

The Establishment of Female Identity in the Black Prince

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Abstract

The paper explores how women reconstruct their identity as a self-conscious individual in the social life in *The Black Prince*. It reveals that Murdoch explores the establishment of female identity from two aspects: the reorientation of the life in the growth of young women who have more freedom to make choices; and the completeness of female individuality based on the women's independence in this novel. The analysis of the female characters' different destinies illustrates Murdoch's view on the reposition of women's identity that is exemplified by Julian's choice of her life path after she owns more freedom of choice and her view on women's economic and spiritual independence that is considered a necessity for female identity through the different ways of Priscilla, Rachel and Christian to survive marriage crisis.

Keywords: Female Identity; Individuality; Iris Murdoch; The Black Prince

I. Introduction

As a prolific writer, Murdoch has tackled the difficulties faced by the female characters with the increasing female consciousness in the historically and ideologically changed society and managed to give "disturbing visions of a disturbed world" (Gerstenberg, 1975, p.16) through the characterization of various female figures. Although Murdoch disregards the tenets of the modern novel and persists in the use of familiar and traditional writing techniques to record the contemporary problem of major importance, she applies an experimental narrative structure to explore the women issues in *The Black Prince*, a novel published in 1973. As winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the most critically acclaimed novel by Murdoch, *The Black Prince* illustrates her success in literary creation and popularity. The delineation of the female characters in this novel evokes the reader's empathy with their efforts to establish their female identity and then come to terms with the world through reorientation of self-identification with the freedom of choice, the completeness of female individuality by being independence, and the empowerment in feminine narrative in the hegemony of male supremacy.

Murdoch blazes new trails to avail herself of male first-person narration in order to skillfully disseminate her views on the reconstruction of female selfhood. The male first-person narrator Bradley Pearson in this novel is a civil servant of fifty-eight years old, who has few publications and retires earlier just to fulfill his ambition to write a great literary work on art and love. A phone call from his old friend, a famous writer, Arnold Baffin interrupts his preparation for his journey to a rented seaside bungalow where he intends to devote himself to writing. In a hurry, Bradley arrives at the Baffins and finds Arnold's wife Rachel is hurt badly in the domestic violence conducted by Arnold with a fireplace poker.

Besides, Bradley's preparations for departure are repeatedly interrupted by others: his ex-brother-in-law Francis Marloe is a homosexual quack psychiatrist; his ex-wife, Christian, has just lost her second husband and returned from America; his sister Priscilla is deserted in a destructive marriage; the twenty-year-old daughter of Arnold, Julian, turns to him for the direction on the literary appreciation and creation. Bradley's vision of world is changed completely by his "sudden, overwhelming experience of love" (Byatt, 1994, p.269) for Julian. Bradley is freed by the shock of love from his previous personality and thrown into a highly activated state. With a changed position and perspective, Bradley appears to be virtuous in the following day. His love for Julian endows him with newfound relaxed social openness which makes him realize that there are "reconcilings" (Murdoch, 1973, p.211) he must effect.

Then he becomes receptive to his former colleague Hartbourne's phone call for the dinner invitation; he admits his unjust attitude to Arnold's works and orders his complete works to read them "humbly and without prejudice" (Murdoch, 1973, p.222); he even treats the most obnoxious of his acquaintances, his brother-in-law, Priscilla's husband, Roger and his mistress Marigold kindly. His elopement with Julian finishes up with Julian's running away without saying goodbye after being notified Priscilla's death and Bradley's real age. At the end of the novel, Bradley received another phone call from Rachel, claiming that she has killed her husband with a blow from the same fireplace poker with which Arnold thought he had killed her. Bradley rushes to console her and help her clean up the poker. Shortly, Bradley is charged of the murder of Arnold Baffin and the fingerprints he leaves on the poke become the hard evidence. Bradley is sent to prison for life, writes this memoir there and dies of cancer. Postscripts respectively by dramatis personae Francis Marloe, Christian, Rachel Baffin, and Julian Baffin provide the retelling and reinterpretation of the whole event from different viewpoints by different people.

