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Between Illusion and Reality: The Shakespearean Intertext in the Poetics of Iris Murdoch's Writings

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Abstract. This article examines the role of Shakespearean intertextuality in the poetics of Iris Murdoch's novels, focusing on how her fiction reinterprets and transforms Shakespearean paradigms within a modern philosophical and narrative framework. It argues that Murdoch's engagement with Shakespeare extends beyond explicit allusion, functioning as a structural and conceptual foundation that shapes character development, plot construction, and ethical inquiry. Through close readings of "The Black Prince" and "The Sea, the Sea", the study demonstrates how Murdoch adapts motifs, character types, and dramatic patterns characteristic of Shakespearean drama – such as mistaken identity, moral testing, and the interplay between illusion and reality. Particular attention is given to the subjective reinterpretation of Shakespearean figures by Murdoch's protagonists, revealing a process of "receptive polysemy" in which established images are reconfigured through individual consciousness. The article also explores the symbolic and philosophical dimensions of Murdoch's work, including the use of sea and cave imagery in relation to Platonic and Christian traditions. Ultimately, it contends that Murdoch's intertextual dialogue with Shakespeare enables a distinctive synthesis of literature and philosophy, foregrounding ethical perception, the problems of identity, and the tension between illusion and truth in the modern novel.

Keywords: Shakespearean intertext; narrative; reflection; Shakespearean paradigm; receptive polysemy; Iris Murdoch.

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The dynamic configuration of world literature is shaped by discrete landmark literary phenomena that are significant for comprehending literature as an integrated artistic reality. In terms of the intensity of its influence on the general trajectory of world literature in the second half of the twentieth century, the legacy of Iris Murdoch constitutes such a phenomenon. Murdoch's oeuvre has generated a substantial and diverse body of critical scholarship within both Anglophone and international literary studies; nevertheless, the distinctive qualities of her novels, when situated within the framework of contemporary literary-theoretical reflection, call for continual critical re-evaluation. Murdoch commands sustained scholarly attention owing to the originality of her thematic preoccupations, the unpredictability of her narrative structures, the stylistic refinement of her prose, and her charismatic impact on the reader's ethical imagination. The specificity of Murdoch's sustained and prolific engagement with the novel form and genre is such that its historical and literary reception remains inextricably linked to the ongoing relevance of her fictional texts within the parameters of particular critical and research contexts.

In this case, the discussion concerns the pervasive Shakespearean intertext that underlies the writer's oeuvre. The protagonists of her novels do not merely allude to or quote Shakespeare, compare themselves to Shakespearean characters, or discuss his plays; rather, they frequently articulate thoughts and ideas that belong to the author herself, who thus enters into an imagined dialogic engagement with the dramatist. In passages devoted to Shakespeare, the reader discerns the contemporary author's profoundly respectful attitude towards the apotheosized playwright. This attitude is consistently foregrounded at the textual level and is embodied in the narrator's discourse. Therefore, in one of her critical writings, Iris Murdoch remarked:

> We know very little about Shakespeare, he is hidden behind his work, and perhaps in this respect is an ideal artist. Invisible and modest, he "disappears" his wisdom into his art. He is not didactic, he is, as artist, selfless, it would never have occurred to him to comment on his writings or discuss what it is to be a poet… But the plays are "showings". They are indeed "criticisms" of vast areas of human life, offered to us by a just and compassionate intellect: not "beyond good and evil", but goodness made perfectly into art" (Murdoch 1993: p. 115–116).

There exists a particularly strong and enduring connection between Murdoch and Shakespeare, in that Shakespeare's legacy serves as a starting point of exploration for dual choice in Murdoch's philosophical and artistic inquiries, as well as for her pursuit of form and structure in shaping her literary writings.

The aim of the article is to analyze how Iris Murdoch incorporates and transforms Shakespearean intertextuality into a structural and philosophical principle in her novels, shaping narrative form and ethical inquiry.

