

# The Sea as a Metaphor for the Past: Charles Arrowby's Moral and Emotional Confrontation in Iris Murdoch's Retrospective Novel

## *Geçmişin Bir Metaforu Olarak Deniz: Iris Murdoch'un Retrospektif Romanında Charles Arrowby'in Ahlaki ve Duygusal Yüzleşmesi*

### Abstract

Zafer ŞAFAK\*

Assist. Prof. Dr. İğdir University, The Faculty of Science and Letters, Western Languages and Literatures, İğdir, Türkiye, zafer.safak@igdir.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-5780-4793 ROR ID: <https://ror.org/05jstgx72>

Gönderilme Tarihi / Received Date

06.11.2024

Kabul Tarihi / Accepted Date

12.02.2025

Yayın Tarihi / Publication Date

21.03.2025

Atıf/Citation: Şafak Z.,

The Sea as a Metaphor for the Past: Charles Arrowby's Moral and Emotional Confrontation in Iris Murdoch's Retrospective Novel, 31, 353-364 doi.org/10.30767/diledeara.1580525

**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:**

İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme.

**Çıkar Çatışması:**

Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

**Finansal Destek:**

Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

**Peer-review:**

Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

**Grant Support:**

The author declared that this study has received no financial support

**Dil ve Edebiyat Arařtırmaları**

Dergimize yayımlanan makalelerin telif hakları dergimize ait olup CC-BY-NC-ND lisansına uygun olarak açık erişim olarak yayımlanmaktadır.

**Language and Literature Studies**

The copyright of the articles published in our journal belongs to our journal and is published as open access in accordance with CC-BY-NC-ND licenses.

tded.org.tr | 2025

The Sea The Sea is a novel published by Irish-British author Iris Murdoch in 1978. As an example of retrospective fiction, which is a narrative method in which the story is narrated from the point view of a character reflecting on past events, Charles Arrowby looks back on the events of his life through introspection, memory and regret. After his retirement, Charles retreats to an isolated dwelling he purchased so that he can get rid of the adverse effects of his former relationships, many of which were with his colleagues. Charles' attempt to exorcise the burden of a life spent without the slightest regard for the morality of interpersonal relationships is disrupted not only by his former lovers but also by the re-discovery of Hartley. Charles deludes himself into believing that she is the embodiment of everything he has not been able to realize and he lost long ago. In his idyllic yet ironically hostile environment, Charles sets out a quest to revive a lost and unrequited love through his retrospective fiction only to confront and acknowledge his belated enlightenment that the fiction is elusive and it falls short of reconstructing what has already been experienced and reconnect with the present. This study aims to discuss and illustrate the dimensions of retrospective and moral aspects of The Sea The Sea by means of his protagonist who is laden with insights and hindsight in line with retrospective narrative.

**Keywords:** The Sea The Sea, Retrospective Narrative, Regret, Memory, Morality

### Öz

Deniz Deniz, Britanyalı yazar Iris Murdoch'un 1978'de yazdığı bir romandır. Yaşanmış olaylar üzerine düşünen bir karakterin bakış açısıyla anlatıldığı bir anlatım yöntemi olan retrospektif kurguya örnek olarak, romanın ana kahramanı Charles Arrowby, hayatındaki olaylara iç gözlem, hafıza ve pişmanlık duygularıyla bakmaktadır. Charles, emekli olduktan sonra profesyonel hayatı boyunca çoğu meslektaşıyla ilişkilerinin olumsuz etkilerinden kurtulmak için kırsal bir yerde satın aldığı izole bir eve yerleşir. Charles'ın, kişilerarası ilişkilerin etğine/ahlakına en ufak bir saygı göstermeden yaşadığı hayatın yükünden kurtulma girişimi, yalnızca eski sevgilileri tarafından değil, aynı zamanda Charles'ın çok sevdiği Hartley'i yeniden bulmasıyla sekteye uğrar. Charles; kendisini, Hartley'i geri kazanma konusunda onu uzun zaman önce kaybettiği ve hayatında gerçekleştirmekte başarısız olduğu her şeyin somutlaşmış hali olduğuna dair hayalperest bir duyguya ikna eder. Charles, cennetvari huzurlu ve aynı zamanda ironik bir şekilde düşmanca ortamında, geçmişe dönük kurgusu aracılığıyla kayıp ve karşılıksız bir aşkı yeniden canlandırma arayışına girer, ancak kurgunun, uçuş/belirsiz ve istikrarsız doğası nedeniyle, geçmişini yeniden inşa etmesinin ve geçmişle bağlantı kurmasının yetersiz kaldığı gecikmiş aydınlanmasıyla yüzleşir ve bu gerçeği kabul eder. Bu çalışma, içgörü ve geçmişe bakışla yüklü olan Deniz Deniz'in ana karakteri aracılığıyla retrospektif anlatıyı geriye dönük ve ahlaki yönleriyle tartışmayı ve örneklendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Deniz Deniz, Retrospektif Anlatı, Keder, Hafıza, Ahlak