In spite of the first-person male narrator in this novel, Murdoch empowers the women's voice in the unique narrative structure, reveals the reorientation of women's identity with more freedom of choice and reveals independence as the way to complete female individuality through the characterizations of deserted wife Priscilla, dissatisfied housewife Rachel, rich and confident widow Christian, and young and idealistic Julian. Compared with the female figures in Murdoch's previous works, the women in *The Black Prince* have obviously more self-consciousness and have more awareness of what they're doing. Their concern shifts from a clear understanding of themselves that they've already owned to an established female identity, circumscribed by social, economic, and personal restraints in the male-dominated society, which will weaken the subordination of women to men.

When it comes to formation of identity, Murdoch's view on the female characters should be taken into consideration. She summarizes her view on her women in an interview as follows:

My female characters are very various individuals with various problems as proposed in the problem stories. ...I do not write as a woman. I do not feel I write only to be putting 'the female case'. ... The women in my stories are – as the men are – individuals with individual fates. (Khogeer, 2005, p. 221)

Since Murdoch acknowledges that formation of identity transcends a rigid gender boundary, discussions of female identity should "incorporate more practical evaluations of equality and difference" (Friedman, 1998, p.23) since "gender is only one constituent of identity" (Friedman, 1998, p.23). The complexity of an identity determines it to be fluid and relational not in a fixed or static but in a state of flux. In the "hybrid interfusions of self and other" (Friedman, 1998, p.19), individuals become more aware of their differences and meanwhile affirm their commonality, which is regarded by Felski as "a difference within sameness and a sameness within difference" (Friedman, 1998, p.19).

According to Murdoch, the establishment of identity is a process of seeking common ground while reserving differences, which is equally applicable to both men and women. Thus she depicts women's condition of life and their different plights through the application of experimental narrative techniques and the portrayal of various situations: unfavorable one that women struggle to escape from and favorable one that women are content with. While women obtain more educational, political and job opportunities in the real world, Murdoch's female protagonists enjoy newly-acquired narrative possibilities under the male discourse power and more individual freedoms in *The Black Prince*. Furthermore, Murdoch illustrates the only way to complete female individuality is to be independent through the characterizations of three female figures.

II. Reorientation of Self-identification with the Freedom of Choice

In *The Black Prince*, Murdoch characterizes Julian, the daughter of Arnold and Rachel Baffin, as a young woman who sets up her goal of life, reorients her life plan and arranges her life accordingly in the light of her own wishes rather than the social or the parental expectations for a woman. Unlike Annette Cockyene in *The Flight from the Enchanter* or Morgan Browne in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Julian is endowed with more freedom to make decision about life though she is still living in the patriarchal horizon, which enables her to have strong sense of self-consciousness to decide her own life.

Julian's debut in the novel does leave the reader a deep impression as Bradley mistakes her for a young man while she is strewing the scraps of her boyfriend love letters upon the roadway repetitively. Bradley's depiction of her appearance makes the reader find little feminine charm in her: Puberty makes her lose her look and "an awkward sulky aggressive attitude to the world in general" (Murdoch, 1973, p.47) diminishes her charm.

Besides, her temper is not quite pleasant as "she was always fretting and complaining, and her little face, as it hardened into adult lines, grew discontented and secretive" (Murdoch, 1973, p.47). Moreover, though adored by her parents, Julian gets them disappointed because she is not as clever as they expect and her reception of education is not very successful. Her education background reveals her capriciousness and indeterminacy in her teenage at the mercy of her parents, which makes her parents disappointed for she fails to meet their expectations.

