

# Absolutism in the Novel *The Sea, The Sea* by Iris Murdoch

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## Abstract

*Iris Murdoch appears to be attempting to provide an unbiased assessment of the human condition while insisting on the reality of things other than oneself. Murdoch's standard method is to center a cast of characters around a vague theme, usually one that is very philosophical in nature. The protagonist in Iris Murdoch's novel is forced to use only his own moral standards as a source of moral guidance. Murdoch's concern that art convey the inherent messiness of reality-what she refers to in her philosophical works as 'contingency' is reflected in *The sea The sea*. It also addresses what has been called Murdoch's 'Central Preoccupation' the issue of ethical goodness. Most notably in the Booker Prize-winning novel *The sea, The sea*, which follows the moral decisions and romantic relationships of Charles Arrowby, a mercurial retired actor-director from the London theatre scene who tries to write his memoirs and rewrite his life, first-person male narrators appear in her most popular books. He seeks asylum by the sea but discovers that his past and his own self-knowledge are literally and symbolically haunting him. The protagonists in Murdoch's books, as in many others, are looking for grand philosophical principles to live by or to help them make sense of their existence and the influence and power that people have over one another is a major theme throughout Murdoch's novels. This paper focuses the concept of absolutism in her novel *The sea, The sea*.*

**Keywords: Absolutism, Philosophy, Relationship, Reality, Theology**

## Introduction

Modernism is a crucial literary movement of the twentieth-century. Irish writers were particularly influential in the 20th century, with James Joyce and later Samuel Beckett playing major roles in the modernist movement. National identity was the key issue of the 20th century for both the newly formed Irish state and the countries that stayed united with Britain. Irish women were in nationalist and literary circles, despite being excluded from many public spaces. Their early century literature reveals that women's identities went beyond definition. Murdoch is frequently referred to as a writer who just so happens to be a woman rather than a woman writer, and there is not much feminism in the critique of her writing. Her philosophy was distinguished by a strong belief in the moral importance of our inner lives: the quality of our seeing, feeling, and imagining is vital, both in and of itself, as well as serving as the backdrop for our active lives.

Novelist and philosopher Dame Jean Iris Murdoch (15 Jul 1919 - 8 Feb 1999) was of Irish and British decent. Murdoch is best known for her books approximately great and fiendish, sexual connections, ethical quality, and the control of the oblivious. To begin with distributed novel, *Under the Net* (1954), was chosen in 1998 as one of present day library's 100 best English

language books of the 20th century. She won the Booker prize in 1978 for her book *The Sea The Sea*. In 2008, The Time positioned Murdoch twelfth on a list of The 50 most prominent British journalists since 1945.

Holding to unwavering principles in topics of politics, philosophy, or theology is known as absolutism. But in her book *The sea The sea* Iris Murdoch primarily concentrates on theology and philosophy neglecting politics. The concept of absolute reality, truth, or morality is referred to as absolutism. People believe that all truths are absolute. However, the author asserts that there are certain absolute truths and that there are others.

A viewpoint or belief system known as theological absolutism maintains that particular religious teachings or principles are always valid and unalterable, regardless of a context's cultural or historical implications. It emphasizes the concept of unchanging facts and frequently disapproves of other interpretations or viewpoints. It is important to understand that various religious traditions may hold absolutist views that differ from one another.

The metaphysical idea that there is an absolute reality - a reality that exists apart from human knowledge is known as Philosophical absolutism. Human knowledge is constrained by space and time, thus its existence exists objectively and without bounds within or outside of those dimensions.

### Research Methodology

Iris Murdoch is among the novelists who are currently deeply worried about the status of the novel in our modern society. Since 1953, Iris Murdoch has shared her critical theory of fiction in her essays, reviews, and articles. Since her method of characterization, which is the main subject of this study, derives from her philosophical concept of personality, an examination of her philosophy should be conducted before delving into her statements regarding the fictional portrayal of characters. This theory is based on her philosophy. Stated differently, the goal of this study is to recognise, categorise, and describe the various facets or components of nature that it contains. In-depth analyses of a few chosen texts show how Murdoch understands of grieving evolved. These analyses engage in discussions with

conceptions of mourning from modern philosophy, theology, and psychology as well as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida, Elias Canetti, and other academics. As a psychological suspense, *The sea The sea* makes clear how well the author can infer each character's innermost feelings and ideas.

