

Decentralization of the Patriarchal Household in *The Good Apprentice*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the reconstruction of female selfhood through Murdoch's elaboration of the multiple ways that the women use to integrate their female self by decentralizing the patriarchal household. According to her philosophical view on the misuse of power regardless of gender, Murdoch illustrates women's frailties in the example of Mother May in *The Good Apprentice*, who becomes a power figure in her family taking the advantage of her husband's decaying health. It illustrates Murdoch's philosophical opinion that the woman, as the winner in the fight against the gender inequality and patriarchal oppression in the family, is likely to continue the male dominance instead of liberating herself from the male supremacy and attaining the perfect life. In conclusion, that's not the real victory over the male oppression but a continuation of male domination in disguise since it brings no benefits to increase women's happiness and change their lives.

Key words: Iris Murdoch; Decentralization; Patriarchal household; *The Good Apprentice*

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In spite of her grieving over the subjection of women to patriarchal power, Beauvoir argues that both men and women have the capacity to become the power figure and exert power on others. Tidd interprets Beauvoir's view on power in *The Second Sex* as that "power is not represented

as monolithic, repressive or as the unique preserve of men, ... but as a potential for action which, in most cases, can be grasped by either women or men" (Tidd, 1999, p.57). Murdoch holds a similar view that power figures are unrestricted in the gender sense, which is pointed out by Cohan that "the male and female are not strictly polarized... because Murdoch sees both sexes attempting to connect form and contingency (Cohan, 1982, p.226). Even so, there are seldom female power figures in Murdoch's early novels since the female characters are struggling for understanding themselves and rebuilding the relationships with the people around in the male-dominated world. However, in her later novel *The Good Apprentice* Murdoch attempts to testify the possibility of integrating female self by women's changing from the dominated to the dominant in the male-female relationship. She depicts Jesse Baltram's domination over his wife and two daughters as a power figure when he is young and his wife May's reverse of the position when he gets old and ill. The characterization of May Baltram and the two daughter Bettina and Ilona reveals Murdoch's exploration on the formation of female self in the conjugal relation once they get rid of the male dominance.

The story begins with the parable of the Prodigal Son: "I will arise and go to my father and say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am more worthy to be called thy son" (Murdoch, 2001, p.1), and with the belief that his father, "the reclusive but notorious dissolute painter Jesse Baltram" (Rowe & Martin, 2004, p.141), could release his "crippling guilt" (p.141), Edward sets out to his father's strange country house, Seegard. Although the weird appearance of this "a long high almost windowless building (Murdoch, 2001, p.99)" makes Edward feel a little bit depressed, Seegard remains "like a significant destiny, at least a novelty, perhaps a refuge" (p.97) when he first arrives there. And dressed uniformly, the "three *taboo* women (Murdoch, 2001, p.105)" at Seegard leave Edward a very deep impression for "their

beauty, their youth, and their resemblance to each other” (Murdoch, 2001, p.100). “Three cloistered princesses” (Murdoch, 2001, p.128) are vegetarians and live a simple but self-sufficient life, weaving their own dresses, growing their own food, doing carpentry and embroidery, making jewelry and Christmas card to sell, and even playing recorders in the morning, “with prescribed duties and rituals as if they made up a small religious community” (Gordon, 1995. p.168). They seemingly enjoy this monastery-like daily routine of “times of silence, times for rest, times for reading” (Murdoch, 2001, p.108) since they “follow Jess’s example ... his rule of order and industry” (Murdoch, 2001, p.108). Though Edward finds his Jesse nowhere in the house and is told repeatedly that he will come back soon, his absence seems not to undermine his control over others in this family.

