

## **The Philosophical Deadlock in Iris Murdoch's *The Bell and The Sea, The Sea***

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**Abstract:** *The fiction of the contemporary British novelist Iris Murdoch hinges on the successful mingling between the epistemological and philosophical on the one hand and the artistic and aesthetic on the other. There is an overriding and recurrent postulate in her fiction: the disparity between one's conscious and deliberate plans and what one eventually achieves. This philosophical view forms the constituent elements of two of her famous novels, *The Bell* (1958) and *The Sea, The Sea* (1978). This study explores the problematics of how this leitmotif is manifested in these two novels and the mechanism of showing that as well as the salient characteristics of her art and writing.*

### **1. Preliminary remarks**

Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) is a British novelist, academic, philosopher and critic. She started her career as a student of Sartre about whom she wrote an influential thesis entitled *Sartre: RomanticRationalist* (1953). A careful analysis of her various novels extending between the realistic, gothic and romantic types discloses her striking ability to put fundamental issues of morality, psychology and philosophy in interesting fictional moulds. In contrast to many female writers of her generation, her work gives the impression that she is not heavily preoccupied with questions of gender or innovative devices and artistic fads under the general rubric of feminism or modernism. Due to the complexity and incompatibility of the critical reactions her fiction has aroused, there is a dire need to have a brief idea about the main postulates and objectives behind her fiction and the main features of her fiction. In her often-quoted article 'Against Dryness', she expounds her intellectual and artistic standpoints (the title is indicative in showing her preference of the flexibility and suggestiveness of art compared to the abstraction and dryness of philosophy) as she pursues a sort of rapprochement between the immediate and abstract, the contingent and metaphysical, physical and spiritual. In this article and many reviews and interviews, she makes it evident that her main objective is to illuminate some underlying philosophical questions pertaining to man's existence. As such, her

conception of the novelistic task is worth-mentioning and exploring since she perceives that fiction is no less impressive than the philosophical discourse:

The novelist, too, seemed to turn to literature as to a metaphysical task whereas the sense of the universe was at stake. Compare the attitude of Proust to his work with that of Tolstoy or even Conrad. The writings of the two latter show forth, are nourished by, their answers to life's questions [...]. The human task has become a lifelong task, and literature a total enterprise, wherein what is attempted might be called reconciliation by appropriation (Murdoch 1961:20).

In the same article, she refers to the precarious position of man as he is divided between his conscious choice and the contingent forces that are at work in dashing his plans and keeping him adrift:

We are not free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy. Our current picture of freedom encourages a dream-like facility, where what we require is a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons (Murdoch 1961:22).

The "difficulty and complexity" of moral life, as Murdoch keeps showing, can be seen as stemming from the author's awareness not only of the tangible and physical but also those related to "vision, convention, neurosis and fantasy" (Byatt 1967: 24). Herein lies the essence of Murdoch's art: it is an attempt to manipulate the artistic and literary devices to serve her philosophical and metaphysical postulates concerning man and his precarious existence as well as the ontological questions facing him. The 'dryness' of the philosophical discourse will be softened by the beauty and grace of art and literature. In one of her novels, *The Black Prince*, she reiterates the discrepancy and inadequacy between content and medium, between art's exigencies and human life's challenges:

Art, my dear Mrs. Belling, is a very much tougher and coarser plant than you seem to be imagining in your literary piece [...]. About the soul we speak always in metaphors ; metaphors which are but used briefly and then thrown away. About the soul we can only converse directly with our intimates (Murdoch 1973:62).

It is this multiplicity of contradictory psychological and emotional states that bestows upon Murdoch's literary work its vastness and comprehensiveness. In his insightful comments on Murdoch's world and all its multifacetedness and complexity, Malcolm Bradbury concludes that her fictional world entails a reconsideration of the whole modern experience "in a world where the 'conventional' definitions provided by philosophy and art require a fresh examination" (Bradbury 1993:371).