In her earliest twenties in Bradley's story, she begins to present her reconsideration of the life on her own and the growth as a young woman because "Julian was already grieving over the wasted years and regretting that she had not much time left" (Murdoch, 1973, p.51). Besides, like the young people of her generation, "so vague and inconsiderate and doing everything on the spur of the moment, and so full of contempt for everything" (Murdoch, 1973, p.208), Julian fears "ordinariness" (Murdoch, 1973, p.114) and likes to "go off with the raggle taggle gipsies or something" (Murdoch, 1973, p.114), which is unacceptable and disappointing to her parents. Contradictorily, Julian's attitude to Priscilla shows her sense of responsibility that other adults are short of. Moreover, she appears to be very considerate of others' feelings and empathetic to the pain of others. Fully aware of her own superiority of an unmarried young lady with a likely promising future to the deserted old woman in a wretched situation, Julian behaves in a becoming manner and tries her best to protect the dignity of the weak. The contrastive description of the differences between Julian's real personality and others' comments on her embodies Murdoch's disclosure of the unjust judgment and prejudiced expectations imposed by the patriarchal values on the young woman.

Murdoch contradicts the completely opposite attitudes of reluctant Bradley and determined Julian to their love and their future in order to highlight the determinacy of the modern women in face of choices of life. When met with opposition of her parents to her relationship with Bradley, she feels so strong and calm, in the middle of the china broken by her angry father Arnold, and quite certain about Bradley and quite certain about herself. Her certainty drives her to run away from home with Bradley whose pessimistic view on their future renders him incapable of attending to Julian and her sincere love. Instead, she tells him her clear life goals: "I'm going to marry you. You will write a great book. I will try to write a great book" (Murdoch, 1973, p.299). However, when Julian happily looks forward to the future life on their way to Patara, where Bradley plans to writer his masterpiece, Bradley's abstract and hollow remarks on love and his indecisive attitude to life make her so irritated that she jumps out of the moving car to prove her love. The days they spend in Patara witness Julian's growth to be a real woman and the practical effects she takes to achieve her life goal. She learns to cook, clean the room and even plan to live together with Bradley's sick sister Priscilla after they get married. The sex with Bradley makes her feel "shattered and empty ... in a place where [she's] never been before" (Murdoch, 1973, p.321) and "complete as if why we had to come together had been somehow explained" (Murdoch, 1973, p.324).

Murdoch not only presents Julian's persistence, pragmatism, and optimism to the love and life, but also displays her decisiveness in crisis handling. Good time does not last long. Their seemingly peaceful love life is broken by the intrusion of Julian's father Arnold who exposes three pieces of destructive news to her: Bradley's lie on his real age, his concealment of the suicide of Priscilla and her mother Rachel's letter to her which reveals Bradley's brief involvement with her mother. Though severely shocked by the facts and self-reproached on Priscilla's death, Julian still declines her father's suggestion to take her back home immediately with strong self-control and dispassion and promises him to go back the next day because she likes to make the decision herself.

The discovery of Bradley's deception makes Julian lose her trust in him and choose to leave him firmly and decisively even without saying goodbye.

III. Completeness of Female Individuality by Achieving Independent

Murdoch attempts to reveal the growth of young women, who own more freedom than their mothers' generation, and the formation of their female identity through the characterization of Julian Baffin in this novel. Besides, she also explores how to complete the female individuality in the marriage through depicting the different fates of the other three female characters (deserted Priscilla, struggling Rachel and self-realized Christian) and the diverse ways they take to survive the marriage crisis. From the experiences of their successes and failures, Murdoch indicates that economic and spiritual independence are fundamentally important to the establishment of the female identity, which ensures women to live with dignity.

Murdoch shapes the tragic image Bradley's younger sister Priscilla to illustrate the miserable consequences of women's overmuch dependence on men.

