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IRIS MURDOCH: THEORY AND PRACTICE - CHARACTERIZATION
IN "THE SEA, THE SEA".

Iris Murdoch has a significant place among the contemporary British novelists. She is a trained and practicing philosopher as well as an extremely prolific writer of fiction. Her work attempts to marry philosophy and art providing intellectual interest on the one hand and on the other the pure enjoyment to be derived from a good story. Iris Murdoch is also one of the novelists who are very much concerned nowadays with the state of the novel in our contemporary world. In her essays, reviews and articles that have been published since 1953, Iris Murdoch has expressed her critical theory of fiction. The ideas contained in this theory are based on her philosophy which should be reviewed prior to an examination of her statements concerning fictional portrayal of character, since her method of characterization, which is the main subject of this study, derives from her philosophical concept of personality.

Miss Murdoch strongly believes in the idea that people are precious and unique and she persists in this age of dehumanization in advocating that novelists should create characters according to this understanding. The major influence on Iris Murdoch as a philosopher was Wittgenstein, but also Plato, Kant and to a certain extent Hegel and Kierkegaard. Her main interest is in moral philosophy and although Iris Murdoch holds no dogmatic religious belief she feels recently close to certain

religious attitudes which are most easily expressed for her in Buddhist terms though she is not a Buddhist herself. Explaining morality in a philosophical sense cannot be done without the reintroduction of certain concepts which in the recent years have often been regarded as metaphysical. Here, especially two concepts seem to attract Miss Murdoch: Kant's idea based on the assumption that to act morally is to act for the sake of duty and the only test of a moral action is whether it is done in accordance with and for the sake of duty; but there is also the natural human desire to evade what is obviously one's duty. The second concept is a platonic one and includes the notion that "good" is very far away and one's task is to transform oneself, to discard selfishness and undergo a very long process of conversion towards the closest possible realization of goodness. Hence, Iris Murdoch's philosophical interest is social morality rather than a moral code or a set of principles. In her philosophical essays Iris Murdoch has been attacking the tendency towards vanishing of the philosophical self, together with the confident filling in of the scientific self in our contemporary environment, which has led in ethics to an inflated and yet empty conception of the will. The idea of life as self-enclosed and purposeless is not only a product of the despair of our age but also a natural result of the advance of science. Thus, very important is the realization that "human beings are far more complicated, enigmatic and ambiguous than language or mathematical concepts, and selfishness operates in a much more devious and frenzied manner in our relations with them. Ignorance, muddle, fear, wishful thinking, lack of tests often make us feel that moral choice is something arbitrary, a matter of personal rather than attentive study."^{1/}

As a philosopher Iris Murdoch sees the twentieth century individual's dilemma as one in which there is "far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality."^{2/} This contemporary dilemma results from a line of Romantic philosophy stemming from Kant through Hegel to the Existentialists /S.Kierkegaard and J.P.Sartre/ and the Linguistic Empirists

/G.E.Moore, L.Wittgenstein/. At present Iris Murdoch sees two important philosophies - existentialism and linguistic empiricism. Modern man is under the influence of the Sartrean Totalitarian Man and the Linguistic Analysts' Ordinary Language Man, the former representing "the surrender to neurosis", the latter representing "the surrender to convention" and neither provides "a standpoint for considering real human beings in their variety."^{3/} For Iris Murdoch both philosophies tend towards solipsism. Neither pictures virtue as concerned with anything real outside the self. She calls for a redefinition of the esthetic experience in line with Kant's distinction between the sublime and beautiful introducing her own esthetics which are roughly three: "Art and morals are with certain provisos, one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals; it is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality."^{4/} Here, Iris Murdoch closely duplicates the critical theory of her husband, John Bayley in "The Characters of Love".