It is worth mentioning that Murdoch's critical sensibility is not confined to her critical views present in her studies of the philosophers or artistic trends. Indeed many parts of her different novels are sprinkled with such a stimulating controversy. For instance, in *The Sea, The Sea* which engages the forefront in the following pages, she sorts out the differences between art, life and philosophy and how each discipline has its own requirements and assumptions. Talking about the 'happy endings' of traditional fiction, Murdoch reminds the reader of art's artificiality:

However, life, unlike art, has an irritating way of bumping and limping on, undoing conversions, casting doubt on solutions, and generally illustrating the impossibility of living happily or virtuously ever after [...]. Time, like the sea, unites all knots. Judgments on people are never final; they emerge from summings up which at once suggest the need for reconsideration. Human arrangements are nothing but loose ends (Murdoch 1978:477).

In more than one novel, Murdoch elaborates this leitmotif—the striking contrast between life and art, chaos and artificial pattern. In this mingling between the critical and creative tones in the same fictional work, Murdoch appears to be partially aligning her art with that of the practitioners of metafiction such as John Fowles, John Barth and Samuel Beckett. Indeed the last one is a name she admires strongly especially in his skilful engrafting fiction with philosophy just like Sartre (Murdoch: 1987). Obviously Murdoch's concern is much wider than those of her generation of female writers. The fact of the matter is that we are in the presence of an author who seeks to transcend the gender and the politics of patriarchal discourse. Given her philosophical perspective, it is not surprising to find her in pursuit of all that transcends the ephemeral and transient—to those ontological realms underlying the human condition. Such a salient feature in postmodern British fiction drives Robert Scholes to label her type as that of “fabulators, the mixing between reality and fantasy and symbolism” (Scholes 1967:18).

Murdoch's comments in this regard are helpful and illuminating in crystallizing her moral and philosophical attitudes which eventually distinguish her from other contemporaries. Besides, they identify her objective behind her philosophical tracts. Indeed she labels her fiction as 'belonging to moral psychology' rather than mere philosophy. Speaking at the University of Caen, 1978, she refers to her novels as simply “the expression of a world outlook, a kind of moral psychology” (Conradi 1986: xvii). Indeed this is a pivotal and quintessential point in Murdoch's literary experience. If her literary and intellectual masterpiece comprises such ambitious and wide-ranging views, it turns out that she holds a negative attitude towards narrow and myopic proscriptions that confine literature solely to gender and matriarchal discourse:

I think I identify more with my male characters than with my female characters. I write through the consciousness of women in those stories which have different narrators, so I write as men as well; but I suppose it's a kind of comment on the unliberated position of a woman (Johnson 1987: xii).

This is a totally fresh and I would say, unprecedented view given by a woman who feels more at ease with men's judgments and presentation of things and events. Such a point of view which runs counter to the mainstream of female writings in creative literature is in line with the deliberate eschewing of any innovative devices brought into vogue by Mrs. Woolf and her school. Due to this striking overlooking of the lessons of modernism and its fresh technical and interdisciplinary devices and disciplines, Harold Bloom sees this as a flamboyant flaw as felt in her disdain for “ formulaic procedures, anachronistic style and outmoded narrative devices” (Bloom 1986:503). The main reason behind this striking reluctance to keep track of the swift changes in form and style is the priority she gives to the thematic rather than the formalistic aspects which often hide a thin and ephemeral material. Murdoch's writing, then, belongs to the earlier stages in the craft of fiction where the writer's paramount emphasis centres on the thematic rather the merely technical and stylistic.

## **2. Iris Murdoch: The philosopher as novelist**

That philosophers resort to fiction as a detour to presenting their philosophical views by means of imaginative literature is not entirely new. It is as old as life itself and such practices date back to times immemorial. Indeed the history of world literature abounds with examples and evidences where the fictional and philosophical run hand in hand. Many figures in French literature have resorted to fiction as a cogent device or mask for airing their philosophical premises. This includes names like Voltaire, Andre Marlow, Sartre, Camus, Gide, Beckett ...etc. As already mentioned, Murdoch has studied French philosophy and imbibed the whole lesson of creative and philosophical writings, in particular the continuity between literature and philosophy. True enough, this overlapping and interaction between these two realms of human experience is the bedrock of Murdoch's fiction. Once again a reference to her 'Against Dryness' is apt and relevant in its explication of her philosophical standpoint concerning the human predicament:

We no longer see man against a background of values, of realities which transcend him—we picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world. For the hard idea of truth we have substituted a facial idea of sincerity (Murdoch 1961:24).