## Introduction

Published in 1978, *The Sea, The Sea* is a seminal work by the renowned British novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch. The novel intricately explores the existential and psychological dimensions of its protagonist, Charles Arrowby, a recently retired and once-acclaimed theater director. Seeking to detach himself from the complexities and moral ambiguities of his former life, Arrowby voluntarily retreats into self-imposed exile in an austere, secluded house on the rugged coastline of Shruff End. This isolated setting serves as both a physical and symbolic space for introspection, where the protagonist confronts his past, wrestles with his desires, and embarks on a journey of self-discovery. Charles ponders on his past relationships with people and particularly with women whose paths have crossed with him during his professional career. His initial purpose to reach some sort of serenity in his isolated estate is first diverted when Charles' former lovers Lizzy and Rosina with Peregrine and Gilbert intrude and haunt him; all of whom he treated selfishly and abandoned mercilessly, then by the discovery that his first flame named Mary Hartley turns out to be living in the same location with her husband Ben Fitch. Charles, who is immersed in the thoughts of bringing back an unsignifiable and unretrievable past personified in Hartley, sets out a nostalgic and an equally melancholic and fantasy mission to revitalize his old affair with Hartley, rescue her from a purported unhappy marital life and provide her hope, happiness and affection.

Charles' sui-generic fiction, which even he is not sure which genre he should adopt while writing down his life and observations, oscillates among the forms of diary entries, auto-biography, and memoir, proves that retired stage director does not only want to exorcize the residue of a past life but he also desires to return to past which is always irreparable. Murdoch's novel, thus provides a fiction which introspection merges with retrospection in the identity of Charles Arrowby who desires to return to past (or re-invent it in the present time) but he only ends up facing (the metaphorical) return of an (impossible) past accompanied by resented lovers, wronged friends and more importantly an unwilling lover to 'come back' who has already left behind the past for more than fifty years ago when she made up her mind that she and Charles had to separate: Charles is unable to return to past or to make the past return in a new way that perfectly overlaps with his desires arises from the fact that the past is neither accessible (and more so) nor is it existed in the way he dreams as his own medley of amorphous genre demonstrates that narration cannot re-construct or re-connect present with past as Bran Nicol, citing Gerard Genet, rightly argues that:

Charles gradually comes to realize that the connective power of narrative form is illusory. For one thing, the very activity of writing teaches him the lesson that he must always already be separated from even his most recent past; all narrative, as Gérard Genette says, is essentially retrospective (Nicol, 2004, p.144).

While unsuccessfully trying to make up a past deemed acceptable —not for others but for himself— Charles reveals that he is indeed in love with his youth and is enthusiastic about his mastery of directing and dominating people who once cooperated with him as stage actors. Charles actually endeavors to enjoy a love that has never existed. In his fanciful mind, Hartley is conjured as the embodiment of a fulfilled life and a lost chance of purity that Charles feels he has not been able to achieve to realize. Accordingly, Charles inadvertently acknowledges that all his affairs from the moment he had been deserted by Hartley in his early youth till his retirement and re-discovery of Hartley were the pastime playthings; he, thereby, reduces the fates of women surrounding him to nothing but expendable lives.

Iris Murdoch's oeuvre, profoundly shaped by her philosophical acumen, intricately intertwines themes of morality, love, and the complexities of human relationships, as exemplified in the nuanced portrayals of her multifaceted characters. Spanning a literary career for over forty years, Murdoch is a prolific novelist noted for such novels as *Under the Net* (1954), *A Severed Head* (1965), *Bruno's Dream* (1969), *The Time of the Angels* (1966), *The Black Prince* (1973), *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) and *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995). As an author of philosophy, who was educated at Oxford and taught at Oxford and Cambridge, also wrote several works of philosophy such as *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), *The Fire and the Sun* (1977), and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992). Although Murdoch never lost her touch with philosophy and justifiably having the status of public intellectual, she sustained "her fascination with the fantastical and supernatural" (Leeson, 2021, p.103) which helped her to maintain a significant literary figure throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Depending on her philosophical background, Murdoch explores the themes of morality, reality and perception, love and the complexities of the nature of human relationships and its connection to ethics. By richly weaving multi-layered plots with a descriptive and labyrinthine narratives in her novels, Murdoch inquires the intricate nature of moral responsibility and how her characters can be at odds with the moral compass of the sovereignty of an acceptable mindset and the limits of right behavior, the themes which she manages to present with the character of Charles in *The Sea The Sea*. In Murdoch's novel, Charles stands out to be an obsessed lover who grapples with his deceptive illusions and fails to navigate through the matters of friendship, love, and familial bonds throughout his life. As characters ineptly fumble around to have tools to exorcise their inner demons and get rid of the conflicts they have enmeshed themselves over the years, which peaks in *The Sea The Sea*, Murdoch evinces the philosophical underpinnings of her narrative.