The twentieth century man has lost his moral concepts, love among them, and whereas the nineteenth century writers had a universal set of norms which they could appeal to, the contemporary artists feel compelled to communicate more personal and unique statements. Iris Murdoch herself is inclined to follow Prof. Hampshire's suggestion "that we should abandon the image /dear to the British empirists/ of man as detached observer, and should picture him as an object moving among other objects in a continual flow of intention into action."^{5/} And the only way out of the problem, as Iris Murdoch sees it, is in a certain transformation of concepts and a new vocabulary of attention which come from what she calls "love". As John Bayley points out, "love is not a theme that can be penetratingly explored, compassionately revealed. It cannot be revealed at all, it can only be embodied. The author cannot show us

what love is like, but his characters - and only his characters - can create it for us in the reality of their separate and unique existence."^{6/} Although Iris Murdoch's definitions of love are numerous, they all imply the imaginative recognition of, and respect for otherness. Implicit in this definition is her idea of "the opacity of persons". Equally as important as love and the acknowledgment that others exists independently, to her concept of personality and therefore important to her ideas of character creation, is what is called by the writer "freedom". It is very difficult to distinguish clearly between love and freedom as Iris Murdoch defines them. "Freedom is knowing and understanding and respecting things quite other than ourselves."^{7/} This definition is very close to the concept of love, the only difference may be suggested by the emphasis on "imaginative" regarding "love" and on "knowing" regarding "freedom". One might gather that love is to be associated with the contemplation and apprehension of others and freedom is to be associated with moral action. On the other hand it might be said that love is a function of freedom, i.e., once one is free to know, understand and respect things other than oneself, one can love that otherness. This insistence upon the need for freedom of the individual, real or fictional, plays a major part in Iris Murdoch's theory of personality and a significant role in her method of characterization.

At the centre of Iris Murdoch's writings about personality is her concern with the contingent, from which proceeds her conception of reality; reality in which real people exist as part of mystery, myth and symbol so the real people are complicated, enigmatic and ambiguous. The main conviction is that man's mind - hence also his personality - suffers when he holds the belief that reality is complete, that chance is explicable. She demands acceptance of the accidental, the unlikely and the improbable. It seems that Iris Murdoch tries to offer an objective view of the human condition insisting on the

reality of things outside the self. This, then, is the base of Iris Murdoch's theory of personality. The individual is unique and opaque. He is composed of fact, myth and unknowableness, must learn through the exercise of love and freedom that others exist independently of himself. He can apprehend this "otherness" only when his moral concepts are transformed. One way that the individual may come to new concepts is through literature. "It is here that literature is so important, especially since it has taken over some of the tasks formely performed by philosophy. Through literature we can re-discover a sense of the density of our lives."^{8/} Recognition of these concepts and qualities and then fictional portrayal of them in the novel require what Iris Murdoch calls "tolerance" on the part of the novelist, tolerance which is equivalent to love in her theory of personality. This theory may now be applied to her method of characterization.

The modern novelist, like the modern man, has lost his moral referents and this results in his inability to create convincing characters. Iris Murdoch advocates a return to the concept of characterization found in the great novels of G.Eliot and J.Austen. "The great novels /of the nineteenth century/ are victims neither of convention nor of neurosis. The social sense is a life-giving framework and not a set of dead conventions or stereotyped setting inhabited by stock characters. And the individuals portrayed in the novels are free, independent of their author, and not merely puppets in their exteriorization of some closely locked psychological conflict of his own."^{9/} Iris Murdoch believes that human figures in fiction possess the attributes of those in real life and their creation poses for the reader and the writer the same ethical problems that arise in life. In "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" Iris Murdoch argued that "a novel must be a house fit for free characters to live in; and to combine form with respect for reality with all its contingent ways in the highest art of prose."^{10/}

