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Research Article

The Questions of Artistic Detachment and Tranquil Recollection in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea*

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ABSTRACT

Iris Murdoch's 1978 novel *The Sea, the Sea* portrays an artist protagonist who mistakenly believes that it would be easy for him to detach from the glitter of life in London. After retiring from the theatre, the famous stage director and playwright Charles Arrowby decides to withdraw from what he has been accustomed to doing. He buys an old house in a coastal village where he thinks he will be able to recollect past emotions in tranquillity and write an autobiographical memoir. This is a clear reference to William Wordsworth's particular idea of poetry. Yet, this becomes Charles's most critical mistake as well, for life in the seaside village will bring him even more turbulence as he is away from the dazzling atmosphere of the theatre neither mentally nor bodily. His mind is always occupied with most of the names he has left behind in London. Besides, some of Charles's old friends who are seeking a chance for revenge for his past misdeeds come to the village in order to blackmail and threaten him. As if his troubles are not enough, Charles meets his teenage love in the village, which turns him into an example of the ridiculous character of the Aristotelian theory of comedy and further spoils his supposed tranquillity. This study thus examines the notions of artistic detachment and tranquil recollection as two Wordsworthian concepts misconceived by Murdoch's protagonist.

Keywords: Detachment, tranquillity, recollection, art, artist

Introduction

Iris Murdoch's fictional narratives are often famous for their meticulously conceived upper-middle-class male protagonists. Featuring the noble and chivalric nature of medieval courtly lovers who mostly serve to entertain the gentry (Tucker, 1986, p. 378), these protagonists are illustrated to be ageing but highly qualified men who typically choose to lead a quiet and tranquil life. Such a life is in direct contrast to what they had had when they were younger when problematic marriages, stormy love relationships, uneasy attachments, and troubled friendships had been the order of the day. The most

notable examples of these central figures in Murdoch's fictional oeuvre are the enchanter Mishca Fox of *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), the wine merchant Martin Lynch-Gibbon of *A Severed Head* (1961), the retired civil servant Hugh Peronett of *An Unofficial Rose* (1962) and the legal advisor John Ducane of *The Nice and the Good* (1968). Drawing on Murdoch's life and her profession as a novelist and philosopher, these protagonists are also said to be artists whose lives typically contrast with those of saints (Burke, 1987, p. 489). One of the best illustrations of these characters is the noted author and literary critic Bradley Pearson of Murdoch's 1973 James Tait Black Memorial Prize winner novel *The Black Prince*. The novel opens with the depiction of a married couple who have been in a turmoil of relationships. Bradley finds himself in the centre of these and seeks to evade whatever he considers could be threatening. These characters intend to keep themselves isolated from the people around who are their friends, partners, relatives and even lovers. They conceive of a new period of life in which they will enjoy being unattached and having no responsibilities although they will still remain indispensable elements of their conventional social circles.

Murdoch's 1978 Booker Prize winner novel *The Sea, the Sea* is no exception to this. Pursuing the same descriptive practice, the book presents an easily discernible Murdochian protagonist who discloses that he is fed up with what he believes his renowned name and prominent reputation have brought about. Murdoch's protagonist, who is the retired but very well-known stage director Charles Arrowby, considers that his life has been in a state of turbulence and chaos generated by the women with whom he has once had close relationships. This is exactly the same argument that Charles uses when he decides to detach himself from what he has been accustomed to doing in London, namely living in the dazzling atmosphere of the theatre. This was once the life of an outstanding young man who had been absorbed not only in the joy of art but also in the agony of greed, jealousy, and intrigue. Charles resolves to withdraw from the city which he believes to be a metaphor for what he wants to leave behind. He buys an old house named Shruff End by the sea, which lacks the satisfaction of a Kensington flat, and settles in a northern coastal village called Narrowdean in order to write a "novelistic memoir" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 257) – or, a diary, a journal, a novel – which is the impressive narrative of Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea*.

Charles's memoir will be a work of art, for he has arranged that his narrative should be read as the confession of an artist who now lives alone. However, Charles's reference to epitomize the artist in seclusion is mostly a reference to the philosophy of art

accentuated in English literature by William Wordsworth in his Preface to the second edition of his 1798 collection of poems, *Lyrical Ballads*. As drawn up by Wordsworth in the late eighteenth century, a poetic composition is the outcome of the artist's recollection of his aesthetic background which is necessary to be remembered in moments of tranquillity. The particular problem for Charles arises here in the formulation of this aesthetic principle. Therefore, the main point of the argument in this study is to figure out how Charles falsely interprets Wordsworth's discussion about the process of artistic creation. It is proposed that almost the whole story Charles tells chronicles the reasons for and consequences of his misinterpretation of Wordsworth's idea of poetry. Wordsworth's definition relies not only on the artist's competence to look back on past experience, for "recollecting demands an inquisitive, sometimes a revisionary, backward look" (Corn, 1999, p. 359), but also on his strength to recollect the same experience in a peaceful mind, which hardly corresponds to Charles's artistic experience. In other words, the origin of Charles's inevitability to achieve tranquil recollection becomes not only the biggest question of his autobiographical narrative but also the initial inquiry made in this paper.