In her retrospective fiction, Murdoch raises the questions of fantasy and reality, morality, identity, and the nature of love through the portrayal of her characters who are difficult to classify neatly as good or evil. Characters wrestle with ethical stalemates compounded by foregone conclusions and futile hindsight, which are underlined by the motif and technique of retrospective fiction by which characters have some perspective about the events that took place and the thoughts and feelings passed through their minds. By the portrayal of Charles, who reflects on his past life that led him to his present situation, Murdoch employs retrospective technique to shed light on the nature of perception and its intertwined relationship with identity, memory, illusion and reality. The retrospective fiction which is recognized and sometimes haphazardly (and erroneously) used in place of *confessional novel*, *the memoir novel* or *the personal novel*, is "a self-begetting novel [...] because its narrator seems responsible for creating the novel we read" (Nicol, 1996, p. 193) and it does not have to be written down after some traumatic experience by the fictional character of the narrative as Hywel Dix proposes "fictions of self-retrospect are not only writings that come after trauma, but writing that comes after writing" (Dix, 2017, p.173). Charles Arrowby, whose professional career included writing, editing and directing, has spent most of his time in cerebral activities but it has excluded writing about himself and of his own experiences. In the context of retrospective fiction, Charles' ability/inability to write a retrospective fiction about himself, which is first nursed by his professional life and then triggered by his solipsistic thoughts and egotistical self, overlaps with Jameson's argument that "[...] retrospective fiction of memory and writing after the fact is mobilized in order for the intensity of a now merely remembered present to be experienced in some time-released and utterly unexpected posthumous actuality." (Jameson,

2017, p.216). Although not being a fully gripping life story, which mostly suffers from Charles' insipid and fragmented form of 'jotting down' his experiences, retirement is an apt time to record an implicitly tumultuous life.

As a philosophical moralist novelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Murdoch seeks to find an alternative to conventional-religious God's image(s) which do not function any longer and she substitutes the waning idea of God with that of *Good*, the attempt of which would secure the access to spirituality. In *The Sea The Sea*, by placing a character like Charles in her narrative, who is excessively self-absorbed to the extent of privileging his private fantasies upon those working with him and destroying their lives, Murdoch encourages reader to reflect on the idea of good without recourse to conventional morality and institutional religion. In his active professional career, Charles used his power menacingly as if it were magical and advancing his directorial authority and extending it unflinchingly over those whom he knows. Charles, as stage director, evidently superimposes on Shakespeare's Prospero of *The Tempest* who cannot but succumb to noxious impacts of power and magic. Accordingly, Diane Capitani, who reads *The Sea The Sea* in the context of virtue and goodness, suggests that Charles can be described as:

[...] an enchanter, a predator, and an egoist, wielding power in a bad way over all those around him. Like Prospero, Charles thinks about attaining the power of "white magic" by which he might become God, since the traditional concept of God is no longer valid in late-twentieth-century Britain. What Charles does not realize, and what [his cousin] James cannot show him, is that in order to save himself the magician ultimately must give up power and set people free (Capitani, 2003, p.103).

In his tumultuous quest to restore both Hartley's affections and his own peace of mind, Charles finds himself engaged in a relentless internal and external struggle. He is compelled to reconcile with a diverse array of figures, each representing a distinct form of confrontation with his own psyche and ethical shortcomings. His cousin James, a retired soldier and Tibetan monk, persistently endeavors to provide Charles with a moral compass, attempting to guide him toward rational clarity and spiritual awakening. Meanwhile, Titus, the adopted son of Hartley and Ben, along with a cohort of women, further exacerbates Charles's confrontation with himself by challenging his deeply ingrained solipsism, the unsoundness of his rationalizations, and the unfounded nature of his illusory dreams. Together, these characters form a collective force that compels Charles to relinquish his misguided sense of self-importance and ungrounded aspirations, which imperil the very foundations of universal moral tenets. Through these interactions, Murdoch underscores the philosophical tension between self-deception and the ethical imperative of confronting one's true responsibilities in the larger moral order.

### **An Impossible and Unethical Desire to Return to an Irrevocable Past**

Iris Murdoch's retrospective novel is divided into three parts titled as *Prehistory, History and Postscript: Life Goes On* all of which revolves around Charles's involvement with Hartley in different times. As a stage director, he sees his art as "an attack on mankind carried on by magic: to victimize an audience every night, to make them laugh and cry and suffer and miss their trains" (Murdoch, 2001, p.31). As a conspicuous Prospero figure, whose colleagues Lizzie, Rosina, Perry and Gilbert have also affinities with the characters of *The Tempest*. Charles has a profound lust for directing; thus, power, as he confesses that "The theatre is a place of obsession [...] Only geniuses

