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“Entering the School of Life”: A Deleuzean Reading of Iris Murdoch’s *The Flight from the Enchanter*

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Abstract

Iris Murdoch is a philosophical novelist whose works provide a suitable case for the study of “philosophy in literature” and “literature as philosophy.” However, so far, chiefly the philosophical positions of Murdoch herself have been applied to her fictional works. Employing Gilles Deleuze’s ethical theory, the present essay offers a resistant reading and sheds new light on Murdoch’s second novel *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956). Focusing on the character of Annette Cockayne, this essay shows how one’s life consists of a set of encounters with other bodies, all striving for gaining more power. Annette’s struggle with nihilism and *ressentiment* and her attempt to discover the immanent logic of life are discussed with sufficient textual evidence and, finally, considering the criteria provided by Deleuzean ethics, it is argued whether she is an active / strong or a reactive / weak force in this fictional universe. Thus, by critiquing traditional, transcendent readings of Murdoch’s fiction, the present essay actualizes some of the virtual aspects of her fiction so far overlooked and, by adopting a novel strategy within Deleuzean criticism, this study also forges a new path for this approach to narrative fiction.

Keywords: life, Deleuzean ethics, happiness, power struggle, active force, reactive force, nihilism, *The Flight from the Enchanter*

1-Introduction

Iris Murdoch (1919-99), the British writer and thinker, though enjoying a considerable national fame in her lifetime, fell out of favor with many of the theory-bigoted academic critics because she did not approve of Postmodernist literature and (Post)structuralist theories, which were thriving in the 1960s and 1970s. Though a well-known professor of philosophy at Oxford, she wrote only a few papers and two short books on “morality” and now is best known for her twenty-six creative novels, written in a four-decade span (1954-95). Her novels mainly deal with such issues as love, sex, goodness, morality, religion, determinism / free will, and human’s mental complexities (Spear, 2007: 11 & 16).

Because of the way she treats the basic problems of Western philosophy in her novels, Murdoch is deemed a philosophical novelist, therefore providing a suitable case for the study of “philosophy in literature” / “literature as philosophy” and, more generally, of the relationship between literature and philosophy. In a sense, all the central characters in her fiction bear traces of a philosophical, reflective mind that grapples with complicated problems in connection with the meaning of life and existence, the nature of the surrounding world, or one’s relationship with other human beings (Mohan, 1977: 3). Indeed, her *oeuvre* is indicative of the mutual, interactive relations between literature and philosophy, contrarily to the traditional notion that they are essentially different from each other. With the establishment of some of the Poststructuralist

ideas, literature and philosophy are no more conceived of in terms of conventional binarisms. Among the writers of the second half of the twentieth century, perhaps this is most manifested in Murdoch's fiction. As Gilles Deleuze (1925-95) and Félix Guattari (1930-92) argue, philosophy and literature transform each other: literature (art, in general) poses new questions for philosophers through its introduction or defamiliarization of new aspects of life and, on the other hand, by creating new concepts philosophy can "provoke artists into recreating the boundaries of experience" (Colebrook, 2002, 7).

However, so far, chiefly the Platonist positions of Murdoch herself have been applied to her fictional works, while her novels are multi-layered texts open to various readings, even those that could contradict her own philosophy. The present essay sheds new light on Murdoch's fiction by offering a resistant reading of her second novel and employing a less established critical approach, namely Deleuzean criticism, which primarily aims at emancipating the text from the forces of "transcendence" that have predominated over it and reduce its virtual power of "becoming" to a mere static identity or "being."

2. Deleuzean Ethics

By bringing Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) to the fore, Deleuze inaugurated a new era in philosophy that later came to be known as Poststructuralism. Deleuze's own philosophy rests on three supporting pillars, without which it will certainly lose its force, namely, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson (1859-1941). From each of these three, Deleuze borrows some key terms and concepts and reformulates them in the context of the second half of the twentieth century so as to develop a novel, more comprehensive philosophical system. Many of the terms or concepts we find in Deleuze's mature philosophy are developed in his monographs on Spinoza and Nietzsche: they are indeed reworkings of the technical vocabulary he selects and reinterprets from their works (Hardt, 2003: xx). Therefore, in order to understand Deleuzean ethics, we need to appreciate the basic tenets of Spinoza's and Nietzsche's moral philosophies.

