

**‘There is no Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship’:  
Lacanian Principles in Iris Murdoch’s *The Sea The Sea***

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**Abstract:** *Iris Murdoch, the English philosopher and writer, and Jacques Lacan, the French philosopher and psychoanalyst, tried to depict the human relations in a questioning way in the twentieth century. In this respect, their ideas frequently meet on the fields such as philosophy and psychoanalysis. This paper will handle Murdoch’s well-known novel *The Sea The Sea* in terms of its protagonist’s, Charles Arrowby’s unconscious motivations in connection with his obsessive love for Hartley. When Charles’s sexual and emotional relationships, such as his relationship with Clement who is old enough to be his mother, his obsession for his first love who is married to another man, his will to steal women from their husbands, and his references to his strict mother are considered, he seems more as a representative of Lacanian subject of the unconscious.*

*In this sense, the references that direct the readers to Charles’s unconscious motivations demonstrate in particular his own but in general everybody’s paradoxical desire to attain the absolute jouissance which is lost in the symbolic order in Lacanian terminology. Charles’s quest for jouissance is presented by his sexual relationships, namely Lacanian object petit a’s. However, the impossibility to attain jouissance is also reflected by those of love failures. As Lacan theorizes, all sexual relationships are illusions and fantasies that cannot ensure jouissance for human being, here for Charles. However, Lacan mentions that “courtly love” lacking sexuality and providing a continuous pleasure (nearly jouissance) by keeping the subject’s desire alive is a significant alternative to sexual relationship. In this respect, this study will examine *The Sea The Sea* in relation to Lacanian “There is no such thing as a sexual relationship” principle in terms of Charles’s unconscious motivations and his obsessive courtly love fantasy that is “the possibility of love in the form of a pure deep affectionate mutual respect” with Charles’s own words.*

**Keywords:** *The Sea The Sea, Jacques Lacan, jouissance, courtly love, sexual relationship.*

**‘Cinsel İlişki Yoktur’: Iris Murdoch’un *The Sea The Sea* Romanında  
Lacancı İlkeler**

**Özet:** İngiliz felsefeci yazar Iris Murdoch ve Fransız felsefeci psikanalist Jacques Lacan insan ilişkilerini yirminci yüzyılda sorgulayıcı bir biçimde betimlemeye çalışmışlardır. Bu bağlamda, fikirleri felsefe ve psikanaliz gibi alanlarda sıklıkla kesişir. Bu çalışma, Murdoch’un *The Sea The Sea* adlı ünlü romanını, ana karakteri Charles Arrowby’nin bilinçdışı güdülenmelerinin Hartley’e olan saplantılı aşkı ile ilişkisi bağlamında ele alacaktır. Annesi olabilecek yaştaki sevgilisi Clement ile ilişkisi, başka biri ile evli olan ilk aşkı için saplantısı, kadınları eşlerinden çalma arzusu ve otoriter annesine yaptığı göndermeler gibi cinsel ve duygusal ilişkileri göz önüne alındığı zaman Charles, Lacancı bilinçdışının öznesinin önemli bir temsilcisi gibi görünmektedir.

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*Bu anlamda Charles'ın bilinçdışı güdülenmelerine bizleri yönlendiren göndermeler, özelde karakterin kendisinin, genelde ise herkesin Lacancı terminolojiye göre sembolik düzende kaybettiği mutlak jouissance'ı (hazzı) elde etmek için paradoksal arzusunu gösterir. Charles'ın jouissance arayışı cinsel ilişkileri, yani Lacancı object petit a'lar (küçük a nesnelere), ile sunulur. Fakat jouissance'a ulaşmanın imkânsızlığı da bu aşk hüsrânları ile yansıtılır. Lacan'ın kuramlaştırdığı gibi tüm cinsel ilişkiler insan için, bu çalışmada Charles için, jouissance sağlayamayacak yanılsama ve fantazilerdir. Buna rağmen Lacan, cinsel ilişki içermeyen ve öznenin arzusunu canlı tutarak daimi bir arzu (nerdeyse jouissance) sağlayan "saray aşkı"nın cinsel ilişkiye karşı önemli bir alternatif olduğunu belirtir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma The Sea The Sea romanını Lacancı "Cinsel İlişki Yoktur" ilkesi ile Charles'ın bilinçdışı güdülenmeleri ve Charles'ın deyimıyla "saf, derin, şefkatli, karşılıklı bir saygı şeklindeki aşk ihtimali" olan saplantılı saray aşkı fantazisi bağlamında inceleyecektir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *The Sea The Sea, Jacques Lacan, jouissance, saray aşkı, cinsel ilişki.*

### Introduction

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, permanently stressed "sexuality" which constituted the basic of his doctrine to give a meaning to the various deeds of human being. "Freud made clear to the twentieth century that 'that Necessity' underlying the world is sexuality – a vestige of animal need, a necessity for the continuation of the species, a sign of the cycle of birth and death that controls reality" (Heusel, 1995: 237). This fact that is related to "cosmos and beginnings make it clear that all beginnings come from chaos; at a practical level, all worlds are created out of the chaos of sexuality (Heusel, 1995: 237). This chaos related to sexuality also occupies a significant place both in philosophy and fiction of Iris Murdoch, one of the prominent philosophers and novelists of the twentieth century. Although Iris Murdoch handles Freudian psychoanalysis from a critical point of view, the ideas of Plato whose doctrines she pays great attention to and the theories of Freud get closer to each other at the point of Eros and sexuality. "Where Plato and Freud converge in an important way in Murdoch's thinking is in their awareness of the importance of Eros as a 'fundamental force'" (Tucker, 1992a: 8). Freud takes the basis of Eros theory from Plato as Murdoch mentions: "Freud certainly follows an important line in Plato's thought when he envisages sex as a sort of universal spiritual energy, an ambiguous force which may be destructive or can be used for good" (Murdoch, 1997: 418). In this respect, according to Plato, sexual energy should be directed to constructive and good aims instead of destructive ones. Murdoch's attitude towards sexuality is mostly Platonic in this sense. Accordingly, Eros, namely the life energy, presents a moral function when the idea of beauty and turning towards *Good* as an *idea* are in question.

In his conception of the beautiful Plato gives to sexual love and transformed sexual energy a central place in his philosophy. (...) Plato's Eros is a principle which connects the commonest human desire to the

highest morality and to the pattern of divine creativity in the universe.  
(...) Eros is a form of the desire for immortality, for perpetual possession  
of the good, whatever we may take the good to be (Murdoch, 1997:  
415).

Murdoch develops Plato's philosophy and designates the ideal route to which Eros should be directed as the *attention* to other people and the *search for ideal good* in her philosophy. As Tucker mentions, to Murdoch "sexual love is a cosmic power whose principle, Eros, 'connects the commonest human desire to the highest morality. Eros is thus [and should be] a mediating spirit that takes human desire beyond sexual to the good'" (Tucker, 1992a: 8). Murdoch's moral attitude here is getting over the destructive force of Eros which removes the subject from the ideal good. The significance of transforming Eros or sexual energy does not mean that Murdoch accepts sexuality as a dark instinct that should be totally abolished. The main idea is that Eros or sexuality should be shifted from subversive and self-centered one to a constructive and other-centered aim. In other words, "[a]s a Platonist, Murdoch argued that spirituality and sexuality (Eros or life force) are integrally connected, and that low Eros (selfish, egoistic behaviour) can be transformed by moral vision" (Heusel, 2006: 20).