The Wordsworthian notion of artistic detachment would never be a complicated concept if it were regarded as the practice of seeking solitude. Charles believes that he has detached himself from what stands for the past, for he has left his city life behind and commenced living a new life in order to cook delicious food, swim every day, walk long distances and write an autobiographical memoir. It is from this moment on that he is going to have enough time to write an autobiographical account through which the reader will be given an authentic expression of his personal history. He assumes that he will be able to recollect the emotions on which his memoir as a work of art will be built. Nevertheless, this is where Charles's disillusionment surfaces. He is disillusioned since, as stated in Wordsworth's interpretation, emotions are recollected in the tranquillity of the physical environment in which the artist is experiencing the same mental state of peacefulness. In the case of Charles's experience, although he has abandoned the theatre, to his surprise, almost all the problematic names show up not only in Narrowdean but also in Shruff End. This practically means that Charles's "retirement is enlivened by a series of visits from past acquaintances from the stage and from his adolescent years" (Hoy, 1999, p. 598). The reappearance of his friends is disturbing since, for example, "Rosina tries to enact some vengeance for the way he has treated her by haunting Shruff End, Peregrine attempts to murder Charles for stealing his wife" (Bove, 1993, p. 85), which spoils his supposed tranquillity.

Charles's Inaccurate Interpretation of the Notions of Emotion, Recollection and Tranquillity

Concisely outlined, the relevance of both emotion and recollection of tranquillity should be illustrated within the key points of the discussions of Wordsworth asserted in his classic text, the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. As Wordsworth articulates, it is the accumulation and recollection of emotions which should set up the reason for all artful writing whether it is poetry or prose. According to Wordsworth, good poetry emanates not from preconceived notions and assumptions but from the way the poet feels and senses. The artistic expression of poetry is how the poet conveys his feelings through straightforward and uncomplicated language. Wordsworth argues that the poet's plain language animates all emotions. Any description of the poet in this medium of expression, which is his honest and unelaborated language, is a product of what the poet feels. As stated by Wordsworth, the poet is the one who is able to speak to man, the one who knows what human nature truly consists of. Wordsworth further claims that the poet has acquired enough knowledge of man to be expressed through his emotions and feelings. Wordsworth thus furnishes quite a precise definition of poetry. He asserts that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (1805, p. x-xi).

Wordsworth suggests that any work of art, literary works in particular, should be a product of the emotions of the artist. As a result, representational art in Wordsworth's opinion is associated with how the artist's senses operate and how his perceptions perform. Therefore, the point of discussion is that if Charles is to adhere to this principle, his memoir as a work of art will adopt the same exemplification. However, it should be noted that aesthetic formation is never reduced merely to the interpretation of the implications of emotions in the case of an artistic achievement. Creativity requires that the artist's recollection of emotions should be accomplished not only in environmental but also in mental tranquillity since Wordsworth "recognize[s] nature's power to quiet the mind [and] restoration through tranquillity" (Viscomi, 2007, p. 41). This is exactly why Wordsworth restates his notion of poetry in the later parts of his illustration where he builds up the proclamation asserting "I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (1805, p. l-li). Tranquillity holds so critical a position in Wordsworth's thought that it "is the condition for Wordsworthian sincerity and self-exploration" (Dickstein, 1987, p. 260). The origin of art is the remembrance of emotion and any recollection of emotion

correlates to the quality of tranquillity. It is to be asserted that as long as tranquillity prevails, the artist might be capable of performing a variety of aesthetic undertakings.

Charles's initial reference to Wordsworth is when he says early in his narrative, "[B]ut now the main events of my life are over and there is to be nothing but 'recollection in tranquillity'" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 2). Charles is so straightforward a narrator that it never takes a strenuous effort to comprehend the creative impulse his memoir will stem from. As Charles assumes that he is now in tranquillity, his mind will recollect whatever he needs as an artist to compose his memoir. However, his critical mistake and inevitable failure are foreshadowed here since he "is told that he has made his lifelong erotic obsession 'into a story, and stories are false'" (Gordon, 1990, p. 116). Besides, it is noticeable that Charles is being haunted by memories of an uneasy past in terms of the repetitive appearances in his mind of some of his friends' names. In other words, "Charles is unable to escape his past […] it revisits him in various forms as figures from the past disrupt his solitude by the sea" (Weese, 2001, p. 635). Moreover, it is ironic that Charles expects a period of tranquillity, for as it is argued here that "when many people go looking for beauty and tranquillity, their very search destroys precisely those qualities" (Thompson, 2007, p. 202). Even before these names appear, the entire image of the theatre, from which Charles's consciousness has never been disengaged, comes back. What has been disturbing Charles is neither the simplicity nor the plainness of the circumstances which characterise his life now but the question of what his friends are now thinking about him as a man who lives by himself in an old house in a remote village. Charles asks himself whether his new life was "to repent a life of egoism" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 2), and then answers his own question by saying, "[N]ot exactly, yet something of the sort. Of course I never said this to the ladies and gentlemen of the theatre. They would never have stopped laughing" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 2). Narrowdean where he claims, "I came here to solitude" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 230), has proved to be no different from London, for Charles has brought back vivid memories of several past events. Therefore, he cannot concentrate on the emotion recalled in tranquillity, but rather his "writing soon comes to focus on the events of the present rather than those of the past" (Mettle, 1991, p. 101). It is surprising to notice that Charles's past is still being set in the present, which has already impaired the meaning of tranquillity.