Hence the persistent pursuit of the truth as the linchpin of her philosophy. This would take the form of novels, stories, memoirs, interviews and critical analyses. All of these revolve around one invariable axis: the intellectual understanding of existentialism, the manifestations and explorations of man's intellectual dilemmas and mysteries as the springboard of her philosophy. If Sartre is one of Murdoch's main influences (at least in her earlier conceptualizations of life and its challenges), one has to recall that his own views move in this direction. He is quoted to be saying that “life develops in spirals. It always passes through the same points, but at different levels of interrogation and complexity” (Howells

1992: 240). The opacity and complexity of life and its mysterious routes is one of the topics that Murdoch will explore and keep track of in her own fiction. She is going to follow her master's steps in choosing the novel as the means of presenting and elaborating one's philosophical ideas and speculations. However she criticizes him for “wanting art to analyze, to set the world in order, and to reduce it to the intelligible” (Lewis 1983: 476). In sharp contrast, Murdoch's view of the world is complex and marked by its unpredictability and mutability. It is because of this original and idiosyncratic presentation of her characters, interests, whims and conflicts and how all these underlying philosophical topics are geared to her fundamental premise that one feels profoundly the interaction and interlocking between the psychic, philosophical and moral levels of the book. In the authorial narration and actions of the main characters this topic balks large and impinges on the reader's consciousness. For instance, in *The Black Prince*, the main character, Bradley Pearson, becomes the author's mouthpiece in talking about human nature and its complexities “hardly any philosopher or novelist has ever managed to explain what that weird stuff, human consciousness, is really made of” (Murdoch 1973:28). Such judgments and intuitions will be the cornerstone of her novels, including the two discussed in this study.

This characteristic mixture of the philosophical, moral, and psychological and the mythological bestows upon her entire work a typical touch, or what Bradbury rightly calls “the Murdochland” (Bradbury 1989:245). One aspect of this Murdochian realm is the fact that the author is not content with informing the reader about its dwellers and their keen problems, but also finds it binding to show it through the attitudes, reactions and conducts of the characters in question. The core of the conflict in her fiction lies in the incompatible interests and views of the characters which usually lead to catastrophic and unexpected ends. As she puts it in one of her comments, “reality is not a given whole” (Gasiorek 1995:191). It should be taken like that and all her fiction undertakes the task of unfolding and embodying these views and concepts. If one assesses Murdoch's philosophy as felt in her fiction, it generally tends to be pessimistic, but not nihilistic, in that her paper people are often involved in a series of righteous attempts to flee the entanglements of society, family and even art. However in these efforts practiced in good will, they realize that these plans often backfire either due to uncontrollable or unpredictable circumstances or from forces within which eventually put an end to such dreams and plans. It is T. S. Eliot in his 'Four Quartets' (East Coker) that refers to this perennial and insoluble dilemma in the human situation in his words, 'and every attempt /Is a wholly new start and a different kind of failure'. This gap between desire and fulfillment constitutes the gist of the matter in Murdoch's fictional world. As she puts it in the interview held with her on BBC radio 4's Kaleidoscope in November 1978, “the road to goodness is a dangerous road” (Dipple 1982:274). In *Henry and Cato*, she refers to man's disillusionment and pathetic failure to respond to life's rare rewards, “So many dawns I was blind to/ Now the illumination of night /Comes to me too late, O great teacher”

(Murdoch1976:330). This nostalgia for better worlds and harrowing pain at not materializing these dreams will be explored in many of her novels and arguments about man's precarious position in the modern world.