Murdoch's Platonic point of view towards sexuality accepts the idea that sexuality and goodness stem from the same source and the aim is to transform the low Eros to high Eros by turning towards beauty and goodness. Murdoch pays great attention to the synergy of loving beauty and desiring the good. So, in her philosophy, "Eros is linked to 'bisexuality' because the quest for goodness is integral to the search for the beautiful, and an individual can be attracted to that which is beautiful, regardless of the sex of the object choice" (Grimshaw, 2005: 169). However, the sexual relationships as results of low Eros hinder the subject from attaining true love and absolute Good. So, Murdoch conceives "the control of sexual impulses as a path to the divine" (Grimshaw, 2005: 61).

According to Peter Conradi, Iris Murdoch underscores the various dimensions of Eros, namely desire: "desire of knowledge, desire for God –the force that can release the prisoners from the Cave; but in its lower –desire for power and possession- precisely the mechanical repetitive force which binds them there in the first place" (Conradi, 2001a: 106). The bicephalous tendency of Eros and desire are reflected by the searches of various characters for various objects of desire in her novels. Eros, which motivates the characters and frequently traps them between sexuality and love, "explains why her characters fall in love in such bizarre ways, why passion can be obsessional and also platonic, and why sex can happen in totally meaningless ways" (Tucker, 1992a: 8). In this respect, in Murdoch's fiction, the dual tendency of Eros including low and high ones frequently conflict with each other.

This dual tendency of Eros in Murdoch's fiction has an important place in the theories of Jacques Lacan, who is accepted as the second important name of psychoanalysis after

Freud. To conceive the relationship of Eros and desire in Murdoch's fiction in connection with Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lacanian concepts such as lack, desire and *jouissance* should be mentioned. Jacques Lacan, being accepted as the re-founder of psychoanalysis, reevaluate many Freudian terms especially according to their symbolic conditions. Lacan's significance comes from his analysis of three orders of human psyche. Ego accepted as the main signified of psyche by Freud is evaluated as an imaginary aspect by Lacan. To Lacan, the main determinant is the symbolic order in which the subject steps into the realm of language and symbolic law. In this respect, one of the main aspects Lacan reconstructs is the Oedipus complex, in other words the place of phallus and the law of the father. While Freud mentions the fear of a real castration, to Lacan language functions as the tool of a symbolic castration. In this sense, Lacanian well-known concept Name-of-the-Father (Nom-du-Père), in other words, No-of-the-Father (Non-du-Père) is at stake. To Lacan, the symbolic father as the legislator takes its power from language. The desire of the child, the archaic wholeness with mother, is castrated by the "name and no" of the symbolic father. The identification with the mother in the imaginary order, which is signified with the mirror stage by Lacan, is castrated by language in this way. Meanwhile, the mother-desiring subject designates "phallus" as the main determiner and tries to identify with phallus. However, the desire to be phallus or to be a whole with mother is castrated by the No-of-the-Father, in other words with incest prohibition. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this symbolic castration opens the way to the symbolic order. The symbolic castration means that "whereby boys accept that they can symbolically 'have' the phallus only by accepting that they can never actually have it 'in reality' and girls can accept 'not having' the phallus once they give up on their 'phallic' identification with their mothers" (Homer, 2005: 55). Thus, Lacan places Oedipus complex, castration, and phallus in the realm of the symbolic order via the dialectic of lack and desire. This process signifies the fact that desire will be never totally satisfied because it is symbolically castrated. At this point, the birth of *manque-a-etre* subject (the lacking subject) is the result of Name-of-the-Father "a signifier that breaks the mother/child couple and introduces the child into the symbolic order of desire and lack" (Homer, 2005: 51). It shouldn't be forgotten that Name-of-the-Father "refers not to the real father, nor to the imaginary father (the paternal imago), but to the symbolic father" (Sheridan, 1977: 281). In this respect, what the Name-of-the-Father bans for the subject is the absolute pleasure or incest that could be gained by becoming whole with mother and in Lacanian terms this absolute pleasure is named *jouissance*<sup>1</sup>. To Lacan, as *jouissance* is castrated in the symbolic order, the subject is signified with the basic lack and it is constructed as a desiring subject. In French, *désir* (desire) "has the much stronger

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1) *Jouissance* is a significant term in Lacanian psychoanalysis. It refers to the pleasure lost by the imaginary incest that causes a lifelong search for it, so it is the absolute, unattainable pleasure, the pleasure in pain and the satisfaction in lack of satisfaction. Lacan recommends this word not to be translated.

implication of a continuous force. Desire is a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation. It is not an appetite: it is essentially excentric and insatiable. That is why Lacan co-ordinates it not with the object that would seem to satisfy it, but with the object that causes it" (Sheridan, 1977: 278). To Lacan, desire will be never satisfied by the subject totally as the absolute desire is incest and the forbidden incest has coded the unconscious of the subject. In this sense, Lacan names the substitute object that will satisfy desire partially and provisionally and keep the desire alive as *objet petit a*, the object of desire.

The subject of the unconscious who desires the archaic wholeness with mother begins a permanent search for *jouissance*. In this process, by choosing *objet petit a*'s, s/he satisfies her/his desire partially. In Murdoch's fiction, this search of the characters appear mostly in two dimensions, two ways of the search for *jouissance* in Lacanian psychoanalysis. The first one is the "desire for incest" which exists in the imaginary order and aims to achieve the absolute hypothetic *jouissance* and the other one is "courtly love", the most ideal condition of love affair according to Lacan. In Lacanian theory, as it is impossible to attain absolute *jouissance* via any sexual affair, only *courtly love* that is the unconditional love destination can be an alternative to his theory of "There is no such thing as a sexual relationship". In this sense, two extreme dimensions of sexual affair in Murdoch's fiction that are incest (low Eros) and courtly love (high Eros) appear as Lacanian two ways of the search for *jouissance* and those inclinations should be examined in relation to Lacan's principle of "There is no such thing as a sexual relationship".