like Shakespeare [...] change it into something spiritual. And obsession drives to hard work. I myself have always worked (and worked others) like a demon (Murdoch, 2001, p.31). While Lizzie stands out to be an Ariel figure who demonstrated servitude to Charles for much of her stage career, Gilbert comes to embody the role of Caliban handling the chores even after Charles' professional career ends when he is willingly accept cutting wood and performing daily drudgeries for him. Additionally, Rosina, whose marriage was first ruined and who was then deserted by Charles, resembles the mother of Caliban, Sycorax. She acts like a demonic figure who haunts Charles after he has retired and taken refuge in his isolated cottage. It is Rosina who sums up Charles's case by telling him that "Those women loved you for your power, your magic, yes, you have been a sorcerer. And now it's over" (Murdoch, 2001, p.79). A similar kind of castrative declaration is also voiced by Perry who in an outright manner speaks out "You're an exploded myth. 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" (Murdoch, 2001, p.300). Charles even reminds of one of the characters from A.S. Byatt's *Matisse Stories*; Susanna, in embodying the tension between personal identity and societal expectations around aging. Both characters confront the inevitable changes of aging but handle them with a similar discomfort and sense of loss. Charles, who fears a decline into insignificance much like Prospero's faded legacy, mirrors Susannah's unease who "already feels uncomfortable in her aging body" (Uçar, 2023, p. 211) and the relentless social pressures on women to remain eternally "young, beautiful, demure and comforting" (Uçar, 2023, p. 211). Charles is inevitably dethroned and demystified in the eyes of his colleagues over whom he once had perfect control. Charles' recollections he has taken down and his servitude to his obsessions invite us to "moral involvement" (Tucker, 1986, p.395) and have readers scrutinize the idea of goodness which is free from ruthless selfishness and delusions.

Charles who refers to Plato's *Allegory of Cave Dwellers* (Murdoch, 2001, p.16), retreats to his cave-like hermitage to atone for a life of selfishness and egoism but unable to realize such an easy way out for repentance as his mean demeanours and malicious actions have had dire consequences on people and changed the course of actions in an irreversibly way for their lives. His seclusion is disrupted when his past revisits him first by Rosina whose marriage was destroyed by Charles. Initially Rosina's appearance comes in the implication of a ghost who haunts Charles' cottage and surreptitiously breaks things in it till she reveals herself as the one coming from the past who initiates others to appear as the narrative gradually unfolds. The women whom Charles thinks he left behind, seem generally have mastered the art of maliciousness after having been deserted and destroyed as exemplified in Rosina's attempt to harm (or hilariously kill) Charles when she rolls rocks on his car over a hill but she settles for only breaking the windscreen and scaring the people in the car. Rosina and the rest of the women in Charles' life resist being the controllable plot devices as opposed to submissive Hartley whom Charles recognizes as an easy target for novelization and a possible main character of a love story, the attempt of which is implicitly "an act not of tenderness but of aggression" (Weese, 2001, p.666). Ultimately, Charles' relationship with Hartley, which depends more on illusion and power than actual love, bounds to fail but the failure for Charles is at last sufficient to be the disclosure of what reality is and how he should think and act:

When did I begin to relax my hold upon Hartley, or rather upon her image, her double, the Hartley of my mind? Have I relaxed my hold, did it happen before, or is it only happening now, when I can look back over the summer and see my acts and thoughts as those of a madman? [...] Have I indeed relived my love simply in order to explain to myself that it was a false love, com-

pounded of resentment stored from long ago and the present promptings of mad possessive jealousy? Was I so resentful long ago? [...] I had deluded myself throughout by the idea of reviving a secret love which did not exist at all. (Murdoch, 2001, p.367, 371).

Charles conceives a plan of returning to an irreversible past in the form of ‘saving’ Hartley, the circumstance which reminds classical tragedies having the feature of the dramatic irony when the audience know intrinsic reality of events enacted on the stage and what will happen but the tragic character does not know and cannot able to foresee. Charles’ friends (and of course readers, as well) are able to see the probable outcomes of his malevolent fantasies while he cannot and ultimately brings about his doom in the form of a failure. As Murdoch states that “Novels are usually partly ironical, just because they are about real human life, and we are ironical people — we look sideways, as it were, at the world” (Lesser, 1984, p.15), Charles looks ironically and somewhat astutely for ‘sideways’ and is unable to feel or willfully reject experiencing a true sense of remorse. Charles’ endeavor to write down or journaling his experiences may seem to have been oriented towards “to repent of a life of egoism” (Murdoch, 2001, p.14), his quest will inevitably turn out to be an insincere attempt as he confesses that “this chattering diary is a facade, the literary equivalent of the everyday smiling face which hides the inward ravages of jealousy, remorse, fear and the consciousness of irretrievable moral failure” (Murdoch, 2001, p.362). Although Charles preaches on remorse by means of his retrospective diary-novel, the irony Murdoch infuses into her narrative is that the character’s insufficient grasp of what remorse truly is and how it feels like for one who experiences it genuinely. In line with this not knowing and not being able to feel the sense of remorse, in his book *Iris Murdoch and Remorse: Past Forgiving?* Frances White points out for *The Sea The Sea* “the narrative indicates that neither character experiences a true form of remorse leading to an unselfing attention to the reality of others to whom their egocentric behaviour causes harm” (White, 2023, p.27). Characters, particularly Charles himself, can be argued to have been suffering ethically for they do not have precisely defined set of moral principles which can guide them and regulate their behaviors and thoughts not to harm those around themselves.

