in the act of recognizing others. That he can by implication admit to having this flaw is itself a mark of self-awareness on his part.

Besides, a sense of enslavement now galls him within. Lindsay herself is the source of his discontent : 'Lindsay was the stronger, Lindsay was the boss : and even if she herself had not yet realized it, it could not be long before she did' (p. 304). He betrays a process of disillusionment with his affair with Lindsay in a renewed vision of Ann that he comes to have in his dreams : 'He saw in a vision the sunny hillside at Greyhallock with its slight haze of green and its myriad little coloured forms and he sighed. Ann' (p. 306). This glimpse, although in a dream, seems enough to indicate the process of his rethinking. Things remain open-ended for him, but the idea of a possible return to Ann also takes shape in his mind. He feels with satisfaction that Ann's tyranny is

broken : 'Perhaps this, and only this, was what Lindsay was for, to free him from Ann' (p. 306). He would now return after his own fashion:

> The wonderful thing now was that no mistake was terrible. There was plenty of time, and time would show him what he really wanted to do. He would survive. He could always, and after his own beautiful fashion, return to Ann. Ann would always be waiting (p. 307).

This is, indeed, the style of the Totalitarian Man whose egoism dies hard. Ann herself is further developed. After all this struggle and especially after her experience of love with Felix whom she rejects, she comes to rediscover her stable centre of reality. On the other hand, Hugh too is truly ready now to rejoin at his long-awaited freedom. He sails in Mildred's company on a trip to India.

Thus the title may have a double implication, first, as one of the two kinds of love, and, second, as one of the two sets of people, represented as the cultivated rose and the unofficial rose. The cultivated rose in the novel is the symbol 'of a human desire to impose order on nature; opposed to the cultivated rose is the unofficial rose of the title : wild, less symmetrical, and contingent'[11]. It is the second implication that fits in with the theme of the novel. In point of fact, like the earlier novels, the present one, too, develops its central vision through a conflict and unity of these opposites of form and the contingent, self and other, art

and fantasy. It reemphasizes that freedom consists in the apprehension of the reality of other persons. The mode that makes it possible is love.

Elizabeth Dipple criticizes the book as unsatisfactory because it is 'defeated by its ultimately over-extended formal contrasts between the demonic and angelic, evil and good, would-be artist and saint, amorality and morality, form and formlessness'[12]. She claims that they remain as simple opposites and do not form the substantial irony in the style of the book. We have shown, however, that irony in this respect forms the very underlying structure of the novel. Admittedly, for the perfection of this style in her novels one has to wait till the later ones.

It has been further complained that there is something 'perfunctory' and 'lifeless' about the book and that it does not appear 'complex and significant' in actual reading as it appears in analysis[13]. Taking up the second part of the comment first, it can be argued in defence of the novel that it is formally a beautiful work but it appears less significant in actual reading because much of its form is masked by its use of contingencies. And 'the reader's overall response is one of subdued, aesthetic pleasure at the blend'[14]. The book, however, does not achieve the desired balance between its 'telling' and 'showing'. Besides, the story itself does not have the gripping suspense that her other novels

characteristically have and capitalize on. All this may have created an impression of a certain perfunctoriness or even an artistic 'staleness' in the novel. But yet one can think of the novel, in the words of Richard Todd, 'as a strong novel with some lapses'[15].

R E F E R E N C E S

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14. Richard Todd, op. cit., p. 50.
15. Ibid., p. 51.