Here comes the question whether she has allowed her own characters enough autonomy and tolerance to become realistic. Extradinarily prolific, beginning with "Under the Net" in 1954, Iris Murdoch has written so far twenty novels, the most recent one being "Nuns and Soldiers" /1980/. She has also written three plays, "The Servants and the Snow" /1970/, "The Three Arrows" /1972/ and "Art and Eros: A Platonic Dialogue" /1980/. In 1980 Iris Murdoch rewrote "The Servants and the Snow" into a libretto. A writer so immensely productive is unlikely to write always at the top of her bent, nor is she likely altogether to avoid repetition of plot, situation, characterization and theme. But no doubt, Iris Murdoch's theoretical bias gains expression in her novels in the form of closely observed character interaction. Miss Murdoch's usual technique is to set a group of characters around some abstract theme, generally of a rather philosophical nature. They serve, through their varying situations and relationships to illustrate, elaborate and expand the central concept. As a novelist Iris Murdoch dramatizes her ethical concerns by increasingly demonizing the existentialist, solipsistic hero who rejects the "messy reality" of involvement with others in order to pursue what he perversely sees as freedom and romance. By failing to see reality as worthy of loving exploration, Iris Murdoch's protagonist is compelled to rely exclusively on personal values as his sole guide to morality. The resulting psychological distortions to which such solipsism is liable cuts a man off completely from others and from society. Such a sickness can be cured only by an act of imagination which Iris Murdoch identifies with love. The response of all the characters to community is complicated by the paradox of their personalities: although the isolated characters long to be a part of a familiar, social or national group, they are at the same time solipsists who rely chiefly on will, ego and power in order to manipulate the behaviour of others according to their own systems and beliefs. For Iris Murdoch, morality grows out of actual encounters with others and the crucial quality in such encounters is an imaginative love

that delights in the otherness.

The most fascinating character type is probably the Learning Protagonist, a typical hero of a Bildungsroman in a modern form, who experiences situations that force him to confront the reality of others and undergo a process of spiritual education, e.g., Jake in "Under the Net", Martin Lynch-Gibbon in "Severed Head" or John Ducane in "The Nice and the Good". The Learning Protagonist often coincides with the Artist type who has great independence, little concern for reputation and appearances /Jake Donnaghue in "Under the Net", Michael Meade in "The Bell", Bradley Pearson in "The Black Prince" or Charles Arrowby in "The Sea, The Sea"/. The Artist type is nearly always presented in contrast to the Saint type, like Hugo Belfounder, Bledyard in "The Sandcastle", J.Tayper Pace in "The Bell", Taillis Browne in "A Fairly Honourable Defeat" or James in "The Sea, The Sea". Another adult category is that of East European refugees who are exotic, rootless, suffering types. They are frequently demonic in their effects on others /"Flight from the Enchanter", "Nuns and Soldiers"/. The refugees blend into another type, more native to Iris Murdoch, powerful, godlike or tyrannical characters. For reasons of esthetic effectiveness, the author always keeps such characters at a distance and one is never in close contact with an inner view of their nature /Mischa Fox, Honor Klein, Emma Sands/. One encounters also a group of adolescent girls, mindlessly amoral in one way and fiendishly clever in another, who are obsessed with an older man /e.g., Annette in "Flight from the Enchanter" and Julian in "The Black Prince"/.

The range of Iris Murdoch's characters is very wide within the milieu of upper middle class professionals. Although her works are seldom organized around a single person she seems generally more comfortable with male protagonist than female. In almost all her novels the reader is encouraged to sympathize with characters who later turn out to be incompetent or immoral. When these

deficiencies are fully revealed the reader is urged to take the lesson to heart. Life is an art and the greatest artist according to Iris Murdoch is the individual who learns about himself through the knowledge of others. The only way we can achieve selfhood, Iris Murdoch insists, is to immerse ourselves in the opacity of others. All the characters who are dedicated to nonhuman goals suffer from loneliness and undergo painful education /e.g., Jake, Paul Greenfield/. The picaresque novel and especially the plotted novel furnish the situations needed for personalities to reveal themselves. As a social entity man discovers himself in action, in interpersonal encounters.