The moral psychology of the case is so acute for Charles that it is not only valid in negative feelings, which is expected to cause pain and requires contemplation for a better existence through interrogation and correction of one’s self, but it also holds good even in positive ones including love itself. Rosina’s protestation of Charles “You are a cold child. You want women but you are never interested in the people you want, so you learn nothing. You’ve had love affairs but somehow you’ve stayed innocent, no not innocent, you are fundamentally vicious, but somehow immature” (Murdoch, 2001, p.79) forces him to face his self-serving and outrages fantasies in plain words. It becomes apparent that “The falsifying veil of egoism not only prevents us from seeing the objective world for what it is; it also constructs illusions designed to satisfy our psychic needs.” (Denham, 2001, p.624). Notwithstanding the self-serving desires of Charles so rampant in the novel, his retrospective fiction is laden with logical insights as well:

When Hartley said she had to ‘protect herself’ by thinking I hated her and blamed her, she added that she ‘always felt guilty’. When she said she had to feel sure it was all over and to ‘make it dead in her mind’, I imagined that this angry hostile image of me was designed to numb her old love and the attraction which I might still exercise, because such an attraction would be too painful for her to live with. But perhaps the fundamental bond was not love at all, but guilt? Obsessive guilt can survive through the years and animate the ghost of the offended one. [...] While there

was no occasion to define it, how could she know exactly what she felt, whether it was shock, or guilt, or love? Why did she go? Because I was in love and she was not; because she simply did not like me enough, because I was too selfish, too dominating, as she put it “so sort of bossy.” (Murdoch, 2001, pp.370, 371).

Charles' first person narrative in the form of retrospective fiction helps him (also the reader) to have insight into objective reality surrounding him. Iris Murdoch, who does not like experimental fiction and declares “to be thought of as a realistic writer” (Rose, 1968, p.73), is intentionally adopting realistic first person narrative for *The Sea The Sea* as to her, goodness and “conception of morality [is] a form of metaphysical realism” (Antonaccio, 2003, p.11). It is implied throughout Charles' retrospective fiction that he must wrestle with his personal fantasies, accept the existence of other people, of their autonomy, and give up superimposing his selfish illusion on them as the extensions of his wish fulfilment. In his case, realism proves to be an antidote for his myopic heedlessness to the existence and needs of others. The reason behind Murdoch's adoption of realism (and of Charles' retrospective fiction) may also arise from novelist's firm belief that morality cannot be reduced to some abstraction or to psychological variables and its conundrums but it is intimately hinged on firm reality.

With the character of Charles, Murdoch illustrates that morality has a solid interplay with reality so much so that they are, indeed, intertwined and through the character of Charles and of his discontent, confusion and unrest, she is unwilling to soothe away any form of perturbation and crumbled hopes as she deeply believes her maxim and wants us to recognize that “almost everything that consoles us is a fake” (Paterson, 1998, p.164). It may be difficult to live without illusions; yet, it is an indispensable step to take to be levelled with the idea of good, morality and requirements of an *author-itative* goodness, which is thoroughly delineated by the substantive argument of *The Sea The Sea*. Charles' bullying and misogynistically inflated self not only obscures the reality of those around him but he also subordinates the authenticity and requirements of them to his own existence. In this sense, Martha Nussbaum, who also considers Murdoch's role as a moralist author, accurately pinpoints that “Murdoch, more than any other contemporary ethical thinker, has made us vividly aware of the many stratagems by which the ego wraps itself in a cozy self-serving fog that prevents egress to the reality of the other” (Nussbaum, 1966, p.36). Charles' totalizing inclinations have deprived him of the common sense that real (and reality) is a phenomenon exists beyond one's deceptive desires and outrageous daydreams, many of which in his case have been sparked by the misrecognition of others either (or both) as intimidating entities or frivolous beings for his wish fulfilment. Even if Charles right at the beginning of his quest decides to be a hermit and “abjure magic” (Murdoch, 2001, p.14), it takes much time and even much more experience to be able to have certain amount of enlightenment that he only gets at the end. This mainly arises from the fact that though Charles seems that he would like to relinquish all his authoritative power he has exerted for a long time in interpersonal relationships, he furtively craves to sustain his domineering role which still comes to embody his associated literary equivalent of Shakespeare's Prospero.

Charles can be said to have been suffering from a condition which can be *termed* —if the true word for it is not *prescribe* in medical sense —an irredeemable Prospero syndrome arising from Lacanian *lack* or *manqué*. Lacanian theory posits that human condition is characterized by a certain and indelible sort of incompleteness or insufficiency. It can apply both to ontological incom-

pleteness and to the aspects of desire and fulfillment. While ontological incompleteness hypothesizes incompleteness is not just a bodily absence but a profound ontological condition that frames our identity and interactions, Lacanian lack tied to desires and fulfillment is never completely procurable as *object of desire* or what Jacques Lacan termed as *objet petit a* is a volatile abstract entity, which is internalized and can never truly be acquired. Innumerable entities can be internalized as *objet petit a* since *manqué* or *lack* is nursed both by in the *symbolic* and *imaginary* realms, which are the orders or the procedures of the formation of ego concerning the dimensions of human subjectivity, experience and the stages of individuation processes formulized in Lacanian theory (Lacan, 1982, pp. VII-XI, 1-7). In Lacanian context, Hartley is projected as an *objet petit a* subtly cultivated by Charles' unattainable *manqué*. Although Hartley proves to be insignificant and vulnerable alternative for Charles' *manqué*, she is more real than anything and anybody for Charles till when he is forced to understand — by the second abandonment of Hartley — the futility of struggling to impose his desires upon contingent circumstances and close fellows to make up for his unattainable *lack*.

