

## Theosophical and Theatrical Approach in 'The Sea, The Sea'

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### Abstract

The period 1970-80 was a notable era that witnessed a substantial increase of interest in philosophy. Many 'isms' have been introduced and many movements have been started to enlighten the people and bring epistemological outlook in the minds of people. Even new religious beliefs have also been arisen in this period. The existence of 'God' and 'Soul', the philosophy of 'Nirvana', safeguarding mother earth from natural calamities and hazards became popular notions in this age. We observed either a monk or a prophet or a saint in every country who have given moral preaching to make the people walk in the right path and establish justice and peace in all the nations. By observing these philosophies and teachings, many people declared that the ultimate goal of philosophy is 'doing benefit' to the human beings but not to blight them. We must also agree that philosophy has the indubitable supremacy to inculcate reasoning power, resourcefulness and renewal of ideas people's psyche. The pivotal role that philosophical thought has played throughout the centuries across all cultures of the world confirmed to its significance. Different types of philosophies entirely changed the life style of the people and unfortunately these life styles endanger human life also. At this juncture a great woman philosopher Iris Murdoch has entered with her great philosophy in English Literacy World with her Booker Prize Novel 'The Sea, The Sea'. This paper tells her philosophical outlook, her extraordinary depiction of various characters and her message to the society.

### Introduction

The concept of 'love' in each philosophy leads some people to get the wrong notions like 'over-possessiveness' and 'fanatic patriotism'. Common people were suffered by the people who had these fervent beliefs and wrong notions. Again the philosophers, who were shuddered by these philosophies, were trying to mend their views and spread the practice of detachment. At this crucial time Iris Murdoch has presented her magnum opus novel *The Sea, The Sea* to the readers, which explains relationships, egoism, self-consciousness, vengeance, solidarity, power etc. Through some characters she has well-tried to explain the difference between 'love' and 'possessiveness'. She clearly shows her talent to depict illusions, opera, drama, love, lust, religion and philosophy in this novel. Malcom Bradbury in *The Modern British Novel* writes that "Theatre and opera seem heavily to have guided both the staging and the ceremonial of her latest books: there is also a clear new texture of Shakespearean allusion and a sense of art shaped by the laws of his later comedies." (232)

### Different shades in Protagonist's character

Having taken the elements of magic and supernatural as the inner threads, Iris Murdoch has woven this psycho-analytical story very effectively. Though some misconceptions and misinterpretations test the patience of the readers, the main character Charles Arrowby makes the readers engrossed in his depiction, his relation with women, his fond for food items, and his epicurean behavior. Charles Arrowby is the protagonist who wants to write his memoirs when he settles at Shruff End, a place near to sea, after his retirement from the theatre. He is a director, writer and an artist. Murdoch has presented him not in a heroic way but in an eccentric, detestable way. As the sea have many images like wild, calm, warm, loving, enigmatic, cruel, chaotic, peaceful, roaring, active etc. Arrowby also has many perspectives and emotions.

He has chosen a craggy atmosphere in his quest for peace and selects a solitary dilapidated peculiar house. Then many twists and turns occur while he is writing day to-day incidents which reveal his real egoistic nature. Taking up the moral development of the individual in a novel rather than a philosophical tract might strike some as a hazardous project, one that could mar both the clarity of thought so necessary for good philosophy and the narrative enchantment so integral to a good novel. And yet it was precisely in her novels that Murdoch so successfully discussed the vital issues of the moral life. Allan Kennedy notes that "her work is often built around allusion to the drama" (Kennedy 277)

Charles Arrowby wants to lead a quiet life but a row of visitors are coming and disturbing him and become a showbiz to the dwellers of Shruff End. His peace is quickly disturbed by a series of past flares. A theatrical series of contempt lovers come to haunt him from London. Among them Rosina Vamburgh is the main person who wants to take revenge on him as he has cheated her and provoked her departing from her husband Peregrine, and spoiled her booming married life. As Charles Arrowby is alone in his house, he writes letters to his former-lover Lizzie in a friendly way and Lizzie responds in an amicable way too. This brings Rosina irritation and

enrage. So she frightens him by her actions like breaking the ancient vase and mirror, peeping through the window glass, follows him secretly etc. When he notices the face of a human on the window glass, he feels that it may be a ghost as he already sees some strange creatures in the sea. He finds a new creature in the sea which is like “a kind of crested snake’s head, green-eyed, the mouth opening to show teeth and pink interior. The head and neck glistened with a blue sheen” (21).

