

The Fragmentation of the Female Selfhood in

*The Flight From the Enchanter**

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Iris Murdoch is a renowned female novelist and philosopher in the 20th century English literature. In her literary creation, she has a preference for male narration and holds a reserved attitude to women's movements with reluctance to be considered as a feminist writer, which permits her realistic depiction of female characters and dispassionate thought on women's problems. This paper, with the interpretation and redefinition of the concepts as consciousness, identity, and self in Murdoch's philosophy, analyzes the fragmented self of three female figures in *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) respectively from the perspectives of self-consciousness, identity, and self and reveals that the fragmentation of female selfhood is mainly due to the overwhelming male dominance in the gender relationship.

Keywords: Iris Murdoch, identity, female selfhood, fragmentation

Introduction

Historically, both the patriarchal culture and discourse were of the opinion that female biology had its own defects and limitations. "The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities", said Aristotle, "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness" (Beauvoir, 1953, p. xviii). For St. Thomas, woman was renounced as an "imperfect man", an "incidental being" (Beauvoir, 1953, p. xviii). Besides, "a man is in the right in being a man; it is woman who is in the wrong" (Beauvoir, 1953, p. xviii). Women were marginalized and disparaged with these defects. Consequently, both in the Victorian age and in the early 20th century, the popular image of the ideal wife/woman came to be "the Angel in the House". They were expected to be devoted and submissive to their husbands just like the Angel: passive and powerless, meek, charming, sympathetic, pious, self-sacrificing, and above all—pure. In the modern society, the outbreak of the two world wars and the advancement of women's movement brought the dramatic changes of the women's roles domestically and socially. The long-established traditional female selfhood has been disintegrated under the new social and cultural circumstances.

Although Murdoch insisted on her status of not being a feminist, she explored the crisis of female identity

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and its consequence, the fragmentation of the female selfhood as the major themes in her novels. In her opinion, the process of the disintegration of the female selfhood is irreversible, and the roots of this disintegration are formulated at a much deeper level than the roots of the disintegration of the male selfhood in contemporaneous texts. While they do share a sense of cultural crisis, the very core of this crisis is defined as the dualism inherent in the patriarchal system, a dualism that justifies women's continual exclusion from the power and their appropriation for the purposes of the male imagination and male desire.

This paper is intended to discuss the female characters' disruptive self-consciousness, marginalized identity, and disintegrated self and to demonstrate women's fragmented selfhood in Murdoch's early novel *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956). The symbolic title of the novel reinforces the sense of restriction, of being confined, and of the desire for independent self. It underlines the basic theme of imprisonment and escapes which is common to most of Murdoch's novels where physical confinement is not a necessary adjunct of enslavement; moral and spiritual compulsions are more devastating; and the enchanters of the novels ensnare the hearts and minds of the female characters around them as surely as the settings enclose them.

The Disruption of Women's Self-awareness

The philosophical state of self-awareness holds that one exists as an individual being, while self-consciousness is a preoccupation with oneself as an acute sense of self-awareness (Lipka & Brinthaupt, 1992, p. 228). That is, self-awareness in a philosophical context is being conscious of oneself as an individual, while self-consciousness is being excessively conscious of one's appearance or manner. Self-awareness Theory states that when we focus our attention on ourselves, we evaluate and compare our current behavior to our internal standards and values. However self-consciousness is not to be confused with self-awareness. We would not become self-conscious until we could function as objective evaluators of ourselves.

In some context, self-consciousness may affect the development of identity in varying degrees, as some people are constantly self-monitoring or self-involved, while others are completely oblivious about themselves (Branden, 1969, p. 42). Both private and public self-consciousness are frequently distinguished by psychological terms. Private self-consciousness is a tendency to introspect and examine one's inner self and feelings. Public self-consciousness is an awareness of the self as it is viewed by others, which can result in self-monitoring and social anxiety. As relatively stable personality traits, private and public self-consciousness are not correlated just because that an individual is high on one dimension does not mean that he or she is high on the other (Bernd, 2004, p. 30).

Murdoch shares with Romantic writers an interest in individual consciousness and how it operates. In Romantic fiction, this preoccupation is expressed through the representation of "problems of consciousness, of vision and perception" (Jackson, 1981, p. 51). In Murdoch's fiction, the interest in "character dispersal and fragmentation" (Jackson, 1981, p. 86) is an aspect of the destabilized sense of self evident during the Romantic period. This destabilization surfaces in descriptions of sightings, material, and immaterial, of the self or an ideal other that can be interpreted as an externalization of the self.