It seems it has never truly occurred to Charles what if Hartley somehow happened to accept leaving her husband Ben and home and came to live with Charles. Peregrine provides a shortcut to reality for Charles' inflated fantasies which are actually self-glorifying reveries:

In ordinary human affairs humble common sense comes to one's aid. For most people common sense is moral sense. But you seem to have deliberately excluded this modest source of light. Ask yourself, what really happened between whom all those years ago? You've made it into a story, and stories are false.' [...] 'And you are using this thing from the far past as a guide to important and irrevocable moves which you propose to make in the future. You are making a dangerous induction, and induction is shaky at the best of times, consider Russell's chicken —' [...] 'The farmer's wife comes out every day and feeds the chicken, but one day she comes out and wrings its neck' (Murdoch, 2001, p.245).

Neither common sense referred as the moral sense, for which Peregrine claims Charles has discarded, nor the sensible admonitions from his friends, whom he has wronged in some way, help Charles to internalize the downright reality to deflate his fancies: He would have inevitably gotten bored — as he did with other women — and deserted Hartley, whom he has idolized through his deceptive delusions, if she had left and begun living with Charles. Charles is reluctant to accept that memoirs cannot be the source of truth as underscored by Rosina, who tries to shake Charles into reality and objects to him vehemently not to take Hartley's adopted son Titus for his son by telling him that “you can't grasp the stuff of reality. He'll turn out to be a dream child too—when you touch him he'll fade and disappear you'll see.” (Murdoch, 2001, p.227). In exactly the same way that Rosina admonishes Charles to be cautious about Titus, he is too reckless to get him drown in the sea.

Remorse could have been a catalyst for Charles to change for the better in giving up selfishness and accepting a moral life but he has failed to do so since such a transformative quest requires companions as well just as suggested by Leeson and White that “Murdoch represents the moral life not as a lonely pilgrimage toward reality, but as a *passeggiata* with others in which one gives way to a movement larger than and beyond oneself” (Leeson and White, 2023, p.8). That's why Charles' solitary attempt, which results — among many factors — from his ingrained self-centeredness and excessive individuality, turns out to be an impossible quest for redemption; hence, it



is bound to fail only leading to a flimsy awareness about his actions and existence. Ultimately, Charles takes great pains to learn about his existence, wishes and longing for his past, if he does at all

### Conclusion

Justifying F. R. Leavis' belief that great literary works must be imbued with morality, Andrew Gibson claims that "in their own particular manner, novels can perform an ethical work, or can be made to, and it is worth trying to enable that work to take place" (Gibson, 1999, p.1). Murdoch's latent attempt to elaborate on morality in her novels, which she does explicitly in her philosophical writings, to question the variables of human ethical/unethical behaviour arises from the same moral involvement to perform a moral task for humanity by means of fiction. In its trajectory, which navigates through the themes of love, hope, resentment, anger, frustration, longing for the past, innocence and the loss of it and remorse (and inability to feel remorse), *The Sea The Sea* presents an index of ethical/unethical behaviors and thoughts of its characters. By the characters, particularly through Charles, who have not been able to learn and bear ethical qualities and moral appreciation, Murdoch seeks to illustrate what kind of perception of life, experience, the mode of living (which shape one's) personality may bring about such private and —at the same time— communal vices and shortcomings. By her retrospective fiction, Murdoch presents an arresting reading experience for the 'observers' who almost stand over Charles —and the rest of his fellows— and make 'uncomfortable' evaluations since such a critical act for Charles entails one to judge one's own self, as well. Exemplifying Charles' thoughts and attitudes, Murdoch candidly proposes that people may readily opt for diverting vital moral distress, which they must feel and behave in accordance to it, into feelings and demeanours that they should not have and display. Charles Arrowby, who strives to revive an old affair, is never bothered by any moral distress to increase the number of his 'casualties' but rather feel the immature anxiety of not being able to win his old flame back, which can indeed be encapsulated as an act of trying to take back some lost innocence of himself; thus, still proving his undue need and haste for his self-serving character and mindset. Charles lets his fancies impinge on his life while stigmatizing his interpersonal relationships since he never tries to immure them even if his forebodings signal the consequences of his actions arising primarily from the plethora of his emotional extensions. No matter how trenchant the consequences get for Charles, he never tends to shun away orchestrating his life to avoid denigrating his integrity. Charles' uncanny attempt to revive the protracted love of Hartley, which turns out to be the fountainhead of his desires, yields no result since the unfathomable pursuit itself is away from moral action, which is subtly and precisely underscored by Murdoch's retrospective fiction.