The three women at Seegard leave upon Edward the first impression that their restrained and ordered life is Jesse-centered and led in a conventional way. Considering Seegard as “a place of pilgrimage” (Murdoch, 2001, p.119) and “a holy shrine” (Murdoch, 2001, p.119) and Jesse as “a holy man” (Murdoch, 2001, p.119), Edward thinks in his first hours that these three women, though amazing, are just “minor figures, not even acolytes” (Murdoch, 2001, p.119), with whom he has no connection at all. Meanwhile, they leave him at the start a good impression that “the women were not only *essentially* remote from his in some quite special way, but also perfect: calm, wise, beautiful, devoid of ordinary human failings” (Murdoch, 2001, p.153). However his first impression proves not to be completely right as the time passes. Edward becomes uneasy and even frightened for his stronger perception of these women’s imperfectness, such as their unreasonable fear of tree man. Besides, Edward gradually realizes the fact that the power that these three women exerted upon him that helps him recover from the depression thought that “*they* could not set him free, and he no longer even desired to unburden his heart to them” (Murdoch, 2001, p.152). Instead, he finds that:

They, as the days went by, began to appear different to him. They were still, as he had first apprehended them, taboo, holy women, and endowed with arcane skills. They had not healed his wound but they had a little soothed it. (Murdoch, 2001, p.152)

Besides, the daily busyness at Seegard makes Edward feel so healthier and stronger that he wonders if the women are attempting to “sweat his misery out of him” (Murdoch, 2001, p.151). Edward really enjoys the tasks assigned for they bring him satisfaction and weariness that make him have “his sense therein of being a slave and needing to have no thoughts” (Murdoch, 2001, p.151) as “a prisoner with the kindest, most beautiful, most loving captors, captors who set him tasks” (Murdoch, 2001, p.151). Under the enslavement of these three women, Edward feels different towards these “elf maidens” (152) through his observation to their incoherence to their words and their spiritual sterility in the pure and innocent life style. Though they include reading as a part of their

routine, stacks of books on the bookshelves, containing from architecture and design works to English nineteenth-century novels, remain “all dusty and undisturbed” (Murdoch, 2001, p.126). While they work at day time, they all perform absent-mindedly: Mother May mends clothes with her beautiful grey eyes vacant, Bettina is busy studying African crafts and Ilona draws dreamily on sketch pads of different sizes. Beside, their weaving from Jesse’s design, as well as the painting in Edward’s room, makes him feel “rather distressing” (Murdoch, 2001, p.111).

However, the reality turns out to be far away from Edward’s first impression since Jesse has become the women’s puppet and Mother May is the real controller of this family. Besides his own observation, Edward is informed by Ilona of the real situation that is contradictory to the outward appearances. Ilona’s confession reveals the in-depth knowledge on their personalities and the true state of their lives and their struggling self. At Seegard, Jesse’s “the source of everything” (Murdoch, 2001, p.161). This family was under the strict control of Jesse who stopped Bettina from falling in love with a young man and from going to the university, and forbade Ilona to become a dancer. Instead, they have been made to be “bad painters, pretend artists” (Murdoch, 2001, p.200). And Mother May suffered a lot from Jesse’s dissolute life with many women. Ilona recalls their past life as follows:

There was something, it’s like remembering history, something long ago to do with salvation by work, and it was anti-religious and anti-God, that was a point, a sort of socialism, and like a kind of magic too, and being beyond good and evil and *natural* and *free* – that’s what’s so tragic, it was something wrong about it, or rather we failed, *we* failed, he was too great for us – but that’s what made Jesse so alive and full of power and wonderful as he used to be, as if he could live forever. (Murdoch, 2001, p.200)

Although they “had to be happy” (Murdoch, 2001, p.200) before, they have no happiness even like that now but to “pretend to be happy, like nuns who can never admit that they made a mistake and that it has all become just a prison” (Murdoch, 2001, p.200). What they do every day is just the inane repetition of the meaningless routine. So far, this family appears to be under the traditional male-domination which is even reflected in Jesse’s paintings where are full of “big grotesque heads of women, mournful, tearful or vindictive” (Murdoch, 2001, p.180) and “the features of the women of Seegard could be recognized in “the mourning heads of women” (Murdoch, 2001, p.181). However, Murdoch uses Ilona’s comparison between the past and the present to arouse the reader’s interest in what causes everything changed in this family, which seeds the discussion for the establishment of female self by decentering the patriarchy in the family household.