### **3. *The Bell and The Sea, The Sea***

Initially, one has to refer the reason(s) behind choosing these two novels out of all the great bulk of Murdoch's fiction as the representative texts of the postulate of the present article. Although there is a long time span separating their publication (20 years), they both develop one invariable underlying theme and follow a similar structural pattern. The sense of place plays a vital role here as the rhythmic life of the semi-religious community in *The Bell* has its correlation in the vastness of the sea in *The Sea, The Sea*. In both, the author has chosen such secluded places from the humdrum and monotonous and crowded places so that the main characters can have a better chance of reconsidering and reassessing their former attitudes and conducts. In both, the emphasis is laid on the futility of such righteous and ambitious enterprises as there is an innate weakness in their psyches which ultimately puts an end to such dreams of a morally better life. Above all, in both novels the artistic technique is symbolic, if not archetypal and theological as the main characters in both novels realize that man's lot is that of endless suffering and self-flagellation for reasons beyond man's conscious control and rational thinking.

The structure of the two novels is interesting and striking in that the author does her best to put the characters in a cyclic pattern where it is impossible to set one's self free from all entanglements: spiritual, physical and psychological. In *The Bell*, the action centres on the attempts of a semi-religious community to lead a morally righteous life, away from the temptations and secular demands of modern life. The present paper has already referred to Murdoch's interest in Sartre's philosophy and artistic interests. However, there is another philosopher whose idiosyncrasy and philosophical concerns she shares and even adopts vehemently. It is Ludwig Wittgenstein whose character she admires (Dipple, 1982) and emulates in one way or another. As a thinker, Wittgenstein is known for his emphasis on the human will and its role in man's life (Mason 1998:201). However, on the personal level, she finds in him some aspects which render Murdoch very kin to him: the strong desire to give up modern life and live a sort of isolated, hermit-like mode of existence. As recorded in his biographies, Wittgenstein spent much time in total isolation in Skjolden, Nov. 1913(*Encyclopedia* 1994:719). This uncommon attitude is already in practice at the hands of writers like the American romantic Thoreau and the Russian idealist, Tolstoy. Murdoch chooses this side of Wittgenstein to weave her two novels about and their climactic epiphanies. Imber Court in *The Bell* becomes the scene of this tragic drama and its pathetic and fallible characters. Many speculations and interpretations have been given concerning the advantages of leaving modern life and preferring a secluded life. Solitude means a quiet, distraction-free zone. This social retreat provides the actant with a vantage-point (or at least this is the original intention of the participants) for having a better

perspective of others and oneself. At the end of the attempt, it turns out that none of these projects materializes. People whether good or evil, innocent or guilty, are forced to go back to the place they have willingly and consciously abandoned. Life defeats man's deliberate plans. That is the core of Murdoch's philosophy in *The Bell*. In essence it is a recapitulation of Sartre's principle that stresses the "failure of human enterprise ... in order to bear witness through his particular defeat, to the defeat of humanity in general" (Howells1992: 142).

The book starts with Dora Greenfields' joining her husband, Paul, the art historian in Imber Court in Gloucestershire where he works on certain manuscripts. Their strained relation at home is replaced by a strict religious discipline and austerity. On her arrival, Dora has to follow the instructions of Mrs. Mark who is in charge of the discipline in Imber Court insists that all should conform to the regulations and proscriptions of the community. Dora is not an exception here as she is expected to get integrated in this society based on moral and philosophical foundations:

We keep everything here as plain as possible. It's a little austerity we practice ... I feel you'd rather be treated like one of us, wouldn't you, and keep the rules of the house? It's like a hotel, and we do expect our guests to fit it in ... we believe it's a sound discipline to give up the particular sort of self-expression (Murdoch1958: 61).