What Annette lacks is the self-awareness, the capacity for introspection and the ability to reconcile oneself as an individual separate from the environment and other individuals. *The Flight from the Enchanter* opens with Annette Cockayne's decision to leave her "expensive finishing-school in Kensington" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 7).

“Learning nothing here” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 7) is Annette’s reason to leave her school and “enter the School of Life” to “educate [herself]” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 7). Her departure is also partly because of her lack of interest in the teaching mission of this expensive college which is to teach “to young women of the *débutante* class such arts as were considered necessary for the catching of a husband” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 7). All these remind the reader of her immaturity as a girl of 19 years old.

A false impression on Annette is that she is an invulnerable character with a charmed life and even without any physical scars. But actually Annette is a nymph-like young girl who has insufficient self-awareness and feels homeless and nationless. Annette had once said to the young women at Ringenhall: “I have no homeland and no mother tongue. I speak four languages fluently, but none correctly” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 63). In spite of her perfect French and English, Annette “liked to think of herself as a waif. Even her appearance suggested it, she noted with satisfaction” (Murdoch, 1956, pp. 63-64). In Demetriou’s theory of cognitive development, self-awareness develops systematically from birth through the life span and it is a major factor for the development of general inferential processes (Demetriou). That is, the previous experiences, especially those in the childhood, are of great influence on the systematic development of one’s self-awareness. In Annette’s memory, “the sensations of childhood” include “the loneliness and boredom and fear of strange places, the hurry and the noise of a world which was never her own, the alien odour of the expensive hotel and the long-distance train. These were the thing that had prefigured the present moment” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 267). Annette’s experiences in her childhood cast shadow on her present sense of instability and make her lack of sense of belonging. When asked to go back home, she said: “Home! Cam’ Hill Square isn’t my home. I have no home. I’m a refugee!” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 271).

Self-awareness makes people align their behavior with their standards, and the failure to live up to their personal standards will result in a negative effect. When Annette evaluates and compares her current behavior to her internal standards and values, she feels completely confused and lost. “The idea of growing up had always been for Annette the idea of being able to live at her own pace” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 63). To her disappointment, she can achieve this aim in no way. Although Annette tries her best to protect her body in the physical sense, she fails to gain access to greater self-awareness in the spiritual sense. In order to reinforce her sense of being an individual being, Annette turns to establish the relationship with other figures, especially male characters, which proves to make her live at others’ pace instead of at her own.

Insufficient self-awareness results in Annette’s inability to overcome the androcentric fantasy and impedes the growth of her selfhood because she has no clear idea about herself, her life as well as the way to set up the appropriate relation with men and protect herself. So when Rainborough asks her what she is going to do for her living, Annette tells him that she has no idea and she is not good at anything “in a helpless feminine way about which Rainborough could not decide whether it was natural or the effect of art” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 132). In Rainborough’s eyes, “Women pick up these conventions at such an early age, ...they’re almost bred in them”(Murdoch, 1956, p. 132). Then he cannot help wondering “how can anyone who has travelled so much be so appallingly juvenile?” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 132). The fact that Annette has no concern about her future source of income shows us her conventional thinking of male and female social roles and division of labor, which leads to her willingly enslavement in androcentric fantasy.

Lack of self-awareness makes Annette not only have no idea about the future life, but also fail to recognize the present reality as she lacks the sense of ownership of her own body and of self-protection. Although Annette

is kind and caring to the people around her, she seldom receives any care, concern, respect, or love from them, especially from the male. Her brother Nicholas arranges his friend to “deflower” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 64) Annette when she is 17 just to make her “rational about these things” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 64). Nicholas expects her not to “build up an atmosphere of mystery and expectation” about sex, because that will only make her “neurotic” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 64). Contrary to his expectations, Annette attends a number of adventures since that time, which bring her “neither delight nor grief” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 64) but the misconception of the appropriate relationship between the sexes. “The mystery was displaced, but it remained suspended in Annette’s vision of the future, an opaque cloud, luminous with lightning” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 64). This misconception hinders her from establishing a positive and normal self-recognition in the male-female relationships. He has no favorite for Annette at all, and what he does is just for his own lust without the consideration to Annette’s feeling and respect to her as a woman. Annette’s reaction is also a sign of her female weakness. Murdoch (1956) depicts the female inferiority to the man regardless of their higher social status or even prominent family background. The sexual offense of the refugee Jan to Annette is a case in point. Although Rosa dislodges Jan from her house, Annette’s terrified feeling does not arouse her any sympathy.

