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The Bell, The Ethics of Judgment, The Ethics of Love

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Abstract

The Bell was published first in 1958. It was Iris Murdoch's fourth novel. *The Bell* has the self-contained form of great art. For all of its concern with ideas, the novel provides a realistic portrayal of a society and a setting and creates characters whose individuality and destiny engage the reader's interest. It is set in Imber Court, a lay religious community situated next to an enclosed order of Benedictine nuns in Gloucestershire. Dora Greenfield leaves her husband Paul Greenfield in the beginning of the novel, but realizes that she is more afraid of him when she is away from him than when they are together, so agrees to return to him. During this time Paul has temporarily moved to Imber Abbey, Gloucestershire to work on some 14th century manuscripts. During chapter seven of the novel we learn of Michael's life. Imber Court is his ancestral home. Michael's homosexuality has in the past complicated his desire to become an ordained priest, and he has decided to make Imber Court a lay community of the Abbey. To the court comes a small group of more and less pure people, whose desire for God makes them unsatisfactory citizens of an ordinary life, but whose strength or temperament fails them to surrender the world completely.

Keywords: Bell, Ethics, Judgment, Love

Introduction

Imber Court is Michael's ancestral home. To the court comes a small group of more and less pure people, whose desire for God makes them unsatisfactory citizens of an ordinary life, but whose strength or temperament fails them to surrender the world completely.

Added to them are the visitors: Toby Gashe, a handsome and earnest young man, soon to attend Oxford, Nick; with whom Michael had a disastrous affair several years before; Paul Greenfield; an egotistical art historian; and Paul's rather bohemian wife Dora, who had begun to suspect that Paul thought her the tiniest bit vulgar.

Murdoch believes that both contemporary fiction and philosophy fail to set forth an adequate idea of human personality. She says "… we substituted a facile idea of sincerity. What we have never had, of course, is a satisfactory Liberal theory of personality, a theory of man as free and separate and related to a rich and complicated world from which, as a moral being, he has much to learn.'(Murdoch, 1950, p. 52) She tries to correct this oversimplified concept of man in her novels.

The Bell shows the complexity of motivation and makes clear that the mind is something other than a simple apparatus operated by reason. (In stressing the role of the emotions and other irrational motives for behaviour, Murdoch is countering the contemporary emphasis upon reason which is found in empiricism and existentialism with their stress upon making choices and performing actions.)

The Bell, The Ethics of Judgment, The Ethics of Love

In *The Bell* the ideas which emerge from a very credible fictional world are concerned with the inadequacy of absolute moral codes, the nature of love, reality and freedom.(Sharon Kaehele and

Hoard German, 1967, p.554) One of the commonest failings in judging others lies, for Murdoch, in the tendency to select criteria which are too narrow.(ibid)She condemns those arbiters who would like: 'by morality to crystallize out of the historical process a simple society living strictly by extremely general rules 'Always tell the truth,' etc, with no place for the morally complicated or eccentric.'(Murdoch, 1961,p. 18.)

The Bell provides considerable justification for James's type of moral code by its presentation of the damage done to Imber by Nick and by its picture of Michael's and Toby's mental and emotional turmoil. However, the greater emphasis in the novel is upon the drawbacks of judging by simple codes or conventions; (Sharon Kaehele and Hoard German, 1967, p. 555.)as Murdoch says, convention leads us to lose sight of the individual; 'because we are ourselves sunk in a social whole which we allow uncritically to determine our reactions, or because we see each other exclusively as so determined.'(Murdoch, 1950, p. 52.)

The chief victim of convention in the novel is Dora, who encounters hostile standards both in her marriage and in her visit to Imber. Poorly educated, lacking in self-knowledge and unable to judge others, Dora unwisely marries a savant, and soon the condescension of her husband's friends and his more explicit criticisms make her feel juvenile, inferior, and vulgar. She feels placed by their opinion, but she is unable to explain her discontent. After an unsuccessful rebellion (an adulterous affair), Dora returns to Paul, but she retains her discontent with her marriage; she feels that she is: 'returning, and deliberately, into the power of someone whose conception of her life excluded or condemned her deepest urges and who now had good reason to judge her wicked. That was marriage ... to be enclosed in the aims of another' (Murdoch, 1958, p.15.)

