

The Sea, the Sea by Iris Murdoch a Psychoanalytic Approach

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ABSTRACT

Iris Murdoch, a highly esteemed author and philosopher of the 20th century, specialised in psychological novels that interspersed philosophical and comedic elements. As stated by Murdoch, affection is individual autonomy. However, a considerable number of her characters lack the liberty to experience love and live. Iris has authored a number of psychological novels, including *The Sea, The Sea*. She focuses on one individual, the renowned actor Charles Arrowby, whose interior life is troubled by his numerous relationships. The fact that he is madly infatuated with his married childhood companion and love, Miss Hartley, is an additional crucial element of the novel. She and her spouse led a tranquil existence until Charles made an appearance in their place of origin. Charles, who previously desired to live an isolated existence, altered his mind after meeting Hartley. He now desires to reside with Hartley despite the fact that she is married. Hartley declines Charles's invitation to his home, prompting him to devise a strategy to demand her presence. Consequently, during her husband's absence, he enters her residence and escorts her to Shruff End. As the text progresses, it becomes apparent that Charles, driven by his preoccupation, abandons and secludes Hartley in a room atop his residence. This demonstrates the psychic malady that Hartley and he both suffer from.

Key words: Psychoanalytic Approach, love, trauma, possessive love, psychic disorder.

INTRODUCTION

The 1978 Booker Prize-winning novel *The Sea, the Sea* is about a man who never matured and is fixated on a romantic relationship from his youth. The narrative is a personal account recounted by Charles Arrowby, a renowned London theatre director who, upon reaching the age of 63, retires from the public eye and ultimately resolves to isolate himself in a coastal mansion known as ShruffEnd. He possesses what could be termed Prospero's Syndrome: not only did audiences find him captivating in his capacity as an actor, but so did his contemporaries. He believes that the time has come to relinquish his abilities and live in solitary contemplation, in harmony with nature, reflecting on his life and times while swimming, walking, and composing a diary/journal/novel. "The pilgrimage from appearance to reality" is the subject of "every good play and novel," according to Murdoch in her book on Plato. The majority of critics concur that *The Sea, the Sea* is about this pilgrimage. As the novel explores the dichotomy between reality and infatuation, envious love is at its core. Charles considers reminiscence to be the foundation of truth. He conducts an inquiry by examining his past experiences, including recollections of his theatrical friends and acquaintances, parents, aunt Estelle, and cousin James. His objective is to identify the specific period in which he believes the truth to be hidden, much like his relationship with his childhood love Hartley. Charles, who habitually compares his thoughts to a cave, reaffirms that the memory of Hartley illuminates them: "...the great light in which I have been wandering my way half-consciously."

The Relationship between Charles and Hartley

Hartley resides in the village and is wedded to Ben Fitch, a retired fire extinguisher salesman and former combatant who torments her with resentment. Despite this, she remains submissive to him. Despite her advanced age and complete estrangement from the theatrical realm, Charles develops an intense fixation on her, romanticising their former partnership and attempting to persuade her to elope with him. The novel explores the protagonist's failure to acknowledge the self-centeredness and egotism inherent in his romantic aspirations. Those who fail to recognise the love that flows through Hartley and Ben in favour of rules are frequently too quick to designate others as prisoners. Charles deduces from an awkward eavesdropping scene that Hartley's life with Ben is difficult and verifies that her marriage to Hartley has been unsuccessful. He disregards their profound affection and concealed desires in their partnership. Hartley's world's conventions are misinterpreted by Charles.⁹ Following the amusing and ineffectual abduction of Mrs. Fitch by Arrowby, he is compelled to spend several chapters pontificating over her rejection in a self-obsessed and gratifying fashion.

One of Murdoch's favourite works of Shakespeare, "The Tempest," is connected to her novel *The Sea, The Sea*. She differentiates recognition from virtue, emphasising the eventual triumph of virtue. Although "The Tempest" explores the nature of reality and visions, it is also preoccupied with the relinquishment of magic. Charles has come to "deny magic," including both the theatrical enchantment and personal strength. Through his thoughts and actions, Charles argues that it is difficult to relinquish power or effect significant change, which is one of the book's central themes. Regarding his affection for Mary, Charles discovers that it is exceedingly challenging to transform himself. His past encounters with Hartley resurface, intensifying his possessiveness towards her. Consequently, he endeavours to determine an opportune moment to abduct Hartley from her spouse, Ben. In pursuit of uncovering the truth about his parentage, Ben and Hartley's son Titus approaches him, inspiring him to bring his beloved into his home. Charles considers this to be an ideal moment to abscond with Hartley. Despite the fact that his ego indicates that his actions are immoral, he adheres to his principle of pleasure. The mental anguish that Hartley endures if she exits her marital union after years of cohabitation is given minimal consideration by him. His preoccupation with his own intentions over those of Hartley demonstrates his psychic predicament. It is apparent from this circumstance that Charles, despite being 63 years old, lacks emotional maturity.