Dominated by the androcentric fantasy, Annette desires nothing as fervently as to become the enchanter Mischa’s captive. Mischa is unmoved by the schoolgirl heroine playing out “her fated role of international waif-adventuress” (Sullivan, 1986, p. 77). Annette, on the other hand, experiences in Mischa’s presence “a daze of beatitude” and feels “with a deep joy, the desire and the power to enfold him, to comfort him, to save him” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 215). That is, perhaps because she is truly an elfin child, or because she belongs to the people who “seek evil simply because they want adventure” (Whiteside, 1964, p. 32). It requires Calvin’s cynicism to make her realize that the “notion that one can liberate another’s soul from captivity is an illusion of the very young” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 240).

Annette’s every effort to make herself more self-conscious is to build up some kind of relation with the male and prove her own existence by their treatment to her. Unfortunately, Annette receives no love and support but indifference from the people around her when she is struggling for the establishment of her self-consciousness. Abandoned not only by Mischa, but also by Rosa and her brother Nicholas, Annette begins to toy with the idea of suicide. The photograph of her brother Nicholas is no longer enough to shield her. In her genuine aloneness, Annette regrets that she will be “forever shut away” from “the world of the chamber maid and the cyclist and the little strange hotel” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 63). She tries “to persuade herself that she felt ill” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 157), but “unfortunately she did not feel ill, only extremely miserable” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 157). Finally, she “attempted to weep” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 157), yet this proves equally “unsatisfactory” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 157). Having lost all reason to exist, Annette throws her jewels into the river. With this symbolic gesture, Annette gives vent to her conviction that “death could not change her now more than she was already changed” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 267) and she stages her suicide. Here, fate or chance intervenes. Her parents arrive and whisk Annette off the Europe and security. On yet another train Annette looks, in the same way she always will.

Our last glimpse of the family is in the south of France as the Orient Express transports the recovered Annette away from the events of the novel to the land of Cockayne. With this splendid tableau of an enchanted family frozen in a state of utter inaccessibility, the story of the Annette Cockayne comes to an end. The question whether Annette has graduated from the “School of Life” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 7) and “learnt more

since she left Ringehall than [she] ever did while [she was] there” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 217), as her brother believes, remains unanswered. Most probably, she is still the unscarred mermaid murmuring “enchanted” through the ballrooms of Europe, ever enchanted by her temporarily sustained glimpses of real life out of the windows of trains, always again to return to her land of jewels and opulence (Sullivan, 1986, p. 79). It seems that everything returns to the beginning, but Annette has been changed by the happenings after she drops out of the school.

Insufficient self-awareness results in Annette’s inability to overcome the androcentric fantasy and impedes the growth of her selfhood because she has no clear idea about herself, her life as well as how to set up the appropriate relation with men and protect herself. In the struggling process of establishing her private self-consciousness as a young lady, Annette tends to introspect and examine her inner self and feelings. With an awareness of the self as it is viewed by others, Annette fails to set up her public self-consciousness because of her unawareness of the real root of her dilemma: patriarchy.

The Marginalization of Women’s Identity

Since female identity is the central concern of Murdoch’s novels, as has been already mentioned, it is necessary to define an individual identity and the female self-identity of Murdoch’s female characters. One’s identity, in Hall’s view (2004), can be thought of as a particular set of traits, beliefs and allegiances that, in short or long term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity, at the same time allowing a myriad of limitations and often unknowable, unavoidable constraints on our ability to fully comprehend identity. Subjectivity as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of influence and control (Hall, 2004, pp. 3-4). Following Hall’s definition and Murdoch’s understanding of identity, the particular set of traits, which will give Murdoch’s female characters a constant personality and mode of being, is the autonomy and androgyny. To be autonomous means to sticking to her own voice and keeping her own life course; to be androgynous means to go beyond her gender constraints, living with the androgynous mind of a “full balance of femaleness and maleness, nurturance and aggression” (Showalter, 2004, p. 264). However, there are a lot of constrains and restrictions preventing the female characters to retain this identity, namely, the historical, social, cultural and biological ones.

