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POSTMODERNIST FACES OF TRUTH AND FICTION IN IRIS MURDOCH'S *THE SEA, THE SEA*

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ABSTRACT. *Postmodernist Faces of Truth and Fiction in Iris Murdoch's* The Sea, The Sea. This essay analyses Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* and argues that the concept of truth stands for multiple-faced fiction to be interpreted according to the readers' vision, culture and education. One's vision of the world represents one's truth about the world. Emphasizing the fictionality of truth and inviting the readers to analyze the symbols of the *sea* and of the "various lights" (Murdoch 77), which stand for different views on the past and the world, Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* evinces its postmodernist and metafictional condition.

Keywords: *truth, fiction, postmodernist faces, vision, the past, the present, the sea, the light, the world*

REZUMAT. *Fețele postmoderniste ale adevărului și ficțiunii în romanul* Marea, Marea *de Iris Murdoch.* Eseul argumentează faptul că în romanul *Marea, Marea* de Iris Murdoch conceptul de adevăr este asociat cu ficțiunea, având fețe multiple ce urmează a fi interpretate în funcție de viziunea, cultura și educația cititorilor. Propria viziune asupra lumii reprezintă propriul adevăr despre lume. Evidențiind caracterul ficțional al adevărului și invitând cititorii să analizeze simbolul *mării* și simbolul "luminilor variate" (Murdoch 77) ce scot în evidență puncte de vedere diferite despre trecut și despre conceptul de lume, romanul *Marea, Marea* de Iris Murdoch își dovedește condiția de roman postmodernist și metaficțional.

Cuvinte-cheie: *adevăr, ficțiune, fețe postmoderniste, viziune, trecutul, prezentul, marea, lumina, lumea*

Introduction

Drawing on the theory of postmodernism developed by Linda Hutcheon (1988) and on the theory of metafiction put forward by Patricia Waugh, this essay shows that Iris Murdoch's novel, *The Sea, The Sea*, illustrates these theorists'

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ideas. The concept of truth escapes a unique meaning, having various faces or interpretations and turning into fiction. Supporting the theory of Lacan quoted and enlarged upon by Judith Butler (1990), I claim that in Iris Murdoch's novel women speak and uphold their own truth, coping with the man's power of manipulation and denying his truth. Just as the concept of truth is given diverse interpretations by the characters in this literary work, the novel is revalued as a theatrical performance and a narrative with multiple faces including the autobiography, the memoir, the diary.

Analyzing Iris Murdoch's novels in the chapter entitled "Post-War and Post-Modern Literature" in *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Andrew Sanders (1994) shows that all of this author's novels "are carefully patterned, though the rules of the obscure game which decide these patterns often seem to be broken, reformed, and realigned by the very nature of the freedom which she allows her characters" (598).

Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* consists of a *Prehistory*, six chapters entitled *History* and a *Postscript* entitled *Life goes on*. The unique narrator, Charles Arrowby, a former famous actor, wants his piece of writing to be "a continuous meditation" (26) without any reference to a specific historical period. He often appears to hesitate about the choice of the events he would like to focus on, wondering if he really wants to write about a particular subject like his childhood or about certain aspects from his past life. Being invited to decide whether Charles Arrowby's piece of writing is a memoir, a diary or an autobiography, we are suggested that this literary work is open to our own interpretation. Hesitating upon mentioning a definite genre of this literary work, Charles Arrowby considers it a combination of a memoir, a diary and an autobiography: "I had written the above, destined to be the opening paragraph of my memoirs. […] Is that what this chronicle will prove to be? Time will show. At this moment, a page old, it feels more like a diary than a memoir" (1). Further on, he says, "I have started to write my autobiography" (22). Charles Arrowby frequently tells his readers that he rereads his own piece of writing. He insists that his autobiography does not reveal the absolute truth of his past. He enlarges upon the metaphor of the world as a stage, associating the theatre with life and with an instrument which offers us the opportunity to "tell our everyday lies" (33). Charles Arrowby represents his past as a world on a theatre stage and the six parts of the novel entitled *History* look like a theatre play. The theatrical performance he stages alludes to William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Moreover, his approach to the theme of the world as a stage and his vision of the artist as a magician, who tries his best to impose his will upon everyone by his power of manipulation, echo William Shakespeare. The former successful actor and director of the Shakespeare theatre, Charles Arrowby, associates himself with Prospero and admits that his