The discovery of his father as the wasted magician with waning powers also exposes him to the real world of these women, especially that of Mother May, and makes it clear that Mother May has become the real power figure in this family. The mystery is unlocked on the afternoon when

Edward finds himself alone at Seegard and then explores the building curiously. To his surprise, he finds his father locked in a room at Seegard, physically ill and powerless, which discloses the true nature of Mother May who, as Jesse's wife and Edward's step-mother, seems at first so charming and innocent as her daughters that Edward find it difficult to judge her age and conjecture her psychology:

Mother May's face was markedly, quite positively, calm, as some women's faces are. The quality of her beauty was radiantly serene. With such faces it may be difficult to tell whether this calmness is unconscious, a gift of nature, or whether it is something achieved, a result of wisdom, or is perhaps a mask of perpetual youth deliberately cultivated. (Murdoch, 2001, p.105)

Though the calmness of her appearance establishes her as "a benevolent motherly figure" (Murdoch, 2001, p.128), her "fine transparent calm face, revealing by daylight some tiny line-thin wrinkles, was amazingly youthful yet expressed a confident reserved authority" (Murdoch, 2001, p.128). And her authority is fully revealed when she burst into the room where Edward was kneeling beside his father Jesse and ordered him to go, "gorgon-faced with anger" (Murdoch, 2001, p.185). In the following plots, Mother May exposes herself as a revenging wife that Murdoch underlines from the very beginning to illustrate the process of her self-establishment in the patriarchal household.

Mother May is self-determined with full female self-consciousness and know how to manipulate the situation for her own sake well. She lived under Jesse's powerful restriction and suffered from his frequent love affairs with both women and men when Jesse was in the peak years of his life. In retaliation, she induced his gay partner, painter Max Pointe, and bore him a child, Ilona. When Jesse's power over her as well the whole family decays in the physical and spiritual sense, Mother May chooses to maintain the life order in his way as usual instead of getting rid of him and starting a new life. But the difference is that she replaces Jesse as the power figure in the family, puts Jesse under her control and takes advantage of him as a chess piece for her following plan. In order to maintain the old order, she brainwashes her two sisters to endure the boring life at Seegard through the enhancement of Jesse's god-like image as "a conqueror of the world" (Murdoch, 2001, p.186) and his specious and vacuous philosophy:

He is a great painter, a great sculptor, a great architect, a great lover of women, a supreme artist, a great human being. He cannot be as less than that either for himself or for us. (Murdoch, 2001, p.186)

She restricts the girl's personal development as what Jesse did and makes them believe that they are living in paradise where "lives are full of natural true busyness" (Murdoch, 2001, p. 160) and they could "exercise the body and the mind" since "the health of the planet rests upon the health of the individuals" (Murdoch, 2001, p.160). They keep carrying Jesse's ideals as true fiery socialists and work "for the good society on the basis of simplicity" (Murdoch, 2001, p.160). The girls are persuaded not to

leave for the big cities like London because they represent "all the empty idle noisy business of the world" (Murdoch, 2001, p.160). Mother May's brainwashing is so successful that the girls "never tire of hearing Mother May talk of the old days" (Murdoch, 2001, p.160) and believes that, compared with them, "others are barbarians" (Murdoch, 2001, p.161). Mother May firmly controls the girls' mind while announcing in a smile that:

The girls are free beings, ... Jesse and I have seen to that. We stand for creativity and peace, continuity and cherishing. Here I think women have something special to give. (Murdoch, 2001, p.161)

To conceal the fact that Jesse is aging and losing his creativity in arts and his power over women in the family, Mother May mythicizes Jesse in the girl's imagination and makes them believe in Jesse's supernatural power that "he knows how to rest from life...so his life can go on and on" (Murdoch, 2001, p.185).

Murdoch cloaks Mother May as a hidden revenging power figure with a deceptive appearance of calmness and benevolence, which reflects Murdoch's exploration on the reconstruction of the female self in the familial life. She applies her philosophical ideas on women's liberation, the fair and balanced relationship between the male and the female, and the likely way to achieve the Good. Regardless of the contradictory and unconvincing excuses for the hindrance to Edward's meeting with Jesse and for the imprisonment of Jesse, Mother May still tries her best to deny the fact that Jesse is old and unrepresentable and maintain Jesse's image and her control over this family in order to complete her revenge plan on the male subjugation over her in the past years. She is so economically minded and calculating that she makes a tough living by doing handicrafts instead of selling Jesse's works because they'll worth more when he's dead. And she believes that it's "ridiculous to be sentimental about the trees" (Murdoch, 2001, p.197) since "they were planted as an investment" (Murdoch, 2001, p.197).