### Literature Review

The language is the most obvious indication of how literary works evolve over time. Prominent female authors of English literature employ language that reflects the societal impact and aesthetic tastes of different age groups. Publishers frequently characterize women's literature as a subset of female writers. Consequently, the task of women's literature is to classify and establish a field of study for a group of individuals who have been historically marginalised and to investigate via their writing the lives they led while holding such a distinctive sociopolitical position within their culture. As one of the most well-known British novelists of Irish descent, Iris Murdoch is most known for her psychological thrillers, which featured a healthy dose of humour, philosophy, sexuality, and morality. Her entire body of work is influenced by her moral philosophy, which includes rejecting behaviourism, existentialism, and linguistic empiricism. This philosophy also serves as a foundation for interpreting the form and content of her writing. Her perspective on the human condition changed drastically, notwithstanding her early exposure to Sartrean existentialism. Murdoch's object must be understood in order for us to look past her philosophical content. Neither a Neo-platonic account of the good nor the fixed, given moral dilemma of late modernity and twentieth-century Anglo-French philosophy, which she has criticised, are her urgent concerns. Our focus is on the bigger picture, which is a constantly shifting landscape of morals, values, culture, and change that serves as the backdrop for our personal lives as well as our moral and spiritual aspirations.

### Theological Absolutism

Iris Murdoch begins her novel *The sea The sea* with the absolutistic concept of theological vision of the teachings of Meister Eckhart, Sufi, Hindu and native America myth, the emergence of the ecology

movement about the principles of Buddhism such as mercy, compassion and right action. Murdoch depicts these three has been a twofold shift: on the one hand, the commodification of religious concepts, which reduces the spiritual to a set of products, treats religion as a mere commodity: on the other. a denial of the very presence of the soul sickness that is almost inescapably at the core of a competitive, poisoned, overcrowded society.

The most crucial aspect that has been convinced is that paraphernalia is what we need or desire. Authenticity (the quality of being genuine or real) is the personal not as an intensive spiritual need, but as a form of treatable neurosis. Despair and hope are inseparable companions. Most of the theologians insist provisional detachment to attain spirituality. Central concept has been misconstrued. Murdoch suggests that one may be passionate and also practise detachment. It is an inevitable reality in theological absolutism. In this novel, James Arrowby is the cousin of the protagonist Charles. Arrowby pursues this principle in his entire life. In addition, Marianne Moore, an American modernist poet who has presented the intellectual insight that 'If I do well, I am blessed whether any bless me or not, and if I do ill I am cursed'. Here is a source for this moral perception from Bhagavad Gita:

When work is done as sacred work, unselfishly, with a peaceful mind without lust or hate, with no desire for reward, then the work is pure.

But when work is done with selfish desire, or feeling it is an effort, or thinking it is a sacrifice, then the work is impure.

And that work which is done with a confused mind, without considering what may follow, or one's own powers, or the harm done to others, or one's own loss, is work of darkness (18: 23-5).

One should understand that the practice of detachment like complacent seclusion, the only valid withdrawal is a temporary one. To practise detachment one must be in the world in the chaos of emotions and needs and conflicts that make up ordinary life. If that world is sometimes disappointing, so be it: a just life is that must be lived in the midst of disappointment. Withdrawal can provide the illusion of perfection. But the fact is to accept illusion- is the key. Iris Murdoch addressed Shakespeare as her

predecessor. So she has also quoted his saying that 'the world must be peopled'.

Murdoch renders her conception about spirituality, saying 'The Gods themselves are dreams. They too are merely subjective visions'. In this novel James asks 'What is religion? where does the one end and the other begin?' How could one answer for this hypothetical question. He admits the concept superficial is essential. All spirituality eventually turns into magic, and using magic has an automatic nemesis even after the mind has been purified of more repulsive habits. White magic is black magic. The good are unimaginable. We cannot say that goodness was to do with loving people, and isn't that an attachment?'. James accumulates thoughts on spirituality saying, All this giving up of attachments doesn't sound to him like salvation and freedom, it sounds like death. Over this view, said we must practise dying, these sayings are evident for airy metaphysic.