The characterization of refugees in Murdoch’s novels is greatly influenced by her experiences in war time. After the completion of her own degree at Oxford in 1942, Murdoch went straight into the Civil Service as an Assistant Principal in the Treasury, living, and working in wartime London. When the war ended, she felt the need to do some social work to help those who had been displaced and disorientated in the conflict, so she went to work for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). While working for UNRRA in Brussels and then Innsbruck from 1945 to 1946, she saw people deported to almost certain death and survivors who would never return to their homes. There is little doubt that during this time she came face to face with many of the horrors and cruelties that man inflicted upon man, which left an indelible impression on her mind. Throughout her novels there are depictions of exiles and refugees, illegal immigrants who have fled the horrors of their own country, men and women trying to escape from their past. For some of them, a line drawn on the map of

Europe can make the difference between life and death. Yet they are not always sympathetically portrayed. In *The Flight from the Enchanter*, the Lusiewicz brothers have minds which appear to be permanently distorted by their early experiences, and the young dressmaker, Nina lives in permanent fear of being deported and is finally destroyed by the fear.

It is of special significance to study the female identity in Murdoch's characterization of Nina as a woman refugee under the dual oppressions. The autonomy for the female characters includes making their voice heard and freedom to choose their own life. So having their voice is the foremost step for female autonomy. Nina's refugee status unvoices her completely. Nina's sensitivity to her illegal status leads her to strive for the integration to the people around by mimicking their appearance, speaking their language and complying with the etiquettes. Nina insists on speaking English "politely and firmly" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 82) when Annette induces her to speak other languages, although "a charming and quite undiagnosable foreign accent" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 82) reveals her true origin. Besides, she dyes blonde her "dark straight hair" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 82) and "long downy hairs" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 82) on her arms, which makes her look like "a small artificial animal" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 82) with "a brown complexion" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 82).

But when it comes to the legal document, all the efforts Nina takes seems to be futile. "She stared at her passport, and it seemed to her suddenly like a death warrant. It filled her with shame and horror" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 288). The sight of the old picture on it reminds Nina of "the worst days of her fear" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 289). She feels that an "anxious, haggard and fearful" "younger black-haired Nina stared back" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 289) at her present golden-haired self. The passport evokes her miserable memories of being exiled in the past and indicates that she has "no official existence" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 289). Both nationality and gender hinder Nina from establishing her own identity by depriving her of the right to voice herself and choose her own life.

Illegal status deprives Nina of having a say as she is not an existence being in the political sense in this country, while the repression which Mischa imposes upon her "condemned" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 154) her love to silence, so she has no right to express her love as a woman. She dare not leave her name and address to the governmental agency because "she had the refugee's horror of the power and hostility of all authorities and of their mysterious interconnection with each other" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 155) and "if she left her name at Australia House Mischa Fox should not be told of this within twenty-four hours" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 155). When Nina is discovered by Mischa in a textile factory, her need for a livelihood and protection makes her pliable to his wishes. Nina knows it well that it is impossible to achieve an "independent establishment and a clientele" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 151) without Mischa's help. Once she realizes that her love for Mischa is not reciprocated, she resolves to leave England to gain "freedom from slavery, rather that freedom in an abstract or philosophical sense" (Rabinovitz, 1978, p. 285). The only hope for her is to flee from England and never see Mischa again, then she could escape from him. What attracts her most is that the future new life will be "in every way the reverse of her present life" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 155) and "she would live in their midst a life of openness and gaiety, respected as a worker and loved as a woman" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 155). To fulfill her plan, she decides to appeal to Rosa for assistance for "her regard for Rosa was augmented by an astonished respect for a being who had once been under Mischa's spell and had freed herself without migrating to the Antipodes" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 156). Rosa's indifference to her pleas ruins her hopes. When the deportation order is likely to come, her only possible escape is death.

Nina's choice to commit suicide is due to her identity crisis both as a citizen and as a woman. Besides Nina's refugee status and her fear of deportation, patriarchal oppression from Mischa is also the primary cause of her tragedy. There is an important difference between the crisis of the female identity and the crisis of the male identity in contemporaneous canonical texts. The male refugees Lusiewicz brothers also experience a loss of identity as the consequence of their illegal status. With Rosa's help, they "rapidly showed a remarkable aptitude with machines, ...learnt to speak English with confidence and charm" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 46). And even "[t]heir appearance improved" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 46). Meanwhile, Nina proves herself to be "a good dressmaker ... patient, good-tempered, humble, discreet, fast, an exquisite worker, and...inexhaustibly imaginative" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 81) after Mischa helped her settle down and rent a house for her. As refugees, all of them try their best to learn the language, work hard and be obedient to their sponsors in order to integrate into the local life and start a new life. However, the male-female different positions in the patriarchal society make their life paths quite different. After their settlement, the Lusiewicz brothers change their attitude to their sponsor Rosa from "with an inarticulate deference which resembled religious awe" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 48) to with aggression by conquering her body and controlling her mind. Yet, Rosa recovers quick from "the first shock of her despair" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 58) and accepts the change from being a conqueror to a prey for fear of losing the brothers.