Although she pretends to worship Jesse as a god and spiritual mentor in their life, she abuses him physically by not providing enough food and restricting his personal freedom by locking him in the room without necessary medical care. She refuses Edward's proposal to send Jesse to the hospital for the reason that Edward doesn't know Jesse's power and has "no conception of the greatness of his being" (Murdoch, 2001, p.198). In Jesse's words,

They're ashamed – in front of the women – I'm a – a – you know – I'm just a load of shit – to be cleared away. Then they'll clean the room – open the windows – (Murdoch, 2001, p.194)

Mother May insists that Jesse is still in charge in an important sense, which is contradictory to what she does. Faced with Edward's doubts and confusion, Bettina explains that: "He was a god in our lives.... Then he became a cruel mad god, and we had to restrain him" (Murdoch, 2001, p.198). Meanwhile, Mother May and

Bettina express their suppressed animosities towards Jesse as “He was a god and has cheated us by becoming a child. It is hard to forgive.... He is imprisoned in speechlessness and cries with anger. To know so much and to be without words” (Murdoch, 2001, p.197). In their eyes, Jesse is “full of impotent rage” (Murdoch, 2001, p.197) since there are “no sane limits to the desire to conquer the world” (Murdoch, 2001, p.197), which is the reason for his trance-like sleeps when he can’t stand his own consciousness.

Naturally at times he resents us, ... We appear as an alien authority, we represent the diminishing of his world, the loss of his talents, his dependence on others. We told you he once tried to destroy his paintings, break his sculptures. (Murdoch, 2001, p.198)

All that they do is under the name of protecting Jesse and his work since he is such “a supreme artist” (Murdoch, 2001, p.198) and “has been forever recreating himself” (Murdoch, 2001, p.198). So Mother May together with her two daughters, especially Bettina as her main supporter, takes part in Jesse’s process of recreation and performs as the guardian of his work for the reason that they are “responsible to posterity” (Murdoch, 2001, p.198).

Suffering the “penalties attached to marrying a genius” (Murdoch, 2001, p.418) and struggling for the consolations to survive the marriage, Mother May mournfully complains that, “He has had absences all his life ... as long as I have known him” (Murdoch, 2001, p.185). Being determined to strike back against the male oppression, Mother May is merciless to any stumbling block on her way to fulfill her revenging plan. “May reveals herself as a scheming, resentful, and jealous female” (Khogeer, 2005, p.128). She warns Edward not to get involved in their order of life and persuades him to follow her arrangement:

Do not get the idea ... that you are a privileged messenger or interpreter of Jesse’s wishes. He talks all kinds of nonsense and forgets it the next moment. You are a new comer here, an *outsider*. You are new to a very complex and in some ways very old situation. You are blundering about in something you do not understand. It is not your fault. But you must realize this and be guided by us. You are our *guest*. (Murdoch, 2001, p.197)

She also clarifies the reason for her invitation to Edward as: “We were – becalmed – it wasn’t good – it isn’t good. We needed a disturbance, a catalyst, we came to feel that any change would be better” (Murdoch, 2001, p.240). She asks him to Seegard just to do them good and make a change, but not to help him recover from his terrible self-accusation and sense of guilt that is due to the tragic outcome of his thoughtless prank.

Murdoch explores how to reconstruct the family order and the female self in the family where the traditional masculine hegemony is abolished. Functioning as the power figure in the family, Mother May does nothing to improve the female status in the family but to maintain and continue the patriarchal oppression on them. She even keeps her own image as one of Jesse’s adherents as usual though she has made everything under her control. When

she finds the difficulty in keeping the dull life going and the conflicting interpretations of Jesse’s beliefs convincing, she is eager to have “a change, any change” (Murdoch, 2001, p.199) because Bettina and Ilona are “just like cats that belong to the house” (Murdoch, 2001, p.199) that couldn’t help her much. So Mother May intends to let Edward replace his father’s status in form since “[i]n a way Mother May is like a Penelope who wants Odysseus to go, to be off on his travels again –” (Murdoch, 2001, p.199). But the difference is that Mother May will still control the whole situation. The fact that Edward finds the imprisoned Jesse brings Mother May’s hatred to Jesse and her ambitious revenging plan to light. She attempts to damage Jesse’s standing in Edward’s heart through claiming that:

Perhaps you imagine that you were the longed-for boy – your mother could have put that into your head – but don’t be charmed by him. You realize he’s crazy. He has all sorts of illusions, and he would tell you anything. He’s just the wreck of a wicked old man. (Murdoch, 2001, p.238)

What’s more, she retorts Edward, saying “Pure wickedness never seems wicked. It’s when it’s mixed with good that it shows. He is an incarnation of evil. He has opened the door of evil and seen within” (Murdoch, 2001, p.238).