For Charles Arrowby in "The Sea, The Sea" this process is especially tragic and painful as it takes place towards the end of his life. The novel itself in many ways continues the line already present in "The Black Prince" /1973/. It also reminds of Iris Murdoch's earlier novel "A Severed Head" /1961/, the background of which seems to be taken primarily from oriental mythology and literature. In common with many books of Iris Murdoch the novel uses first person narration and cumulatively undermines the narrator's originally self-confident perception of order in the things and people around him. Charles, the main character and narrator of the story, is a retired theatre director. He is recording the events as they happen to him and evoke certain memories from the past, thus using the form of autobiography. Charles, like Bradley Pearson in "The Black Prince" and Iris Murdoch herself, seems to be perplexed by the problem how to characterize people in the story, "How can one describe the real people? /.../ I must work harder on those portraits. Perhaps that is what the book will turn out to be, simply my life told in a series of portraits of the people I have known." /"The Sea, The Sea", p.88/

At the age of sixty Charles Arrowby retires to his sea-side cottage "Shruff End" hoping for peaceful life of simplicity /no electricity, fridge, hot water, laundry/ but instead he experiences the biggest shock of his life. In the nearby village of Narrowdean he meets the woman he

was deeply in love with in his youth and whom he lost from sight for over forty years. All his passionate feelings revive once more in spite of the fact that his youthful love, Mary Hartley Smith, is a pale, uninteresting, old woman married to a Benjamin Fitch. Charles nevertheless decides to rescue her from the marital inferno he considers her to be living in. Here starts the tragedy of all the people involved together with Charles in this attempt. In due course, this love destroys the main protagonist as he appears to be trapped in his own fiction, living in his dream world of youthful memories. His love was an end in itself on the basis of which he was trying to build his earthly paradise seizing Hartley, as he preferred to call her, and her adopted son Titus for his egoistic purposes. Pursuing Titus and vowing to set him up financially and professionally, a Ulysses after his Telemachus or Bloom in search of Stephen Dedalus, Charles causes Titus's death by drowning. Hartley and her husband escape from Charles's influence and manage to go to Australia. His friends leave him one by one and eventually he is left alone - an old, miserable man who has wasted his life.

Basically speaking one can note here the familiar Murdochian dialectic: contingency battling and defeating myth. It might be questioned, however, whether this novel is not an art that deals principally in abstract metaphors for contingency. In order to answer this problem one has to analyse several aspects of the novel. "The Sea, The Sea" may be viewed from at least three different points of view - thematically, it is no doubt a love story, no matter how unusual it may seem but it is also a typical detective story with certain elements of modern gothic novel; metaphorically, it is a beautiful poetic novel about evil, egoism and profound human tragedy, a story full of moral significance; structurally, it is a narrative with a very interesting author - narrator - reader relationship.

Charles chose the form of autobiography so he is the one who characterizes himself and all the other people

taking part in the story. In such an arrangement it is very important to realize to what extent the narrator is reliable, how much the reader ought to believe him and how he should cooperate with the author in order to understand the main protagonist and all the characters fully. In Iris Murdoch's creation of Charles Arrowby there must be a lot of co-operation and even creation on the part of the reader because it is only when the reader realizes more than the narrator that the total moral meaning of the novel may be grasped. While reading the story it is obvious that there are many things that Charles either hides from the reader of his story or he himself does not understand. It is through the portraits of the other characters, and especially their behaviour in certain situations, that Charles's true character is revealed. The introductory paragraph may already cause some doubts on the part of the reader, "I am Charles Arrowby and, as I write this, I am, shall we say, over sixty years of age. I am wifeless, childless, brotherless, sisterless. I am my well-known self, made glittering and brittle by fame." /p.3/ The reader might ask himself: does Charles really know himself so well? How can he be so sure and self-confident? These basic questions make the reader more cautious while reading and in fact there are many moments in the novel which prove that we cannot entirely trust him and believe in everything he says. Especially so that even Charles himself is not quite sure of all the things he sees around. He has hallucinations which might be caused by his experiments in the past with LSD. As a writer Charles is conscious of the importance of credulity on the part of the reader and thus he says, "I could write all sorts of fantastic nonsense about my life in these memoirs and everybody would believe it! Such is human credulity, the power of the printed word, and of any well known "name" or "show business personality". Even if readers claim that they "take it all with a grain of salt" they do not really. They yearn to believe, because believing is easier than disbelieving and because anything that is

written down is likely to be "true in any way". I trust this passage reflection will not lead anyone to doubt the truth of any part of this story." /p.76/