Charles enjoys being alone in Shruff End built upon rocks and he relishes the idea of being away from the crowd, yet there is an abundance of names with which his mind is occupied. He identifies himself through his references to the other names in the

theatre. He justifies his situation claiming that he is tired of the theatre. Yet, what follows is one of the best illustrations of how he still craves for recognition. Although those were his friends,

> but how few […] they really are after a lifetime in the theatre. How friendly and 'warm-hearted' the theatre can seem, what a desolation it can be. The great ones have gone from me: Clement Makin dead, Wilfred Dunning dead, Sidney Ashe gone to Stratford, Ontario, Fritzie Eitel successful and done for in California. A handful remain: Perry, Al, Marcus, Gilbert, what's left of the girls. (Murdoch, 1999, p. 16)

It is the tranquillity which is still premature. Charles has been experiencing a placid life; it has been a pastoral scene where he has been. His attention, however, has been drawn to the past, for he wishes there were at least some letters sent by his friends. Instead of tranquillity, it is the idea of remoteness that could illuminate his situation. Charles has misinterpreted the connotations of the term so much so that he has reduced it to some less laboriously demonstrable notion such as indolence and inactivity. Tranquillity involves silence. It requires more in terms of mental harmony and peace. However, Charles's mind has been occupied with recollecting memories which fill him with nostalgia.

Charles has lost tranquillity through a sequence of events, the first of which is his experience of some unusual appearances. There are other reasons, yet Charles's discomfort has been initiated by these inexplicable happenings. It is only after this that the other developments alter his innocently fashioned expectations of achieving his piece of mind. In addition to his encounters with the abnormal, Charles has had a lot of trouble with some old friends who have frequented where he has been living. There are some women who challenge Charles to acknowledge who he used to be in the past. Furthermore, Charles comes upon the woman who he was – and still is – in love with and wishes to marry, which throughout the whole narrative troubles him the most. In other words, the present is inhabited by the past considering the circumstances presently surrounding him, which will further be illustrated in the following chapters under a number of headings such as mysterious events, reappearances of old friends, and Charles's approach to the reality of love.

Charles's Experience of the (Un)natural as One of the Reasons for his Loss of Tranquillity

The very beginning of Charles's memoir introduces a bizarre incident "which was so extraordinary and so horrible that [Charles] cannot bring [himself] to describe it even now after an interval of time and although a possible, though not totally reassuring, explanation has occurred to [him]" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 1). Charles represents the incident as almost an unprecedented development; it is nevertheless not a "horrible experience" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 20). Even though it is not spelled out clearly, it is probably because of the presence of some seals swimming so close to Charles that his blurred vision generates olfactory hallucinations. It is at the end of his memoir that Charles is able to resolve the mystery and offer an explanation for the incident. However, it had come as a great shock; it was so unexpected that Charles felt the horror. He recounts the scene saying,

> [o]ut of a perfectly calm empty sea […] I saw an immense creature break the surface and arch itself upward. At first it looked like a black snake, then a long thickening body […] I could […] see the head with remarkable clarity, a kind of crested snake's head, green-eyed, the mouth opening to show teeth […] The head and neck glistened with a blue sheen […] I feared beyond anything. (Murdoch, 1999, p. 20-21)

The above experience, which portrays Charles as a character who "is also a victim of his own mind's creations" (Tucker, 1986, p. 382) is so unsettling that it leaves Charles with a puzzled mind which blocks any possibility of achieving the tranquil state of mind. Charles speculates that he must have visualized the sea serpent. Yet, he remembers every single detail of the ghastly animal. His conclusion is that "one does not 'simply' imagine anything so detailed and dreadful" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 22). Although Charles might be a "moderate drinker" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 22), he is "certainly not an unbalanced or crazily 'imaginative' person" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 22). What Charles saw might have been a rare species as yet undiscovered by scientists, which is a weak explanation of what happened. Besides, Charles might have been looking at an invertebrate, a worm in the water before he saw the monster. His explanation is that his retina enlarged the image of the tiny worm on the surface of the sea. It was thus a device comparable to that of motion picture photography. According to him, "it is possible, perhaps plausible, to conjecture that the sea monster which [he] 'saw' was a hallucination" (Murdoch,

1999, p. 23), which possibly resulted from his past experience of LSD. This is how Charles struggles to make up a logical explanation of what happened to him when he needs to remember the past in tranquillity. Charles's misinterpretation not only of emotion but also of recollection and tranquillity becomes discernible in every stage of his enterprise. His interpretation of artistic detachment and tranquil recollection of emotion proves too primordial to be proper.