In the austere religious environment at Imber, Dora experiences a similar confinement, though she finds the censure less explicit. Unable to find a satisfactory role, she makes no attempt to work, and her indolence widens the gap between her and the rest of the community. She becomes increasingly aware of how she must appear to them:

Often it seemed to her that the community was easily, casually even, judging her, placing her. The fact that so little was expected of her was itself significant. This was distressing. The sense that the judgment occurred without their thinking about it, that it happened auto-matically, simply as it were by juxtaposition, was still more distressing'. (Murdoch, 1958, p.141)

Dora's reaction to these judgments is more important; she vacillates between dejectedly accepting them and indulging in acts of rebellion (like the bell-switching scheme) which assert her independence. Her reactions show the consequences of casually judging individuals and suggests that she, and possibly Nick, would not have been so destructive at Imber had they not been so arbitrarily placed by the society. The clash between Dora and the Imberites' code reflects the conflict between the complex nature of reality and man's aspiration for the simple; the results indicate that the diversity of individuals is so great that it is impossible to render fair judgments by automatic application of principles.(Sharon Kaehele and Hoard German, 1967, p. 555)Murdoch notes that, contrary to Kant's belief, rational men have different natures and see the world with radical differences: 'we can no longer even imagine that all reflective men have common purposes and common values'. (Murdoch, 1959, p. 33.)

The Bell emphasizes the substantial differences between individuals through its presentation of characters as dissimilar as Dora and the Abbess. In the novel Murdoch shows some of her characters in the act of trying to apprehend the nature of other people and thereby coming to recognize the uniqueness of the individual. Toby, for example, shows an increasing awareness of differences in personalities and, consequently, a growing distrust of absolute standards. He resists the temptation to prejudge Nick because there are 'many ways of being a drunkard. There were good drunkards'; (Iris Murdoch, 1958, p. 54)watching Dora and Paul argue, he refuses to condemn their

marriage because he has come to realize that'…there are a great many different ways in which marriages can succeed'.(Ibid, p. 48)

Michael's sermon, with its emphasis upon the uniqueness of the individual and the value of self-knowledge, provides an indirect refutation of James's argument for universal, unquestioning adherence to Biblical decree: recalling the parable of the talents, Michael states that:

'in each of us there are different talents, different propensities, many of them capable of good or evil use.... As spiritual beings, in our imperfection and also in the possibility of our perfection, we differ profoundly one from another.... Each one of us has his own way of apprehending God.... Each one of us apprehends a certain kind and degree of reality and from this springs our power to live as spiritual beings'.(Ibid, 218)

Michael commits several mistakes because of his own lack of self-knowledge, but he usually tries to respect individuality and to abstain from judging others rashly. For example, at the end of the novel he refuses to press Dora to rejoin Paul, because he feels that there is no need to urge her into 'a machine of sin and repentance which was alien to her nature'. (Ibid, 329)

Love in Murdoch's opinion is the force which combats convention. It is a sympathetic understanding of another individual. As she defines it, love is: 'the imaginative recognition of, that is respect for,' the otherness of another person. (Murdoch, 1950, p. 52.)

Because of her belief in the importance of love, Murdoch criticizes those modern novelists who depict the quality of loneliness but fail to recreate any sense of those feelings (such as love) which involve other people. The relationship between Dora and Michael at the end of the novel reveals the respect for the other kind of genuine love; they enjoy a harmonious kind of co-existence which Murdoch describes in *Under the Net* as one of the guises of love. (Sharon Kaehele and Hoard German, 1967, p. 557.)

Michael's realization that Dora loves him and does not judge him gives their brief companionship a certain ease for him. By portraying such lovers Murdoch shows that relationships between men and women, like marriages, can be successful in many ways.

The Bell presents two opposing standards of morality, an ethics of judgment and an ethics of love. The contrast between these two standards is emphasized by the difference in the appearance of the two bells in the novel. The ethics of judgment is symbolized by the new bell with its plain, highly polished bronze surface and its judicial Latin inscription-*Defunctosploro, vivosvoco, fulminafrango*. The ethics of love is symbolized by the medieval bell, whose legend tells of love victimized by judgment. Covered with mud, moss, incrustations, and intricate mouldings, the older bell's appearance embodies the messy particulars of individuality. Many details of the medieval bell recall Christ, presented in this context as an example of divine love. Like the new bell, the medieval bell is named Gabriel, but its Latin inscription-*Vox ego sum Amoris*- recalls the Gabriel of the Annunciation rather than the Gabriel of the Last Judgment.(Sharon Kaehele and Hoard German, 1967, p. 557.)