Apart from having visual illusions of sea-monsters and faces at windows or having nightmares, Charles also likes to drink a lot of whisky and Beaujolais and frequently visits the Black Lion pub or is drowing his sorrows in the Raven Hotel bar. Taking all this into account we might say that Charles is partly reliable narrator. This device in narrative originates in Henry James's writings and in fact the novel bears many resemblances to Henry James's short story "The Beast in the Jungle", especially on the metaphorical level. John Marcher's realization of the jungle of his life is very similar to Charles's understanding of his life. They both have their hallucinations, John Marcher of the lurking Beast and Charles of the open mouth of the sea-monsters; both had wasted their lives and come to this understanding only too late. For Marcher the reason lies in the fact of misunderstanding his inner sense of being kept for something special and thus rejecting love, the most precious thing in his life; for Charles it is the misconception of love and reality. Those sea-monsters that Charles sees puzzle his orderly structurings of reality. They symbolize evil and egoism of the main character. In both narrative structures the main protagonist is mistaken or sometimes he believes to have qualities which the author denies him. In both cases the reader cooperates with the author to create his vision of the characters. In "The Sea, The Sea" we observe how Charles simultaneously uncovers himself. The full picture of Charles that gradually emerges is that of a typical hedonist who enjoys the company of women, likes to drink and eat well /lots of excellent recipes included in the memoir/. But he also turns out to be a self-centered, extremely jealous and egocentric man, unable to give or even take love and share other people's feelings.

The most influential person in Charles's life was an actress, Clement Makin, his first mistress who was at

least twenty years older than Charles. Although now long dead, she is, as Charles himself admits, all the time present in his psyche: "Would I have ever met Hartley if I had not become Clement's possession? Clement stretched over the years, she was the one permanent thing, only removed by death. I had been her lover, her creation, her business partner; the nearest thing she ever had to a husband, finally her middle-age never-estranged son. The transformation of my love for Clement, its metamorphosis, had been one of the main tasks and achievements of my life: that love which so often almost failed but never quite failed." /p.244/ Charles had also other love affairs but they all seemed to boost his ego only; he could never give himself fully to another person. Perhaps realizing this inability he says, "marriage is a sort of brainwashing which breaks the mind into the acceptance of so many horrors. How untidy and ugly and charmless married people often let themselves become without even noticing it. I sometimes reflect on these horrors in order to delight myself thinking how I have escaped them!" /p.52/ But he is not really happy having escaped. He is madly jealous of other people's happiness and takes great pleasure in destroying it. He steals his friend's, Perregrine Arbelow, wife Rosina Vamburgh, destroys their marriage and after a brief affair leaves her for another woman, Lizzie Scherer. Although he soon realizes that he acted badly he feels no remorse. He simply enjoys playing with people's feelings and likes to play the part of the most powerful one.

When Charles had decided to retire to his sea-side cottage, he thought he would leave his past behind. He does not understand however, that one cannot interfere in somebody's life without consequences, and that one cannot escape responsibility and duty. All the characters that Charles treated so unjustly and who suffered because of him turn up at Shruff End as if to haunt like "demon trails from the past". First arrives a letter from Lizzie who still deeply loves Charles in spite of the fact that she is the one who is familiar with his bad character and

rightly sums it up when she says, "...you're like a very good dancer, you make other people dance but it's got to be with you. You don't respect people, you don't see them..." /p.45/ Charles cannot understand how much Lizzie loves him, he has just a feeling of ownership about her and delights in this power relationship, so typical of many Murdochian characters. When Lizzie informs him in the same letter that she lives with their mutual friend, Gilbert Opian, another actor, a homosexual, Charles is insanely jealous of this relationship based on pure friendship. Now that he is getting old, he feels he might need Lizzie and considers taking her back with whatever methods he can. "As for my stern policy with Lizzie," Charles writes, "I really have nothing to lose. If she delays too long I shall go and fetch her. If she still tries to say no I shall not take it for an answer /.../ If she really decides in the end not to come then that will prove she is not worthy of me." /p.99/ This feeling of extreme jealousy has been deeply rooted in Charles's life since his childhood which is clearly seen in the portrait of his cousin James and his parents. As a child Charles was fascinated and yet envious of his rich and glamorous uncle Abel and his wife Estelle. At the same time he was very much ashamed of his own parents. James had a much better start than Charles, he became a professional soldier and then spent a long time in India. Charles pretended not to be interested in his cousin but was rather pleased when he heard about his failures. "One day," he writes in the memoir, "a friend /it was Wilfred/, meeting him by accident, said, "What a disappointed man your cousin seems to be." A light broke, and I felt better at once. /.../ My own feeling that I have "won the game" comes partly from a sense that he has been disappointed by life, whereas I have not." /p.66/ This self-satisfaction will lead him eventually to his life tragedy, when only too late he realizes that the source of evil, symbolized by the sea-monsters, is in his own