Spinoza (1994) describes life as a set of "encounters" among various bodies with different forces of affection. He defines the opposite point, that is, "death," in the same terms: a body dies

"when its parts are so disposed that they acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another." (Spinoza, 1994: 221)

And this is always caused by the force of another more powerful body. Consequently, that which threatens the integrity of a body and, thereby, decreases its power is "bad," and that which maintains the integrity of a body and, thus, increases its power is "good" (see also Deleuze, 1988: 22 & 33 & 71-72). Harking back to Nietzsche's dictum in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Deleuze (1988) reformulates Spinoza's thesis as "There is no Good or Evil, but there is good and bad" (22). Consequently, Deleuze (1988) deems an individual good, rational, strong, free, and happy that strives, as far as s/he can, to structure and control his/her encounters with other individuals or beings; and he considers as bad, foolish, weak, enslaved, and sad those who live carelessly and let themselves be subjected to their encounters (22-23; see also Deleuze, 1990: 260-61).

Nietzsche has rightly been called a philosopher of life. The cornerstone of his thought is, more than anything else, the meaning of life. Nietzsche's philosophy of life can be summarized in one sentence, namely, that man by nature seeks to "actualize" his "virtual" potentials. To refer to this, in his later works, Nietzsche uses the term "will to power" and describes it as an immanent force within all beings, whether animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic. Therefore, the

relations between various beings in the world are defined by their power struggle, for each one of them does his utmost to raise his power up to the maximum, thus entering into conflict with others with the same purpose. For Nietzsche, there is no world or essence behind these struggles for power (Spinks, 2003: 5). What is important, however, is that not all men are able to increase their power actively and spontaneously. Here, Nietzsche’s critique of modern man comes in shape: the modern man, dominated and controlled by such forceful moral systems as Christianity and modernity, has turned into a reactive being, devoid of any incentive for becoming and creating new values. The only way for man to become active again is to move beyond the idea of “man” produced in the modern age by the Church, Humanists, and Romantics, until a new being, the “Overman,” is born (Nietzsche, 2006: 5 & 232; Nietzsche, 1989: 261).

The Overman “spontaneously” and “actively” creates his own values and lives a “meaningful” life, instead of “reactively” submitting to the negative values produced and established throughout modern history at the hands of “the weak,” i.e., those who negate the immanent value and essence of life and resort to a fictional transcendence in order to fill an illusionary vacuum. Consequently, only a figure like the Overman can reach true “happiness” or “blessedness,” because only he is able to feel what life truly is and what it means to live or be living. Nietzsche (2005) defines “happiness” as “the liveliest feeling of power” (68): one who is happy (i.e., feels power) considers himself good and seeks to exercise his power over others; for this reason, those who are affected by his power consider him evil (Nietzsche: 2005, 190 & also 166).

This argument leads to one of the basic notions in Nietzsche’s thought, namely, the feeling of *ressentiment* (resentment). This is the consequence of experiencing “nihilism,” i.e., the situation where man searches for a transcendent world within the framework of slave morality but finds none (since *there is none*). Then, he begins to feel himself guilty, beaten, worthy of punishment or even punished in a world devoid of any sense. This is the characteristic of the modern period, when men have lost faith in traditional values and standards but cannot find a way for creating alternative values (Spinks, 2003: 4). The only thing that can help him escape from this “resentment” of life and himself is to assume a positive viewpoint on life, affirm his potential powers, and try to live his life fully and actively as a strong, noble force.

Deleuze’s ethics is an immanent ethics that does not depend upon any norm or law without life. In consequence, Deleuze repudiates all those endeavors to determine what is good or bad for human beings according to a transcendent concept or framework which lies outside the plane of life. Deleuze (1997) sees life as an endless process of positive, immanent becoming and difference that finds meaning from within itself, and precisely because it is not fixed or even identical to itself, no external concept or institution can ever claim to be able to grant a meaning to life. Life, according to Deleuze, is different in itself and at any moment from itself; there are no origins or ends to its becoming. That is why all the ethical norms and values must be identified with respect to this nature of life. What is significant in Deleuze is, thus, “how one might live” rather than “how one should live” (Jun, 2011: 92), because the latter question in a sense still assumes the notion of law and prescription.