### **The Search for *Jouissance*: Incest and Courtly Love**

In Murdoch's philosophy, the influence of sexuality on search for good is important; however, in her fiction sexuality is mainly a substitute of the characters' quest for *jouissance* which cannot be attained totally in Lacanian theory. That's why; Murdoch presents sexuality as the opposite of love in many of her novels. In an interview with

W. K. Rose, Murdoch mentions that "sex is a very great mystifier, it's a very great dark force" and love should get over sex (Rose, 1968: 26). In the same interview, Murdoch mentioning the relation of evil energy (low Eros) to love and sex asserts that "[p]art of the drama in closed-up, rather obsessional novels is the struggle between love and sex" (Rose, 1968: 25). In those obsessional novels, incest presents minimum love, even none. To Murdoch, while Eros can be directed to beautiful and good, it "is also a trickster; hence the representation of sexuality of every sort, including oedipal fixations and incest, in so many of her novels" (Tucker, 1992a: 8). Incest, one of those representations, is the most extreme condition of sexuality and the lowest level of Eros that is pictured by Murdoch directly or by some implications in her novels. As Ben Obumselu mentions, "in making use of the incest, castration and parricide themes Murdoch is not picturing an individual perversion but a larger normality" (Obumselu, 1975: 304). As a matter of

fact, Murdoch herself defines incest as a desire not unusual at all for human being: “Too upsetting&dangerous? The theme of loving one’s sibling, always near to my heart-but to attack it directly- ?” (Conradi, 2001b: 430)

Murdoch’s emphasis on incest as a really common issue is mostly related to Lacanian psychoanalysis in terms of *jouissance* and desire. As Freud mentions, human being is under the influence of the stable but unattainable desire for the impossible target, the absolute happiness –the hypothetical absolute happiness of various figures of sexual pleasure felt in the condition of incest (Nasio, 2007: 33). So, the subject whose desire cannot be satisfied via incest that is the hypothetic absolute sexual pleasure, namely *jouissance*, searches for *objet petit a*’s that will keep her/his desire alive. Lacanian *objet petit a* is a tool to keep the subject’s desire alive and active but it does not completely satisfy it as the absolute and hypothetic pleasure, namely *jouissance*, is based on the desire of incest. However, the extreme forms such as death, insanity and incest are illusive and enchanting fantasies (Nasio, 2007: 37) in Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the real life, regarding incest as a way to attain absolute *jouissance* does not take the subject beyond fantasy or fiction. J. D. Nasio emphasizes incest as a universal and mytic figure (Nasio, 2008: 43-4). Its status as being mythic points out the fact that it exists on an imaginary and unattainable dimension although it is desired by some subjects. It is just because of the fact that the conflict between desire and *jouissance* that is encoded in the unconscious of the subject with the archaic lack (as a result of Oidipus complex and symbolic castration) cannot be solved via incest. Furthermore, incest in life does not get the subject closer to the realm of Lacanian “the real order”; contrarily it buries the subject into an imaginary unreality. In this respect, the incest cases in Murdoch’s novels are unreal and imaginary situations in which the characters are lost.

In many of her novels, Murdoch pictures incest cases by concrete incidents and incest-like themes and implications. Her characters frequently choose father and mother substitutes as their lover and they have or desire to have sexual relationship with them. *The Sandcastle*, *The Unicorn*, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *A Fairly Honorable Defeat* and *Nuns and Soldiers* are some of the novels in which incest theme is given not via the blood tie relatives but substitute fathers and mothers. In those novels, the answer to “‘Who is one’s first love?’ finds its echo” (Johnson, 1987: 15). The characters that choose substitute fathers, mothers, sons and daughters are pictured as having an unconscious desire of incest in those narrations. Peter Conradi mentions that many Murdochian characters are in love with their parents such as Rain in *The Sandcastle*, Peter in *A Fairly Honorable Defeat*, Edmund Naraway in *The Italian Girl*, Elizabeth Fisher in *The Time of the Angels*, Bruno in *Bruno’s Dream*, David in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, and Henry in *Henry and Cato* (Conradi, 2002: 3). Conradi gives the example of mother-daughter oedipal rivalry in the relationship of Miranda and Anne in *An Unofficial Rose* and he adds that the same theme lies beneath the competition of Julian and Rachel Baffin to gain first Arnold then Bradley (Conradi, 2002: 3).

Iris Murdoch's novels such as *The Unicorn*, *The Italian Girl*, *The Red and the Green*, and *The Time of the Angels* which "can be credited even in terms of the fantasy-realistic fiction deals with peculiarly self-destructive families, and incest comes to be seen almost as a way of conveying internecine destructiveness and the raw nerve-endings of suffering" (Todd, 1984: 54). Murdoch, in her novels from *The Bell* (1958) to *The Time of the Angels* (1966), handles brother-sister incest in *The Bell*, *A Severed Head* and *The Red and the Green* and father-daughter incest in *The Time of the Angels*. Dorothy A. Winsor mentions that

In her study of Plato, Murdoch implies that she shares his idea of eros, or transformed sexual energy, as a prime force, leading one to reach out of the self to the rest of the world, but in her novels, sexual energy more often remains a drive characters seek to satisfy in self-absorbed ways. (...) [A]s she moves from *The Bell* to *The Unicorn* to *The Time of the Angels*, sexuality becomes more and more dangerous and love becomes less and less possible (Winsor, 1986: 121-2).

Among those novels, in *A Severed Head* and *The Time of the Angels*, the incest scene is explicitly presented by creating an *unheimlich* atmosphere. In those novels, Murdoch by taking an ethical stand reflects her ideas on low and high Eros in terms of love and sexuality. In the interview with W. K. Rose, she comments on the relationship between demonic energy and love and/or sexuality by mentioning that sexual energy is an internal and unavoidable force including many forms and conditions in life (Rose, 1968: 25). Definitely, Iris Murdoch accepts the basic role of sexuality for the subject of psychoanalysis, however, her attitude as a philosopher and novelist is mostly moral. In general, for Murdoch, besides the fact that Eros is the basic energy, it "can be good and can be bad" (Haffenden, 1983: 132). The ideal attitude is to direct the sexual energy to the realm of good. However, many of the characters in her fiction, of which Carel in *The Time of the Angels* is the most extreme example having incest with his own daughter, behave under the influence of low Eros. In this respect, it can be inferred that although Murdoch presents an ethical stance against the low side of sexuality, she is totally aware of the reality of human nature that approximates her to the realm of psychoanalysis.

Iris Murdoch, as psychoanalysis points out, accepts incest as a phenomenon that may occur in all regions, epochs and societies. Furthermore, it should be added that she accepts all dimensions of sexuality including incest as indispensable cases in life. Murdoch relates all possible sexual intercourses, especially those controlled by low Eros, to the solipsist nature of human being living under the great influence of fantasy. That's why; though she offers the transmission of Eros to the high ideals such as love and attention to the other, sublimation of good, and removing from solipsism, she commonly exhibits problematic, conflicted, negative and manipulated sexuality as a result of low Eros. Tammy Grimshaw

mentions that Murdoch's fiction therefore illustrates that anatomical sex, gender, and sexual orientation are irrelevant to love because individuals are united through their uniquely human shortcomings in matters of love, sex, and morality, especially in their desire for power and other cravings of low Eros (Grimshaw, 2005: 227). While Grimshaw handles sexuality in Murdoch's fiction in terms of the defects in human nature, Angela Hague comments that sexual comedy invades the fiction of Murdoch (Hague, 1984: 50). Similarly, Harold Bloom infers that Murdoch is "an original and endlessly provocative theorist of the tragicomedy of sexual love, with its peculiar hell of jealousy and self-hatred" (Bloom, 1986: 2). While Murdoch's attitude towards dark, stony, solipsist, comic, obsessive, and even absurd sexuality is evaluated in terms of her moral philosophy, the studies in psychoanalysis should be reconsidered to examine her fiction. The most detailed investigations on sexuality and its dimensions are mainly brought out by psychoanalysis. So, sexuality appearing in Murdoch's fiction is not possible to be analyzed without any reference to psychoanalysis. In this respect, sexuality in her fiction generally not ensuring an absolute love or a final satisfaction but being a perverse phenomenon for the subjects intersects with Lacanian principle "There is no such thing as a sexual relationship". In Murdoch's novels, sexual relationships which are mostly away from being passionate and full of love are pictured in an unenthusiastic atmosphere. Murdoch does not try to reflect sexual feelings or analyze them; she narrates sexual relationship within a cold narration as an ordinary case (Aksoy, 1989: 23). In this respect, this mechanical sexuality in Murdoch's fiction is very similar to Lacanian principle "There is no such thing as a sexual relationship".