Compared to the disorder above, the unexpected appearance of one of his old girl friends, Rosina Vamburgh, in his house disrupts Charles's supposed tranquillity more dramatically. This scene, very much like "[t]he house by the sea, the life of the theatre, erotic obsession, the contrast of simple and sophisticate, the artist and the ascetic soldier, the different women" (Conradi, 1990, p. 231), is interpreted as one of the themes of the narrative: "[t]he subject of penetrating Charles Arrowby's domain" (Morley, 2014, p. 33). It is indicated by some critics that Rosina could be associated with what Charles considers creepy, strange, unpleasant and perplexing. Whenever the main focus of interest is on Rosina, his narrative echoes the intensity and tension that Charles feels. The following sentences are some examples of how Charles commences the episodes where he is talking about Rosina: "[s]omething rather odd and distressing has just occurred" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 42); "[s]omething rather frightful happened last night" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 59); and "I was sitting writing […] late last night in my drawing room when something very disconcerting happened" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 74). Rosina becomes one of the most prominent justifications for Charles's inability to accomplish what he has conceived of. She is an intruder who has arranged a visit to Charles although she has never been invited.

This chapter analyses three separate incidents as further examples of the reasons for Charles's loss of tranquillity in which Rosina plays the leading role. Charles "realize[s] that [his] lovely big ugly vase [is] gone from its pedestal. It [has] fallen onto the floor and [is] broken into a great many pieces" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 43). What is signified by Charles as 'odd' and 'distressing' in this scene is the fact that there has been no intelligible reason why the vase has fallen onto the floor. Charles claims that "[t]he pedestal is perfectly steady and has not moved. There has been no wind, the bead curtain is motionless" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 43). He struggles to understand why it has happened. He considers that he is to blame, yet he does not remember if it had been his mistake: "I am reluctant to think that I am to blame and I am sure I am not" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 43). A broken vase is something plain and ordinary; it is quite commonplace. Indeed,

what puzzles him is the question he asks himself: "[h]ow can it have jumped off its stand?" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 43). There is no explanation for how it has happened.

Comparable to the broken vase, a mirror in Charles's house has mysteriously disappeared from the wall and fallen onto the floor. This is the large oval mirror in the hall which he has found himself 'attached' to and which, he says, "seems to glow with its own light" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 18). It was the shattering of the glass that had interrupted Charles's sleep early in the morning. What is 'odd' is that both the wire and the nail on the wall are undamaged. Might somebody have taken the mirror from the wall and dropped it onto the floor?

Charles has never had a superstitious mind. He says, "I have never suffered from night fears. I was never, that I can recall, afraid of the dark as a child" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 19). He has never regarded Shruff End with suspicion; he has never considered that the house might be haunted. Nevertheless, something inexplicable has happened again. This is the blurred image of a human face that Charles has seen looking at him in the mirror. Although the image has been unclear, he says he is "perfectly sure that he [has seen] a face looking at [him] through the glass of the inner room" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 74). This was so frightening that he sat "absolutely still, paralysed by sheer terror" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 74). Charles examines what might possibly explain the situation. According to him, one of the options is that "it was simply a reflection of my own face in the blackness of the glass" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 74). The other theory is that "[t]he window that gives onto the sea was uncurtained and there was an almost full moon. Could I have seen the moon reflected in the inner glass" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 74)?

These are all powerful ploys deliberately staged by a creative actress, Rosina Vamburgh, who "was a huge phenomenon" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 77), and "probably the most famous person in this book, after [him]" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 77). She acted thus in order to distract and plague not only Charles's life in Narrowdean but also his project to write his memoir in tranquillity. Among the other women of the theatre who had their love affairs with Charles, Rosina was the most burdensome. Charles is clear that it was not love; yet it was a "furious mutual desire for possession" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 77) which could characterize his ended relationship with Rosina. It becomes indisputable that what captivated Charles was his desire for Rosina especially when he recounts her kisses. Rosina wanted to marry Charles, which he dismissed. She broke up her marriage with Peregrine Arbelow, yet Charles "never had the slightest intention of marrying her.

[He] simply wanted her, and the satisfaction of this want involved detaching her permanently from her husband" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 78). As set here, Charles is a man who is still "[m]anically self-interested and untrustworthy" (Dipple, 1982, p. 275).

Rosina displays the demeanour of a venomous woman who had been beguiled into listening to Charles's pledges. Charles has overlooked his past involvement with Rosina, yet she has managed to retain an excellent memory not only of her marriage but also of her relationship with Charles. That is why Rosina first reminds Charles what he promised her. She says, "[Y]ou promised that if you ever married anybody you would marry me […] And you promised that if you ever settled permanently with anyone you would settle with me" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 113). She intimidates him and foreshadows Charles's eventual failure to accomplish his intention asserting "you will not live happily ever after" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 113).