Murdoch frequently draws upon a structural pattern characteristic of Shakespearean drama, beginning with the depiction of a sombre reality that engenders the isolation or separation of characters, followed by intricate amorous entanglements and a state of general disarray in which the protagonists experience a loss of identity, thereby generating a condition of false appearance or mistaken circumstance. Subsequently, through a series of deliberate efforts, the characters nevertheless confront and endure their distressing experiences, and the situation is ultimately resolved in an unexpected manner. In following Shakespeare, Murdoch does not commence with the character as such but with the situation itself, compelling her characters to act irrationally, as if subjecting their moral resilience to a form of trial, which in turn renders them particularly vulnerable to the operations of contingency. Murdoch's novels are replete with additional Shakespearean markers: the frequent appearance of twins; eccentric men akin to Shakespearean fools; and youthful protagonists endowed with the charm of Puck or Ariel, alongside various "Shakespeare's transvestite girls" (Murdoch 1978: p. 36). Murdoch's heroines in male disguise often embody a provocative form of desire that is aroused within male characters, as exemplified by Julian Baffin's Hamlet costume in "The Black Prince" and by Lizzie Scherer in "The Sea, the Sea", whose roles recall Shakespearean Viola, Puck, and Ariel. Another "even more specific and precise link in the characterisations of the brothers who appear in Shakespeare's plays and those who people Murdoch's novels" that brings together the novelist and the dramatist is "their handling of the sibling theme" (Whittome 2024).

Such a Shakespearean background, articulated through both explicit and implicit allusions, narrative and philosophical analogies, and repeatedly noted by scholars of Murdoch's work (R. Todd, E. Dipple,

D. Johnson, A. Muro Llorente), emerges in almost every one of her novels: the spirit of "Hamlet" pervades "The Black Prince" (Todd 1979: p. 27–36); the fateful aura of "The Tempest" looms over "The Sea, the Sea"; and "A Fairly Honourable Defeat" bears an affinity with "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (Todd 1979: p. 127). Murdoch herself acknowledged that her inclination towards a rigorous compositional structure, inherited from Shakespeare, enables the sustained articulation of moral dilemmas.

As a philosopher, Murdoch endeavoured in her novels to confront the pressing moral and existential questions of the contemporary world, situating her fiction at the intersection of ethical reflection, literary-theoretical inquiry, and imaginative writing. Her literary oeuvre manifests a distinctive synthesis in which the development of a personal theory of the novel is inseparable from the articulation of a nuanced conception of modern human subjectivity, one deeply attuned to questions of moral perception, spiritual striving, and the ethical condition of being.

Thus, in one of her most significant works, "The Black Prince", she examines the problem of the creative personality from multiple perspectives: art and love, love and marriage, life and art. Through the interrelation of these perspectives, she explores the issues of self-expression and self-knowledge, as well as truth and freedom in the life of the artist. Shakespearean allusions in "The Black Prince" function not only to characterize the protagonists – Bradley Pearson and Julian Baffin – but also as a significant element in the novel's structure. They serve as a foundation between the forces of good and evil within the moral and ethical framework of Iris Murdoch's worldview. In this regard, the transformation of the traditional image of Hamlet acquires paradigmatic significance in the novel.

According to Bradley Pearson, Hamlet is "the tormented empty sinful consciousness of man seared by the light of art, the god's flayed victim dancing the dance of creation" (Murdoch 1977: p. 200). At the same time, Pearson characterizes Shakespeare as a mysterious deity. The specificity of the author's use of the Shakespearean paradigm lies in the fact that Iris Murdoch's characters interpret well-known Shakespearean images through their own subjective perspectives.

In Pearson's reception, psychoanalysis techniques are clearly discernible, since he reflects on his relationships with his parents through the model of Hamlet's family relations (Murdoch 1977: p. 195). Pearson maintains that because these were precisely his own feelings toward his parents:

> My mother was very important to me. I loved her, but always with a kind of anguish… I felt for my misguided mother pain and shame which did not diminish but qualified my love (Murdoch 1977: p. 82).

For Bradley Pearson, Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia is a projection of his relationship with Gertrude. The principle of identification extends, in Pearson's interpretation, to the parallel between Hamlet and Claudius: "Claudius is just a continuation of his brother on the conscious level", hence, in his opinion, Hamlet "identifies Claudius with his father" (Murdoch 1977: p. 195). Such a receptive response to Shakespeare's characters unfolds as a psychological process: Pearson's consciousness reconstructs these figures in relation to reality. In this context, Pearson functions as an interpreter of Shakespearean images, which are transformed by his own consciousness.