But the situation is completely different in Nina's case. Without her voice being heard, Nina, as a woman, has no capability to change the pattern of her relationship with Mischa and consequently has no freedom to choose her own life path. Nina has no way to decline Mischa's monthly allowance for his excuse that "his 'inconvenient ways' were possibly damaging to her business" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 153). As "a good organizer and a good business woman" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 153), Nina has an ambitious plan to enlarge her business since "her range of contacts was now very considerable" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 153). But without any doubt, this plan displeases Mischa apparently, which makes it clear that any plan of this kind will violate Mischa's expectations to Nina. Her love for Mischa has been transformed "into a strange emotion which had in it more of terror and fascination than of tenderness" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 154) and "an emotion more mixed with puzzlement and curiosity" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 153), which becomes the source of distress for Nina because "his personality made it impossible for her to open her heart to anyone" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 154). In great anxiety, Nina has a nightmare in which her sewing machine turns into an unstoppable monster which savages both her and an endless cloth map of all the countries in the world.

Nina's aphasia states as a refugee for the land of her birth and her enslavement as a woman for the gender of her birth makes her autonomy establishment impossible. Moreover, to be androgynous remains slightly out of her reach, which is the last question she thinks about before she kills herself. As she sits on the window-sill, she looks at a crucifix and thinks the idea that death is the end is not "senseless blackness" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 291) for Christ, as it will be for her. She throws herself out of the window with a broken and marginalized identity. The same political guile for the removal from the scene of the illegal immigrants Jan and Stefan destroys Nina, who becomes the innocent victim, the scapegoat who suffers not merely for the sins of others but also for their neglect. Her act of self-destruction becomes a response to a general feeling of hopelessness for which she finds no outlet, neither in her unsatisfactory relationship with Mischa nor in any meaningful activity.

Murdoch illustrates the destructive female identity through depicting Nina's plight and her tragic ending. As a typical example of doubly marginalized women, Nina is powerless to struggle against destiny of being

marginalized by the political authorities and controlled by the masculine hegemony regardless of her unremitting efforts to integrate with the new environment and her willingness to mingle with the new culture. Besides, through the characterization of Nina, Murdoch also tends to unravel the lack of mutual assistance among women to struggle with their marginalized identity and survive the male dominance in this novel.

The Disintegration of Female Self

While Murdoch depicts Annette Cockayne's disruptive self-consciousness and Nina's marginalized identity, her main concern is the portrayal of the female protagonist in this novel: Rosa and her disintegrated self in the process of her flight from the enchanter. Murdoch's moral philosophy is premised on the reality of the individual self, so much so that she starts that "the central concept of morality is 'the individual'" (Murdoch, 1970, p. 30). Distinguished from Romanticism, Murdoch holds the opinion that the individual as a self-in-relation is renewed in the context. While Modernism emphasizes on "formal autonomy" (Waugh, 1989, p. 79) and holds identity as "transcendence of history through symbol and self as a construction of language" (Waugh, 1989, p. 79), Murdoch focuses on the self in relation. In her novels, she portrays how individual consciousness functions in people as moral beings, and the effect this has on their perception of reality, rather than the social and historical conditions in which her characters operate. "Underlying Murdoch's moral philosophy is a concept of the individual as the 'owner' of their 'inner life' and of inner activity as morally significant" (Widdows, 2004, p. 21). So the self in Murdoch's fiction is a fixed entity that is built in the relations.

Compared with Annette and Nina, Rosa Keepe has a stronger sense of self-consciousness and self-identity since she knows who she is and what she wants better. Unfortunately, she still fails to obtain integrated self for her personal weaknesses in specific and female limitations in general obstruct the building of her in-relation self. The following analysis will mainly focus on three pairs of relationships: Rosa and the Lusiewicz brothers, Rosa and Mischa, and Rosa and other female characters in the novel.

Though educated, the heroine Rosa is willing to work on the assembly line in a factory instead of being a journalist or a teacher because she is unable to stand her mother's disappointment at her failure to be "a fanatical idealist" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 47) and her own at to be "a good teacher" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 47). She still makes this choice "in a mood of self-conscious asceticism" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 47) although she knows it well that working in the factory is an experience of almost unbearable affliction and a kind of modern slavery. The machines in Rosa's factory never stop, day or night. She fears being "caught in the machine" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 42).