Dora, as already pointed out, is not happy with her husband. Thus going there is hoped to be a sort of change or distraction to what is going on at home at best. In this place she comes across Toby Gashe, who is equally disillusioned by similar emotional and sexual fiascoes. However the two share one aspect: both are outsiders to this community. They are observers, perceivers and participants in the drama taking place in Imber Court. Sometimes they are both subject and object of situations and events which succeed at last in crystallizing the philosophical content of the book. The first thing one notices is that both perceivers and perceived are in the same boat: they are far from happy and in frantic and endless pursuit of spiritual enlightenment and perception. As the events of the novel gradually unfurl, the reader perceives that the title of the book refers to a medieval bell that miraculously fell into the lake due a nun's adultery. Curiously enough, it is to be found and salvaged by the most obscure elements in the novel, Dora and Toby Gashe. Dora's position in this community is similar to Toby's: she is an unsuccessful art student, unlike her husband who is a famous art historian descending from a German family. Because of the tense relation between husband and wife and Paul's domineering attitudes, she is attracted to Toby, physically and emotionally. Both of them are tied to each other in a symbiotic relation. If she is unhappy in her domestic life, Toby is in a similar position. He is a student who comes to Imber Court for a short period of time and he has got nothing to with the yearnings and aspirations of that community. However, his arrival betrays a latent homosexuality in Michael, the leader of the community. This contingent element in the self-imposed discipline is explained by Murdoch herself while referring to Toby's affair with Michael,

"No power on earth could have prevented him at that moment from touching Toby" (Murdoch 1958:181).

Thus these deliberate plans will be doomed simply because human nature does not allow man to transcend his inborn weaknesses. The utopian self-constructed world is essentially fragile and its roots are too weak to resist the power of evil and the test of harsh experiences. However, the two succeed in their attempt and bring out the medieval bell from the bed of the lake. The symbolic implication of the act is self-evident: the two try to set right an old transgression. But such a gracious act is doomed to fail as evil represented by Nick, one of the members of the community will soon erupt and the sabotage of the bridge on which the bell is transported puts an abrupt end to all that. Nick undermines that bridge leading to the abbey with all its symbolic implications of the impossibility of transcending man's adulterous nature and evil intents. Critic James Gindin interprets the matter from a philosophical perspective as he states that 'the unconscious creatures survive where the human conscious venture fails' (Gindin 1963:182).

*The Bell*, then, suggests that the road to goodness is really dangerous and costly, simply because man suffers from innate selfishness and inability to transcend his egotism and unpredictable intents and purposes. In this gallery of characters, the reader is given a chance to perceive the differences in the attitudes of the different characters involved in this quest of integrity and moral righteousness. If Mrs. Mark insists on strict dogmatism and relentless discipline, there are those who can prevent themselves from succumbing to allurements and seductions. Also there is a third camp that still abides by the liberal spirit such as James Taylor. Pace, in his turn, represents the unmistakable liberal spirit as he talks to Toby, "we have our individual lives to live, haven't we? And heaven liberalism, if that sense of individual vocation is even lost" (p.18). In other words, the unmistakable individual differences among those enmeshed in that voluntary self-enclosed world are key factors in delineating every one and their subsequent reactions. Such differences are in line with Murdoch's understanding of the human situation. Nature often defeats one's conscious thought and sophisticated plans and enterprises. This discrepancy between those involved and its catastrophic ending drives the British critic Frank Kermode to deduce that there are allegorical connotations in the structure of *The Bell*, "a quasi-allegorical significance" (Todd 1984:41). The reason behind this assumption lies in the fact that the events, situations and characters in that lay community could not absolve themselves entirely from the entanglements they have done their utmost best to leave behind—perversion, evil, selfishness and lack of moral integrity. Liberals like Michael, James and Paul are too weak to change the inescapable course of things. Nick represents the evil always lurking and might erupt at any time. Dora and Toby are the outsiders whose main task is to reveal the sham righteousness of some members of the community. The disintegration of the community at the end is indicative that man's position is that of misery and anarchy no matter how careful one's plans and cautions or precautions might be. Murdoch's pessimistic view of man's existence is self-evident throughout the



whole pages of *The Bell* and its cyclic structure. In other words, the events and attitudes of the characters in the novel do represent the philosophical postulates of the writer and her conception of life and art. She argues that what happens here is one of the symptoms of the “failure of the traditional liberal philosophy to develop an adequate sense of the uniqueness and mysteriousness of the human personality” (Bergonzi 1970:57).