In Deleuze’s thought, an oedipal / social / reactive force is one that tries to regulate and control (and, consequently, restrict or repress) its fluid force, whereas a schizophrenic / desiring / active force “goes to the limit of its power” and does its utmost so that its power can be fully realized (Jun, 2011: 96; Deleuze, 2006: 54). Following Spinoza and Nietzsche, Deleuze calls these

two forces as “life-denying” and “life-affirming” respectively. In Deleuze and Guattari’s account, there is a constant struggle between active and reactive forces, with one type of force always trying to “territorialize” and limit the flow of desire and the other type continually attempting to “deterritorialize” desire and forge a “line of flight” for its becoming (Jun, 2011: 97). Since each human being is constituted by a unique multiplicity of forces, it is only s/he who can define what is good or bad for him/her, i.e., only the “machine” itself can determine what increases its power or reinforces its becoming and what decreases its power or hinders its becoming (Jun, 2011: 103). Therefore, Deleuze’s ethics is particularistic and relativistic. For Deleuze, life is intrinsically valuable and this demands that human beings should affirm and love life for its own sake and not for anything outside it.

3. The Ethics of Life in *The Flight from the Enchanter*: The Case of Annette Cockeyne

“Life” is the central problem in Deleuze’s thought as well as in Murdoch’s fiction, and “desire,” “love,” “happiness,” “freedom,” and “goodness” are the major concepts that are supposed — both in Murdoch’s fiction and in Deleuze’s philosophy — to give a meaning to human life. *The Flight from the Enchanter*, described as “the most difficult and the most puzzling of the early novels” of Murdoch (Spear, 2007: 25), is the second novel written by her, first published in 1956. Like many of her other works, it contains significant philosophical themes, particularly ethical ones concerning the meaning of life, happiness, freedom, subjectivity, and human affects. The novel, among other things, consists of an intricate web of (love) relationships among the major characters or, to use the words of Priscilla Martin and Anne Rowe (2010), “romantic triangles and polygons” (33). This complex web also subtly suggests the power relations among the bodies involved. As Martin and Rowe (2010) state, in this novel “power is enjoyable, an end in itself” (30): an increase in a body’s power results in that body’s feeling of active joy and happiness. Offering a detailed analysis of all these relations is certainly beyond the scope of an essay of this length. Therefore, in the following study, we focus upon the sub-story of Annette Cockeyne, partly because in the critical literature on this novel (a review of which is offered by Barbara Stevens Heusel [2006]), more than any other subject, the Rosa-Mischa relation has been a matter of concern and the character of Annette has largely been treated as marginal. For instance, A. S. Byatt (1994), a leading figure in Murdoch studies, presumes that, in terms of personal enslavement (as opposed to social), there are only “two characters whose fates are really at issue” in the novel, namely, Rosa Keepe and John Rainborough (50). On the other hand, Richard Todd (1984) argues that *The Flight from the Enchanter* is one of the novels Murdoch herself calls “peripheral,” i.e.,

“one that is [...] attentive to characters who cannot be regarded as the centre of the plot or pattern.” (33; qtd. in Heusel, 2006: 46)

If we admit this view, then Annette is a peripheral character in *The Flight* — however, one that reveals a great deal about the sub-text of power struggle in the novel.

The first chapter of the novel focalizes upon the character of Annette Cockeyne and the way she decides to leave her college forever. On reading the opening, the reader may assume that Annette is the heroine of the novel, but as the reading goes on through the following chapters, the reader realizes that the center of consciousness is variable in each one. All in all, though Rosa Keepe is more prominent than the other ones, the novel, in our analysis, has no central character, as a typical novel might have.

In this narrative, “epiphany” marks the point of rupture in a character’s subjectivity, the moment s/he is able to get rid of his/her static identity and become a new person, fleeing from any sort of enchantment (for a general examination of the significance of epiphany in Murdoch’s novels, see Ingle, 1993). The very opening of the novel reveals how an ambitious young girl realizes, through an epiphany the background of which is not exposed to us, what it really means to “live,” to be active and adequate (in the Spinozan-Deleuzian sense of the terms), to be able to create one’s own values, and to go beyond what traditions dictate as good and evil. This she does by beginning to love and enjoy life itself, not anything beyond or outside it. The nineteen-year-old Annette Cockayne, on an inner impulse, suddenly decides to leave the Ringenhall Ladies’ College for what she calls the “School of Life” (Murdoch, 2000: 7).