Charles's psychological breakdown becomes more apparent when he confines Hartley to his room, preventing her from engaging with the other inhabitants of his residence. His son Titus's visit to the chamber to speak with her is refuted by him. He believes that Titus and Hartley would return to their families in opposition to his scheme. Hartley's intermittent yelling and screaming at Charles demonstrates her exasperation at being isolated. Additionally, she is apprehensive about her spouse, whom she believes would visit Charles' residence and exacerbate the situation. Occasionally, she updates Charles on the whereabouts of Ben, but Charles assigns minimal significance to this conversation. Despite isolating Hartley in a room, he frequently enters to check on her, demonstrating his affection for Mary. His provision of meals for Hartley represents an additional instance in which he exposes a facet of his character to the audience. Hartley requests that he occasionally leave her alone and return to her spouse, but Charles simply closes the door. His frustration is directed at Hartley, his childhood sweetheart, for her ignorance. After careful consideration, his superego determines that Hartley will only cohabit with him and her son. Even if her son Titus departs, she will remain with him without any complications.

The relationship between Ben and Hartley

Ben and Hartley have been wed for an extended period of time. At the outset, their relationship is remarkable and serves as a model for numerous contemporary families in English society. Ben, an army general, possesses a resolute disposition, in contrast to Hartley, who exhibits the exact contrary trait. While they cohabit, they occasionally engage in antagonistic discourse motivated by affection. Additionally, they have a son named Titus who vacates the residence as the dispute between his parents escalates. The quarrel arises due to Charles's presence in their municipality. Given the predicament of Hartley's mother, which compels her to leave her spouse in order to care for her, Ben harbours doubts regarding Mary's decision to maintain her association with Charles. Ben frequently criticises her former partner upon her return home, which irritates her, but she remains uncomplaining. She is regarded as the very definition of purity and affection.

As previously stated, Ben possesses a resolute persona. Although he deeply cherishes his wife, their egotism prevents him from expressing his affection for her. His superego is activated, prompting him to pass judgement on Hartley's previous relationship. An additional salient feature of his persona is his failure to demonstrate affection or regard for his spouse. Hartley, in return, demonstrates profound affection and care for her spouse. Her ego derives satisfaction from providing care for and preparing meals for her spouse. She disregards Charles upon their initial encounter in favour of her spouse. She hesitates to discuss her life with Ben in response to Charles's insistence, fearing that he will intervene and cause disruption to her routine. Her ego consistently prevents her from discussing her marital status. Hartley becomes at ease enough with Charles after a few encounters to discuss the whereabouts of her missing son Titus. While contemplating her innermost thoughts and feelings, she beseeches Charles for assistance in locating and returning her son so that they may reunite in bliss. The manifestation of her internal struggles becomes apparent in her conversations with Ben. She occasionally yells at him in exasperation. She is then compelled by her ego to apologise to her spouse. However, her superego compels her to apologise non-verbally by simply attending to his needs. As a result, Ben is captivated by her purity and affection towards him.

Ben, who unexpectedly travels to the Shuff End to retrieve Mary, converses with Titus and then exits the location without causing any disruption. Although he desires Hartley's company, he does not wish to appear contrived in the presence of others. Moreover, upon spotting Titus within the residence, he is convinced that his son and Charles have conspiratorially orchestrated the operation and have no intention of releasing Hartley. In 1945, James, an army general himself, was taken aback by Ben's heroic deeds during a violent uprising in an Ardennes prisoner-of-war camp. The dormant affection that Ben harboured for Hartley upon her return is evident in the manner in which he greeted her. His desire for her is not based on physical or mental attachment; rather, he desires her as a representation of the bygone era of purity and innocence.

CONCLUSION

As a psychological suspense, *The Sea, The Sea* demonstrates the author's ability to deduce the inner thoughts and emotions of every character. Murdoch depicts the various personas of contemporary English society who undergo profound transformations based on their life circumstances. The novel's primary characters, Charles, Hartley, Rosina, and Ben, attempt to resolve their inner conflicts through interactions with others. Charles discovers the truth upon reuniting with the woman of his youth. Despite having been in numerous relationships, he discovers his genuine love in Hartley. Ben, an extremely obstinate army general, experiences a reduction in anxiety after moving in with his wife Hartley. He occasionally erupts because he fears Hartley will abandon him for Charles. Hartley discovers her true self upon meeting Charles; however, she is reluctant to reveal herself to him because she is deeply in love with her spouse, Ben. She never experiences affection for Charles, who disrupts and squanders her life in pursuit of his affection. All of these characters exemplify contemporary society, in which people adore one another for the sake of their own advancement. They disregard the emotions and psychological traumas of the other individuals in this situation. Therefore, it can be deduced that Murdoch has created a piece of art that merits recognition in the contemporary era.

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