When Rosina turns up at Shruff End she tries to explain that she is a part of Charles's life just like all the others are. When she is introduced in the story Charles mistakes her for a ghost and she pretends to be one. But in fact it is the past that haunts him and the sad thing is that he does not understand it even when Rosina points out, "you want women but you are never interested in the people you want, so you learn nothing." /p.108/ Charles misinterprets people's reactions and explains everything in a way that suits him. When back in London he reviewed the evidence of his first meeting with Mary and Benjamin Fitch, he had an explanation ready too, "Hartley loved me and had long regretted losing me. How could she not? She did not love her husband. How could she? He was mentally undistinguished; there was no wit or spiritual sweetness in that man. He was physically unattractive with his big unshapely sensual mouth and his look of cropped schoolboy. And he was, it seemed, a barbarian and a bully. He was a tyrant, probably a chronically jealous man, a dull resentful dog, a limited slut-in fellow with no sense of the joy of life." /p.158/ Charles does not know that Ben had always remembered him and even suspected that Titus was his son. Ben's ideas about Charles have been like demons in their marriage and as James explains it to Charles Mary's marriage "may not have been happy, but it has survived a long time. You think too much about happiness, Charles. It is not at all that important." /p.334/ Charles has not enough courage to look into the core of the truth about his life and he even lies to himself. He cannot stand the fact that it was Mary who had left him and not vice versa. How could a woman leave HIM, Charles Arrowby, the famous personality? So he finds excuses for his own use and tries to fool others too. Hence, Charles lives in his private hell and often not realizing it makes hell for the others. Kidnapping Hartley and keeping her in his house Charles does not see how cruel he is in his "act of love". James tries to convince him that time can divorce people from the reality of others and turn them into ghosts. Yet, Charles's



preoccupation with the past only allows him to exercise his power. Hartley does not coincide with the dream figure and he is not able to transform her.

In contrast to Hartley, both Rosina and Lizzie emerge as very fascinating, handsome and feminine characters, full of energy and joy of life. Their portraits are those of typical modern women. All the female characters seen through Charles's eyes are not quite fully presented by him and it is up to the reader to draw the final conclusions. The most ambiguous is definitely the portrait of the main heroine, Hartley. We never have a full picture because of the specific form of the narrative. The total organization is such that there are many problems open to the reader and for him to decide. Some characters are stereotyped by Charles but more often than not these stereotypes are reversed in the course of the story. When Charles is pushed into the sea, nearly losing his life, he jumps confidently into the conclusion that his attacker is Ben. The assailant turns out to be Perregrine, stereotyped hitherto as a drunken Irishman. He later subverts this judgement by opening a very good theatre in Londonderry and becoming quite famous as a propagandist for peace in Ireland. Unfortunately, soon comes the news that Perregrine has been murdered by terrorists in Londonderry. It is Perry who delivers the climatic denunciation of Charles as someone who cannot grasp "the stuff of reality", "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 you doing 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. At least they will for a while. You never did anything for mankind, you never did a damn thing for anybody except yourself." /p.399/ And towards the end of the novel Charles is no longer in the lime-light and people tend to forget him. Rosina had to start a few rumours to keep his memory alive and Charles is very disappointed when in the last part of his memoir,

significantly enough entitled "Life Goes On", he discovers sadly that someone on a BBC quiz did not know who he was.