Here she has a secret about the refugee Lusiewicz brothers, who arrive "dejected and colourless, like half-starved, half-drowned animals" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 46). Except Rosa, no one shows any interests in them at that time. As a dutiful protector, Rosa guides them, gives them financial support, teaches them English and treats them as her children. "Then after a while Rosa found herself becoming oddly secretive and possessive about the pair" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 46). With her help, the brothers have been making big process and becoming popular in the factory, which brings Rosa mixed feelings: "with interest and pleasure at first, and later with sadness" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 47). The brothers treat her at first "with an inarticulate deference which resembled religious awe. They were like poor savages confronted with a beautiful white girl" (Murdoch, 1956, pp. 48-49). Their dependence upon her makes Rosa even worried at the degree of her power over them. They need her permission to the simplest things and they make no choice without her opinion just like her slaves. This power makes Rosa

feared as well as joyful. Overwhelmed by their primitive adoration and their abject respect, Rosa feels “like the princess whose strong faith released the prince from an enchanted sleep, or from the transfigured form of a beast” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 54) and in return for their devotion, she showers the brothers with love.

Contrary to Rosa’s expectations, her role as an enchantress is of short duration. Once “the mastery had passed to the brother” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 60), Rosa becomes their property. They begin to thrive and make their own conquests, including Rosa, whom they share sexually. Gradually and almost without awareness on her part, Rosa changes from mother-surrogate to sister-surrogate. What helps her to accept the role reversal is her ability to overcome the “physical sensation” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 57) with “that numb paralysis which is the deliberate dulling of thought by itself” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 57) and the painful fear of losing the brothers. When they retell Rosa their experiences of raping their school teacher by turns and abandoning her just to revenge her for humiliating them in the class, which leads to her death directly, Rosa is so anesthetized while she is “empty of thoughts and feelings” and experiences “a kind of triumph” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 78). Consequently, she does not resent the brothers and accepts without demur “the rules of the new regime” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 57) which Jan and Stefan “made plain to her” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 57) with “gentle tact” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 57). After her acceptance of the grotesque reversal of roles, Rosa uses the machines in the factory as instruments to immobilize her feelings. Nevertheless, the brothers’ more and more excessive behaviors, such as uninvited visit to Rosa’s house and assaulting Annette sexually there, drive Rosa to reach the point where she confronts herself with the realization that she is unable to break the black spell the Poles hold over her. In the relationship between Rosa and the brothers, Rosa functions as a power figure at first because of the superiority of her social status, but she soon descends to the enchanted because of the inferiority of her female gender. The formation of her self faces a great challenge and becomes instabilized in this process of reversal.

In utter frustration, she resorts to the powers of Mischa whose marriage proposal she refuses ten years ago to run away from his control. She tells about her plight with reservation, however Mischa asks no question but her permission to use any method he likes. Rosa “felt as if she were selling herself into captivity” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 262). “But to be at his mercy was at that moment her most profound desire” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 262). Mischa then manipulates SELIB, the Special European Labor Immigration Board, to have Stefan deported. To her consternation, Rosa discovers that after all these years she is still very fond of Mischa and would not mind to be rescued by him. As she approaches her former lover whose enchantment she believes to have disappeared, she is “quite ready to acknowledge herself to be under a spell ... [and] she knew that even if at that moment Mischa was oblivious of her existence, yet he was drawing her all the time” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 257). As she attempts to solve her personal problem, Rosa has either not yet gained the “degree of self-knowledge” (Rabinovitz, 1978, pp. 330-331) necessary “to achieve morality or love” (Rabinovitz, 1978, pp. 330-331), or is not fully aware of her “moral strength and weakness to be able to overcome the vicissitude of a moral crisis” (Rabinovitz, 1978, pp. 330-331).

At “a point of disequilibrium where rest was no longer possible” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 292), Rosa impulsively travels south herself to join Mischa at his villa in Italy. She feels compelled by the enchanter whom she like to be reunited with. But Rosa does not return to Mischa thanks to Calvin Blick’s interference. He shows the photographs of Rosa with the Lusiewicz brothers, telling her Mischa has seen them, though he tells Hunter he has not. Looking at the photograph Calvin has taken of her, Rosa is able to recognize the flaws in her

obsession with Mischa. Many years ago, Rosa “put herself under the enchanter’s spell because she thought he was in touch with reality” (Whiteside, 1964, p. 49) and is satisfied with her lot until she senses “that Mischa was not merely in touch with reality but had power over it, and then she began to fear him” (Whiteside, 1964, p. 49). Calvin comforts her that she “will never know the truth” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 304) because “[r]eality is a cipher with many solutions, all of them right ones” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 305), and therefore, she “will read the signs in accordance with [her] deepest wishes” (Murdoch, 1956, pp. 304-305), just like everybody else. Rosa retorts that this view is a surrender of his power.