From Bradley's description, Priscilla has "no zeal and talents and made no efforts" (Murdoch, 1973, p.60) to improve herself and is spoilt by her mother who has "a continued grudge against the world" (Murdoch, 1973, p.60) and "convey to female children a deep sense of their own discontent" (Murdoch, 1973, p.60) unconsciously. Their mother's unhappiness comes from "a sense of have married 'beneath' her" (Murdoch, 1973, p.60) and consequently she eggs on her daughter to change her own destiny through the marriage and helps her pick up herself and socialize with the rich singles with painstaking effort. Priscilla takes great effort to dress and behave elegantly in order to penetrate into some better social circles than the one that she comes from. At that time, entirely unskilled Priscilla only has very little working experience in a wholesale establishment as a junior salesperson. Unfortunately, she loses her job and has no attempt to find another because she spends too much time on finding a husband. What's worse, all her endeavor has no return but her nervous breakdown. After her recovery from it, with the loss of some of her first good looks, Priscilla plans to become a mannequin but have no serious attempt to make it come true. What she does is to move "in a world of business men, golf club bar proppers and night-club hounds, who certainly regarded her" (Murdoch, 1973, p.61) as a "tart" (Murdoch, 1973, p.61). Her pregnancy with a reasonably well-off guy Roger Saxe doesn't lead to her marriage with him but a humiliating abortion financially supported by her brother, which makes her father "ashamed and frightened" (Murdoch, 1973, p.62) and her mother "dedicated herself now to getting Priscilla married off soon somehow to somebody or anybody" (Murdoch, 1973, p.62). Then Priscilla and her mother trap Roger to marry her by pretending to be pregnant again. She achieves what she wishes: marriage with a rich and handsome husband, a splendid house in the better part of Bristol, grand dinner parties and a big car. Murdoch doesn't let her story end here with the happy ending that from then on Prince and Princess had a happy life, but casts Priscilla back to the cruel reality that women don't deserve a good life without self-reliance and self-improvement.

Priscilla's first appearance in the novel is her unwelcomed visit to Bradley's apartment as she has no place to go after she quarreled with her husband and ran away from home. Her comment on her awful present life is as follows: "I've been living trapped inside a bad dream, my life has become a bad dream, the kind that makes you shout out" (Murdoch, 1973, p.64). And she has been unhappy for years since her life has been "sort of pure intense hell" (Murdoch, 1973, p.65). Bradley is deeply frightened by the possibility of having his sister on his hands since he simply doesn't love her deep enough to take care of her. Therefore, fully aware of Priscilla's unhappy life with her husband, Bradley's his immediate reaction when she says that she has left Roger is that she must return to him: "You can't leave Roger. It doesn't make sense. Of course you're unhappy, all married people are unhappy, but you can't just launch yourself on the world at fifty whatever you are now –" (Murdoch, 1973, p.65). What Bradley does for his sister is nothing propitiatory or soothing but the deadly blow one after another, which drives Priscilla from depression, to frustration and then to hopelessness. He tells her that she can't leave Roger no matter how tiresome and selfish he is because there isn't anywhere else for her to go. With both parents dead and without husband's love, Priscilla fails to get any kind of support from her bother, which drives her life to bay. Highly dependent on her family life, Priscilla believes that the end of her marriage will lead to the end of her own life.

Murdoch endows Priscilla who is completely under the patriarchal control in the traditional way with no positive male figures in her life, which helps women realize the impossibility to hang everything on men as what their mothers did in the past.

The three most important male figures (her father, her brother and her husband) in Priscilla's life fail to provide a strong support to her life if not the destructive impact on it. Priscilla recalls the negative influence that her father and her brother exerted on her when she was young: "You and Dad made me feel so ashamed and inferior in the old days, you were both so cruel to me and Mum, Mum was so unhappy –" (Murdoch, 1973, p.78). What's worse, her husband hates the sight of her and is adulterous with other women. The only consolation for Priscilla is the occupation of jewels, clothes and other material things "which she seemed to attach an almost magical significance" (Murdoch, 1973, p.92) for the reason that: "I love all the things – I hadn't anything else to love" (Murdoch, 1973, p.66). Her repeatedly expresses her regret for not taking her jewels with her and without them she feels as if "all my life has been taken away from her me – I'll destroy myself – I'll tear myself to pieces –" (Murdoch, 1973, p.66).