### **Philosophical Absolutism**

The novel holds up the various concepts of 'recollection in tranquility, repentance of egoism, antagonism, realism, self-satisfaction, obsession and reconciliation. Each one of these concepts present the multifarious philosophical thoughts of absolutism. As the central character is a theatrical celebrity who considers the theatre is a place of learning about the brevity of human glory. Charles Arrowby, gives an account of appealing romantic, theatrical myths: the figure of the wise hermit: the voluntary surrender of worldly powers. Appealingly the view of marriage is presented by almost all the characters in *The sea, the sea*, including Charles Arrowby a entirely negative, eavesdropping on his former lover Hartley and her husband Ben Charles who remarked that 'Marriage is so hideously private' and his friend Peregrine who offered a caustic view of wedded bliss:

Every persisting marriage is based on fear'. said Peregrine 'Fear is fundamental... As for marriage, people simply settle into positions of domination and submission of course they sometimes 'grow together or achieve a harmony (Murdoch xiv).

He regard that only people conceal their misery and their disappointment in a relationship. Charles even questions Shakespeare why the comedies of

Shakespeare always end with a marriage, or is it simply that they see weddings as part of the theatrical illusion: good endings, rather than significant beginnings?. Thus Charles wants to escape from attachments, As the novel progresses, his obsession is terrifying. It is only when he is left alone, abandoned, he sorts out some kind of reconciliation with the world.

*The sea, the sea* is a beautiful complex, ironic novel, which confronts our major demons: fear, jealousy, vanity, envy, the pain and confusion of misplaced love and the impulse to violent action. Charles may not have learned to give up the search for perfection, whether it be through sainthood or romantic love. This recognition of the value of the imperfect is theme which recurs time and again in Iris Murdoch's work and seems to be central to her philosophy.

As a philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch poses a serious of questions: 'What is a good man like? can we make ourselves morally better?'. These are the questions that Murdoch believed as important for the philosopher to address. She argues that no one is good and no one can't be good. But when we try to think about people, we discover that the knowledge we have about them is sparse and hazy, and that, despite their magnificent moments, it is their simplicity and directness of speech that most shapes our perception of them as excellent. It is significant that the idea of goodness has been largely superseded in western moral philosophy by the idea of rightness, supported perhaps by conception of sincerity.

The novel consists of absolute philosophical conceptions, related to real life. Charles states, 'Emotions really exist at the bottom of the personality or at the top, in the middle they are acted (36). From this statement he vividly points out that emotions cannot be emerged exactly as they are in our mind. He shares with us his love affairs. From that description he admits the fact that people are so secretive and marriage is a sort of brainwashing which breaks the mind into the acceptance of so many horrors. As he loves nearby sea, he feels that the sea is always a refreshment to the spirit. People are consumed with curiosity. The plot comprises of elements like bizarre, the grotesque, the grotesque, the mysterious, and the demonic. He continues his

former relationship with Mary Hartley Smith who is married now with Ben. But he believes that it is an unhappy relationship.

In this novel Murdoch expresses her view that Extreme love must bring terror with it. Charles accepts this reality after seeing Heatley in Shruff bed. He accuses her for all of his demonic actions. He states 'She made me a worldly man by rejecting me, that failure received me morally' (91). He admits his whole life has been a tissue of memories of heartley. He explicit that if one had time to write the whole of one's life thus bit by bit as a novel how rewarding this would be. The hilarious sections would be funnier, and sin and grief would be eased by a light of philosophic consolation. The happy parts would be twice as pleasant. He distinguishes words from promises. Lizzie (one of his love affairs) states him that 'Promises are words'.

Murdoch employs Charles as a tool of the representation of her own philosophical views in this novel. Her spectacle of relationship is 'What does it matter what exactly they 'are' to each other, so long as they love and cherish each other and are true to each other?' (146). Here, Murdoch stresses dubious words used by couples in relationship. So marriage was indeed a mystery to Charles. He insists that people should keep themselves to themselves, Rosina (Charles' girlfriend) says 'one's soul becomes numb with the endless blows and of course one becomes a sort of fiend oneself, that goes without saying; one becomes ingenious in evil' (174). This may hurt Charles, but Rosina delivers truth in the state of chagrin. Even though women are portrayed as a commodity in this novel, Murdoch does not emphasize feministic view. Due to the fact they are not required to do so. They like to live as they wish. Charles does not even criticize or despise women. It is obvious by his saying 'I don't despise women, I was in love with all Shakespeare's heroines before I was twelve' (176). He believes, women like convincing lies more than bitter truth. Almost all art is lies.