Charles emerges from the story as a typical Murdochian powerful, god-like character. He is interested in people only as long as they serve his purpose. He became interested in Titus because he needed him mainly to keep Hartley. Later on when Charles had to take Hartley back home he also stops being interested in Titus. Charles's lack of responsibility causes Titus's death in the sea. Charles feels very possessive towards other people and he does not understand that the only condition for a life to be fulfilled is the appreciation and acceptance of others. The contrast to Charles in these terms is obviously James - the Saint type. James is interested in other people and tries to understand them and help them as much as he can /e.g., helping Lizzie to keep in touch with Charles, rescuing Charles, having some interest in Titus etc./. It is only in the end of the novel that Charles realizes that he and James might have been good and close friends. Like so many other Murdochian characters, Charles goes through a tragicomic education in which he makes a painful discovery of the power and virtue of contingent life. Through the exercise of love and freedom he must learn the cruel truth that others exist independently of himself. James emerges, in this context, as the most powerful character with an aura of mysticism around him. James's flat in Pimlico constitutes an interesting background for the understanding of his character. The descriptions of his appearance also prove that he is quite an unusual person and, although he does not admit it, Charles is full of admiration for his cousin. The unusual aspect of James's nature makes that he is always present in the most crucial moments in the story and he also seems to know more people from Charles's circle than Charles might think. Iris Murdoch points out in an interview that "James in "The Sea, The Sea" is too mystical in that he is pictured as a Buddhist and interested in the magical tradition. He represents somebody

who has in a way sold out to magic. He is a spiritual being and as such he is incomprehensible to his cousin. James lives in a demonic world, he is a demonic figure, he is a demonic figure and he has got the spirituality of somebody who can do good, but also do harm. He is a complicated fantasist because he is a religious one. He is somebody who is really hooked on the absolute, he has got a religious passion but he is also in love with the magical aspect of religion which of course is anti-religious. This is one of the paradoxes of religion that it is partly magical, but that in a way magic is the greatest enemy of religion."¹¹/ Although they never come to a very close contact in a way James's problem may be seen as the same as Charles's. Charles attempts to give up magic, that is theatre and to give up power and he does not succeed. James has apprehended his own problem about giving up magic. He wants to die well and he wants to release himself from the wheel; he is afraid that he has enmeshed too deeply in the magical side of religion. On the other hand James could be thought of as having saved himself because he "goes on" in the book, even influences Charles's life after his death. And as James's Indian doctor P.R. Teang writes, "Mr Arrowby died in happiness achieving all." He died by will power and Charles can hardly believe that James is dead, especially when he recalls their last conversation in Shruff End about reincarnation, nirvana and the wheel of attachments, desires. The novel ends with a rhetorical question and a frightening image when Charles says, sitting in the flat inherited after James, "My God, that bloody casket has fallen on the floor /.../ the lid has come off and whatever was inside it has certainly got out. Upon the demon-ridden pilgrimage what next I wander?" /p.502/

In "The Sea, The Sea" we encounter the familiar Murdochian pattern based on two main conflicts : between symbol and "the losely contingent man" and that of the self-conscious person struggling against another for domination or for separation from him. According to Iris

Murdoch's theory of characterization all figures in a novel should be first of all pictures of individuals as they are perceived in real life. In "The Sea, The Sea" she certainly achieved the "freedom" of the main characters. One of the paradoxes of Iris Murdoch's art seems to be the convincing presentation of all the characters in balance with the atmosphere of contingency and poetic freedom. In "The Sea, The Sea" these concepts partly overshadow some of the secondary characters. But Iris Murdoch is her own best critic here saying that "The creation of character is a difficult thing. I'm not yet particularly good at it. My plot and the kind of central magic are so strong that they tend to draw the characters too much towards the centre."^{12/}