vision of life has been influenced by this dramatist's plays: "I owe my whole life to Shakespeare" (27); "I think I was a good Prospero" (38). Like Prospero, Charles Arrowby is an artist who attempts to subdue his world by the power of his mind, by his knowledge and by magic: "From the guileless simplicity of my parents' life, from the immobility and quietness of my home, I fled to the trickery and magic of art" (29). At the same time, Arrowby associates his own life with a novel – "So I am writing my life, after all, as a novel" (153) – and turns his piece of writing into metafiction as defined by Patricia Waugh. According to this theoretician, exploring the concept of one's life (world) as fiction is specific to metafiction.

> Metafiction pursues such questions through its formal self-exploration, drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, but often recasting it in the terms of contemporary philosophical, linguistic or literary theory. (Waugh 2-3)

Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* is a postmodernist metafictional novel which draws our attention to the fact that truth is nothing but a "veiled face" (500) and the result of our own analysis and interpretation. "Reason said that the evidence was not conclusive and could be read in other ways" (158). According to Patricia Waugh, in a metafictional novel, "through continuous narrative intrusion, the reader is reminded that not only do characters verbally construct their own realities; they are themselves verbal constructions, words, not beings" (26). In line with Patricia Waugh's idea, Charles Arrowby suggests to his readers that his piece of writing can be associated with his autobiography and his diary, but it is also his fictional creation. Arrowby mocks at his readers' readiness to believe what is written, emphasizing the fictionality of his own autobiographical account. That is why he is an instance of what Seymour Chatman calls an "unreliable narrator" (233). According to Chatman, "in 'unreliable narration' the narrator's account is at odds with the implied reader's surmises about the story's real intentions" (233).

The title of the novel, *The Sea, The Sea*, is an invitation to analyze Iris Murdoch's novel beyond its surface structure and declared status of an autobiography. The symbol of the *sea* stands for the hidden meanings of fiction and the past to be explored and understood. Like fiction, whose meanings can be either easy to decipher or hidden into symbols difficult to understand, the sea either allows us to penetrate its mystery by laying bare its bottom at ebb and flow or it hides its mystery in its abyssal depth difficult to reach and understand. Both fiction and the sea stand for complex worlds with various faces whose interpretation requires open-mindedness and a broad cultural

background. Both fiction and the sea are open to our analysis in a postmodernist fashion. Their unique truth is never known. In Iris Murdoch's novel, the image of the sea is shown as a background, its changing color and mood being present throughout the novel. To Charles Arrowby, the sea is his source of happiness, of energy and inspiration. Moreover, the sea stands for the narrator's hidden consciousness and for the present past whose depth we have to investigate and understand.

Visions of the Past and the Present Conveying Various Truths

Conducting an experiment with the form of the novel, Iris Murdoch's literary work introduces us to six chapters entitled *History* which look like the six acts of a well-staged play whose background is the sea with its changing colors and moods. The stage director is Charles Arrowby, the narrator of the novel, whose former successful acting career in the Shakespeare Theatre seems to have influenced his perspective on the concept of fiction writing. The protagonists of this six-act play are Charles Arrowby and his former colleagues and friends, his cousin James, his former girlfriend, Hartley, her husband, Ben, and her adoptive son, Titus. The stage is Charles's house "called Shruff End" (10) in the village of Narrowdean near the sea. Being considered a "haunted" place (54), Shruff End can be associated with Prospero's haunted island. Like Prospero who subdues all the spirits met on the desert island, Charles, a former charismatic actor and theatre director, influences his friends and former colleagues' lives both in a positive and in a negative way. His influence is imprinted on their minds and that is why they keep visiting him at his new house in Shruff End. They are either willing to build new relationships with him, as Lizzie and Gilbert Opian tell him, or they want to take revenge against him, as Peregrine and Rosina show him. Before coming to the scene of taking revenge, the characters ponder on the past, with Charles, and spend their time eating, drinking, swimming and chatting. Their dialogues evince their different visions on the truth of the past and the present, their views on Charles's ideas and actions. They argue about what they consider the truth of their lives. Unlike Prospero who defeats the evil spirits led by Caliban and who finally comes to terms with his relatives and former enemies, Charles Arrowby is defeated by his former friends who reject his views and do not accept the consequences of his actions. He is a world apart in his approach to the past and to the present and turns into a tragic hero in a drama we are invited to watch.