Rosa’s final triumph is in her inexplicable act of turning back from Mischa even though he is waiting for her. Now that he has transformed Rosa into the “real” woman worthy of his love, she reveals herself to be tougher than he has thought and succeeds in shattering his ephemeral formula for control by her unexpected assertion of freedom. However, Rosa’s decision is one of pure renunciation. Nonetheless, Rosa does make one vital gain and discovery. She can choose to be free of Mischa and to recognize herself as a free agent. She says to Calvin, whose name tolls predestination, “in the past I always felt that whether I went towards him or away from him I was only doing his will. But perhaps it was all an illusion” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 308). Years ago, Rosa refuses Mischa’s offer of marriage and flees from Mischa because she fears the ultimate consequence of his control over her as much as she dreaded the intimacy of married life. Years later, Rosa goes back willingly to be under his control and protection. The journey from flight to regression reveals the incapability of Rosa’s disintegrated self to find a balanced position in the patriarchal male-female relationship.

Moreover, the deficiency of Rosa’s sense of self hinders her from establishing a healthy and normal relationship with other female characters. Rosa has no easy-going and cheerful characters since she “never wanted other human beings to come too near” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 48). The intimacy with the person makes her at times feel horrible. She lives with her brother Hunter and her schoolfriend’s daughter Annette, whom “had never yet occupied very much of Rosa’s attention” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 66). Rosa shows no caring and love to Annette as expected from a female seniority to a young girl, but the hostility and indifference from a jealousy same-sex peer. Annette’s “kittenish” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 66) ways both charm and irritate Rosa for they remind of “her memories of herself at that age” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 66). She often likes to be accompanied by Annette, yet the child makes her uneasy. Although she knew that her sarcasm make Annette feared, she becomes more inclined to “prick and bite her” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 66). When Jan offends Annette sexually in her upstairs room, Rosa’s first reaction is to pretend not to have heard Annette’s cry for help. When she is urged to see what is happening upstairs, she just gets Jan away by striking his face. Then “without a glance at Annette” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 163), she descends “at a leisurely pace” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 163). What Rosa really cares about is not Annette’s terrible state of mind as a victim of sexual assault but her own jealousy for the brothers’ betrayal and their interests in other women. She feels greatly relieved for “after the incident with Jan, ... a certain coldness in her reception ... had almost immediately vanished and everything had seemed to be as usual” (Murdoch, 1956, p. 245). In the party at the Mischa’s, the tripping dancing of Mischa and Annette irritates her so much that she ruins the party by breaking the fishbowl into pieces. Her next gaffe comes as:

Rosa shook herself like a dog. Her hair, which had been loosened by the struggle, cascaded down her back. She had been cut in the arm by some of the broken glass on the floor. People gathered round her. As she stood there looking at the blood upon her arm her eyes slowly filled with tears. (Murdoch, 1956, p. 213)

After the party, Mischa drives to the seaside with Annette to comfort her and then sends her back to Rosa's house. The sight of Mischa's coat on Annette makes Rosa so annoyed that:

Suddenly Rosa turned into Annette's room and began to drag open the drawers of her dressing-table. She seized an armful of clothes and hurled them down into Annette's face. Then pulling out one of the drawers entire she upended it at the top of the stairs. (Murdoch, 1956, p. 220)

With no attention to the fragility of Annette's body and mind, Rosa commits these crazy behaviors which make Annette so physically and mentally broken that she rolls down the stairs and hurt her leg. Rosa's madness proves her to be a completely self-centered woman showing no concerns to any other people or events only when they violate her own life, which makes it impossible for her to have a wholeness of self.