Much modern fiction is fiction about fiction, art about art, deliberately exploiting or displaying its own artificiality. In this respect Iris Murdoch's writings, including "The Sea, The Sea", show a typically modern tendency. Yet, at the same time, she insists on the mimetic aspect in literature. In this sense she continues the nineteenth century tradition in English literature. Iris Murdoch develops and continues the tradition of Henry James's writings adding at the same time her deep, modern psychological insight, interesting variety of themes and methods of characterization and narration. She creates characters who exist in the spirit of traditional omniscient author, but they are placed in mythic and psychic relations of a typically modern kind. The characters are means of bridging two worlds - they move and function in easily identifiable real world of present-day England, but they themselves and their acts are embodiments of the symbolic ideas which transcend the ordinary world into the meaningful and significant realm of art. Iris Murdoch is definitely not guilty, like some of the modern writers, of locking her own private conflicts into the characters. Here is the vision of a more universal predicament and ever important meaning. For Iris Murdoch, like for Jane Austen and George Eliot, art is a means of giving moral guidance and Miss Murdoch is the most profoundly moral

spokesman. Her moral goal is not only to show the instability of reality but also to demonstrate that each social situation is so densely particular that it generates its own perception and value. Her novels are not novels of consciousness; it is as if the myth carries the function of consciousness, rather than the inner lives of the characters. Iris Murdoch's awareness of the necessity for authorial tolerance stems from her theorizing about personality, especially about love and freedom as enemies of neurosis and convention which she sees as destructive elements in the modern novel. All these problems are conveyed to the reader by means of rather traditional techniques but used with great artistic subtlety and enriched by fascinating modern aspects.

NOTES

- 1 I. Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good, p.86.
- 2 I. Murdoch, "Against Dryness", p.23.
- 3 I. Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited", p.254.
- 4 *ibid.*, p.270.
- 5 I. Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good, p.6.
- 6 J. Bayley, The Characters of Love, p.266.
- 7 I. Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited", p.276.
- 8 I. Murdoch, "Against Dryness", p.20.
- 9 I. Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited", p.257.
- 10 *ibid.*, p.258.
- 11 Ch. Bigsby, Interview with Iris Murdoch.
- 12 O. Bellamy, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch", p.139.

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Streszczenie

Iris Murdoch: teoria i praktyka - charakteryzacja
w "The Sea, The Sea"

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie postaci literackiej w twórczości niezwykle popularnej powieściopisarki angielskiej Iris Murdoch i koncentruje się na omówieniu jej założeń krytyczno - literackich oraz na szczegółowej analizie metody charakteryzacji postaci w dziewiętnastej z kolei powieści "The Sea, The Sea" /1978/.

W swej twórczości krytycznej, publikowanej od 1953 roku, Iris Murdoch stworzyła teorię powieści, która opiera się na jej filozoficznych poglądach ukształtowanych przede wszystkim pod wpływem Platona, Kanta i Wittgensteina oraz w mniejszym stopniu Hegla i Kierkegaarda. Jednocześnie Iris Murdoch wprowadza swoją własną koncepcję, zgodnie z którą sztuka i moralność tworzą jedno pojęcie, a jego podstawą

jest miłość, rozumiana jako fakt twórczego respektowania i akceptowania drugiego, całkowicie niezależnego człowieka. Tylko poprzez miłość, a stąd również sztukę i moralność, można odkrywać fascynującą rzeczywistość otaczającego nas świata.

We współczesnym, tak bardzo niehumanitarnym świecie szczególnie ważna jest rola pisarza i jego zdolność tworzenia ciekawych i bliskich czytelnikowi postaci. Iris Murdoch widzi jedyną możliwość realizacji tego zadania w nawiązaniu do koncepcji charakteryzacji występującej w powieściach XIX wieku. Dlatego też w swoim powieściopisarstwie Iris Murdoch stara się kontynuować wielką tradycję literacką realistów XIX wieku.

Metoda charakteryzacji głównych postaci w "The Sea, The Sea" jest ściśle związana z teorią postaci literackiej wyrażoną przez pisarkę w jej pracach krytyczno - literackich. Iris Murdoch nawiązuje do tradycji, a jednocześnie wzbogaca swoje powieści o bardzo ciekawe artystycznie i wybitnie nowoczesne aspekty.