Having important roles in Charles's play, his friends, former colleagues and actors express their frustrations over their past relationships with Charles and over their life. They reflect on their past and attempt to avenge it. Thus,

Peregrine and his former wife, Rosina accuse Charles of having maliciously dissolved their marriage. On the other hand, Lizzie and Gilbert Opian try to rekindle their old friendship with Charles in order to come to terms with their past and present. Except Charles, all of his visitors view the past as a lost time. Their vision on the past conveys their own truth regarding the meaning and the importance of the past.

To Charles, the past is like a property which he strives to hold and protect at all costs. In his opinion, "the past can recover" (84). Charles argues that "we must quietly collect our past, collect it up with tacit understanding, without any intensity or drama" (121). He does not perceive any difference between the past and the present. They are "so close, so almost one, as if time were an artificial teasing out of a material which longs to join, to interpenetrate" (153). Being an idealist who preserves his old illusions about the perfect love which he met and lost in the past and which he still searches and hopes for, Charles Arrowby, considers the past "the most real thing of all, and loyalty to it the most important thing of all" (354). He is determined to live the past again and wait for Hartley, the love of his childhood and the woman of his present dreams, hoping that she will come back to him: "I've got to wait. She'll come to me here. She's part of me, it's not a caprice or a dream" (354). Charles Arrowby lives in a present past which offers him food for thought, urging him to ask many rhetorical questions about its faces, its reactions and final outcome. Stubbornly embracing an illusory idea, he turns into a hilarious character who lives in a dream world, tilting at windmills to have his dream come true. Only time shows him that his illusions have been shattered, urging him to admit that "the past refused to come back, as it did in dreams, to be remade" (414). His vision on the present past fades as he admits that "the past buries the past and must end in silence, but it can be a conscious silence that rests open-eyed" (500). Nevertheless, by associating the past with the "conscious silence that rests open-eyed" (500), Arrowby suggests that the past is still alive and open to interpretation.

Charles exploits the complexity of fiction which offers various perspectives on the past and on the present under the guise of an autobiography or a diary. To give more authenticity to his account, Charles Arrowby shows us his full letters to Lizzie, to Hartley, to Mr. Fitch and their replies as well as other letters. This technique of combining various types of texts and writing styles within a novel is specific to postmodernist literary works. According to Frederick M. Holmes, "it is fairly typical for postmodernist novels to present themselves as unintegrated agglomerations of different kinds of documents" (34). Not only does Charles Arrowby include various letters in this novel but he also presents us what he imagines these characters might think. He asks and tries to answer many rhetorical questions about the characters' feelings and their possible approaches

to the past and the present. At a certain point, Charles tries to convince the readers that they read a truthful account of the events, playing with their expectations: "This novelistic memoir, as it has now become, is however, as far as its facts are concerned […] accurate and truthful" (239).

The narrator, Charles Arrowby, focuses on his obsession with his past and present love for Hartley, turning his novel into a love story. His successful career of an actor at a famous London theatre and his various love affairs have not managed to make him forget his pure childhood love for Mary Hartley Smith who left him when he decided to attend an acting school in London. We are introduced to Charles's dramatic encounter with Hartley and to their different truths about the past, the present, and the world. He accidentally meets her in the street many years later when he retires and moves to Shruff End in a village near the sea. He has a private conversation with her in a church and pays her unexpected visits, hoping to convince her to leave her husband, Ben, and marry him. Despite her old age and physical change, Charles seems to be enchanted with the beauty he remembers from his past. Mary Hartley Smith is the woman of his dreams who shared his love in his childhood and who abandoned him when she found out that he wanted to pursue an acting career. Just as Charles believes in his ideal love which can never die, Hartley believes in the importance of her marriage despite its hardships. She thinks that an actor cannot make a good husband, preferring an unhappy married life, an isolated life with a tyrannical, jealous husband. Both Charles Arrowby and Hartley illustrate and uphold their own principles and nothing can convince them to change their mind.