Through its presentation of the various ways in which the characters achieve a sense of being, *The Bell* demonstrates Murdoch's concern with questions of existence and reality and makes clear her conviction that the most permanent and vital sense of being is felt by individuals who share James's belief that reality is 'something outside us'.(Murdoch, 1958, p. 138.)

Any activity such as work or love which forces the individual to attend to particulars outside of himself is conducive to recognition of external reality and, consequently, to a sense of being: 'what stuns us into the realization of our super sensible destiny is not, as Kant imagined, the formlessness of nature, but rather its unutterable particularity.'(Murdoch, 1950, 51, 52.)

The relationship between the individual's sense of being and his idea of reality is most vividly shown through Dora's experiences. Although she is not nearly so adept at self-analysis as

Sartre's protagonists, Dora shares their solipsistic view of the world. She lacks any of the interests which ordinarily develop the individual's awareness of outer reality: she does not work, and Paul has discouraged her from painting; her memory is bad and the past has no meaning for her; she has superstitious prejudices but no religion; she finds her marriage unreal; her imagination with regard to others is too undeveloped to give her a perception of their identity or being. Her attempts to acquire a feeling of existence by creating roles for herself and then filling them have failed because her visions of herself, as a cultivated woman for example, outdistance her capabilities. Contrasting herself with Paul, Dora feels flimsy and ephemeral, 'as if she were merely a thought in his mind'. (Murdoch, 1958, p. 40.)

This sensation that she has no being other than as one of Paul's thoughts explains her occasional feelings of gratitude for his love: since she is unable to find a reality outside of herself or to create a satisfactory inner reality, Paul's definition of her often becomes Dora's only means of achieving a sense of being. This reliance upon his concept of her is shown when, standing before the mirror wearing Paul's shirt and knowing that he wants to make love to her, Dora looks at her image as if through his eyes and thinks 'how very much, after all, she existed'. (Ibid, 44)

A similar example of Dora's orienting herself by imagining another's concept of her occurs during a walk with Michael when she supposes (with an amusing lack of perceptivity) that he sees her as Woman Incarnate, a 'potentially naked woman'(Ibid, 80) walking by his side. She knows that the Imberites find her inferior, and she realizes for the first time how much contempt Paul's love for her contains. When she disowns the community's and Paul's concepts of her, she has, because of her own emptiness, nosubstitute, and she loses touch with reality. Her reflection in the mirror, Paul, and all her surroundings seem unreal to her: everything was 'inside her head ... everything was now subjective'.(Ibid, 194) Noticing the placid lake, Dora throws a lipstick at it with the hope that 'it would fall into the lake with a splash and disturb the reflections'. (Ibid, 195) Dora's desire to disturb the lake suggests once again that the lake symbolizes the mind; her urge to ruffle its surface parallels her desire for a form of mental excitement which will destroy her dreamlike state and give her a sense of being. When the lipstick falls short of the lake, Dora next tries more extreme steps to dispel her fit of solipsistic melancholy:

She felt the need of an act, and it seemed to her that there was only one act which she could perform, to take the train to London. The idea sent the blood rushing to Dora's head. She felt her cheeks hot, her heart beating-at once more real.... Nothing stopped her from going, she was free.... Ought she to go? Paul would be very upset... More deeply, she felt a wish to punish him.... Dora felt the need to show him that she could still act independently. She was not his slave. Yes, she would go; and the idea, now it existed more fully for her, was delightful. (Ibid)

This passage offers an effective compendium of the modes whereby the individual with the inner orientation can achieve a sense of being: by committing an act, especially an act which entails choice or an assertion of will and thus creates a sense of freedom or power; by experiencing a strong physical sensation; and by conceiving an idea, particularly an idea which one attempts to match by action.(Sharon Kaehele and Hoard German, 1967, p. 558.)

Dora's flight to London provides a temporary respite until Paul's telephone call destroys her feeling that she has achieved identity through a meaningful act. This call forces her to regard herself from a point of view which finds her action objectionable; although Dora rejects Paul's judgment, she finds that merely being aware of it has weakened the sense of reality originally created by the act.

A second flight takes her to the National Gallery where she has a kind of revelation about the nature of reality.