### Geniřletilmiř Özet

Iris Murdoch'un Deniz, Deniz adlı eseri, piřmanlık, anı, öfke ve gemiři yeniden canlandırma isteęi gibi duygular arasında gidip gelen retrospektif bir anlatıdır. Emekli tiyatro yönetmeni Charles Arrowby, egoist yařamını ve kadınlarla kurduęu acımasız iliřkilerini hatırlarken, ahlaki kaygılardan yoksun geirdięi hayatın olumsuz etkilerinden kurtulmaya abalar. Bu süreç, gemiři sorgulamanın ötesinde, varoluřsal bir yenilenme arayışının da izlerini tařır.

Bař karakterini ahlaki kaygılarının sözcüsü olarak kullanan yazar Iris Murdoch, Charles Arrowby'nin kullandıęı iç gözlem ve yařanılan olayların ardından ikincil düşüncelerle tecrübelerini dışarıdan bir kimse gibi gözden geirme motifli anlatım özellięi bir araya getirilir. Yakın kiřil-

erarası iliřkilerde etik ve etik olmayan davranıřların bir dizininin sunulduęu anlatı, yazara ve kahramanına belirsiz bir retrospektif gnlk-roman kurgusu oluřturmasına izin verir. Bu baęlamda; alıřma, hayata dair hatalı bir bakıř aısının, aldatıcı yařam tarzı seimlerinin, ahlaki pularının kiřiye makul dřncelere ve sonuları itibariyle kederden uzak tecrbelere ynelik tutarlı deęerlendirmelere yneldirmedięi zihinsel kurulumların ve tutumların, kiřinin karakterini nasıl etkileyebileceęi ve tm bu durumların kaınılmaz olarak bireysel ıkımlara nasıl yol atıęı konularını irdeler. Bu doęrultuda alıřma; *Deniz Deniz*'in retrospektif ve etik boyutlarını, yine retrospektif kurguya odaklanan bir anlatıyla, igrler ve geriye dnk bakıřlar aısından zengin olduęu kadar takıntılı da olan ana karakteri aracılıęıyla keřfetmeyi ve tasvir etmeyi amalar.

Gemiři piřmanlık duymadan ve etrafındakilerin zararına yeniden inřa etmek iin bir fantezi arayıřına koyulan Charles, tedavi edilemez bencillięini ve gemiřte yakın arkadařlarını bile nasıl kurban ettięini retrospektif anlatısıyla ortaya koyar. Bu durum ise biz okuyucuların anlatıya zorunlu olarak ahlaki katılımını gerektirir. Retrospektif kurgu baęlamında ahlaki sorumluluęa ynelik byle bir yorumlayıcı davetin gerekliliklerini yerine getirmek iin, Murdoch'un ahlakı bir yazar olarak rol ve etik tutumunun sınırlarına deęinen kurgusal/kurgusal olmayan eserleri ve geriye dnk kurgu hakkındaki dięer yazarların alıřmaları irdelenmiřtir. Őimdiye kadar yrtlen alıřmalar ya ncelikli olarak Murdoch'un kurgusunun ahlaki/etik ynlerine (zellikle *Deniz Deniz* rneęinde), onun ince mesajlarına ve geleneksel ve kurumsal dine bařvurmadan ahlaka iliřkin rtk takdirine odaklanmıřlardır ya da bu alıřmalar yazarın geriye dnk kurguya olan eęilimi zerinde durmuřtur. Bu alıřma, hem ahlak/etik hem de geriye dnk kurgu merceklerinden bakma zorunluluęundan dn vermeden *Deniz Deniz*'i incelerken bir yandan eserin ana karakterinin aık, gzlemlenebilir tutumlarına dięer bir taraftansa psikolojisinin rtk ya da i iřleyiřine odaklanmıřtır.

Charles Arrowby, bencil hayatının bedelini demeye alıřırken, geride bıraktıęı yařamını temize ıkarmak adına bařarılması imkansız bir uęrařın gereklilięi konusunda kendisini kandırır. Charles'ın uzun yıllar nceki iliřkisini yeniden canlandırmaya ynelik varsayımları ve gayretleri, gemiřte bir Őekilde haksızlık ettięi kiřilerle yzlemeden ve dahası onlarla aıka uzlařmadan kendisini temize ıkarmaya yetmez. Charles'ın ironik bilinsizlięi ya da bilgi kayıtsızlıęı ve piřmanlık duymamaktan yorgun dřmş tedbirsiz vicdanı, eski sevgilisi Hartley'i saflık ve mutluluk adına kaybettięi her 'Őey'in cisimleřmiř hali olarak hayal ederken onu kazanmak uęruna verdięi uęrařı tm sorunlarının zm olarak grmesi, bu abalarını Hartley'in kiřilięini de yok sayarak onu romanlařtırma giriřimleri ve gemiřten gelen ve Charles'a artık kin duyan sevgililerinin onu gten dřrme/hadım etme giriřimlerinin tm yazara-esere-okuyuna ve temaya dayalı yorumlama ynteminin benimsenmesini ngren yakın, eleřtirel ve karřılařtırmalı okumayı gerektirmiřtir. Karřılařtırmalı ve eleřtirel okuma yoluyla alıřma, Charles'ın gemiře olan zlemine ve kendi imgelemindeki kaybettięi cennet benzeri varoluřunu geri kazanma abalarını ve nihayetinde kendisi ve arkadařları arasındaki dinamikleri inceleyerek yukarıda belirtilen ahlak ve retrospektif kurgunun ilgili deęiřkenlerini ortaya ıkarmayı dener. İlgili literatr incelemesini karřılařtırılarak yapılan byle bir yorumlayıcı giriřim, bu alıřma iin zemin ve aęrıřımlara aık bir zengin okuma deneyimi saęlamıřtır.