Charles's memoir exemplifies even more illustrations of Rosina's disillusionment with her relationship with Charles. Whenever Rosina is the subject of his discussion, Charles frequently recalls hearing her accusing him of ruining her marriage. It becomes hurtful to listen to her as it causes emotional pain. Details arise when she says,

> [Y]ou wrecked my marriage, you prevented me from having children, for you I made a slaughter of all my friends. And when you'd begged me on your knees to leave my husband, and when I'd left him, you abandoned me […] Do you not remember what our love was like? Have you forgotten why you uttered those words? (Murdoch, 1999, p. 116)

After this vigorous confrontation, what becomes recognizable is the conclusion that there could be nothing more incongruous than any reference to tranquillity.

Rosina has broken into Charles's house. It was so unexpected to encounter her in his house that Charles is "still trembling and quickly digesting [his] fear. [He has] felt intense relief mixed with rising anger. [He has] wanted to curse aloud but […] remained silent, controlling [his] breathing" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 109). What Charles has felt is evidently outrage largely provoked by Rosina's distressing presence in front of him. It is at the same time fear and regret, for Charles has been unable to deny any of the details disclosed by Rosina. Whenever Rosina points out how Charles disappointed and victimized her, he acknowledges it. What has already become obvious is that, since

settling in Narrowdean, Charles has been unable to accomplish anything he set out to do in terms of his expectations of retiring to a tranquil life. It has turned into a disappointment for Charles to leave the theatre and to live in a small village. Charles believed the idea that leaving the theatre would grant him the tranquillity that he assumed he needed as an artist. But it never came true. Although her tone is ironic, Rosina is probably right when she wittily tells Charles, "I could have told you the country is the least peaceful and private place to live. The most peaceful and secluded place in the world is a flat in Kensington" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 111). Charles left his flat in Kensington, "where everything was under his control, where […] all went well for him" (Tucker, 1992, p. 164), and settled in Narrowdean presuming that it would be the peace and seclusion that he needed for tranquillity.

Charles's Confession of his Complete Disillusionment: "The Impossible Come True"

Rosina's temporary disappearance introduces into the scene the reappearance of Charles's lost love, Mary Hartley Smith. The phrase in the above subtitle is inspired by how Charles interprets this unexpected incident – his most unpredictable amazement in the whole story. It was so unpredictable that Charles is in a state of shock:

> [He] was paralysed. [He] cannot think why [he] did not fall to the ground, the revelation was, in its initial impact, so terrible. [He] grasped it first, [he did] not quite know why, in this way, not as something unwelcome or horrible, but purely as the impossible come true, like what we cannot imagine about the end of the world. (Murdoch, 1999, p. 119)

Charles considers Hartley "the most important" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 38) figure in his life. Hartley occupied so influential a status in his memories that her reappearance has rendered whatever Charles has had not only insignificant but also meaningless. From a moral perspective, this is the lost youth and innocence through which Charles craves to "recapture an idealized memory of the chastity and purity of an adolescent relationship" (Hague, 1984, p. 121). Earlier in the narrative Charles concludes that his memoir should never exclude Hartley although any remembrances of his memory of her have inflicted massive pain on him. It is painful for Charles to have lost Hartley, for their relationship was an experience beyond what love would describe. Charles says, "We were 'in love', that vague weakened phrase, cannot express it. We loved each other, we lived in each

other, through each other, by each other. We were each other" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 84). The relationship between Charles and Hartley is a sad story. It was once "pure joy" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 84), which had been overshadowed by Charles's extreme anxiety about losing her.

Charles's relationship with Hartley had been unsettled and problematic all along. It will be more comprehensible if this relationship were divided into three separate stages where the development of events is interpreted. The first part answers to who Hartley was and what she meant for Charles in her youth. Although Charles says it was love as they were in love, he illustrates Hartley as a young girl who mostly preferred keeping silent. She never spoke. Almost all the lyrical descriptions of those school years depict a Hartley who was not as overjoyed as Charles was. Hartley was his 'darling,' she was his 'Hartley,' she was the source of light, his 'daylight;' yet Charles "feared to lose the light and to be left in the darkness forever" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 85). It was Charles who was in love with Hartley; and Charles was only a 'child' when he dreamed of marrying her when they would be eighteen. What Charles feared was "a child's blind fear" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 85). Since Charles was a 'child,' Hartley became the ideal that he extolled. Charles idolized Hartley. It was his delight and satisfaction to watch Hartley participate in school athletics.