As mentioned earlier, the desire of Lacanian subject to be *phallus* is castrated by the law and Name-of-the-Father and s/he obtains only a symbolic phallus instead. In this process, for the male subject *obtaining phallus symbolically* and for the female subject *being phallus symbolically* are in question. As a result, feminine or masculine genders are constructed by giving up desiring the mother and by placing the law and Name-of-the-Father instead of phallic desire. However, this process which constructs female and male identities signifies *phallus* as the main signifier of the fundamental lack for the subject. The subject is constructed as a gendered subject, however this subject is castrated symbolically from her/his absolute *jouissance* and the reality of her/his body. The subject who is confined within the law of sexuality cannot achieve the Lacanian *Real*, namely an absolute sexual satisfaction that is *jouissance*, anymore (Faraci, 2009: 600). Nevertheless, this subject does not give up the search for the archaic wholeness with the mother and s/he continues to look for this hypothetical incest via substitute sexual intercourses to achieve an imaginary satisfaction. However, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, for the subject of the unconscious who has once entered into the realm of the law of the symbolic and the language, it is not possible to attain the reality of the body; namely to relate with the *un-symbolized* 'natural' bodies (Soysal, 2009: 610). In this respect, pure and absolute *jouissance* is no more than an unattainable phantasy and dream. Therefore,



the subject of the unconscious can achieve only a partial and deficient satisfaction via any sexual relationship. In that case, Lacanian principle "There is no such thing as a sexual relationship" should be defined as follows: There is no [archaic] incest sexual relationship; there are only substitute sexual relationships (Nasio, 2008: 44).

Sexuality in Murdoch's novels frequently reflects Lacanian substitute sexual relationships going after the unattainable *jouissance*. The characters often change their partners and all kinds of sexuality including homosexual and incestuous are possible to appear under all circumstances. However, the common point of those sexual relationships is that none of the characters are able to attain the absolute *jouissance* they desire for. When Lacan theorizes that no sexual relationship can endow absolute *jouissance* to the subject, Murdoch, in a similar way, fictionalizes the average subject's futile sexual journey on the way to the *jouissance*. In her novels, sexuality is a necessary but temporary stop opening the way to the others; it is just a tool (Aksoy, 1989: 24). In a sense, it is not more than Lacanian *objet petit a* standing as a substitute for unattainable *jouissance*. So, Murdoch's characters questing for almost any kind of sexual relationship, even incest, are to be accepted as the reflections of Lacanian subject of the unconscious going after archaic *jouissance*. However, for those characters and for Lacanian subject, incest is the most illusionary and so the most dangerous sexual relationship. As mentioned earlier, Iris Murdoch examines incest mostly from a moral point of view and in terms of will to power. To Murdoch, the solipsist subject who is buried in her/his ego and egoist desires creates an imaginary condition and so cannot see the other according to her/his reality. Similarly, Lacanian psychoanalysis accepts incest as the most illusory substitutional sexual relationship that is consulted to achieve absolute *jouissance*. However, when Lacan mentions that "there is no incest sexual relationship but there are only substitutional sexual relationships", by "incest" he means the condition of archaic wholeness with the mother's desire when the subject of the unconscious had not experienced the symbolic castration. Incest, here, refers to the condition that cannot be attained anymore, cannot be returned, that is pre-symbolic and signified with the absolute *jouissance*. Contrarily, in the post-symbolic process, any sexual intercourse with the family members appears only as a substitutional sexual relationship like any of sexuality. That's why; incest in real life according to both Lacan's principles and Murdoch's morality is an illusive and solipsist phenomenon. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject of the unconscious cannot ontologically attain *the real*, the pre-symbolic condition, and the realm of the *jouissance*. Furthermore, as the archaic *jouissance* is not certainly the equivalent of the factual sexuality, it is never possible for the subject to achieve *the real* and *absolute jouissance* by incest just like any other sexual relationship.

The characters in Murdoch's fiction that are searching for the absolute *jouissance* sometimes tend to incest that is the most extreme form of sexual relationship. In this way, instead of getting nearer to Lacanian *the real*, they move away from it and enter into an imaginary dimension. Dorothy A. Winsor, by examining the incest case in *The Time of the*

*Angels* in terms of Lacanian “There is no such thing as a sexual relationship” principle, mentions that:

All this suggests that only primitive love is possible, and problems come when the transition to adult sexuality must be made. Indeed the suggestion is that adult sexuality is impossible. There is, then, no source of redemptive love in the self-absorbed world of the Rectory (Winsor, 1986: 130).

Winsor’s emphasis that “adult sexuality is impossible” resounds in Nazan Aksoy’s comment on *A Severed Head*. Murdoch’s emphasis on sexuality as a very dark power directing people to great illusions is valid for *A Severed Head* most according to Aksoy; she mentions that sexuality in this novel is not a real one because it is shifted, deviated, in other words masturbatory and fetishist etc. (Aksoy, 1989: 81). Besides, in Lacanian theory, any kind of sexuality, whether it is perverse or not, is not *real*. In this respect, perverse sexual relationships in Murdoch’s fiction should be evaluated as diverse dimensions of the search for *jouissance*. In brief, that sexuality in her novels is not *real* but illusory and imaginary is related to the fact that the subject of the unconscious can never attain absolute *jouissance* and *real* sexuality by any sexual intercourse.

To summarize, the subject of the unconscious whose desire is castrated in the symbolic order try to find substitute objects of desire, namely *objects petit a*’s, by aiming to find a substitute for the lost *jouissance*. In this respect, incest is the most illusory form of desire for the subject of the unconscious. Instead of getting the subject nearer to the realm of *jouissance*, namely Lacanian *real* order, it buries the subject into an imaginary fixation as the Lacanian principle “There is no such thing as a sexual relationship” reveals. In this sense, another form of desire to attain *jouissance* appears both in Lacan’s theory and Murdoch’s fiction that is “courtly love”. Courtly love, the adverse of all sexual intercourses including incest, is examined as an alternative to sexuality by Murdoch and Lacan in terms of moral philosophy and unconscious motivations respectively.

In Lacanian theory, the subject’s heading towards *courtly love*, a kind of unconditional love not including sexuality, to keep her/his desire alive is an alternative way to get closer to the realm of *jouissance*.

Lacan takes *courtly love* as an example to conceal the gap of impossible union which lies on the basis of sexual act: “Compensating the lack of sexual relationship by pretending to prevent the sexual intercourse is the very fine and elegant way to fill this gap.” And he adds, “This attempt is the most marvelous and incredible trial of all times” (Faraci, 2009: 600).