She marvelled, with a kind of gratitude, that they [the pictures] were all still here, and her heart was filled with love for the pictures, their authority, their marvellous generosity, their splendour. It occurred to her that here at last was something real and something perfect. Who had said that, about perfection and reality being in the same place? Here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour, and by making it part of her fantasy make it worthless. Even Paul, she thought, only existed now as someone she dreamed about; or else as a vague and external menace never fully encountered or understood. But the pictures were something real outside herself, which spoke to her kindly yet in sovereign tones, something superior and good whose presence destroyed the dreary, trance-like solipsism of her earlier mood. When the world had seemed to be subjective, it had seemed to be without interest or value. But now there was something else in it after all.... She gave a last look at the painting, still smiling, as one might smile in a temple, favoured, encouraged, and loved.'(Murdoch, 1958, p.203-204.)

Dora's experience at the Gallery verifies elements in both James's and Michael's credos: in responding so completely to a set of particulars outside herself, Dora shows that the most satisfactory feeling of existence comes from an attention to something external to oneself; her finding reality in art confirms Michael's belief that each individual perceives reality in his own way. The reference in the passage to love and religion are reminders of other ways of apprehending an external reality. Dora, like most individuals, finds art a satisfying means of experiencing reality because in art particulars are shaped into an aesthetic whole, a perfection of form, which satisfies man's desire for a total order.

With Dora, the experience at the Gallery is too brief to provide a permanent escape from her solipsism, but it does point the way toward the more lasting sense of existence she acquires at the end of the novel.

Dissatisfied with her role at Imber, Dora adopts the role of witch in a holy community and determines to bring about a modern miracle by switching the bells. She is so fascinated by her project that she regards herself as a priestess(Sharon Kaehele and Hoard German, 1967, p. 558.)'dedicated now to a rite which made mere personal relations unimportant'.(Murdoch, 1958, p.255).Toby's participation in her plan illustrates the frantic attempts of an individual to recapture a sense of being once his fragile self-image has been destroyed. When his concept of himself as an innocent youth, a favourite of God, is shattered by his involvement with Michael, Toby is left with an objectionable self-image. His invasion of the Abbey is an act of limited violence by which he attempts to escape from this image of himself. He next tries to assure himself of his masculinity by falling in love with a woman. Without ever apprehending Dora as a real person, he enters into her plot in order to pay homage to an ideal of Womanhood and to prove himself capable of loving a woman. His new role of dutiful lover gives him, once again, a satisfactory sense of existence; the freshness of the emotion Dora arouses gives him 'a sense almost of the renewal of innocence'.(Ibid, p. 231.)

Enchanted by their ideas, neither Dora nor Toby has much regard for the other's position or for the welfare of the community; their actions illustrate the dangers of what Miss Murdoch has termed neurosis, a failure to see the individual because 'we are completely enclosed in a fantasy world of our own into which we try to draw things from outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream objects of our own.'(Murdoch, 1950, p. 52.)

The influence of a self-image upon the individual can also be seen in Michael, a type of man whose plight Murdoch has referred to as the situation of a being who, deprived of general truths, is tormented by an absolute aspiration. Michael's yearning for the absolute, which is seen in his desire to find a significant pattern in his life, is combined with a belief that he is a favourite of God and a man with 'a definite destiny'.(Murdoch, 1958, p. 85.)Aided by his romantic imagination, he

searches for signs in events; for example, when the Abbess mentions a lay religious community, he reads into her suggestion a divine summons. His desire for total order, however, causes him to be dissatisfied with ‘the incomplete and ill-defined nature of his role’ (Ibid, p. 89)as leader of the Imber community. Whereas in his youth Michael had been attracted to the military life ‘with its absolute requirements and its ideals of exactness and devotion’, (Ibid, p. 91) as an adult he finds himself yearning for the priesthood because of his romantic ideas about the completely defined nature of the priest's role. Michael's image of himself as one favoured by God shapes hismoral life and, occasionally, his relationships with people; it leads to spiritual pride and to a facile optimism about the consequences of his actions because he believes that ‘God would not ultimately let him suffer shipwreck’. (Ibid, p. 177) Overconfident about his virtue and self-control, he fails to recognize the danger in becoming involved with Nick and Toby: ‘by a dialectic well known to those who habitually succumb to temptation, he passed in a second from the time when it was too early to struggle to the time when it was too late to struggle’.(Ibid, p. 109)

Once involved with Nick and Toby, Michael attempts to disguise the sensual quality of his passions by envisaging himself as their spiritual guardian, and he overlooks, or sees too late, the possible harmful effects of his behaviour on them. At the end of the novel, however, Michael has discarded his sense of destiny and his belief in a pattern; he recognizes the disparity between his former hopes and emotions and a real faith in God. In place of the emotional sense of identity which religion had previously given him, he finds a form of external reality in the mass, which ‘contained for him no assurance that all would be made well that was not well. It simply existed as a kind of pure reality separate from the weaving of his own thoughts.... Whoever celebrated it, the mass existed, and Michael existed beside it’. (Ibid, p. 355-356)