Moreover, Pearson asserts that, in general, the reader is inclined to "identify with the hero" (Murdoch 1977: p. 196). However, in the case of "Hamlet" as a great work of literature, such identification acquires a particular significance. In Pearson's view, a striking example is Shakespeare himself:

> "Hamlet" is a wild act of audacity, a self-purging, a complete self-castigation in the presence of god… Shakespeare here makes the crisis of his own identity into the very central stuff of his art (Murdoch 1977: p. 200).

Another vivid illustration is the variation on Hamlet's line: "Words, words, words". Pearson employs it as a characterization of Shakespeare, of his play, and of Hamlet as a character:

> He has performed a supreme creative feat, a work endlessly reflecting upon itself, not discursively but in its very substance a Chinese box of words as high as the tower of Babel, a meditation upon the

> bottomless trickery of consciousness and the redemptive role of words in the lives of those without identity, that is human beings. Hamlet is words, and so is Hamlet (Murdoch 1977: p. 199).

Thus, in "The Black Prince", a distinct paradigm of Hamlet's image is developed in a new interpretative framework. In Shakespeare, Hamlet's tragedy is that of a noble individual confronted with the triumph of evil in life. Hamlet is isolated; he continually reflects on how he ought to act, yet ultimately does not act in the most effective manner. Otherwise, Bradley Pearson considers himself a "puritan" in both feeling and art, and repeatedly refers to his own consciousness; nevertheless, he is likewise profoundly solitary, and his actions appear incomprehensible to those around him, which ultimately leads to tragedy. By tracing the analogies between Hamlet and Pearson, Pearson finds himself accused of murdering his friend and the father of his beloved Julian Baffin (recalling that Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius, Ophelia's father).

Besides, certain symbols play an important role in representing the protagonist's inner world, whose indeterminacy of meaning may have a philosophical foundation and allow for multiple interpretations.

The integration of philosophical concerns with the author's distinctive narrative manner underpins her novel "The Sea, the Sea". The life story of the protagonist, the theatre director Charles Arrowby, narrated in the first person, is presented to the reader as a series of contradictory reflections on his tempestuous theatrical past, on Shakespeare and the theatre, and on the events of different stages of his life as they collide with the realities of the world. The auctorial narrator Arrowby, a hedonist and an egocentric person, describes these reflections as "a record of mingled thoughts and daily observations: 'my philosophy', my pensées", which he seeks to impart to a hypothetical reader (Murdoch 1978: p. 12). For a truly receptive encounter to happen, the reader must discern within this verbal and conceptual complex the central trajectory of the protagonist's spiritual and moral development – not merely to apprehend the essence, but to engage with the ethical mode of the narrative and to approach an understanding of the author's intentional stance toward the protagonist. The semantic density of the novel's title assumes particular significance in this regard, functioning as a richly multivalent symbol that opens onto a spectrum of interpretive

possibilities, thereby inviting the reader into an active, ethically attuned, and ontologically engaged process of meaning-making.

One such concept, as suggested by Murdoch, is "the sea of love". For Murdoch, as for Shakespeare, love guides the characters towards the right moral choices. It is therefore hardly surprising that Arrowby's reflections are invariably intertwined with his first love – the love of his entire life: "On n'aime qu'une fois, la première" (Murdoch 1978: p. 49). However, Arrowby's "true love" transforms into a brutal sentiment. Obsessed with love, Charles "metamorphoses" into an evil "demon", a wild Caliban, as he pursues his former beloved Hartley, forcibly confines her in his home, and commits a moral transgression by attempting to determine her fate against her will. The ambiguity of Charles Arrowby's actions can be explained by the dualistic nature of the protagonist's moral choice: he is driven by noble impulses, yet, due to the limitations imposed by his illusory consciousness, he is unable to fully realize them.

Arrowby assumes his role of a rejected lover, while the love object is the sixty-year-old married woman, Mary Fitch, née Mary Hartley. Blinded by the "light of pure love" and his own illusions, Arrowby strives to rescue his beloved from the captivity of her tyrannical husband. "Oh, the weakness of the power of love! You feel you can compel the beloved, but it's an illusion!" (Murdoch 1978: p. 34), one of the characters (Lizzie Scherer) admits – though in fact the reader senses that this commentary remark more credibly belongs to the author, Iris Murdoch.