It is not surprising that "Hartley […] becomes for him a religion" (Tucker, 1986, p. 385). Charles's idealization of his love (i.e. Hartley) led him to attribute a spiritual characteristic to their relationship. He recites the opening lines of "Veni Creator Spiritus," when he recollects how he conceived that they were in Paradise, which was of great happiness. "I remember Hartley singing in church," Charles says, "her bright innocent lovely face raised up to the light, to God" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 85). Yet, Charles has introduced himself as a man who has no interest in religion. He is almost irreligious and asserts that he "acquired that vague English Christianity which disappears in adolescence" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 71). The most persuasive rationale for this change of behaviour is that Charles's ongoing glorification of Hartley compelled him to constitute a spiritual disposition in which he could avoid confronting his fear of losing her. Charles's uneasiness at the prospect of desertion was so considerable that he believed that his Christian faith could save his love. That is why Charles accentuates that they were devoted believers. He says, "We felt that we were dedicated people who would be protected by love" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 85).

Since Charles conceived of a beautiful girl, he wished to see Hartley as pretty as she could be. This is the reason why Charles portrays Hartley's expression through ambiguously specified descriptions. He claims that Hartley was beautiful "but with a secret beauty" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 86). He maintains the idea that Hartley was a beautiful girl though she "was not one of the 'pretty girls' of the school" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 86). However, there is no inconsistency here in what he has stated. Charles sculpts the physical characteristics of an average young girl into an aesthetically gratifying illustration. Hartley's face was colourless, it was very pale, yet he revises his descriptions further stating, "although she was so strong and so healthy" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 86). Charles had been moulding Hartley into the frame. Her face was finely shaped as well and she looked "like a young savage" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 86). She was so thin that she was almost fragile, yet she was "clean, and so strong" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 86).

Hartley's disappearance outlines the second stage that Charles was going through. Her withdrawal was so abrupt that any statement or comment about her causes Charles to be in intense emotional pain. From the moment that Charles identifies Hartley in Narrowdean, he has been recalling the memory of the past and giving intensely animated yet dramatic descriptions of his strong attachment to her. The relationship between Charles and Hartley was so fragile that he felt overwhelmed by agonies of uncertainty and suspense. Although Charles considered himself a man who was overjoyed to be with Hartley, he was going through a dreadful experience that would haunt him in the present. It is overtly expressed that it was love, yet Charles recognizes that "[e]xtreme love must bring terror with it, and great terror, like some kinds of prayer which lean upon the omniscience of the Almighty, has a vast unlimited all-embracing compass" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 87). Charles believed that his happiness would be cursed. He says, "I feared so many things, that she would die, or I would die, that we would be somehow cursed for being too happy" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 87). Hartley ended their relationship saying she had decided not to marry him. Charles briefly but effectively recounts what happened: "I lost her, the jewel of the world" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 87). It is mostly due to Charles's already-fashioned hopelessness that Hartley's sudden disappearance did not come as a surprise; it was what Charles had already been expecting.

Charles's Exemplification of the Aristotelian Idea of the Ridiculous

This chapter illustrates the final stage of Charles's relations with Hartley which draws overall conclusions about his state of mind. It is about how Charles rapidly grows into

a man who perfectly exemplifies Aristotle's notion of the ridiculous as an aspect of the comic character after he runs into Hartley in her old age many years after she left him. In the fifth chapter of his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines comedy as one of the two forms of human imitation. According to Aristotle, comedy as a form of dramatic art is "an imitation of people of a lower sort [characterized by] what is ridiculous" (2006, p. 25). Aristotle generally specifies by the ridiculous what is not serious and particularly "a deformity that is painless and not destructive" (2006, p. 25). Aristotle identifies the ridiculous character, as distinct from the tragic hero, not only with the low in importance, the unacceptable and unrespectable, but also with unwise and poor judgement. These features establish the most typical characteristics of the ridiculous character who represents the imitation of base action. The period between Charles's startling encounter with Hartley and the end of the story chronicles how Charles steadily develops into a ridiculous man whose behaviour has been appalling and unreasonable, more particularly, "inappropriate" (Lesser, 1980, p. 9). Elsewhere the Aristotelian concept of the ridiculous in character formation is related to "an error […] or ugliness […] which does not cause pain and is not destructive, is clearly related to the doctrine of the inappropriate or incongruous" (Golden, 1984, p. 287). Since the ridiculous character signifies absurdity and irrationality, Charles is said to address "the strategies of the madman because he has become one" (Moss, 1986, p. 229). Although Charles states that he is "over sixty years of age" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 4), he becomes a teenager when he speaks to Hartley. It has been more than forty years and Hartley is now a woman who is married to Benjamin Fitch. They have an adopted son. Charles is acting and talking as if these critical changes were meaningless. "Charles has patterned his life around the fantasy he has created and carried around with him for forty years – that of resuming his earlier relationship with [Hartley]" (Capitani, 2003, p. 103). This is how Charles speaks to Hartley: "[y]ou are my love, you are still that, you are still what you were for me" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 125). Charles's speech becomes increasingly irrational when he says, "'[w]hat shall we do?' […] when shall I see you […] can we meet in the pub, or would you come down to my house'" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 127). Charles's frequent assertions, his continual declarations and enquiries strengthen his image as an example of a ridiculous character.