According to Lacan's principle, by elevating an ordinary and worldly woman up to the status of a sublime object level (Žižek, 2010: 118), the desiring subject signifies this sublime object with un-attainableness. In this sense, the subject keeps her/his desire in the highest level that could not be achieved via any kind of sexuality. The man attached to the woman with "courtly love" attains his lady in real terms when he is faced to lose her; the woman conquers the place of phantasy which governs the subject's desire by the way of this loss (Žižek, 2010: 119). While Lacanian subject of the unconscious cannot attain absolute *jouissance* with sexuality, s/he desires what is forbidden for her/him and in this way s/he keeps her/his desire alive. Here, it should be re-mentioned that the absolute pleasure, that is *jouissance*, is forbidden and castrated by the law and Name-of-the-Father and this symbolic castration signifies the subject with a never replaceable lack. In this respect, Lacan states that "Man's desire is the desire of the Other (Lacan, 1977: 235). So, courtly love is possible to present that kind of desire. The subject abandoning sexuality and *pretending to abandon* the search for absolute *jouissance* desires to be *the desire of the other* and by this way s/he actually steps into a stronger quest for *jouissance*. While Lacan emphasizes that "there is a kind of *jouissance* in being separated from one's *jouissance*" (Fink, 1999: 184), he stresses the subject's attempt to prompt her/his desire by including the other into this process. In this respect, courtly love is the product of that kind of *jouissance*-desire dialectic.

Courtly love, theorized by Lacan in terms of *jouissance*-lack-desire, is observed in Murdoch's philosophy and fiction in a great deal. However, Murdoch examines love without sexuality mostly in terms of morality. According to her moral philosophy, "[i]ndividuals therefore attain increased freedom with respect to their gender as they improve their moral vision through the disciplined purification of sexual love: as they attempt to transform selfish, obsessive desire, or low Eros into high Eros, a transcendent spiritual level" (Grimshaw, 2005: 167). The ethical stance of Murdoch is to transform low Eros (sexuality) into high Eros (sublime love not including solipsist sexuality). "However, Murdoch believed that the complete transformation and purification of sexual love which is required in order to reach high Eros was desirable, yet unachievable aim" (Grimshaw, 2005: 167). In this respect, she gets quite closer to Lacanian principle "There is no such thing as a sexual relationship".

The alternative approach of Murdoch, like Lacan, for the purification of sexuality is the notion of unconditional love, which is courtly love. In this sense, as Peter Conradi mentions, Murdoch "combines the different pessimism of both thinkers [Plato and Freud] with a high valuation of the idea of a spiritualized sexuality, and the unconditional love which is its ultimate if unreachable goal" (Conradi, 2001b: 50). This position that could be defined as lacking any sexuality or a kind of transformed sexuality is accepted as pure love by Murdoch. In this respect, while Murdoch accepts pure love or courtly love as the most ideal form of love, Lacan accepts it as an alternative way of transforming desire, an

attempt to fill the lack of the subject. After all, both of them share the idea that sexuality does not satisfy the desire and lack of the subject totally; however, unconditional love is possible to be another choice for the search for *jouissance*.

It is possible for many Murdochian characters to be named as “posturing Courtly Lovers” (Tucker, 1992b: 161). For instance, in *The Bell*, Toby’s love for Dora who is married to Paul, a father figure for Toby; in *An Unofficial Rose*, Penn’s love for Miranda and that of Hugh and Emma who decide to found their love relationship as courtly love; in *The Unicorn* Effingham’s love for Hannah who is perceived as an object of love that is impossible to be attained by Effingham, a confined lady in a castle in the middle ages; in *Bruno’s Dream*, Mile’s love for Lisa who defines Mile’s love for her as imaginary and as the charm of un-attainableness. In a way, Lacanian thesis that “there is a kind of *jouissance* in being separated from one’s *jouissance*” (Fink, 1992: 184) comes on the scene in those novels. The objects of desire that are confined in castles or monasteries, or married to someone else, namely holding the state of the unattainable, keep the subject’s desire continuously alive. On the other hand, the possibility of any sexuality with these objects of desire, the loved objects, would put an end to this continuing desire of the subject. In this sense, the subject would inevitably experience frustration as sexuality cannot present absolute *jouissance* but it only makes the subject realize that the loved object is also signified with a lack. By the way, for the subject realizing the reality of “absence of sexuality” and the status of the object of desire also as a lacking subject, the most desire-fostering aspect appears as courtly love that does not include any sexuality but pursue desiring permanently.

The most significant example of courtly love in Murdoch’s fiction is the love of Charles for Hartley in *The Sea, The Sea* awarded the Booker Prize in 1978. This novel in which unconscious motivations and the psyche of the main character are mainly referred is one of the prominent novels of Murdoch that is open to psychoanalytic criticism. The major incident the fiction goes around is the encountering of Charles with Hartley, his love of adolescence, and then his obsessive desire to put an end to her forty-year-old marriage and to come together with Hartley again. Charles’s love and desire that is reflected as an obsession in the novel seems extremely egoist, meaningless and inept on the surface. However, this act would seem more meaningful when handled in terms of Lacanian lack-*jouissance* and desire dialectic. Thus, to examine Charles’s desire that is a product of his mind and could be defined as courtly love could render his acts into a more understandable ground. In this respect, *The Sea, The Sea* is the most significant example of Murdoch’s fiction which exemplifies Lacanian *jouissance* and desire dialectic, correspondingly his principle “There is no such thing as a sexual relationship” and his examination of courtly love.

### **"There is no such thing as a sexual relationship" for Charles Arrowby**

Charles Arrowby, the narrator and the protagonist of the novel, retires as a famous drama director, writer and actor and moves to an isolated house on the shore to live a peaceful life. However, this place brings no more than chaos and conflict instead of peace and calmness. When he meets almost every important people from his earlier life in this place in a way, the reader gets the knowledge about his past. In "Prehistory" chapter, the narration about his childhood provides significant knowledge for a psychoanalytic examination. By this information, we are acknowledged about the childhood depressions of Charles who "has nothing better to say about any past loves or friends, all of whom he had treated badly" (Bove, 1993: 84). In this respect, the main conflict of Charles that has coded his unconscious appears as mother-father-child triangle. He remembers his mother "not as a lovely girl" but "a strong one", her face "as a mask of anxiety" (*TSTS*,

24) contrary to his father. Charles complains that "no one else ever [including his mother] knew how good [his] father was" (*TSTS*, 28). When he moves to the Shruff End, a remote house by the sea, he thinks that "his father would have loved this place" and mentions "I still think of him and miss him" (*TSTS*, 7). His statement that "the lights went out in my life. I mourned long and miserably for my father" (*TSTS*, 65) presents his love for his father clearly. From a psychoanalytic point of view, it could be said that Charles's growing up with a strict mother and passive father causes his inability to accept completely the law and Name-of-the-Father in the symbolic order. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, identifying with the father as a law-maker is really crucial. However, when the father is not signified as a law-maker, the authoritarian and dominant mother figure swallows the child as a "crocodile" in Lacanian terms. In this way, the child does not get over the symbolic order by the law of the father. So, the subject who is not able to separate from the desire for the mother experiences a fixation in her/his desire for the mother figure. Furthermore, this fixation is a conflict including both dependence on and fear of the mother.