It is noteworthy that in each of the novelist's fiction, the dynamics of her characters' relationships are shaped by distinctive configurations of passion. These range from obsession with the illusion of love ("The Sea, the Sea"), to unrequited love ("Under the Net", "The Red and the Green"), to incest and adultery ("The Time of the Angels"), to homosexual relationships ("A Fairly Honorable Defeat"), and to tragic love ("The Black Prince"), among other variations. Across her oeuvre, these recurring motifs reveal the author's sustained interest in the complex interplay among desire, moral constraint, and human emotions.

In the novel, the sea (both as a natural element and as a metaphor) represents various states of the human mind – particularly those of the explicit author – ranging from profoundly reflective and introspective to

extremely perilous or carelessly contemplative. The element of water here acquires a broad spectrum of corresponding symbolic meanings. On the one hand, it symbolizes the fundamental origins of being: states of calm, the protagonist's unconscious insights of happiness, truth, beauty, and perfection; on the other hand, it manifests as a destructive force, embodying suffering, fear, and even death (such as the drowning of the young Titus or the mysterious death of his cousin James). Its negative connotation is further intensified through depictions of the sea as a deadly, raging element – "the ruthless unchilding sea" (Murdoch 1978: p. 247). At the same time, the narrative emphasizes the indifference of nature to human suffering, as illustrated in the ekphrastic description of a seascape: "I went out to see what the horrible sea was up to. It was calm and slippery, sliding in among the rocks like oil" (Murdoch 1978: p. 249).

Thus, water (the sea) functions as an ambivalent symbol, embodying both potential and actualized existence, while simultaneously serving as a purifying and regenerative force. Its ceaseless motion renders it not only a source of life but also a manifestation of reality's inherent chaos. This symbolism extends metaphorically to human relationships: the "man-woman" dynamic mirrors the paradoxical nature of water – essential for life, yet impossible to inhabit fully. In this way, the sea comes to signify both the narrator's creative and imaginative impulses and the destructive tendencies that emerge from his actions, reflecting the complex interplay between aspiration and limitation, vitality and peril that define human experiences.

Murdoch's fiction engages with the full spectrum of philosophical and psychological questions concerning the modern individual. In "The Sea, The Sea", the novel's central reminiscences are deeply indebted to Shakespeare, particularly "The Tempest", reflecting the enduring influence of literary tradition on contemporary human consciousness. Arrowby, the former director, owes not only his profession but, in many ways, his very sense of self to Shakespeare:

> I went into the theatre of course because of Shakespeare. Those who knew me in later years as a Shakespeare director often did not realize how absolutely this god had directed me from the very first (Murdoch 1978: p. 26).

Throughout the novel, the protagonist frequently reflects on the role of chance and contingency in shaping his life, highlighting Murdoch's preoccupation with the interplay between human agency, moral responsibility, and the unpredictable forces that govern human existence. In these reflections, Arrowby's personal struggles become a lens through which the novel explores broader philosophical concerns, including the limits of self-knowledge, the ethical challenges of desire, and the tension between illusion and reality:

> I was born at Stratford-upon-Avon. Or to be exact, near it, or to be more exact, in the Forest of Arden. I grew up in leafy central England, as far as it is possible to be in this island from the sea. I did not see the sea until I was fourteen. Of course, I owe my whole life to Shakespeare. If I had not lived close to a great theatre, indeed close to that great theatre, I would never have managed to see any plays… I would never have gone to a theatre at all if it had not been that Shakespeare was "work" (Murdoch 1978: p. 25).

The Shakespearean paradigm provides a key to understanding the narrator's intricate worldview, as well as that of the author; one among many such cues, for the "sea" of her characters is ever-changing: calm and gentle, yet at the same time turbulent and perilous – in short, a "sea of human passions".

It is worth recalling that the protagonist was born and raised near the famous theatre and participated in school Shakespearean plays. It is precisely through Shakespeare that he chose the profession of a theatre director and became renowned for his productions of Shakespeare's plays. His entanglements in love are likewise closely connected to the works of the dramatist. The theatre director Charles Arrowby extrapolates images of Shakespearean heroines onto every woman in his life: from his mother, through his numerous actress-lovers (Lizzie, Jeanne, Rita, Rosina, Clement, Angela), to his first love, Hartley.