Aristotle's idea of the ridiculous as the defining feature of the comic hero becomes obvious in Charles's character formation as the inevitable consequence of his obsession with Hartley. Murdoch interprets this alike, saying "Charles is suffering from a delusion that the first love is the great one and that people don't change" (Brans, 1985, p. 50). Charles's constant compulsion to be with Hartley is awakened when they meet in a church.

His obsession becomes uncontrollable, for "[a] chance meeting with the woman he loved and lost in his youth plunges his mind into chaos" (Nicol, 2004, p. 11). Charles concludes that Hartley must be an unhappy woman married to a strange man. It is Hartley's marriage that Charles is uneasy about. He has ludicrously deduced that "she must regret it so much, that wrong choice. She must have spent her life regretting that she had not married me" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 129), for "Charles is the most incurable of [Murdoch's] major egoists" (Gordon, 1995, p. 88). This is part of the ridiculous, namely Charles' decision that Hartley is an unsettled woman married to a man she does not love.

Charles has left his London flat and settled in a small village to live in tranquillity so that he could recollect his past and have a written record of his life. However, his unreasonable behaviour when he is with Hartley introduces the most farcical scenes and renders his intention impractical. Charles's obsession with Hartley seems ludicrous, yet he still provides self-serving rationalizations for his constant compulsion to be with her. He believes that "Hartley loved [him] and had long regretted losing [him]" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 170). He is ready to dismiss any objection against his assumptions about her. Although these are naïve assumptions based on nothing but his presumptions, Charles speculates more about Benjamin. According to Charles, Benjamin "was physically unattractive, with his unshapely sensual mouth and his look of a cropped schoolboy. And he was […] a barbarian and a bully. He was a tyrant, probably a chronically jealous man, a dull resentful dog" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 170). Charles concludes that it must be impossible for Hartley to have a happy life, a happy marriage. It is obvious that Charles has been convinced by his own delusions.

Charles strongly believes that his 'central question' has been answered. He is convinced that Hartley is unhappy. As his mind is restless and he is unable to be calm he tries to illustrate the situation through questions he asks himself. He wonders if she is too much in love with him, if she is jealous of his mistress that she most probably believes he has, if she was walking by Shruff End in order to spy on him when Rosina's headlights exposed her to Charles (Murdoch, 1999, p. 149). Despite the plethora of such promptly fabricated questions, Charles promises that he "shall rescue her and make her happy for whatever time remains to [them]" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 191), a plan which is seen to be an example of Charles's almost delusional thinking. According to this interpretation, Charles's intention is "less a reflection of a reasonable hope, however, than of outrageous fantasy" (Denham, 2001, p. 616). The best way for Charles to keep his promise is to marry Hartley. He has become unreasonable enough to ignore that Hartley is a married woman who says that she loves her husband. He is so preoccupied with the idea that

he has to save her from a husband who he believes is a brutal man. Although Hartley says that she is not the same person that Charles was in love with and that she is not the same Hartley but she has changed a lot, Charles unreasonably tells her, "I love you [..] You love me, you need me [..] Don't resist […] You're my wife now" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 229). These last remarks thoroughly epitomize the idiocy of the whole scene which has become an illustration of the Aristotelian idea of the ridiculous.

It is clear that the ridiculous is the inescapable development of the unreasonable attitude that Charles has taken since he saw Hartley in Narrowdean. His disproportionate excitement of and irrational reaction to Hartley's presence in the village has put him into a position which he confesses is "a comic one" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 257). Although Charles chooses to describe the scene as comic, the whole situation has become farcical due to its silly and unreasonable character. Charles's uncontrollable and violent behaviour is interpreted as "[a] ruling passion […] an idee fixe […] all so often the source of the ridiculous in a character" (Nevo, 1963, p. 330). The first example of the sheer absurdity of Charles's perspective is his exiting and often dangerous practices. As Charles is stuck to the idea that it now is practically impossible for him to be without Hartley, he goes to their house, hides in the garden, moves silently and sits down outside the window to eavesdrop on the conversation between Hartley and Benjamin, between the wife and the husband. He considers trying the same again, but he surprisingly says,

> I had no wish now to eavesdrop, indeed I had almost no curiosity left, so strongly did my mind shy away in horror from the interior of that house and of that marriage. I felt disgust with myself, with him, even with her. (Murdoch, 1999, p. 256)

This is not only how Charles acknowledges the idiocy of the way that he behaves but also how "he finds his first love whose life he disrupts with his egomaniacal pursuit" (Rowe, 2004, p. 92). It is so irrational that the whole picture has suddenly lost its significance. It now seems quite inconsequential, an interlude which Charles does not want to remember any more. He says when he gets home, "[t]he candles had fallen over again and burnt themselves out on the wooden top of the table, making long dark burns which remained there ever after to remind me of that terrible night" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 256).