*The Bell* is one of Murdoch's early novels (1958) in which the author has sought to concentrate on certain leitmotifs: moral, philosophical, psychological and religious. As the action of the novel shows, these topics are inextricably entwined and interrelated. The inescapable impression the novel leaves on the reader is the inevitability of evil which can take different guises. All the efforts of the members of the community prove to be of no avail at the end. Murdoch's masterpiece, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) which won the Booker Prize runs in similar structural and thematic lines. Both of the main characters want to live in isolation, away from the distracting and madding crowds. Both find themselves involved in latent sexual desires which eventually put an end to their ambitious enterprises. In both case man's selfishness plays havoc in subverting his plans. In both the philosophy is one and invariable: determinism and fatalistic views as the characters are unable to change the status quo. Again the main character is a successful individual, a competent theatre director who has experienced the advantages and temptations of success and fame. At last he has become disillusioned with the dazzling lights of celebrity. His ambition now is to retreat and follow the steps of his mentor, Prosperous in Shakespeare's swansong, *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's memorable character seeks to abjure art and the magic of words. Here the protagonist Charles Arouby retreats to a seaside resort to write his memoirs and experiences of a very eventful life. Although Charles's description of the sea ostensibly seems neutral, it actually has much to say about his own psychological status and the forces smoldering underneath, “It affords me a curious pleasure to stand upon this bridge and watch the violent forces which the charming waves, advancing or retreating, generate within the confined space of the rocky hole” (Murdoch 1978: 21).

Accordingly, the setting of *The Bell* and its monastery and quasi-religious community of Imber Court are replaced by the sea and its vast implications. The sea here becomes a receptacle and site for a drama in which Charles is not the director as is his wont, but will be its sole agent and perceiver. He has come to this place in good faith, in the hope that it will provide him with psychological poise, “how very much I am enjoying myself here only if ...” (p.20). Such interrupted statements indicate that there is always something that spoils this much-desired peace of mind. Indeed he will be haunted by all types of demons and hallucinations which eventually suggest his restlessness and inability to materialize his dream of abjuring worldly matters. The present is always marred by the drastic impact of the past. Turning to the sea, he can only see a projection of his nightmares and concealed libido that takes different forms and manifestations:

I saw a monster rising from the waves [...]. I could also see the head with remarkable clarity, a kind of crested snake's head, green-eyed, the mouth opening to show the teeth and a pink interior (p.19).

It is through fantasy, recollection and hallucination that Shruff End becomes similar to Imber Court. In both cases, the physical seclusion is not enough. The ghosts or agents of the past keep revisiting those involved in addition to the failure to put to rest those egotistic and worldly concerns. Charles himself is very surprised at this curious situation that after the elapse of a very long time and the change in place and disposition, the memories remain unabated and green 'Can a woman's ghost, after so many years, open the doors of the heart? (p.89) Charles keeps asking himself such unanswerable questions. His self-delusion is undoubtedly the main issue and he has to learn to come to terms with reality. His situation is summed up by Katherine Weese's statement that "Charles's counter narrative returns him from his social withdrawal at Shruff End to the world of misery, contingent reality" (Weese 2001: 637).

It turns out that Shruff End is no more than a replica of the world the characters have sought to give up in the same way Imber Court was in *The Bell*. It is a drama of its own where the whims, conflicts, concealed desires and repressed yearnings engage the centre. Charles consciously or unconsciously feels entrapped once again and the more he escapes the deeper gets in the ontological maze and intellectual impasse. This is because his egotism is too overwhelming to be mitigated or overcome by such a retreat. The past is there in his mind although physically he is far away from his normal routines and practices. The actors Gilbert and Peregrine revisit him and indeed the latter almost succeeds in drowning Charles. This is because of the heated jealousy between the two men as Charles managed to seduce Peregrine's mistress and win her to his side. Peregrine's words addressed to Charles stem from the keen pain of jealousy. His words crystallize the central theme of the novel: the moral issue which constitutes the core of Murdoch's fiction:

You're an exploded myth. And you still think you're Genghis Khan [...] I can't think why I let you haunt me all these years, I suppose it was just your power and the endless spectacle of your coping well and flourishing like the green bay tree. Now you're old and done for, you'll wither away like Prospero did when he went back to Milan, you'll get pathetic and senile, and kind girls like Lizzie will visit you to cheer you up (p.399).