With subtle irony, Murdoch illustrates how Arrowby frames his emotional love story with actress Lizzie through the sequence of Shakespearean productions he directed, associatively tying each stage of their relationship to a different play:

> I was directing a season of Shakespeare. She fell in love with me during "Romeo and Juliet", she revealed her love during "Twelfth Night", we got to know each other during "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Then (but that was later) I began to love her during "The Tempest", and (but that was later still) I left her during "Measure for Measure" ... I recall very clearly that occasion when I first realized that Lizzie loved me. She was playing Viola. (This was during Lizzie's brief "shining period", her annus mirabilis) (Murdoch 1978: p. 35).

Arrowby regards Shakespeare not merely as "primus inter pares", but as a writer of fundamentally distinct quality. It is evident that the author shares this view. Like her protagonist, she openly admires the mastery of the dramatist and the "sea of passions" that whirls in his plays. In Arrowby's reception, Shakespeare's pronouncements acquire a certain variable significance: "Emotions really exist at the bottom of the personality or at the top. In the middle they are acted. This is why all the world is a stage" (Murdoch 1978: p. 28). A comparable form of improvisation is applied to the equally well-known phrase from Hamlet's monologue, "To be or not to be," in "The Black Prince." In this instance, its variable meaning brings the reader closer to an understanding of the protagonist, Bradley Pearson. The fundamental questions of life and death are reconfigured in Pearson's reception from the perspective of a writer: "Being is acting. We are tissues and tissues of different personae and yet we are nothing at all" (Murdoch 1977: p. 200). Pearson's words as of "unreliable narrator" suggest that, for him, "to be" signifies a perpetual performance, insincerity, and an attempt to present oneself in the most advantageous light. "Murdoch's Bradley Pearson is consciously unreliable, since he deceives the audience for a purpose" (Muro 2014).

Therefore, the theatrical topos in Murdoch's novels serves as a realm of illusion rather than a tangible space. For the protagonist Arrowby, it is precisely the "temple" of insincerity that he abandons in order to restore "true" feelings. Yet even this constitutes another illusion. As his obsession with theatre, he transposes onto the realm of feelings:

> The theatre is a place of obsession. It is not a soft dreamland… All good dramatists and directors and most (not all) good actors are obsessed men. Only geniuses like Shakespeare conceal the fact, or rather change it into something spiritual (Murdoch 1978: p. 28).

It is inevitable that Charles's obsessive pursuit – to reclaim his youthful love at any cost – culminates in disappointment, which he is unable to overcome:

> You've built a cage of needs and installed her in an empty space in the middle. The strong feelings are all around her – vanity, jealousy, revenge, your love for your youth – they aren't focused on her, they don't touch her. She seems to be their prisoner, but really you don't harm her at all. You are using her image, a doll, a simulacrum (Murdoch 1978: p. 238).

Here, Murdoch appears to side with Charles's cousin James, who is convinced that we cannot escape ourselves, for human beings are ultimately inscrutable creatures, oriented inward toward their own self. The author employs Shakespeare's retardation technique to dramatize the protagonist's inner struggle in the process of making crucial decisions.

Within the structure of Murdoch's novels, a symmetry in the relationships between characters becomes apparent, a feature characteristic of the dramatic genre in general, and of Shakespeare in particular. In dramatically heightened scenes, in brilliant dialogue, Murdoch conveys the unusual in everyday life, the strange, the mysterious, and the unexpected in human character, thus inserting mythological elements into the text of her novels. Following Shakespeare (magic in "The Tempest"), she frequently employs mystical metamorphoses to interpret real life: the awakening of "demons" ("a sea monster rising from the waves" (Murdoch 1978: p. 21)), and the miraculous rescue of Charles from the sea abyss. Arrowby eventually offers perfectly realistic explanations for all this mysticism, yet by then, each reader's imagination has already formed their own interpretations of the scenes described.

In particular, the emergence of the sea monster constitutes a direct allusion to mythological narratives concerning a mythical struggle with a dragon, often interpreted as the separation of the conscious ego from the unconscious. This evokes a set of associations: all that is luminous and divine descends from above, while, from below, from the chthonic depths, all that is negative rises, stirring the corporeal passions, egoism, and obsessive drives of the protagonist.

> Only the loss of the dearest people (the tragic deaths of cousin James and young Titus) and related events will help Charles Arrowby look at his life differently and finally understand that his love for Hartley was not a part of real life; it belongs to the world of artistic reflection (Matiychak, Nikoriak amd Tychinina 2023: p. 151).