Murdoch depicts Mother May’s change after she decentralizes the male dominance in the family to imply a likely way to reconstruct the female self in the contemporary society. Mother May was overwhelmed by mixed love-hate feelings towards Jesse when she was under his powerful control, whereas she turns the complicated feelings into the pure hatred for Jesse’s being old and powerless. Jesse once was her truth. When her truth proves untrue because of his physical decay, the psychological blow is so shocked that she hates to accept the fact he has betrayed them by becoming their child. In her opinion, compared with her agony, what Edward calls suffering is nothing:

You are the blameless outsider, not tainted as we are by having knowledge him as he once was. For that knowledge *he* cannot forgive *us*. You are fresh and unspoiled, you were never his gaoler, you never forced him screaming up those stairs. (Murdoch, 2001, p.238)

In all her life, Mother May admires Jesse’s talent and power and fights with other women or men for Jesse’s favor. When Jesse proves himself to be weak and powerless, Mother May is seething with disappointment and hatred combined with her accumulated enmity towards the women and men who intended to take Jesse away from her in the past. She makes no secret of her hostility to Edward’s mother who died years ago. She admits that “a Gorgon face” (Murdoch, 2001, p.240) and confesses to Edward that: “Your poor mother was a bitch and a whore, ... I hated your mother. I prayed for her death. Hatred kills. I probably brought about her death” (Murdoch, 2001, p.240). And she believes that Edward’s mother died of “A mysterious virus. the virus of hate”

(Murdoch, 2001, p.240). Instead of enjoying the freedom from Jesse's control and starting her new life, Mother May chooses to spend her rest life hating and avenging to establish herself as a fighter against the patriarchy.

Murdoch brings change to Mother May's life for her revenge and her actualization of her female self in her own way. Failing to alienate Edward from Jesse, Mother May finds new hope in Edward step-brother Stuart. His visit to Seegard makes her "so pleased and radiant" (Murdoch, 2001, p.266) and almost laugh with pleasure because she sees the new candidate who is likely to help her fulfill her ambition. The new hope makes her in an air of satisfaction. And what happens next makes her "trembling with excitement" (Murdoch, 2001, p.287) and "breathing deeply" (Murdoch, 2001, p.287) with her gentle grey eyes very large and sparkling and her lips moist. What makes her so exciting is the unpleasant and accidental reunion of the main characters at Seegard, which makes her sense the opportunity to change her life and infuriates her to enact her revenge. Harry Cuno, Edward's step-father and Stuart's father, and Midge McCaskerville, Edward's aunt, arrive at Seegard for their car has got stuck in the mud on their way back home after their extramarital affair. To cover up the truth, they give false names. To their dismay, they find Edward and visiting Stuart, who are ignorant of their illicit affair up to then. Mother May sees through their trick for she recognizes Midge whose elder sister Chloe, Edward's mother, was her rival in love. However, Jesse's intrusion into the scene ruins Mother May's delight in Harry and Midge's misfortune. Jesse mistakes Midge for her dead sister Chloe and clasps her in an embrace. Then they kiss "passionately, ... hungrily, quickly, unable to get enough of the longed-for food" which enrages Midge so much that she, complaining about the mess "in a tone of disgust but without emphasis", puts "a hand on Midge's arm to drag her away" (Murdoch, 2001, p.292) in vain and then "prod Midge violently in the back" (Murdoch, 2001, p.292).