### **Reminiscences of the Protagonist**

Arrowby’s paternal grandfather was a market gardener in Lincolnshire and he lived in a house called Shaxton (24). He has two sons Adam and Abel and Charles Arrowby is Adam’s son. Adam is the unluckiest person in Arrowby’s mind. But he is intelligent, good natured and pure in heart. His mother Marian who works as a secretary on a farm is a strict evangelical Christian. Arrowby’s uncle Abel has married a wealthy attractive American girl Estelle who is very affectionate towards him when he was a child. As her voice is sweet she sings latest romantic songs and enralls the people. So Arrowby treats her just like a heroine and a super-figure. But his mother doesn’t like the habits and culture of Estelle and becomes silent and rigid when she visits them. Though his mother shows love and affection on him and on his father, people show pity on them because of her strict rules. Uncle Abel and Aunt Estelle have a son James who is a lucky boy according to Arrowby enjoys everything and learns everything. He knows Latin and Greek (which are very hard subjects to learn) along with many modern languages. But Arrowby knows a little French and less Latin. As James is a rich person he visits new places and attends art galleries. According to Arrowby James is a flourishing person just like his father, and he is a failure like his father. “Clearly my cousin is destined for success and I for failure” (68). Every year James sends a post card on his birthday and on Christmas but Arrowby never sends a simple card. But he gives a terse reply to James’ uninformative letters.

Arrowby starts his main theme with his god mother cum girl friend Clement, a popular actress. She is his first mistress. She loved him that’s why he also loved her. Only because of her he is there in film industry and has got reputation. Then he thinks about his childhood friend Hartley whom he has loved deeply and wanted to marry. As they were too young to marry, they decided to marry after their education. Charles Arrowby went to London for his studies. Though he went to London to the drama school he wrote letters everyday and came for weekends and both enjoyed long strolls and cycling. But all of a sudden one day she told that she couldn’t marry him. She said with tears, “I can’t marry you. We wouldn’t make each other happy. You wouldn’t stay with me, you but I can’t trust, I can’t see.” (88) He requested her at least they should be friends for ever but she hasn’t permitted. At that time his situation was horrible. He again tried to change her but in vain. Then one day she was disappeared and her mother wrote a letter to Arrowby that he was disturbing her daughter’s life.

### **Misconception of the Protagonist**

When Arrowby has seen Hartley in Shruff End, he is stunned and speechless. It is very common in Murdoch’s novels we find sudden twirls and twists which engage the reader in complete drama and tension. Elizabeth Dipple reveals her opinion in her *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit*, in this way “her novels are not, especially the late ones, very suitable for dramatization. For all the verve and energy of their action, their brilliantly exciting scenes, their sudden turns, surprises and *peripeteia*, their lasting interest and most profound life exist in issues that cannot be portrayed by means of stage”(89).

Arrowby meets Hartley who is afraid to talk with him but pleads him to help her in search of her adopted son Titus, who went away from the house many years ago. Arrowby imagines himself as a young lover at the age of sixty and dreams Hartley as a ballet dancer, dancing and leaping in the air. The next day he visits Hartley’s house at Niblets. Her husband Ben Fitch doesn’t like Charles’s visit and tells him not to come to their house again. Charles feels that Hartley is living with a brutal person and she is unable to come out from the cruel hands of her husband. He wants to save her from her husband and give her a pleasant life.

Then he tells about Hartley to his cousin James which he never wants to talk with him. But just like a reverie he has explained everything about Hartley and doesn’t like the advice of James when he suggests him take off his hands on Hartley’s affair. Arrowby knows that his cousin doesn’t like conversation on marriage, but he is dismayed by his advice.

One day he sits on rocks and observes a boy on the tower. After some time that boy climbs down and enters the grass land. His lip is parted. Arrowby asks him if he is Titus. He says ‘yes’. The boy also asks him “Are you --- Mr Arrowby – Charles Arrowby?” (267) Then the boy asked him whether he is his father. Arrowby says he is not his father. He says he is in search of his real parents but no record is available to find out his parents. Then Titus inquires if he has come to that village for the sake of his mother. Arrowby says ‘no’ and explains how he has met his mother all of a sudden just like an accident. Then Arrowby asks him whether he has met Ben and Hartley, he replies he has come here to see him. Titus has read the news about Arrowby in a music journal and wants to ask if he is his real father. Charles keeps the boy with him and sends this information to Hartley. When Hartley comes to Charles’s house to see her son, Charles doesn’t allow her to go back to her husband.

Even if Arrowby plans to give Hartley a new life, support, freedom she requests him to send her home. He

recollects their past memories and depicts many incidents of their childhood. Even though she shares those incidents with him at last she says she wants to go her home back. Hartley starts howling, wailing and becomes hysterical with exasperation. Arrowby is shocked and confused. Later he explains her in a soothing way that he loves Titus and Titus also loves him, is ready to live with him. The next day James along with Peregrine, Gilbert and Titus start a discussion with Arrowby about Hartley's release and make him take a wise decision about her and promise him that they'll help him in this issue. At first Arrowby declines rudely their offer but later he responds in a positive way. All these members request him to send Hartley back to her house because she wants to go.