In *The Sea, The Sea*, many *unheimlich* incidents and visions appearing as supernatural give clues about Charles's unconscious motivations. As Bran Nicol mentions "[h]is experiences in the novel force him to descend into the underworld of his own unconscious and confront whatever compels him before emerging into the light" (Nicol, 1999: 132). Among them, especially "snakelike headed sea monster" (*TSTS*, 19, 105, 171) is significant. "Charles is a victim of his own mind's creations" and when "he undergoes his strange vision of the serpent rising from the sea, he is given a signal that the unconscious is emergent" (Tucker, 1992b: 164). Lacan's definition of mother as "the crocodile opening her mouth waiting for swallowing her baby" (Soysal, 2009: 606) invokes Charles's snakelike sea monster. In this respect, Charles could be accepted as the subject who is unable to accept the law of the father and so swallowed by his authoritarian mother symbolically. According to Peter Conradi, "Charles's fear of women singing – 'the wet white teeth, the

red, moist interior' is textbook Freudian alarm at the *vagina dentata*" [toothed vagina myth in relation to castration complex] (Conradi, 2001b: 524). Besides, the permanent references to "Peter Pan" emphasize Charles's desperate attempt to grow up but not to achieve it (Conradi, 2007: 193). To Conradi, Charles who loves to direct Peter Pan in theatre, is actually a "Peter Pan figure" (Conradi, 2001a: 298).

Charles's desperate attempt to grow up could be interpreted as his inability to step into Lacanian symbolic order, in other words his failure to construct himself as a subject by accepting the Name-of-the-Father and giving up the desire for wholeness with the mother. Charles, a subject unable to give up desiring the imaginary mother, has a long term love relationship with Clement, a woman nineteen year older than himself when he was just twenty. Charles defines Clement as "old enough to be his mother" (*TSTS*, 52) and mentions he has "such a close connection with Clement, just as if she were indeed his mother" (*TSTS*, 53). Throughout the narration, no information about Clement who is presented as a mother substitute is given. Charles frequently asserts that he will talk about Clement; however he hangs up it with the same frequency. Furthermore, Charles's relationships with other women in his life are also problematic. After Clement's death, he falls in love with Lizzie, an actress, while she is performing Ariel in *The Tempest* on the stage. "Although Lizzie was madly in love with Charles, he found it 'surprisingly easy to leave her when the time came' (*TSTS*, 41)" (Bove, 1993: 84). Besides, Charles's love adventure with Rosina Vamburgh is based on his attempt to separate her from his husband and then his wish to get rid of her. Namely, the search of the subject of the unconscious via *object petit a's* –here love affairs– as a result of the fundamental lack and the wish to attain *jouissance* is under consideration for Charles. His quest for founding relationships with women that he could not accomplish with his own mother, his choice of especially unattainable loves, and his desire to steal women from their partners are signs of that kind of search. In this respect, Charles's own words towards the end of the novel are significant references to the symbolic functioning of *mother figure* in the novel: "Yes of course I was in love with my own youth. (...) Who is one's first love?" (*TSTS*, 502)

Charles's inability to be subject to the law of the symbolic order completely should be handled in terms of his choice of profession besides the surgy relationships he experiences with women. Jacques Alain Miller uses the term "ordinary psychosis" for the people who are deprived of "father metaphor" but who try to create a name for them by means of an act based on a talent (Eecke, 2009: 429). As those subjects do not adopt the law and Name-of-the-Father, they struggle to create their own names by some extraordinary achievements; although that is a narcissist and solipsist act, it requires a talent and effort to improve it (Eecke, 2009: 416). That aspect which includes the deeds based on talent and named as *sinthome* by Lacan is proposed as the reformation of the archaic/primary error resulted from the omission of father (Morel, 2009: 432). Charles's success in theatre brings to the mind that kind of *sinthome*. Charles is well-known as a *famous Shakespeare*

*man* in his successful art life, in other words he is a sort of *father* of Shakespearean plays. However, he gives up theatre when he is just at top and his deeds that could be named as psychotic begin since after. While Lacan mentions "the encounter with the One-Father, with the Father as a pure symbolic function (...) that leads to the triggering of psychosis", he makes this into a very general principle: "The encounter with the Father as a pure symbolic function may also occur without the intermediary of another person, as, for example, when a man learns that he is about to become a father, or is called upon to play the role of a social/political/juridical father figure" (Fink, 1999: 106). Charles's giving up theatre when he is elevated to the status of the father of theatre, his moving to Shuff End which functions as his journey into his unconscious and his deeds since then bring to the mind that sort of psychosis. Charles's psychosis becomes more explicit by his encountering with his first love Hartley in the coast village he moved to and it gains a more obsessive dimension after that.

Many critics including Murdoch herself relates Charles's obsession to his solipsism and will to power. Murdoch mentions this novel "is about the nature of power in human relations" (Haffenden, 1983: 125). Peter Conradi evaluates Charles's behaviours as "rapacious egoism and will-to-power" (Conradi, 2001b: 523). In a similar way, Cheryl Bove relates Charles's behaviours to his illusion as a result of his "egoism" (Bove, 1993: 85). Afaf Jamil Khogeer accepts Charles's love for Hartley as "a regressive force that aims to keep her completely in his power" (Khogeer, 2006: 119). As all those comments suggest, it is inevitable to talk about the illusion Charles experiences that is resulted from his solipsism and will to power. However, besides relating Charles's deeds to his egoism and will to power, it is significant to examine the unconscious motivations triggering those inclinations. In this respect, that "[t]he power of the unconscious mind to unwittingly determine conscious action is what the novel explores" (Martin and Rowe, 2010: 123) should be examined in terms of the references to the unconscious motivations of the characters.

While Charles mentions that "[s]ince I started writing this 'book' or whatever it is I have felt as if I were walking about in a dark cavern" (*TSTS*, 77), he presents the book as a kind of journey to the unconscious. Besides, when Charles says that "[m]ost of what we think we know about our minds is pseudo-knowledge" (*TSTS*, 175), he stresses again the reality lying beyond the conscious. The general illusionary mood of the novel creates a sort of *unheimlich* atmosphere created partly by the reflections of unconscious. As Tucker mentions, "[e]veryone in the novel is trapped in a world of dreams, but surely no one more than Charles (...) The illusions he once thought he controlled on stage now control him" (Tucker 1992b: 167). Many weird incidents occurring throughout the novel –breaking down of the vase (*TSTS*, 39), dropping down of a mirror of 1890s from the wall (*TSTS*, 55), appearing of a sea creature with green eyes (*TSTS*, 19), the sounds of footsteps coming from the attic (*TSTS*, 18), reflection of a human face on the window (*TSTS*, 68)

etc.– function as the scenes reminding unconscious illusions and fantasies although some of them are related to rational reasons later on. In this respect, the incidents in the novel, particularly Charles’s love for Hartley, appear as the reflections of his unconscious and so it is open to a Lacanian analysis in terms of desire, love and sexuality.