By looking carefully at human behaviour, *The Bell* shows the complexity of motivation and makes clear that the mind is something other than a simple apparatus operated by reason. (In stressing the role of the emotions and other irrational motives for behaviour, Ms Murdoch is countering the contemporary emphasis upon reason which is found in empiricism and existentialism with their stress upon making choices and performing actions.) The existence of an appetite for emotion and its impact upon choice are shown by Dora’s refusal to listen to music which asks only to be contemplated; the effect of this appetite on thought is revealed when Michael, worried about Toby’s opinion of him, finds that the ‘complexity of his thoughts began to collapse.... He felt dully and violently, with a mixture of pain and pleasure which was not itself unpleasurable, the need to get it over ... to rid himself of a craving which made all other activity impossible’.(Ibid, p.178)

The proper use of power can best be achieved by a consideration for the individual which resists both automatic application of convention and selfish absorption into a personal illusion. While Michael can make good decisions (such as his advice to Dora), the evidence in the novel seems to suggest that the better users of power are considerate people like James and the Abbess, whose sense of external reality makes them more immune to the subtle appeals of power. Although James may be committed to simple moral principles, he tries to understand the opinions of others; unlike Michael, he does not try to force his opinions about the mechanical cultivator and the shooting of squirrels upon the community. Despite his military heritage, James would prefer to have all authority ‘melt in brotherly love’(Murdoch, 1958, p. 90)and instead of sensing any of the subtle pleasure of power when informing Michael of Toby’s confession, James feels only ‘pain and misery’. (Ibid, p. 318) The Abbess, who perplexes Michael because she is both good and powerful, has chosen a simple moral code for herself and, in proposing the Imber community, seems to be urging others to escape life’s complexities. However, she is only offering the community an alternative for those who seek a meaningful form of work in a religious environment. The proposal shows her awareness of man’s various capacities for spiritual life. The Abbess approves of an

impromptu element in the bell-christening ceremony. She is shrewd enough to understand both Michael's fondness for the inner drama and Nick's desperation in coming to Imber. Convinced that 'all our failures are ultimately failures in love', (Ibid, p. 253) she believes (and probably rightly) that Nick can be saved by some evidence of affection from Michael. Despite this evidence of her realistic grasp of life; the Abbess reveals her own version of man's fondness for the simple in her great faith in sincerely performed, generous acts and perfect love.

Only near the end of the novel does Michael become aware of what Murdoch calls tragic freedom. Shaken loose from his own preoccupations, Michael regards Dora with a disinterested attention, an imaginative freedom that leads him to an understanding of her individual personality. His most intense glimpse of tragic freedom comes when he acknowledges to himself that he failed to give Nick the imaginative understanding required by love; he speculates about whether in the future he will 'experience again, responding with his heart, that indefinitely extended requirement that one human being makes upon another'.(Murdoch, 1958, p. 335)

David W. Beams in his essay, 'The Fortunate Fall', considers three actions in *The Bell*. On her arriving to Imber Dora forgets her husband's notebooks and sun hat in the absorbing task of rescuing from the floor of the car a Red Admiral butterfly. As Beams describes:

The butterfly, as she kneels down to scoop it gently into her hand, brings a friendly, surprised look from the boy Toby and his older companion and a moment later, everyone is surprised as Dora's palms open like a flower and the radiant beauty of the butterfly emerges to circle around them.'(wwwjstor.org/stable/441885)

Dora's name is the diminutive of Theodora or Dorothy, that is, a 'gift of God.' However unexpectedly and unconventionally in the midst of her typical remissness, Dora has, as if from a fortunate proximity to the other new arrival, the boy, come to Imber with a kind of fresh promise and gift of her own. According to Beams the fate of the fallen butterfly is the first intimation of the 'fortunate fall' or the Christian gift of grace, particularly as, when Dora kneels to rescue the butterfly, she says to those in the compartment, 'Excuse me'.(Murdoch, 1958, p. 21.)He believes that 'It is also typical of Iris Murdoch that, in a myth centering on a lake as the fallen world, the butterfly should be an 'Admiral'; perhaps, even for Dora, there is mastery of the fallen element.'(David W. Beams, 422.)David W. Beams interprets this first of three actions in the light of the recurrent pattern in the novel, of which the crux is the fall and resurrection of a great bell.