His cousin, who has been recently converted to Buddhism, keeps reminding Charles of his fatal faults of egotism and selfishness. Indeed, his encounters with other people and his own disquieting and woe-begonne ego, betray Charles's ontological dilemma and failure to come to terms with his unhappy situation. Significant and influential as this physical conflict is, the psychological and mental one is more harrowing as the memory does not give a moment of peace. The actresses Lizzie and Rosina revisit him as the actors have done before and

consummate the subversion inaugurated by the men. However, all this seems slight compared with the charming Hartley whose presence and remembrances shatter all his bulk and virtually put an end to his plans of living a peaceful life. Of all the list of lovers and mistresses he has known, Hartley engages a special, if not a unique, position as he loves her platonically and romantically. Or at least that is what he claims. Much to his dismay, he finds her unhappily married to a man who does not appreciate her feelings and femininity. That is what Charles keeps stating in order to convince himself about the validity of his blatant intrusion in her life and her most intimate affairs. Here his failure becomes complete. In his narration Charles tries to convince the reader and himself that her husband is a tyrant. This excessive emphasis on the injustice inflicted on her is meant to win the sympathy of the reader regarding his irrational plans of saving Hartley from her unhappy marriage. The major part of the novel is about this psychological struggle in Charles's mind which neither the sea nor the isolated place can alleviate or remove. He finds himself in a vicious circle where the egress is not foreseeable or accessible. In more than one situation Charles tells us that she has degraded herself in such an inconvenient marriage. This is an indirect way of saying that he holds an uncontrollable jealousy towards the man who has married her:

I seem to see her now, forever disfigured by that filthy, untidy, frowzy, dirty, old. How cruel and unjust. I let loose my demons; not least the sea serpent of jealousy [...] and I know that I quietly belittle her (pp.492-3).

In short, the retreat to Shruff End is a sort of a spiritual sojourn for Charles's inner life and exploration of his innermost desires particularly, his predatory and selfish concerns. Obviously the retreat could not provide the rehabilitation and better life he has been envisioning. Indeed at certain moments in the drama tasking place beside the sea, the reader automatically recalls William, Golding's fable, *Pincher Martin* (1958). In both the emphasis is laid on man's evil and egotistic and lecherous intents. In both, the protagonist shows a demonic spirit and failure to regret his former attitudes and conducts. At the end of the book, however, there is the possibility that Charles may reconsider his views and concepts in sharp contrast to Martin's invariable attitudes concerning regret and expiation of former sins.

The conclusion of the present study inevitably highlights once more Murdoch's choice of fiction that is different from, and even contradictory to, the mainstream of fiction going on in the sixties of the last century. Instead of dealing with the familiar topics of feminism and woman's rights, she has laid her stress on the moral, psychological and philosophical questions. She tends to emphasize the reactions and judgments of men. Indeed her representation of man in *The Bell* and *The Sea*, *The Sea* is convincing enough. She has involved her characters in a complex web of relations and through these the reader is offered a chance of perceiving and appreciating their inner struggles and deepest drives. The two novels either state the philosophical principles

directly or the behaviors and attitudes of the characters in question show that in addition to the authorial intrusions and explications through her spokesmen. Ordinary objects in both carry actual and symbolic suggestions such as the bell, sea, and even ephemeral situations such as the demonic scenes of Charles's past. In both novels, the structure is cyclic and brings the reader to the same starting point. The dreams of the main characters in both novels prove to a mere mirage and an act of self-deception. In both the past and the contingent destroy all these hopes and expectations. In both disintegration and disillusionment set in. The pessimistic tone of the two novels is outstanding in that the author in both novels has provided the reader with moments of pleasure, suspense, enlightenment, intellectual stimuli. This is perhaps the message of any serious work.

The duality of art and life which informs the whole structure of *The Bell*, is forcibly present here as well. The contingent and incidental which life endlessly poses is put face to face with the artificial form that art entails and supplies. Life is given the priority in both cases and art seems too weak to bring the solace and order the author and her characters badly need.

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