In the evening Arrowby sits on a rock near the sea, all of a sudden he falls in a valley and tries to catch something but in vain. When he starts breathing heavily then he understands he is alive. All his guests carry him to home and a doctor comes and gives him some injection and declares no bone is broken. The next day half in delirium Arrowby recollects how he fell down and remembers someone has pushed him. It is not an accident. At the same time he wants to write something unusual and important thing that shocked him and brings a paper and a pen and starts writing something and hides the paper. Then he goes to sleep. But after waking up he forgets what he has written and where he has hidden that paper. He feels that it is absolutely an essential one which he unfortunately couldn't remember because of tranquilizers given by the doctor.

Arrowby decides that he was pushed by someone from his back and it was surely Ben. As Ben has warned him that he would kill him, he has tried to kill him but by his luck he is survived. Now he gets the moral hold and he'll blackmail Ben by showing the murder attempt and will get Hartley back. A new hope for him is if he tells her the murder attempt of her husband, she gets abhorrence, repulsion, and apprehension and comes to him right away.

The following day Arrowby finds James still on bed and questions him why he is always in bed and drowsy. James says nothing and they both instigate their discussion on 'death', 'life' and 'nirvana' which are very complex to understand. When they are involved in deep discussion, suddenly they hear a shrilling voice and later recognize that voice is Lizzie's. They immediately come out and find something unusual on the road to the tower because a group of people surrounded that area. When Peregrine says, "It's Titus", James mumbles "I should have held on." (415) Titus drowned in the water and died. Arrowby feels Titus was also murdered by Ben. James denies it and urges him to come with him to London. But Arrowby is adamant and he still believes the murder attempt on him and murder on Titus both were done by Ben. James proves the murder attempt was not tried by Ben and Titus death was quite a mishap. Arrowby is astounded when James tells that Peregrine is the person who has tried to kill him. Peregrine accepts that he has schemed to kill Arrowby and elucidates the reason that he has taken away his beautiful wife Rosina with him.

Charles again tries to get Hartley and visits her house where he finds booming faces of Hartley and her husband Ben Fitch. They are leaving for Australia and they want to settle there and Ben will get pension in Australia. Arrowby goes to Raven Hotel and is staggered by seeing Rosina and Peregrine together enjoying their reunion. Rosina says she is impressed by the murder attempt of Peregrine on Arrowby which indicates his love for her and revenge on Arrowby reflects losing her because of Arrowby. All these days Rosina feels regretful because Peregrine has not taken any vengeful action on Arrowby. Now she feels happy and joins her ex-husband again and they are about to re-marry.

### **Reaching the stars**

Charles Arrowby comes back to his house, sits alone thinking about all the people, reading the letters. When he comes to the little red room, he finds a white object in the cracks. He pulls it and finds it is a paper on which he has written something wonderful and unusual when he is in delirium after the accident. Even though he has the paper in his hand, still he cannot tell what he has written in that letter. He reads the paper:

I must write this down quickly as evidence, since I am beginning to forget it even as I write. James saved me. He somehow came down right into the water. He put his hands under my armpits and I felt myself coming up as if I were in a lift. I saw him against the sheer side of the rock leaning down to me, and then I rose up and he held me against his body and we came up together. But he was not standing on anything. One moment he was against the rock as if he were clinging onto it like a bat. Then he was simply standing on the water. (502)

Now Arrowby remembers clearly what has happened. James not like a bat but like some beast without holding his hands or legs came near to him and lifted him as he has described like a lift and his head struck a rock and he was unconscious. Arrowby is excited when he has discovered everything and comes to the conclusion that no one can save him at that sweeping situation only his cousin saved him with his will power or mental concentration or with those tricks he has explained him. At that time he finds a letter in his letter box in which James doctor passes on the information that James died happily on his own will. The doctor has recognized his death as a willing death and he knows a few people have this power. James has told the doctor that he has a cousin and after his death his cousin is the heir. The doctor is an Indian and he informs Arrowby that his cousin knows many things about the eternal world which are impossible to understand and apply in life.

Arrowby is in full confusion about the letter and death of James and his tricks. This state of perplexity leads to

truth and sometimes it is good to be in mystification. The reader can notice the modification of mind in Arrowby while he is in James's flat at the end of the novel, is somehow different from the Charles Arrowby in Shruff End at the beginning. Bove observes "an indication of some spiritual growth" in Arrowby. (92)

### **Conclusion**

He recognizes his egoism (but he justifies it rather than endeavoring to be stripped of it), and he admits that he is a moral failure, "What an egoist I must seem in the preceding pages. But am I so exceptional? We must live by the light of our own self-satisfaction, through that secret vital busy inwardness which is even more remarkable than our reason. Thus we must live unless we are saints, and are there any? There are spiritual beings, perhaps James was one, but there are no saints" ( 517-8). The willing death of James changes the mindset of Charles Arrowby. The idea of death, a memento *mori* that makes him partially recognizes his moral state. Charles starts to see everything around him in a different manner. He finally concedes that he had deluded himself throughout with his idea of reviving a secret love which did not, in fact, exist at all. He sees as he looks back his own dream text and does not look at the reality (535).

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