When Charles discloses his secretive call to Hartley he emphasizes his insistence on the way that Benjamin talked to Hartley. He unabashedly condemns Benjamin, for he

considers that Benjamin must be the reason for Hartley's unhappiness. However, he is unable to calculate how Hartley would reply to his revelations. She is absolutely enraged at what Charles says he has done. She condemns him saying, "[h]ow can you – you don't know what you've done – how could you push in, spy on us like that – it was nothing to do with you – how could you intrude into secret things which you couldn't possibly understand? […]" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 328). Hartley's deep disappointment is unpredictable. She asserts, "[…] it's the wickedest vilest most hurtful thing anybody's ever done to me […] I'll never forgive you, never, it's like, it's like a murder, a killing […]" (Murdoch, 1999, pp. 328-29). Hartley's attitude to Charles's misconduct is so incalculable that she has lost all her charms, for she is now in a hysterical state and is unable to control her behaviour. She is crying, screaming and yelling at him. In addition, "when she cries we are constantly made aware of her otherness by Charles' description of her inhuman, animalistic wails" (Jordan, 2012, p. 367). Charles reports the significant reversal of Hartley's earlier disposition. He describes it by saying, "[h]er face was red, wild with tears, her mouth dribbling. Her voice, raucous, piercing, shrieked out […] a frenzied panic noise" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 329). For the first time in the narrative Charles experiences the worst displeasure ever. He acknowledges that he felt "horror, fear, a sort of disgusted shame, shame for [himself], shame for her" (Murdoch, 1999, p. 329). This is Charles's increasing disillusionment with Hartley. It makes sense that "[i]nsofar as all human beings are victims of illusions, Charles is typical" (Heusel, p. 70). It has never been so discernible in the story that Charles is so confused and depressed. No matter what it might cost, he wants her to stop; he wants to silence her. This reversal of the previous state of mind is only momentary. Having no alternative at all, Charles lures Hartley to Shruff End and imprisons her until he releases her after a period of time in which she has cried, wailed, shouted and fought. What Charles has done so far "makes a mockery of his original intention to retire to a lonely house by the sea to renounce the illusory world of the theatre" (Nicol, 2004, p. 137). His intention to detach himself from his former life is "incomplete" (Spear, 1995, p. 94).

Conclusion

Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea* is about an aging man's bitter disillusionment with himself as a retired actor, playwright and stage director. Charles Arrowby is a Murdochian upper middle-class male protagonist who is fed up with what his reputation as a well-known artist has brought about. The theatre has become so nauseating that Charles wants to settle in a coastal village and spend the rest of his time away from the troubles of the bustling city. As his city life is over, Charles believes that as an artist he needs to

recollect his past in tranquillity so that he can compose an autobiographical memoir which would give all the facts about his unsettled past. What becomes obvious at this point is his reference to Wordsworth's definition of poetry. Wordsworth concentrates on the artist (the poet) and wants to figure out the way that the artist as an individual perceives and senses the physical environment. Poetry for him is the product of emotion recalled in peace and tranquillity. Though aesthetic, this is a rather plain definition compared to the earlier interpretations made by critics of previous ages. Since Wordsworth provides an uncomplicated explanation, Charles does not quite understand the implication and wrongly assumes that he will easily be able to recollect his past. This is his biggest and most critical fallacy, especially regarding his casual and inaccurate approach to Wordsworth's formulation.

It is neither in the city nor on the stage but at his house in a seashore village where Charles is troubled the most. First it is the theatre and all the names of the artists he has worked with which never leave Charles alone. He repeats these names again and again in his mind as if he wants them to accompany him even in the village. Some of them make their appearances in his life again. But it is especially Rosina and Peregrine who return to blackmail him into admitting his mistakes. Rosina secretly hides herself in Shruff End and almost haunts the house, which terrorizes Charles. Peregrine tries to murder him claiming that Charles stole his wife from him. Charles's torment begins when he meets his teenage love Hartley in the village. Hartley's reappearance comes as a complete surprise which dramatically turns Charles's programme upside down. From the first moment that Charles sees Hartley in Narrowdean, she becomes a passion. She becomes the centre of his sexual attraction, love, hate and anger. Charles almost loses his mind when Hartley reminds him about the truth. She has a family; she is a married woman, and she has an adopted son. Nevertheless, Charles's obsession with Hartley blinds him. He turns into a man who can best be described as ridiculous. He is a man who is unreasonable and what he has done is inappropriate. It is unbelievable that Charles kidnaps Hartley and imprisons her. He is no more a grown-up who thinks logically, but a schoolboy who acts irrationally. These are all substantial instances of Charles's inability to achieve peace and tranquillity. He misinterprets both the implication of artistic detachment and the significance of tranquil recollection. He considers these terms to be simple and uncomplicated notions. As a result, Charles starts a spiritual journey towards a greater understanding of himself as an artist. However, he concludes that he has created an illusion about art, remoteness, feeling, and reminiscence.

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