Jesse's fanatical passion with Midge and Stuart's departure frustrates Mother May so much that she exposes her female helplessness fleetingly. She begs Edward to help her, love her and love her enough. But she recovers from her weakness soon and becomes "unembarrassed" (Murdoch, 2001, p.315) and "full of power" (Murdoch, 2001, p.315) again. Then she persuades Edward "with insistence, with authority" (Murdoch, 2001, p.315) not to give them up for they have changed him and they need each other. At the moment, Mother May is well ready to carry on her revenging plan further. So her reaction to Jesse's disappearance is really self-composed and unserious, if not indifferent. Her explanations to his disappearance are rather unbelievable and funny:

He has metamorphosed himself, ... he has taken on some other form to renew his strength. He is lying in the woods in a trance, he has become something brown and small like a chrysalis, imperceptibly stirring with the force of a new life. You might

have stepped upon him as you were tramping around. (Murdoch, 2001, p.320)

He has removed himself into invisibility, he has entered another dimension, he is entranced, transformed. He knows the herb lore. He has gone into the wood like a dog to find and eat the herb that rejuvenates and heals. (Murdoch, 2001, p.320)

And instead of admitting the truth of Jesse's death, she also deceives herself as well as others that Jesse, with "a different sense of time" (Murdoch, 2001, p.321), is so manic and unpredictable that he might act a part of being helpless and go off somewhere. Mother May's careless response to Jesse's disappearance reflects his insignificance in her present life now no matter how important he was in the past since she has established her female self through the survival in the marital relationship that provides her with a full consciousness and female identity.

Mother May's philosophy of life helps explain why she is so determined to establish her own self on the basis of the fight against the vengeance on the male domination as well as her female rivals in love.

We all have horrors in our lives which have to be lived with. We must all harden our hearts about the harm we have done to others, forgive ourselves and forget our deeds as the victims of them would do if they were righteous. (Murdoch, 2001, p.241)

She believes that violence must be met by violence and pays all attention to her own sufferings from "many stings and arrows of jealous pain" (Murdoch, 2001, p.419) as well as her envy of Jesse's fame, attraction, talent, charisma, and everything she doesn't have. So when she refutes Edward's view that Jesse doesn't mean to hurt her at all no matter what he does, she says: "If you are aware of nothing but your own desires you don't have to intend to kill, you just kill" (Murdoch, 2001, p.238).

Besides keeping Jesse's works for a high price after his death, writing diary is a way for Mother May to relieve her own hatred and a tool to take revenge on others. After the accidental reunion at Seegard, the jealousy on Jesse and Midge's intimacy drives Mother May to publish some parts of her diary in the newspaper, which shows off Jesse's supernatural power of "bringing about coincidences and of drawing people to him by will" (Murdoch, 2001, p.405) and implies the extramarital affair between Harry and Midge. In this novel, Murdoch depicts a minor character, the feminist Elspeth Macran, whose comments on Mother May's diary from a feminist perspective are that "it is an orgy of indiscretion and revenge. Every page glows with malice" (Murdoch, 2001, p.418). And Elspeth points out that the considerable dispute stirred up by Mother May's writing will undoubtedly entice the reader to concern more about the publication of the complete version of her diary as well as Jesse's works. An economic return will follow. Elspeth also reveals its sociology value in general since many women are in such an elusive state of liberation:

The discerning sociologist, now and in the future, will no doubt treat these ramblings as a text for the psychology of women who imagine they are liberated and are emphatically not: a phenomenon of our age. (Murdoch, 2001, p.419)

Here Murdoch implies that many women are not completely liberated either from the male supremacy or from their own rooted thought of patriarchal ideology. Furthermore, many women replace the male's role as the super power in life and integrate their female self with the continuation of the past male dominance. Mother May's writing on her life story that is full of "yards of spiteful stuff" (Murdoch, 2001, p.468) and her continual restraint on her daughters reveal nothing but her marble-hearted solipsism, which leads her to be a complete self but not to be a happy being.

Jesse's death functions as a sign implying the ending of Mother May's fight against the male subjection over her when Edward finds his drowned body under the water. Blaming Edward that he brings death into the house, Mother May is in "a chaos of misery" (Murdoch, 2001, p.480) and "degrading herself with grief" (Murdoch, 2001, p.480) instead of enjoying the joy of winning. Ironically, if Edward doesn't burn Jesse's testamentary will, which leaves all that Jesse has to him, without divulging its contents, Mother May's elaborate revenge plan will undoubtedly be completely ruined. So Murdoch arranges no winner in this wife-husband or female-male battle. As a fighter against the gender inequality and male supremacy, Mother May gets no true happiness from her success in revenge, which is coherent to Murdoch's view on feminism and women's liberation that what women need to do is to join the human race, but not to become the rival of the male.