Deeply involved in the marriage crisis, Priscilla regrets having the abortion for she believes that the child could make all the difference between her and her husband, attracts her husband's attention with some self-destructive behavior and consoles herself by excessively buying things rather than to improve herself to adapt to the situation and save her marriage as well as her own life at her own effort. In contrast to Priscilla's depression and gloom, her husband Roger is in a very good state. Completely opposite to Priscilla's description of their house as "filthy pigsty" (Murdoch, 1973, p.79), their house has "a quite conspicuous air of cleanliness and order", which makes Bradley wonder whether he is in the wrong house. The poor person must be utterly detestable. Besides these untruthful descriptions of Priscilla, her husband's account of what she's like in their family life, although a little bit subjective, undermines the reader's sympathy with Priscilla. In Roger's eyes, Priscilla is "crazy disappointed woman and as cruel as a demon" (Murdoch, 1973, p.95) who tricks him into marriage.

Priscilla condemns the gender inequality in the family for the women have no financial independence. When the husband does anything he like, the wife's only choice is to stay at home lonely. She further complains that: "He had no idea of equality between us, I suppose no man had, they all despise women –" (Murdoch, 1973, p.126). And her brother's unwillingness to get involved in her marital crisis and tend her in a long term, which is like "a palpable thorn in the flesh of [his] versatile egoism" (Murdoch, 1973, p.117), makes Priscilla reflect her own life and decide to go back to Roger though she knows it well he can't give her happy life but only to kill her mind and make her mad. Without the ability to live independently, Priscilla has no idea on how to start her life and pursue happiness again. So her wishful thinking is to compromise and be more tolerant to the loneliness, Roger's adultery and unhappiness in life. And Priscilla even decides to change herself to be "resigned and quiet" (Murdoch, 1973, p.215), to "do little things" (Murdoch, 1973, p.215), to "go to the cinema more" (Murdoch, 1973, p.215), not to "shout and cry" (Murdoch, 1973, p.215) because she holds a negative view on her life that: "Oh my life has been such hell, but when I go back I won't be worse than now, it couldn't be" (Murdoch, 1973, p.215).

Bradley pitilessly reveals the fact that there is no possibility of her going back because Roger wants a divorce and decides to marry his pregnant mistress, a beautiful and young dentist Marigold, which makes Priscilla completely break down. Her terrible state obtains no more attention from her brother who sends her to his ex-wife's house and seems to have "totally and absolutely forgotten Priscilla's existence" (Murdoch, 1973, p.241). With all hopes being dashed to pieces, Priscilla seems to accept the reality and turns to her brother to help her with the divorce and ask him to go with her to the lawyer that morning. It seems that her life will be changed no matter whether it's for better or for worse. Instead of being thoughtful, Bradley refuses to give her timely help because he is ready to elope with the young woman Julian, regardless of her begging him not to leave her. Though Bradley feels "horribly upset at the sight of Priscilla, but of course there was no question of changing [his] plans" (Murdoch, 1973, p.292). His departure drives Priscilla to despair and she dies of an overdose of sleeping pills one day later. Murdoch's cruel but real depiction of Priscilla's tragedy contributes her desperate fate to undependability of the men and dependence of the women. And Murdoch illustrates her point that the women without independence are incapable of establishing their own identity and are on a road that leads nowhere.

Murdoch characterizes the female figure Rachel Baffin to present another revengeful way that women use to survive the marriage crisis. As Bradley claims, Rachel is "one of the main actors, in a crucial sense perhaps the main actor, in my drama" (Murdoch, 1973, p.25). The novel begins with Arnold's fear that he has killed Rachel by accident and this domestic violence results in her vows of revenge. Unlike Priscilla, Rachel has a strong sense of female consciousness and is aware of the gender differences as:

All men despise all women really. All women fear all men really. Men are physically stronger, that's what it comes to, that what's behind it all. Of course they're bullies, they can end any argument. Ask any poor woman in the slums, she knows. (Murdoch, 1973, p.32)

Meanwhile, the domestic violence strengthens Rachel's sense of female inferiority as what her husband does takes her whole life from her and spoils her life. She points out the unfairness to the woman in the family:

I am as clever as he is. He has just blocked me off from everything. I can't work, I can't think, I can't be, because of him. His stuff crawls over everything, he takes away all my things and turns them into his things. I've never been myself or lived my own life at all. I've always been afraid of him, that's what it comes to. (Murdoch, 1973, p.32)

Rachel's remarks express the general plight of the housewife, who are confined to the household for the destruction of their female identity by the male supremacy that Rachel complains: "He has taken away my life from me and spoilt it, breaking every little piece of it, like the breaking of every bone in one's body, every little thing ruined and spoilt and taken away" (Murdoch, 1973, pp.32-33).

Fully aware of her situation, Rachel chooses not to obey the male domination over her any more but to defend in her own way, though which proves not to be an ideal one later. She admits the male supremacy with sad resignation: "I obeyed him, I've always obeyed him. I haven't any private things. He owns the world. It's all his, his, his" (Murdoch, 1973, p.33). Unfortunately, the way she figures out is just that: "I won't save him at the end. I'll watch him drown. I'll watch him burn" (Murdoch, 1973, p.33). Her husband Arnold has little concern about her complaints and doesn't care much about the damage that his violence brings to her. He just does whatever he likes without taking her feeling into account. When Rachel finds her husband flirting with other woman, she feels "like a great stone" (Murdoch, 1973, p.109) in her breast and "suddenly doomed by fate" (Murdoch, 1973, p.109). Rachel confesses her conflicting feelings to her husband in her letter to Bradley. Rachel writes to seduce Bradley to have a secret communication with her in order to irritate her husband's jealousy and then get more concerns from him, with the reason that: "Arnold has "played the tyrant for too long. I must have new love, I must have love outside the Arnold-cage –" (Murdoch, 1973, p.149). After writing this letter, Rachel feels she's "developing" (Murdoch, 1973, p.131), "changing" (Murdoch, 1973, p.131), and "blazed with a sort of euphoric purpose" (Murdoch, 1973, p.126) because she accidentally finds "the key to perfect happiness" (Murdoch, 1973, p.131) to comfort her eager needs to love and to be loved, that is to have a love affair with Bradley.

However, to Rachel's great disappointment, Arnold's reaction to her affair with Bradley is quiet indifferent, which forces her to obtain more self-consciousness as a married woman: "A married woman has no dignity, no thoughts which really stand up separately. She's a subdivision of her husband's mind, and he can release misery into her consciousness whenever he pleases, like ink spreading into water." (Murdoch, 1973, p.168)

In a "compulsory" (Murdoch, 1973, p.168) and "caged" (Murdoch, 1973, p.168) life, a married woman is just "a growth on" (Murdoch, 1973, p.168) her husband without being of her own. Since "marriage is such an odd mixture of love and hate" (Murdoch, 1973, p.171), what Rachel wants is not to leave Arnold, but "a little privacy, a little secrecy, a few things of [her] own which aren't absolutely dyed and saturated with Arnold" (Murdoch, 1973, p.171). Failed to attract her husband's attention and obtain the love from Bradley, Rachel becomes complete enraged by Bradley's elopement with her daughter Julian and Arnold's letter to Bradley confessing his love to Christian. In the quarrel with Arnold, Rachel wields the poker and strikes out at Arnold in the same way as Arnold did on her in the opening scene, but this time the murder is real. Then Rachel misleads the police to believe that Bradley is the murderer as he leaves his finger prints on the poker while he's willingly helping her clean the blood on it, which becomes convincing evidence in the court. Consequently, Bradley is sent to prison. "Rachel, as Bradley recognizes in his Postscript, has taken a perfect revenge on the two men she had sworn never to forgive" (Spear, 2007, p.78). However, Rachel's successful revenge doesn't bring her the happiness and freedom she wants but a tragic and broken family with the husband dead and the daughter cutting off any communication with her.

IV. Conclusion

Murdoch illustrates Julian's realization of the importance of concern and love to others in this letter where Julian mentions the shock that Priscilla's death brings to her and her sympathy to the old and abandoned people, especially to the female.