Peter Conradi mentions that “appetite and possessive hunger partly characterize Charles” and “his life has been spent acquiring fame, women, worldly success” (Conradi, 2001a: 298). Conradi’s emphasis is illuminating especially in relation to Lacanian symbolic castration, lack and the nature of desire. The subject of the unconscious experiencing symbolic castration by the law of the father leans to various objects of desire to fill the gap in her/his psyche. Love object is one of the most significant objects of desire, namely *object petit a*. When love object is under consideration, the subject desires to be *the desire of the other*. When Lacan mentions that “[m]an’s desire is the desire of the Other” (Lacan, 1977: 235), he mentions the subject’s desire to be desired by another subject. In this respect, Charles is defined as a subject who “desires to be desired” the most; however, when he is desired he loses his own desire. “Charles does punish his women by a deep, cold uninvolvedness which is nonetheless possessive, partly in revenge” and “he rarely wants to spend the night with a woman he has made love to: ‘In the morning she looks to me like a whore’ he says (*TSTS*, 52)” (Conradi, 2001a: 299). Even when he is with Clement, the most significant love in his early life, they both have different partners. In this sense, Charles’s attitude towards women and sexuality should be examined in terms of his un-compensable psychic lack and unsatisfied desire above his solipsism. His individual unconscious constructed mostly by an authoritarian mother should be examined in terms of a collective dilemma of human subject: the Lacanian principle that the desire can never be fully satisfied; in other words absolute *jouissance* can never be attained. Charles appears as an example of an average subject of psychoanalysis who cannot fill the gap in his psyche by love and sexual experiences. Charles’s deep desire for his adolescence love Hartley arousing in a critical period when he excludes almost everything from his earlier life appears as his last residual *object petit a* which his desire is directed to and keeps his desire alive on the highest level. That Hartley is married to Ben for forty years and has a son makes her more desirable and attractive object for him.

In fact, the relationship between Charles and Hartley has begun when they were child and ended by Hartley’s leaving him in their early adolescence. When Charles runs into Hartley in the village he plans to pass his retirement days, his feelings towards Hartley deepen and turn into an obsession. Furthermore, he begins to live in an illusionary atmosphere and convince himself that she hates her husband and wants to leave him but she is scared to do. To Murdoch, although Hartley “might have had some regrets sometimes”, “on the whole” she didn’t have, contrary to what Charles imagines (Brans, 1985: 163). However, Charles “can’t help feeling [h]ow much she must regret that she didn’t marry Grand Me [Him], and that she married this absolute nonentity” (Brans, 1985:



163). In fact, Ben and Hartley have some problems throughout their marriage. Hartley who cannot have a child from Ben adopts her son Titus when she is long away from Ben to look after her dying father. That's why, Ben has suspicion on her being pregnant from another man and giving birth Titus when she is away. This suspicion has created a crucial conflict in the relationship between Hartley, Ben and Titus for years. As Hartley has talked Ben about Charles, Ben suspects that Charles is the real father of Titus and Charles's arrival into their village strengthens his suspicion. Interestingly, Titus also believes that his real father is Charles and he goes to meet him. The frequent emphasis on Charles's wish to have a son comes true in a way: "Titus was my son, the offspring of our old love!" (TSTS, 227) However, by the death of Titus by drowning in the sea, a significant bond that could keep Charles and Hartley together is also broken. But Charles does not give up his plans to gain Hartley. He even kidnaps and imprisons her into his house. By James's request (Charles's saint figure brother) to free her, he releases Hartley. Although Hartley has great sorrow when she is confined in his house, he does not believe that she wants to go. He cannot even get rid of his illusions after he releases Hartley and keeps on to dream that she will return: "She'll come to me here. She's part of me, it's not a caprice or a dream. When you've known someone from childhood, when you can't remember when they weren't there, that's not an illusion. She's woven into me" (TSTS, 354-55).

Peter Conradi mentions that "Charles has started to neutralise Hartley as a pain-source in his life" and "this lifelong habit of *needling* such consoling explanatory figures, centres of blame and of shriving, dies harder" (Conradi, 2001a: 322). This motivation named as "pain-source" by Conradi can also be named as "the source or object of desire". As Conradi mentions, Hartley is a sort of "consoling figure", namely Lacanian *object petit a*. From a psychoanalytic point of view, "Hartley, represents the temporary substitute and objectification of desire" (Turner, 1993: 108). Although Hartley seems as an afflicting object on the surface, she is in fact a sort of Lacanian *object petit a* keeping Charles's desire alive. In this respect, "Hartley, a figure of his dream world, becomes his reality" (Tucker, 1992b: 167). Charles's choice of Hartley as reality is the result of his inability to achieve absolute *jouissance* via love and sexual relationships with various women in his life. Contrarily, his desire for Hartley makes him feel "so helplessly, vulnerably close to [his] childhood" (TSTS, 327); in other words, to the archaic wholeness when the fundamental lack had not been constructed. In a sense, Charles "wants her because she is an embodiment of a lost world of innocence" (Nicol, 1999: 130).

*The Sea, The Sea*, pictures Lacanian principle on the impossibility of an ideal sexual relationship, of an attainable *jouissance* by any sexuality and related to this condition the attempt of the subject of the unconscious towards courtly love as another choice of desiring. Charles, who cannot attain an absolute and fixed satisfaction in his relationships, places Hartley into the status of an unattainable subject and his desire grows more and more with this impossibility. Charles voices the love *possibility* he aims when he says

“[w]hat I must now concentrate upon was the possibility of love in the form of a pure deep affectionate mutual respect” (TSTS, 121). In terms of this possibility, by desiring to be the desire of the other (here, Hartley), he keeps his desire on the highest level. Lacan mentions this situation as follows:

The object of desire is the cause of the desire, and this object that is the cause of desire is the object of the drive—that is to say, the object around which the drive turns. (...) It is not that desire clings to the object of the drive. But all desire is not necessarily agitated in the drive. There are empty desires or mad desires that are based on nothing more than the fact that the thing in question has been forbidden you. By virtue of the very fact that it has been forbidden you, you cannot do otherwise, for a time, than think about it (Lacan, 1977: 243).

In this respect, Hartley is placed in the status of a forbidden object of desire. “In fact, as James attempts to make clear to him, the broken-hearted lover is simply another role that Charles assumes in order to console himself for the emptiness of his spiritual life; it is a story that he has invented to account for his life” (Spear, 1995: 95). This role shuttles between desiring an object desperately without expecting any response and at the same time desiring to possess it. Charles both loves Hartley with an unconditional love and he desires to possess her. His persistent desire for Hartley brings to the minds the obsessive desire of a child aiming unconsciously to steal the mother from the father. To Lacanian dialectic of desire: “Desire is subservient to the law! What the law prohibits, desire seeks” (Fink, 1999: 207). In the novel, Hartley’s husband Ben holds the status of law maker and Charles desires Hartley, the object forbidden by that law. In this sense, “Hartley, represents the temporary substitute and objectification of desire” (Turner, 1993: 95). This object holds a stronger meaning as it is placed into the position of “unattainable” and it becomes indispensable for the subject.