alıřma tartıřma ve sonuları aısından deęerlendirildięinde; piřmanlık, Charles'ın sahip olmadıęı ve kendisinin geliřimi iin can suyu sunamadıęı duyuřsal ve biliřsel bir kurtarıcı duyu olduęu ileri srlebilir. Ayrıca, Charles'ın kkleřmiř benmerkezcilięi ve ařırı bireysellięinden

kaynaklanan bu tür eksikliklerin, kişisel kurtuluşu için gerçekleştirilemez bir arayış biçiminde tezahür ettiğini ileri sürmek mümkündür. Yapılan titiz yakın okumalardan ve karşılaştırmalı yorumlardan, Charles'ın düşünce ve tutumlarını değerlendirmenin kaçınılmaz olarak acı verici olduğu sonucuna ulaşmak olasıdır; çünkü, Charles için böylesine eleştirel bir eylem, kişinin kendi hayatına yönelik yine kendisini dürüstçe yargılamasını ve böylesine eleştirel bir girişimin sonuçlarıyla yüzleşmesini de gerektirir. Çalışma, meta-metinsel olarak, büyük edebi eserlerin ahlaki/etik kaygılar taşıdığını ve Iris Murdoch'un eserlerinin de bir istisna olmadığını ileri sürer: Murdoch'un ahlaki keşfetme ve insanın etik davranışını etkileyen faktörleri inceleme yönündeki temel çabası, retrospektif kurgu eseri *Deniz Deniz* aracılığıyla ahlaki bir görevi üstlenmeye bağlılığından kaynaklanmaktadır.

## References

- Bran J. N. (1996). "Anticipating Retrospection: The First-Person Retrospective Novel and Iris Murdoch's "The Sea, the Sea", *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 26, (2), pp. 187-208.
- Bran J. N. (2004). *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Capitani, D. N. (2003). "Ideas of the Good: Iris Murdoch's "The Sea, The Sea", *Christianity and Literature*, 53, (1), pp. 99-108.
- Denham, A. E. (2001). "Envisioning the Good: Iris Murdoch's Moral Psychology", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 47, (3), pp. 602-629.
- Dix, H. (2017). *The Career Novelists: Career Construction Theory, Authors and Auto-Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Gibson, A. (1999). *Postmodernity, ethics and the novel: From Leavis to Levinas*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jameson, F. (2017). *Progress versus Utopia: Can We Imagine the Future?* (Ed.) Latham, R. 2017, *Science Fiction Criticism: An Anthology of Essential Writings*.) London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Lacan, J. (1982). *Écrits: A Selection*, New York: Routledge.
- Leeson, M. (2021). Iris Murdoch (1919-1999). (Ed. Showers, B.J. *The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature*, No. 18, 2021), Dublin: Samhain- Swan River Press.
- Leeson, M., White, F. (2023). *Iris Murdoch and the Literary Imagination*, London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Lesser, W. (1984). "Interview with Iris Murdoch", *The Threepenny Review*, 19, (1), pp. 13-15.
- Murdoch, I. (2001). *The Sea The Sea*, London: Penguin Books.
- Nussbaum, M. (1996). *Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and The Individual*. (Ed. Antonaccio, M. and Schweiker, W. *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, 1996), Chicago: Chicago Press.
- Paterson, R.W.K. (1998). *The New Patricians: An Essay on Values and Consciousness*, Lon-

don: Macmillan.

Rose, W. K. (1968). "Iris Murdoch: Informally, Interview with William K. Rose", *London Magazine*, pp. 59-73.

Tucker, L. (1986). "Released from Bands: Iris Murdoch's Two Prosperos in "The Sea, The Sea", *Contemporary Literature*, 27, (3), pp. 378-395.

Uçar, A. S. (2023). Medusa and Matisse: Myth and Art in A.S. Byatt's "Medusa's Ankles". *Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, 33(1), 205-218. <https://doi.org/10.26650/LITERA2022-1104177>

Weese, K. (2001). "Feminist Uses of the Fantastic in Iris Murdoch's "The Sea, The Sea", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 47, (3), pp. 630-656.

White, F. (2023). *Iris Murdoch and Remorse: Past Forgiving?* London: Palgrave MacMillan.