Peter's custom is to trap birds in cages, dome-shaped wire structures they enter for food and sometimes 'out of sheer curiosity',(Murdoch,1958, p.21.) and then to band and photograph them. The banding of the birds, as David W. Beams says corresponds to the mark of Cain or to original sin, and thence to the governing metaphor of the 'curse' on the bell in the lake, reinforced by such material as Michael Meade's alarming dreams of a booming bell in the lake and a drowned person being pulled out of the water by sinister nuns, as if some terrible curse threatened Imber Abbey, dealing death to Michael and Imber Court even as they aspire to holiness. But, as we know, the bell embedded in the ooze will rise. (The curse of original sin and death is indeed the reality known to the Abbey, but so is the Incarnation.) Just so, the birds, though marked, fly up and away. The excessive, sentimental distress of Michael and Dora corresponds to that melodramatic sense of sin that is partner to self-willed innocence (the twins Nick and Catherine), the fear or despair of fallen nature or personality that is the Imber Court syndrome. This includes the hazardous misjudgement in the rigid ethic of rules (holding the bird too tight). The plight of the birds in the trap applies generally to Imber Court.(David W. Beams, p. 424.)As Peter tells the group, when the birds, trapped in the first compartment of the cage,'try to get out by flying what seems the easier way into the second compartment … then it's still harder for them to escape'. (Murdoch,1958. P.133)

That is, Imber Court's ethic of will and action paradoxically defeats the moral life and is an illusory freedom, magnifying the fallen condition.

But as the birds, once banded, are released by this Peter who has the power to bind and loose, as they fly aloft like Dora's butterfly, the idea is clearly that of rebirth, of Paradise regained, and this set piece becomes one of the novel's most fetching renditions of Felix culpa. Thus, when it is all over, Michael laughs to see how affected by it Toby has been: Toby's lips are moist where he has bitten them (the lake or Fall motif), but his eyes are wide. Peter's traps, which he sets 'in order to ring the birds'; (Ibid)connect not only to the Fall and knowledge, but, of course, to the bell, the ring of joyous Easter. (According to the medieval chronicler, the bell 'flew like a bird' (Ibid, p 127)into the lake). (David W. Beams, p.424,425)

We come now to the third action of the bell lifted from the lake. The description of the bell should confirm to any reader the specifically Christian myth, from the moment Toby's tractor draws it above the muddy bubbles and it lies stranded on the ramp 'like a terrible fish'. (Murdoch, 1958, p. 42.)

Inspecting the gaping and enormous 'thing from another world' in the barn Toby and Dora find scenes of the life of Christ inscribed on it, the Nativity, people catching fish, the Last Supper. Dora sees 'the Crucifixion'. And 'the Resurrection'. Toby also reads and translates the Latin inscription, amid crosses: 'I am the voice of Love. I am called Gabriel'80. (Ibid, p. 235.)

The lake in Imber is shaped like an L. The house is in the crook of the L. By contrast to the elevation of Imber Court, the lake of fallen history is the upside down form of Christ's redemptive Love, of God become Man, of Incarnation, the sole reality of Christianity. The 'crook' of the L is at once the crookedness of nature strayed which Christ takes upon himself and the crozier of the Good Shepherd: 'To God more glory, more good will to men.' The main action of the novel is the right-side-upness in the raising of the bell by Toby and Dora, so that the Voice of love may sound, and this is at one with most of the actions of the book.(David W. Beams, p. 432.)

Conclusion

The Bell has the self-contained form of great art. For all of its concern with ideas, the novel provides a realistic portrayal of a society and a setting and creates characters whose individuality and destiny engage the reader's interest. Ms Murdoch does not impose a thesis upon her material. Like life, *The Bell* leaves one in doubt; we are in doubt about whether Dora will resume her career of crime or whether Michael will soon again slip from a time when it is too early to struggle to a time when it is too late to struggle. Although it suggests answers to moral questions, *The Bell* is perhaps more valuable for the success with which it reproduces some of the circumstances of moral life and enables the reader to acquire a deeper understanding of the human personality.(Sharon Kaehele and Hoard German, 1967,p. 563.)

We can realize that how *The Bell* creates a real society and portrays characters in a variety of differences. Murdoch believes that anything that alters vision in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism is to be connected with virtue. Dora decides not to return to Paul in London, she wishes to be alone. She progressively realized the realities outside of her own. At the end Michael also gets rid of his sense of destiny and recognizes the difference between his previous emotions and a real faith in God.

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