Hartley represents the faithful and obedient wife who would rather die for her principle. She considers that she has to protect her married life by being a submissive, humble wife no matter how painful it might be rather than accept Charles's offer of a new life. Her vision on married life is her own truth. She upholds an old tradition which encourages women to be obedient and humble, preventing them from making their voices heard in their married life in order to be happier. Accepting Charles's invitation to his house in Narrowdean and satisfying his curiosity, Hartley tells him her story and insists upon the misfortunes she has suffered in her married life. Her only reason for having accepted to suffer has been her desire to make her husband, Ben, happy at all costs. "And I married him to make him happy" (227). Her life principle prevents her from escaping her condition. "You can't see it, nobody can understand a marriage. I've prayed and prayed to go on loving Ben" (228). Accepting marriage as a prison is part of an old tradition of female submissiveness as a condition for maintaining the matrimony. "And, as I told you, I've never really had any friends, Ben and I have lived so much together, so much on our own, so sort of secretly, a kind of hidden life, like criminals. I never had anyone to talk to, even

if I had wanted to talk" (229). Planning to save her and keep her in his house in Narrowdean, showing her the advantages of starting a new life with him, Charles faces her hostility, aggressiveness and stubbornness. Frightened by a new life perspective and refusing to make new decisions and changes, she behaves like a hostile woman lost for words and ideas and subject to her violent instincts.

> As she was crying out Hartley had been running to and fro in the kitchen like a demented animal. […] She then began to fight me, silently, violently, and with a surprising strength, kicking my ankles, writhing her body about, one hand pinching my arm, the other pressed hard against my neck. (232)

Despite the clear evidence that Hartley will not come back to him as she cannot escape the prison of her principles, Charles still hopes that he will succeed in convincing her to start a new life. He starts spying on her secretly, trying to obtain important information. He spends his time just remembering their beautiful past love:

> I did not want to become simply obsessed with her misery. […] So I reverted to the past when she was the unspoilt focus of my innocent love, seeing her as she had been when she seemed my future, my whole life, that life which had been taken from me and yet still seemed to exist somewhere as a packaged stolen possibility. (245)

Charles's views on his present and past reality must be associated with his own truth about this reality. The dramatic scenes of Charles's obsessive love story are vividly recreated and staged starting with the moment when Titus, who is Hartley's and Ben's adoptive son, enters his life. Being informed of Ben's suspicion that Titus might be his own son following a secret relationship with his mother, Hartley, Charles tries to make Titus his ally in his plan to convince Hartley to marry him. Having left his adoptive parents for not loving him, Titus does not feel happy to meet them. Nevertheless, he accepts to have an encounter with his adoptive mother, Hartley, in Charles's house, warning him that she will never leave her husband as "nothing could make her happy" (259). Hartley forgot "about freedom long ago" (274).

Charles is determined to keep Hartley in his house in Narrowdean away from Ben and convince her to relive their beautiful past and love story. This scene is fundamental for the condition of a tragic heroine – a humiliated woman, prisoner to Charles and to her own tyrannical husband, having no choice but to take the blame upon herself. Charles turns into a merciless oppressor who only shows his interest in taking advantage of any opportunity that could determine Hartley to leave her husband and marry him. He behaves like a gaoler, locking the door of the room where she stays for fear that she might run away and drown

in the sea. Seeing Hartley's misery, sickness and hysterical attitude, Charles finds it difficult to admit that his actions are doomed to failure. He contradicts Hartley, being unable to understand her decision and mentality. He cannot understand the dutiful Hartley who believes that "life is pain" (304) and who gives in to her misery, accepting her unhappy marriage and terrible fear as normal states of affair. Charles fails to properly grasp Hartley's hysterical reactions, her feelings of pain and revolt against him, which are nothing but her desperate means of revealing her own truth about happiness and pain, life and the world, her past and her present. She is nothing but a tragic heroine misunderstood by Charles who claims to love her. Invited and kept in Charles's house for a while, she behaves as if she were bedridden in a hospital, refusing to eat, enjoy life with Charles, sleeping on a mattress and asking Charles to let her go home.