Bran Nicol mentions that *The Sea, The Sea* “revolve around a ‘primal scene’ of lost love” (Nicol, 1999: 74). This archaic scene signified by Oedipus complex and symbolic castration is inevitably reflected on both Charles’s memories presented to the reader by his words and his deeds in his life. “Charles’s insecurities: his repressed feelings of jealousy, shame and a hidden fear of women” (Martin and Rowe, 2010: 125) can be evaluated as the results of the defects he has experienced in his unconscious. His attitude towards women and sexuality is also related to his unconscious motivations. For instance, the sea creature appearing frequently in the novel can be explained as an unconscious vision. Bran Nicol mentions that the sea monster appearing frequently in the novel is “a symbol of jealousy, an emotion central to the book, or a displaced expression of the fear of female sexuality” (Nicol, 1999: 132). Thus, the way to escape from the sexual

relationship with women appears as Charles's dedication to Hartley with unconditional love. "While falling in love is for Murdoch a way in which the dreaming ego is shocked into awareness of an Other, it can also be dangerous desire that attempts to 'de-realize the other, devour and absorb him, subject him to the mechanism of our own fantasy' (FS, 36)" (Tucker, 1992a: 8). In this sense, Charles's attitude appears as the latter one, "absorbing the other to the mechanism of our own fantasy". That mechanism of fantasy functions to form Charles's desire as a sort of courtly love. In this way, Charles, who "has given Hartley the status of absolute in his life" (Conradi, 2001a: 316), creates his own imaginary world. Nevertheless, he is partially aware of that unconditional love fantasy created by him. When he mentions "I had deluded myself throughout by the idea of reviving a secret love which did not exist at all" (*TSTS*, 498), he reflects his awareness. Barbara Stevens Heusel mentions that "Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* illustrates the confusion and disorientation a character can experience if he ignores reality and reads his own 'dream-test'" (Heusel, 2001: 84). Although Charles's deeds are examined as ignoring *reality*, those deeds should also be analyzed as the reflections of his own *unconscious reality*. Particularly, the Lacanian dialectic of lack and desire constitutes the basis of Charles's deeds that occur mostly unconsciously.

Peter Conradi talks about "Murdoch's own Freudianised Platonism" in this novel and states that to Murdoch going after "variously available light-sources" is the result of search for a substitute light that would take us to Good: "In a sense what Charles has done, in self-defence against the pain of losing her, is to make Hartley for 'the one great light', the Good itself" (Conradi, 2001a: 312). If Conradi's comment is applied to Lacanian psychoanalysis in a broad sense, those "variously available light-sources" are kinds of Lacanian *objet petit a*'s and Murdoch's ideal Good takes the place of Lacanian *jouissance*. In this respect, Charles, who cannot achieve the Good in Conradi's words and absolute *jouissance* in Lacanian psychoanalysis, leans to Hartley as "a substitute light", an *objet petit a*.

At the end of the novel, Charles's great search by going after the substitute objects does not come to an end even after Hartley and Ben's leaving the village they live. At the beginning of the novel, Charles personally mentions the "continuous small treats" (*TSTS*,

8) as the secret of a happy life. In this respect, his desire for Hartley has served as a kind of pleasure for him. While Charles says that "Of course this is a love story. She was not able to be my Beatrice nor was I able to be saved by her, but the idea was not senseless or unworthy" (*TSTS*, 500) at the end of the novel, he summarizes the nature of love based on desire and pleasure in a way. Even though the seals coming to the shore at the end of the novel seem like "the symbols of Charles's new consciousness" (Tucker, 1992b: 172), that "Charles agrees to see Peregrine's provocative stepdaughter, Angie, who has been pestering him to give her a child, and who is incidentally about Hartley's age at the time of the breakage of their relationship" (Conradi, 2001a: 322) is an indicator of his choice

for a new object of desire. In this respect, his last words describe the nature of desire that is not able to attain satisfaction but still continues to look for it: “Upon the demon-ridden pilgrimage of human life, what next I wonder?” (TSTS, 502)

### Conclusion

Eventually, Iris Murdoch handles Eros, in Freudian terms the *life energy*, as “sex, power, desire, inspiration, energy for good and evil” (Conradi, 2001a: 157). According to this point of view, Eros can be directed to either solipsist sexuality or unselfing and ideal Good. To Murdoch, although the nature of human being has a tendency to act with low Eros, it is also possible that high Eros can present many virtues such as the ability to love, to see the other, and unselfing. Murdoch mentioning “the idea of *Eros* as fundamental energy, a drive which includes sex and which can be good and can be bad” (Haffenden, 1983: 132) does not ignore sexuality completely but she does not ignore its egoist side either:

I’m not a Freudian but I think that Freud understood something very important in suggesting that sex was such a very very general force. (...) But the ‘obsessional demons’ I think are something slightly different. I mean, obviously they are connected with sex but that’s a kind of localization of sex. I think that art, and indeed good life and so on, is connected with getting out of obsession (De Pue, 2008: 9).

Although she frequently mentions in her philosophy –from a Platonic point of view– the possibility of directing Eros and sexuality to Good, she mainly reflects the obsessive nature of sexuality directing the subject to the evil, in other words the “obsessional demons” in her fiction. As mentioned earlier, her characters cannot achieve Lacanian “the lost object of desire” they are looking for via sexuality. The pursuit of those characters going after various objects of desire is parallel to the search of Lacanian subject who is signified with lack of *absolute jouissance*. However, just as Lacanian subject of the unconscious, Murdoch’s characters can never attain *absolute jouissance*. In this process of search, especially the characters that blindly go after sexuality and objects of sexual desire are buried into their illusions and fantasy mostly. In this respect, the characters fantasizing to attain *absolute jouissance* consult to incest, a phenomenon accepted by Murdoch as the lowest and the most solipsist form of sexuality. To examine incest –depicted as the most extreme point of solipsism of the subject and handled especially in terms of moral philosophy by Murdoch– in terms of Lacanian principle ‘There is no such thing as a sexual relationship’ presents a different dimension. Murdoch accepts the actors of incest that she names “obsessional demons” as the subjects acting with low Eros and solipsist fantasies. In Lacanian theory, incest is the fantasy of the subject who is signified with symbolic castration and fundamental lack. However, in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, no sorts of sexuality including incest can provide the subject to attain

absolute *jouissance* lost by symbolic castration.

In conclusion, according to Murdoch and Lacan, sexuality does not fulfill the lack of the subject; contrarily, this subject imagining to achieve absolute pleasure by sexuality just gets into her/his solipsist fantasy more and more. Incest, the most obsessional form of sexuality, is conceived as dangerous and imaginary by both Murdoch, in terms of morality, and Lacan of psychoanalysis. The counterpart of incest, the lowest form of sexuality, is presented as "unconditional love" by Murdoch. This unconditional love corresponds to Lacan's examination of courtly love in terms of his principle 'There is no such thing as a sexual relationship'. To Lacan, as no sexual relationship assures absolute *jouissance*, *courtly love* by not including sexuality and so keeping the subject's desire alive and giving great pleasure is a significant alternative for the desiring subject. In *The Sea, The Sea*, Charles appeals to this alternative as a result of his unconscious motivations and his inability to be satisfied with any of his sexual relationships. In fact, Charles's motivations are not different from an ordinary Lacanian subject of the unconscious. Consequently, the parallel between Murdoch's and Lacan's conceiving the human nature lies in the character of Charles who is a representative of any subject that "will realize that his [or her] desire is merely a vain detour with the aim of catching the *jouissance* of the other" (Lacan, 1977: 183).

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