Charles's rescue from the depths of the sea, in the context of his cousin's Buddhist beliefs, can be interpreted as the stripping away of the illusion of love – in its most extreme form, a destructive and coarse emotion. Viewed in a Christian framework, it may be seen as a symbolic rite of baptism, representing the renewal and purification of feeling. In this understanding, the "sea" also functions as a biblical symbol. One might recall, for example, the Apostle Peter: it is faith that keeps a person afloat, preventing them from sinking into the sea of mundane life. The search for God occupies a significant place in the artistic work of the philosopher Murdoch, and biblical allusions in her novels serve a stimulating function in the reader's reception, enriching the interpretive experience. An example of an indirect biblical reminiscence concerning Heaven and Hell can be found in the episode in which Arrowby compares his reflections to wandering through a dark cave, into which light enters only through various holes. Among the spots of light, there is one, the largest, to which he unconsciously moves, although it is unclear what it might signify for him: a hole through which the day shines, or a fissure from which flames erupt. In this perspective, a further paradox of reception emerges: even the names of Charles's relatives are essentially biblical (Adam and Abel), although Arrowby himself cannot be regarded as a religious man.

Thus, the author seeks to bring the traditional Christian worldview into a dialogue with that of her favorite Shakespeare and Plato:

> Shakespeare's plays have their own special moral and religious atmosphere. Morality and religion do not appear in abstract or doctrinal guises in the plays. Shakespeare's great intelligence and high moral and religious understanding are otherwise on display, transformed by the poet into densely particular work. The plays are preeminently about the difference between illusion and reality… we may in that respect, and in spite of the "old quarrel", compare Shakespeare with Plato (Murdoch 1999: p. 141–142).

In this instance, the intertextual connection with Plato's myth of the cave (Republic, 514) is essential. The cave, as an image-symbol through which Plato articulates a central epistemological problem, is transformed and carried by Iris Murdoch across novels, acquiring new contextual meanings (Matiychak 2018: p. 324). However, whereas in Murdoch's other novels the cave is perceived primarily as a "place of initiation" for young protagonists – the perilous ascent of Tom McCaffrey to the source he imagines as a cave ("The Philosopher's Pupil"); the mortally dangerous ordeal of Pierce, who, driven by unrequited love, resolves to wait out the rising tide in a cave ("An Accidental Man"); or Dora's experience in "The Bell", where she identifies with the mystical bell, which in her perception functions as an "inhabited cave" – in "The Sea, The Sea" the cave emerges simultaneously as a "theatrical enclosure" and as a locus of reflection, confrontation with spiritual truth, and moral testing – "a place of contemplation, of confrontation with inner truth, a testing-place" (Johnson 1987: p. 91).

The metatext for elucidating Murdoch's reception of Plato's myth (or allegory) and its reinterpretations in her novels is provided by Murdoch's own philosophical works: "The Sovereignty of Good", "The Fire and the Sun": "Why Plato Banished the Artists," and "The Idea of Perfection" (also published as "Concepts of Unity. Art"). In Murdoch's view, this allegory "depicts a spiritual pilgrimage from the visible to the real". Yet, in contrast to her philosophical reflections, in her novels Murdoch, as Deborah Johnson observes, "ironically plays with Plato's myth". (Johnson 1987: p. 87–91). For this reason, the Platonic allegory of the cave in "The Sea, The Sea" is perceived specifically as a "metaphor for the human condition of *eikasia*, a subjection to illusion". Deborah Johnson compares this to the Sibyl's Cave as an image of illusion, or to "Prospero's cell," a space in which truth may be apprehended and where the illusions of power (and of theatre) finally begin to dissipate. This transformation occurs when Charles decides to become a hermit; significantly, he frequently refers to his secluded dwelling, Shruff End on the seashore, as a "cave." In Arrowby, the traits of the morally deficient savage Caliban (his moral violence towards Hartley) are curiously combined with those of the wise Prospero, who ultimately succeeds in mastering his selfish impulses (the relinquishing of illusion and the realization that he "was in love with his own youth").

Thus, in "The Sea, The Sea", the representation of the protagonist reveals a convergence of several paradigms, realized through water and cave symbolism as well as the Shakespearean paradigm.