Finally, Charles has to accept his defeat and he becomes a tragic hero as well. "I felt dread and a terrible fatalism; and bitter grief, grief such as I had never felt in my life since Hartley had left me so many years ago" (310). In fact, both Hartley and Charles look like tragic heroes in a Greek tragedy. Both of them are doomed to personal disaster due to their own actions and decisions. Struggling with his impulses and illusions, Charles takes his friends' advice that it would be better to leave her free to go back to her husband. Charles's theatrical performance shows how ambitious he is to play the role of Prospero. He tries hard to impose his will upon everyone and hopes to be successful. Unlike Prospero, Charles ends up in a bitter defeat, having to adapt to a painful reality. According to Andrew Sanders,

> as a range of novels from *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1955) to *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) and *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983) suggest, those characters who attempt to impose nets, theories, mystical enchantments, 'artistic' arrangements, or restrictive myths upon reality must themselves adapt to a world which of necessity eludes predetermined human systems of control. (598)

Charles's approach to his past and present reality is rejected by Hartley and by his friends. Hartley associates him with a bird and a fish for his total freedom of movement and thought. She calls her love for him a dream impossible to come true.

> Yes, I suppose I love you, I've never forgotten you, and when I saw you I felt it all again, but it's something childish, it isn't part of the real world. […] There isn't any place for this love in the world now, it's pointless, it's irrelevant, it's a dream, we're in a dream place and tomorrow we must leave it. (280)

Charles is a voice apart as all of his visitors to Shruff End – his former colleagues, Peregrine, Rosina, his cousin, James, Gilbert Opian, Titus – disagree with his ideas and actions. Peregrine accuses him of considering Hartley his personal possession and looking down on women. Charles is also accused that he has only taken advantage of women all of his life, cheating them and destroying their married lives. To James, Charles's effort to marry Hartley is an act of vanity and power. Charles fights for an illusion: "Some kinds of fruitless preoccupations with the past can create such simulacra, and they can exercise power, like those heroes at Troy fighting for a phantom Helen" (352-353). Charles's attitude, discourse and wishful thinking about Hartley turn him into a Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Only when informed that Hartley has sold her house and left for Australia with Ben, does he admit his total defeat and the fact that he has been just an actor in this story.

Pondering on Charles Arrowby's actions and discourse, one can associate him with the symbol of oppressive power and determination to have his desires satisfied. On the other hand, Hartley stands for a reasonable, thoughtful woman conscious of her own reality and of Charles's impossible dreams. Her power to stick to her principles prevails over Charles's oppressive power. She represents the power to convince by means of reason. She convinces Charles that he believes in a dream which cannot come true. Hartley confirms the theory of Lacan quoted and commented by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. According to this theory, women are the power whereas men have the power.

> Women are said to "be" the Phallus in the sense that they maintain the power to reflect or represent the "reality" of the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject, a power which, if withdrawn, would break up the foundational illusions of the masculine subject position. In order to "be" the Phallus, the reflector and guarantor of an apparent masculine subject position, women must become, must "be" […] precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the essential function of men. […] On the other hand, men are said to "have" the Phallus, yet never to "be" it. (Butler 61-62)

Mary Hartley Smith's determination to continue her married life with her husband, Ben, and her belief in the importance of her own marriage and in her own truth demonstrate her feminine power to be what she wants to be and to have what she wants to have. Fighting Charles's plans to marry her, she looks like a tragic heroine in a Greek tragedy. Her view of happiness differs from Charles's vision. She understands and accepts her own condition and limits, rejecting any change in her life. Her attitude and tragic condition confirm the

idea expressed by F.I. Zeitlin in the article entitled *Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek Drama*, where he shows that women as tragic heroines in the Greek drama have more power of reflection than men and acknowledge their limitations much better.

> Woman comes equipped with a "natural" awareness of those very complexities men would resist, if they could. Situated in her more restrictive and sedentary position in the world, she is permitted, she is asked, we might say, to reflect more deeply, like Phaedra, on the paradoxes of herself. Through these she can arrive better at the paradoxes of the world that she, much better than men, seems to know is subject to irreconcilable conflict, subject as well to time, flux and change. (F.I. Zeitlin 122)

In Iris Murdoch's novel, women speak their own truth and are powerful enough to uphold it. They either endure misery and humiliation, coping with the male power of manipulation, oppression and with their illusions like Hartley and Lizzie, or they take revenge, like Rosina. Unlike Hartley's strong power and determination to uphold her own principles, Lizzie's attitude does not show any sense of feminine dignity. The scene when Lizzie visits Charles in Narrowdean to beg him to marry her and love her as he has promised her shows the condition of a woman ready to make any compromise and be humiliated just for the sake of getting married. Says Lizzie: "I'm yours. […] I don't want you to be unselfish and scrupulous and generous, I want you to be the lord and the king as you have always been" (189). Lizzie does not protect her dignity and does not restore her pride. Nevertheless, like the other female characters, she plays her role successfully on the stage of Iris Murdoch's novel.