The death of Jesse is also a huge shock to the next generation of women in this family. At the moment he dies, both Bettina and Ilona bob their hair to celebrate their freedom. Apart from cutting their hair, there are no changes, at least no changes for the better. Although the two daughters, almost the copies of Mother May, act and react alike regardless of their individual faces, their fundamental difference makes them choose different way of life after Jesse's death. Bettina who "had a young man, or sort of" (Murdoch, 2001, p.200) becomes as forceful as her mother after her love is forbidden by Jesse. Unaware of the fact that Mother May has replaced Jesse and become the real power figure in the family, Bettina still considers Jesse as the controller over the whole family and couldn't "bear to see him decaying in front of our eyes –" (Murdoch, 2001, p.477). However, in spite of her pity for Jesse's senility and fading, Bettina is firmly convinced that, "You can be absolutely sure of one thing, whatever happened it was what Jesse wanted to happen" (Murdoch, 2001, p.478). Therefore, Bettina chooses to stay with Mother May at Seegard and continue to live in the same way as before. And she and Mother May become even more identical than before:

Today she and Bettina had their hair done in identical styles, every pin matching, the long heavy hair bunched in a long neat bun suspended upon the back of the head, showing the neck at the back. They were wearing their day dresses and long blue aprons. They stared at him with their similar youthful faces. (Murdoch, 2001, pp.437-38)

However, she looks "younger, cleverer, foxier, like some casual stylish boy who might be pointed out as a brilliant student" (Murdoch, 2001, p.475). "Her face was very sad, yet with a beautiful relaxed repose" (Murdoch, 2001, p.479), because more or less, Jesse's death partly relieves her from the domination of his principles of life. For Edward, Bettina, being lonely and separate, has turned into "someone with a private individual future" and cease to be "part of a trio". (Murdoch, 2001, p.475)

Different from Bettina, Ilona chooses to start her new life in big cities when she feels that: "They don't need me. They're strong. I have to follow my own path now" (Murdoch, 2001, p.454). She is "transmogrified into" (Bloom, 1986, p.3) the naked stripper, different from the real dancer that she dreams of becoming. She suggests that Edward should come in order to "demonstrate that she was not ashamed" (Murdoch, 2001, p.463), yet her performance makes Edward feel pity for her as her new life is even nowhere better than the enslaved life at Seegard.

Her nakedness was pitiful, touching like that of a child, pallid, clammy, bare, the human form revealed in all its contingent absurdity. It was shameful and tragic. ...like an exhibition of a deformity, which at the same time was little, pathetic, soiled and childish. (Murdoch, 2001, p.464)

Although it is doubtful whether Ilona, who pacifies Edward with the vague promise that she will "go back to see them later" (Murdoch, 2001, p.454), will ever know herself better, for better or worse, it is at least Ilona's first trial to begin a new life freely and independently.

Mother May, a female avenger, spends all her efforts fight against the gender inequality and patriarchal oppression in her family. However, when she becomes the real controller of the whole family, what she does is just the continuity of male dominance. Here, Murdoch implies that Mother May, thought with a complete self, fails to liberate herself from the male supremacy and attain the perfect life because of her rooted thought of patriarchal ideology, her excessive concern about her own misfortune and her undue attention to herself.

Through the depiction of these three ladies, Murdoch describes women's reaction to the control of the male patriarchal power in the family and reveals deficiencies of both women's self-centered obedience and revenging resistance to male domination. According to Murdoch's philosophy, the reason why the women's happy life won't come in time even when Jesse disappears from the earth is that they all fail to consider and care for others. On the contrary, each one is only concerned with herself. For example, none of them gives Edward and his tormented

soul a real consideration. The invitation to him is just to do them good regardless of his guilty soul. Moreover, the reconstruction of their female self on the basis of complete isolation and self-centeredness without spiritual growth could not lead them to the Good without a doubt.

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