The example of Charles Arrowby is highly illustrative and typical, for the majority of Murdoch's protagonists persistently inhabit a world of their own illusions and imagination. Murdoch transposes into the texts of her novels the very problem she addresses in her philosophical essays: "Man is a creature who makes pictures of himself and then comes to resemble the picture. This is the process which moral philosophy must attempt to describe and analyze" (Murdoch 1999: p. 59–75).

As we can see, the author does not confine herself to philosophical discourse alone: her creative imagination transposes this problem into the literary domain. Consequently, Murdoch cannot avoid intertextuality, associativity, and the metaphorical nature of intuitive thinking. The intertextuality of her novels is partly immanent (the unconscious presence of one text within another) and partly intentional (the deliberate use of other texts). Her novel "The Sea, The Sea" is equally characterized by explicit and veiled reminiscences and allusions, both to Shakespeare's plays and to Plato's dialogues, constituting a form of intertextuality.

In a broader sense, Murdoch's intertextuality, or, more precisely, intertextual dialogue, extends beyond works of fiction to encompass philosophical texts and literary-critical essays, which effectively serve as a kind of metatext for her creative activity and as a reflection of the writer's complex worldview. Her works are marked by narrative discontinuity and fragmentation with shifts in spatial and temporal coordinates, as well as in irony and self-irony.

Therefore, the sea – as a vivid and polysemous setting, an agent, and a metaphor within Charles Arrowby's memoirs – plays such a significant role in the novel. A paradigm is always inscribed within the context of contemporary culture: it is activated by that culture and typically demands articulation, particularly in its aesthetic dimension. Murdoch, as a representative of classical culture, reveals the latent potential of the sea paradigm through classical exemplars. In this way, Iris Murdoch appeals to the moral dimension of the human personality, which she associates with the possibility of achieving harmonious relations with the world. It is precisely in such a compromise that the

novelist perceives the reconciliation of moral truth with reality. Accordingly, the meaning of this paradigm lies in the juxtaposition of incompatible elements: topos and logos.

The multilayered structure of Iris Murdoch's symbol-saturated novels does not allow for a single, unequivocal interpretation; rather, like Shakespeare's plays, it positions itself as a phenomenological fact. By rethinking Shakespearean images, Murdoch inherits the Shakespearean mode of their literary embodiment. A striking example in her novels is the use of soliloquy as a dramatic form of the protagonist's extended monological reflections. The enigma and unpredictability of human behavior, as well as the contingency of reality, become essential conditions for receptive polysemy not only within Murdoch's text but also exert a formative influence on the relationships between characters, thereby fulfilling a compositional function in the plot construction. Within this framework, the Shakespearean paradigm elevates the problem of the artist and art to the level of a worldview.

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Між ілюзією та реальністю: шекспірівський інтертекст у поетиці творів Айріс Мердок

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Анотація. Досліджується роль шекспірівської інтертекстуальності у поетиці романів Айріс Мердок, зосереджуючи увагу на тому, як її проза переосмислює та трансформує шекспірівські парадигми в межах сучасного філософського й наративного контексту. Доводиться, що звернення Мердок до Шекспіра виходить за межі прямих алюзій і функціонує як структурна та концептуальна основа, яка визначає розвиток персонажів, побудову сюжету та етичну проблематику. На матеріалі романів «Чорний принц» і «Море, море» показано, як письменниця адаптує мотиви, типи персонажів і драматичні моделі, характерні для шекспірівської драми, зокрема мотиви хибної ідентичності, морального випробування та взаємодії ілюзії й реальності. Особливу увагу приділено суб'єктивному переосмисленню шекспірівських образів героями Мердок, що виявляє процес «рецептивної полісемії», у межах якого усталені образи трансформуються індивідуальною свідомістю. Також розглядаються символічні та філософські виміри творчості Мердок, зокрема використання образів моря та печери у зв'язку з платонівською і християнською традиціями. У підсумку стверджується, що інтертекстуальний діалог Мердок із Шекспіром забезпечує своєрідний синтез літератури й філософії, акцентуючи етичне сприйняття, проблематику ідентичності та напруження між ілюзією і правдою в сучасному романі.

Ключові слова: шекспірівський інтертекст; наратив; рефлексія; шекспірівська парадигма; рецептивна полісемія; Айріс Мердок.

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