Nina is another victim of Rosa's misanthropy. Every time after her attempts to plea for Rosa's help, Rosa always has the same reaction: care nothing about what Nina says and forget her completely soon after her visits. In Mischa's villa in Italy, Calvin Blick shows Rosa a newspaper report of Nina's suicide, remarking that "someone ought to have explained things to her" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 306). Obviously, Rosa bears responsibility for Nina's death in two ways. At first, She herself unleashed Mischa's power, authorizing him, to "use any methods" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 256) to protect herself and Hunter from Stefan. Secondly, because she was so rapturously abstracted at the thought of seeing Mischa, she failed to attend to Nina's plea for help: "I have some problems... I would like to ask your advice" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 259). However, Rosa replies merrily: "Life is a series of problems! ...Never be afraid to ask for advice, ...People try to be far too independent of each other. I'm just going in now to ask Mr. Fox's advice" (Murdoch, 1956, pp. 259-260). Nina's death is in part as a result of Rosa's inattention, in part because Rosa enlists Mischa and his methods. This moment of unexpected moral crisis made to see her responsibility for Nina's death, she is ready to perceive the destructive consequences of the enchanter in herself and others.

The closing chapter is melancholy, though it contains good as well as bad news. On her return from Italy to rainy London, Rosa goes straight to see Peter, free of the moral and emotional ties which have bound her to Mischa. From him she learns that Camilla Wingfield has died, leaving her all the shares of the *Artemis* and an annual income of £500 if she will edit the journal. The *Artemis* has been saved from Mischa, and Rosa has been saved from the factory and given a new purpose. However, a bilingual inscription has been discovered which is a key to the Kastanic script and proves Peter's work on it to be futile. Peter is stoical: "One reads the signs as best one can, and one may be totally misled. ...It was worth trying. Now I can go back to my other work in peace. There's nothing to be sad about, Rosa" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 315). But Rosa is sad because Peter Saward rejects her offer of marriage because he knows that Rosa is merely seeking a safety-net. The novel ends with Peter showing Rosa the photographs of the lost world of Mischa's childhood and "she saw the pictures through a gathering haze of tears" (Murdoch, 1956, p. 316).

Conclusions

The Flight from the Enchanter starts from Annette's running away from her finishing school to enter the school of life, which directly points to the theme of the novel: Flight, with the central plot that a feminist magazine called *Artemis* is close to closure due to a lack of readers. All the people's lives in the novel revolve around the mysterious figure of Mischa Fox, a frightening figure of power. As for the female figures in this novel,

what they flee from is not only the power or enigma of Mischa Fox, but also their fragmented selfhood. Regardless of her wealthy and decent family background, spoiled but rootless Annette is confronted with lack of love and attention from her parents, her brother, her guardian Rosa. Meanwhile, her gender makes her unable to escape from the economic exploitation, emotional control and sexual assault of the male. So she is thirsty for love and attention to prove her existence even at the cost of her life. From her, Murdoch depicts women's inability to introspect and examine their inner self, desires and feelings in order to know themselves as an individual. The worried immigrant dressmaker Nina endures double oppressions—racial and sexual oppression. Though she is more financially successful than the Polish brothers who have the same immigrant status as her, she can't reverse the position of the controller and the controlled as they do just because of the female weaknesses. In spite of her economic independence, the confinement of her spirit disables her to be definable and recognizable in the relations. The main female character Rosa, fierce and strong-minded, is too indulgent in her own world to know the reality. Her status as a power figure, due to her racial privilege, in the life of two Polish brothers is soon destroyed by the gender advantage of the male. Then she is occupied by the malformed relationship with two Polish brothers without their admiration and attachment to her as they have before. Frightened by the gradually out-of-control situation, she turns to the power of her former lover Mischa Fox, the male force, to help her get rid of the entwinement of these brothers. In this novel, Murdoch reveals that no matter what kind of backgrounds they have, women are not powerful enough to overcome the gender advantages of the male and the suppression imposed by the male domination on them. Moreover, Murdoch expresses the women's desire to flee from the situation where they are and from the fragmented selfhood for reconstruction.

In modern mass society, a conception of individuality appears hopelessly outmoded to many philosophers. Instead, Murdoch embraces the idea that selfhood is the outcome of relational activities, beginning with infant nurturance, extending to language, and culminating in reflexive consciousness, in which selves become self-aware. In *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Murdoch avoids approaching the female plights in the aspect of financial dependence, less human right, family squabbles, parenting and other issues as many other feminist writers do. Instead, she reveals the deconstructive female selfhood in the modern society caused by the historical, social and economic changes. Regardless of their origin and background, what these female characters in common is their attempt to escape from "an enchanter", who usually imposes physical confinement as well as mental and spiritual confinement on them. Their disruptive self-consciousness, marginalized identity, and disintegrated self of the female characters fail all of them to complete the wholeness of female self and obstruct their way to human goodness.

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