Murdoch embodies her philosophy in the characterization of Julian as she takes full advantage of the freedom she has to control her own life regardless of the stereotyped expectations for the young women from the patriarchal society and parental stress. Besides, Priscilla's death makes her aware of the importance of attention to others with love, which is essential in Murdoch's ethics to come close to the goodness.

Murdoch depicts Rachel as a revenging female figure who establishes her self-identity in an extreme way to survive her marriage crisis which is a prevalent plight among the middle-aged married women. Rachel's success in revenge and failure to get the love she wants illustrate Murdoch's point on this issue that destructive exertion on others can't guarantee women with female identity and a happy life. What's more, Murdoch shows the reader the right way for women to live a satisfactory life through the characterization of Christian who achieves herself through self-improvement and independence.

Christian, Bradley's former wife, determines to leave Bradley when she feels depressed in the marriage where Bradley couldn't offer her enough fun and happiness. Shortly after her divorce from Bradley, she married an American, Evandale. Although her departure from Bradley makes him hold a grudge on her, Bradley can't help highly praising the improvement of her appearance and manner to be "competent and distinguished" (Murdoch, 1973, p.85). What surprises Bradley is not only her present attractive deportment, but also her great success in business. Although Bradley's description and Christian's narration of her second marriage are sort of contradictory, the reader could easily discover that her boredom with her second husband and with the whole place, which doesn't bring her down for she takes making-money as the only thing that keeps her going out there. After she achieves the economic success at great effort, she feels that "that there was another world, a sort of spiritual world. I guess, waiting for me somewhere" (Murdoch, 1973, p.220), which demonstrates her strong sense of self-consciousness and self-reflection. So she implores Bradley to talk properly with her about "the past" (Murdoch, 1973, p.220) and "what went wrong" (Murdoch, 1973, p.220) because it would do her "a power of good" (Murdoch, 1973, p.220).

Though divorced once and widowed now, Christian still holds a positive and ambitious vision for her future: "I'm going to have a new life, Bradley. I'm going to hear the trumpets blowing in my life. ... I'm going to be happy and to make other people happy" (Murdoch, 1973, p.89). Moreover, with the self-confidence that she is not "a has-been" (Murdoch, 1973, p.159) though she's over fifty, Christian expresses her view on aging women and female identity that "because we've less to lose, we can be wiser too." (Murdoch, 1973, p.160) Meanwhile, she emphasizes the importance of the economic independence for the female identity: "Anyway, what's wrong with being rich? It's a quality, it's attractive" (Murdoch, 1973, p.159). Fully aware of her own identity as a woman and being independent economically and spiritually, Christian turns her attention from herself to others. She wants "friendships with men" (Murdoch, 1973, p.159), wants "to help people" (Murdoch, 1973, p.159), and intends to testify whether "helping people is the way to be happy" (Murdoch, 1973, p.159) and see what makes people sick. All the efforts she likes to take concern with her desire to "live in the open" (Murdoch, 1973, p.159-60) instead of "going to get stuck in any hole and corner dramas" (Murdoch, 1973, p.159). Christian is so good at making use of every opportunity for her advantage that she even attracts the public attention and achieves fame in the trial of Bradley, which lays a good foundation for her business in *haute couture*. And what's more, she knows Bradley's old colleague Hartbourne in the court and becomes him the third husband who is greatly helpful in her business.

Christian is a very special female character with complete female individuality in Murdoch's novels because she lacks a good education which Murdoch considers an essential for women's freedom and even no interests in art which Murdoch takes as the way to goodness in her philosophy. However, Murdoch depicts this character to convey to the reader that there are some more important characters for women than education and art: be practical, have the courage to change, and never give up. Through describing comparatively the ups and downs in these three female characters' lives, Murdoch indicates the importance of self-improvement and self-redemption for the female to survive the women's life dilemma and the necessity of being economically and spiritually independent for the completeness of female individuality.

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