This is a postmodernist approach to truth, namely there are different meanings assigned to the past and the present, to the concept of happiness and pain according to the characters' vision, personality, education, and life experience. Moreover, there is a postmodernist outline of autobiography, diary, and memoir that are nothing but the faces of fiction in Iris Murdoch's novel structured like a well-staged play whose analysis may offer multiple interpretations.

The Symbolic Representation of the World in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea*

A postmodernist novel which evinces the fictionality of the autobiography, the memoir, and the diary and encourages multiple interpretations, Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* draws our attention to a series of symbols that can help us understand Charles Arrowby's vision of the past and the present, happiness, life and the world. Claiming that truth has a "veiled face" (500), Charles Arrowby suggests that truth is the result of our own analysis and conclusions. He is

the protagonist of a postmodernist fiction defined by Linda Hutcheon as "historiographic metafiction." According to Linda Hutcheon, "what historiographic metafiction explicitly does, though, is to cast doubt on the very possibility of any firm 'guarantee of meaning', however situated in discourse. This questioning overlaps with Foucault's challenging of the possibility of knowledge ever allowing any final, authoritative truth" (55).

Charles's discourse evinces his own truth about the past and Hartley, about true love, happy life and the world whereas his friends and former colleagues offer different perspectives on these notions, arguing for different truths. The multiple truths to be uncovered and acknowledged are symbolized by the metaphor of the *sea* in the title of the novel. The different interpretations are symbolized by the metaphor of "various lights" (77) perceived by Charles while writing. The "various lights" (77) are the various truths about the past. One of the *lights* is associated with the symbol of the "mouth opening to the daylight" (77) which stands for the plethora of details we read and have to make sense of. This special *light* is also associated with "a hole through which fires emerge from the centre of the earth" (77), a symbol standing for our creative reading and reconstruction of the past. Another *light* is associated with Charles's deep feelings of love for Hartley. "Perhaps it is the only true light in my life, the light that reveals the truth. No wonder I feared to lose the light and to be left in the darkness forever" (79). Despite her physical change and old age, Charles perceives Hartley in the same *light*, not making any difference between the past and the present. Thus, Hartley, the woman of Charles's dreams, becomes a symbolic representation of an axis mundi as she is associated with "the world centre" (115) and with his "pure substance […] like nerves, like blood" (170). Charles's unrequited love for Hartley is metaphorically represented by *the sea monster* that he sees a couple of times: "What was I looking for? I was looking for that sea monster" (130). Moreover, the symbol of the sea serpent can stand for death as Charles sees this monster in the cauldron where he was pushed by Peregrine in order to be killed. "The monstrous sea serpent had actually been in the cauldron with me" (466). Charles's world is represented as a stage whose lights and symbols are open to our own analysis and interpretation in a postmodernist fashion. The play on the stage evinces the interconnection between the past and the present. It points to man's vanity and desire to keep control of the world as well as to woman's power to uphold her own truth and principles.

Conclusion

Iris Murdoch's novel offers a postmodernist representation of the faces of truth which are the different meanings the characters assign to the world, to the past and the present, to happiness and pain. The two protagonists of this

novel, Charles Arrowby and Hartley, as well as the other characters speak and uphold their own truths about the past and the present, revealing their own feelings and perspective upon the world. Their power lies in their ability to argue for their truth and follow it. In a postmodernist manner, Iris Murdoch's novel invites us to cast our interpretation on the dramatic representation of its world, on the various truths supported by the characters and on the symbols in the novel. Associating the concept of truth with the symbols of *the sea* and *the light*, Charles Arrowby, the narrator of Iris Murdoch's novel, demonstrates that one's vision of the world represents one's truth about the world. The concept of truth is nothing but fiction with multiple faces (drama, autobiography, memoir, and diary). Iris Murdoch's fiction evinces its postmodernist condition, having the power to hint at the various faces of truth as perceived by the narrator and by the other characters in the novel.

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