Undoubtedly jealousy is a major topic in the memoirs of this novel. It is an irresistible emotion, it does show a certain limited reasonableness where temporal priority is concerned. The central character and all other main characters of this novel

are haunted by this emotion. Charles is boastful. He lives his life as hedonist but act like a cold fish with clean hands. He always belittle his cousin James and other men in this novel. James is spiritual, honest and genuine. Charles never finds faults at himself. But he is packed with demonic and vulnerable thoughts and actions. He says, 'It was too exhausted to be honest' (211). He grants unspeakable deception to his women lovers (Because most of them are married women). Though these women are deceived by him, they do not surrender themselves to him. Because, they live their life independently. Charles is stricken by his own imagined invented things. He tells blasphemies about others in this. He contemplates that real love is like in a marriage. When the glamour is gone, he forced Hartley to stay with him. But She vividly declares that 'we can't suddenly make someone leave someone, They've lived with for years' (125). Charles commits many mistakes. That is why he states 'guilt makes fear' (312).

Finally he realizes the reality that real things become unreal when one enters the truth. We come to know the reality that we can love a dream, we think that reality makes a sort of push to action. It is not real. Because, it is a dream. It is made of lies. Murdoch highlights the point that for most people common sense is moral on the basis of wrong assumption. It shows his view against moral ethics. Titus, an adopted child of Hartley advises Charles not to interfere in other people's lives, especially married people. That's sort of the reason why marriage is so miserable. He additionally says that he can't think how anyone dares to do it and he has got to leave them alone. Because they have got their own way of hating each other and hurting each other, they enjoy it. This analytical view made him to contemplate. Each character of this novel produces philosophical view about life and relationships. James pursues the topic saying 'Most real relationships are involuntary'. This is a reality.

The concept of revenge is also expressed through the character Peregrine, (uncle of Charles) who tries to kill Charles. Because his wife Rosina also trapped by him. He darely condemns him for his crime saying, 'You didn't even want her for yourself, you just wanted to steal her from me to satisfy the beastly impulses of your possessiveness and your jealousy!

then when they were satisfied, when my marriage was broken forever you went jointing off somewhere else' (426). Because he thinks that Charles regard women as trash, For this chance, he has been waiting all these years. But his attempt to kill him gets failed. Because of this incident Peregrine and Rosina are reunited, Till then Charles regards Ben as a murderer. Charles believes himself as right and good. But it is not, He is sometimes a hysterical person. Most of the people are fantasized regarding the reality. Charles begins to admit his fault on Titus' death. He mourns that his burden of sin and despair was constant and had simply redistributed. New aspects of grief were open to him. He had wantonly entered in Harley's life and taken away her blessing very fast, The human mind rushes towards the most precise visions of disaster, In addition, he says 'Jealousy is been with love, but does not always die with love' (436) and Any lie is morally dangerous. Furthermore, 'Secrets are almost always a mistake and a source of corruption' (437). He additionally presents a sensible thought, of course if one starts lying one deserves what one gets'.

Murdoch believes that ordinary mediocre people think that if they confess one tenth of truth they are in the clear. But results in vain. Charles imagined this awful situation like having the car but no Hearley. It is a metaphysical statement. Finally Charles realizes the reality that he lost his love. In that desperate state he utters that the women had all lied and it was their nature. He enquires Peregrine about his thought regarding marriage because once he said marriage was hell. But now he replaces his false statement by saying 'Not when you marry the same person for the second time. Everyone should do it.' Murdoch claims this reality is obvious.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude the theme of absolutism is presented throughout the novel. This holds up an absolutistic view that judgments on people are never final. People need to live by the light of their own self-worth, through that hidden vital busyness within of them that is even more astounding than their reason. There may be no saints. But, the light of self-satisfaction can illuminate the whole world. Some men play their whole lives as a comedy. Only death is not humorous, but it also is not tragic. The story ends up with the

death of James and Peregrine. At the end Charles become more theological and deployed a theory that remains a good one, extremely plausible. He regrets for his obsession towards women and life. He is now aware of fear, anxiety, envy and desire. There is such a thing a being overly clever in one's pursuit of the truth. Sometimes, all one can do is to appreciate its masked face. Most of what we consider to be our understanding of the mind is pseudo-knowledge. We are all such terrible posers who excel at exaggerating the significance of the things we believe to be important. Sometimes we have to pretend. It is just a matter of convenience.

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