Annette’s urge to leave the college, which seeks “with the stringency of a military operation” (Murdoch, 2000: 7-8) to turn young girls into English ladies, is highlighted by her discourse being internally focalized from the very first line. As a result, the action starts *in medias res* and we are plunged deep into her inner world perhaps at the most critical moment of her life. Indeed, the college “taught to young women of the débutante class such arts as were considered necessary for the catching of a husband” (Murdoch, 2000: 7), but Annette “had loathed it from the very first day” (Murdoch, 2000: 8). Although from the beginning she dislikes the atmosphere of this college, her momentous decision to leave it is arrived at “spontaneously” at a time when she is sitting in the class and the Italian tutor is offering a lesson in classical Italian literature. The latter is reading out a passage from the twelfth canto of Dante’s *Inferno*, which deals with the Minotaur (of Greek mythology) being tormented in hell, “bound[ing] to and fro in pain and frustration” (Murdoch, 2000: 7). The speaker (Dante), guided by Virgil, runs into the furious Minotaur as he is guarding the entry of the seventh circle of the hell, the place of the violent. Rather than listening to the “affected high-pitched voice” of the tutor reading this “cruel and unpleasant book” (Murdoch, 2000: 7), Annette reflects on her life and how she can possibly escape the college that looks to her more like Dante’s inferno. There everything is indeed “affected,” and no one is really living but merely existing. Apparently, all the other students and the teachers are turned into slaves by the enchantment of Miss Walpole, the headmistress of the college (her name reminding us of Horace Walpole [1717-97], the canonic writer of “gothic” novels). Annette can no longer put up with these shackles on her freedom. As she carelessly hears the tutor’s lesson, Annette thinks about the Minotaur.

She is right in saying that “It was not the Minotaur’s fault that it had been born a monster. It was God’s fault” (Murdoch, 2000: 7). The Minotaur is not essentially bad or evil but only so considered by the salvific morality of the weak who cannot tolerate his vital power, with Minos, the Cretan king, as their chief representative. In fact, Annette regards her own situation like that of the Minotaur and sees in him her own image, as if the college were Dante’s hell.¹ Here, the question arises as to what God’s fault is in the case of Annette herself: is it that she was born a woman in a reactive society (still dominated by traditional Victorian morals), which is going to hinder her becoming and reduce her to the clichéd identity of the “English Lady”? She was sent to the Ringenhall Ladies’ College by her father Andrew Cockayne, a diplomat who hoped it would convert her “cosmopolitan ragamuffin” into a sophisticated young lady (Murdoch, 2000: 8). Nonetheless, as Byatt (1994) remarks, Annette is “a sort of life-force” (52). She “is bursting with life” (Ashdown, 1974: 76), and wants to be herself, a living force constantly in becoming, able to

create her own value system in accordance with her own desire and her own virtual powers. Hence, the fateful decision to get out of the hellish confinement the others have imposed upon her and, thereby, to emancipate the Minotaur in herself: "From now on I shall educate myself. I shall enter the School of Life" (Murdoch, 2000: 7).ⁱⁱ

In escaping the college, an act performed out of adequacy, she feels extreme joy, since it is what increases her power:

"She was by now feeling so happy that she would have shouted for joy if it had not been for the delicious spell which she felt herself to be under and which still enjoined silence. She looked about her complacently. Ringenhall was at her mercy." (Murdoch, 2000: 9)

She is no longer subject to the college; on the contrary, now the college and its inhabitants are dominated by her, "at her mercy." She is a strong body that readily risks her future (the one prescribed for her by "common sense") in order to enhance her feeling of joy. This is the active, radical ethics she believes in, and only this can bring her happiness. She is ready to let her joy overflow, regardless of the physical dangers it might pose: "Annette looked up at the chandelier and her heart beat violently," and though she "was afraid of heights," she climbs up a table and jumps for the chandelier, swinging to and fro (Murdoch, 2000: 10). Her joy is totally spontaneous, and when Miss Walpole asks her the reason for this act, Annette "had no ready answer" (Murdoch, 2000: 11). This joyful trance goes on until she becomes one with the surroundings, she becomes part of the scene. She becomes everybody, "imperceptible," no longer Annette Cockeysne:

"the boarders of Ringenhall [...] would make their way round on either side of her swinging feet and sit down, paying her no more attention than if she had been a piece of furniture." (Murdoch, 2000: 11)

Murdoch's narrator here places Annette in opposition to the character of Nina the dressmaker, who is described by the narrator (through Annette's discourse) as

"patient, good-tempered, humble, discreet, fast, an exquisite worker, and where clothes were concerned inexhaustibly imaginative." (Murdoch, 2000: 75)

All of these are the adjectives Nietzsche uses to define the weak / slavish. All of them imply reactive traits, that is, they are the characteristics that only slave morality deems "good." Nina is "imaginative" but only so far as working is concerned. Annette likes her and thinks one day she could have Nina as her confidential servant (Byatt, 1994: 46). However, "there were moments when Annette suspected that really Nina detested her heartily" (Murdoch, 2000: 75). Nina is in fact a weak person being jealous of a strong one. This indicates a negative view based on which first the weak / base Nina defines the strong / noble Annette as "evil" and, then, herself as "good" (for Deleuze's reinterpretation of Nietzsche's account of such negation and affirmation in slave morality, see Deleuze, 2006: 111 ff. & Hardt, 2003: 33 ff.). Annette has a desire for incorporating other, less powerful bodies into herself, thus increasing her own force:

"There was no feeling Annette liked so much as the feeling that someone else was making or doing something for her the fruit of which she would soon enjoy. This feeling was perhaps for her the essence of freedom." (Murdoch, 2000: 76)

"Freedom" is defined in Annette's jargon as being self-sufficient, powerful, and the adequate cause of one's action.

The climax of Annette's story in the novel comes at the point where she for the first time encounters Mischa Fox, who apparently (and to many former critics) performs in the plot the title-role of the "enchanter" (see, for instance, Carson, 1979: 12; Tawakuli Sullivan, 1986: 81; Byatt, 1994: 51; Spear, 2007: 25; Leeson, 2010: 46). Mischa is perhaps the strongest and most active figure in the novel, "the artist-figure," as opposed to the saint-figure in Murdoch's fiction, a force that "is the creator of his own myth [and values], with which the other characters actively collude" (Conradi, 2001: 66). Annette promptly falls under his spell, entirely affected by his presence. Mischa's visage is singular and uncanny to her, mainly because he has one blue and one brown eye: "Annette could not help staring at his eyes" (Murdoch, 2000: 79). Annette, though a very powerful and desirous body, simply yields to Mischa's greater strength and this leads to his dominance over her. In Nina's storey, Annette was just feeling blessedness and extreme power as well as dominance over such a weak body as Nina, but now with the arrival of Mischa she is anxious and already defeated. She loses control, insofar as she has to run away from Nina's house so that she may be able to retrieve the situation.

Annette's feeling of love toward Mischa achieves perfection perhaps at the critical scene in John Rainborough's house. After her encounter with Mischa at Nina's house, Annette, already attracted to him, goes to Rainborough's house in order to receive more information about Mischa, as Rainborough is said to be Mischa's close friend. One afternoon, when he is standing in his garden, reflecting on his condition and alive with a desire for Miss Casement, his secretary at the office, Rainborough notices Annette entering into his garden. This is Annette's second encounter with a male body. This happens at a time when Rainborough is ready for it. Driven by the desire Miss Casement has ignited in him, he is determined to move on and assume more power, emancipating himself from his present subjectivity that has brought himself nothing but a life of routine. That is why when he sees Annette in his house, his desire for mastery and power takes the form of a spontaneous sexual yearning for Annette. They sit at the table and have some sherry. Then, Rainborough has a sudden urge to have Annette. She begins to struggle violently against Rainborough to free herself. Then, at the same time, Mischa abruptly enters the house and the perturbed John immediately hides the half-nude Annette in the cupboard behind them, thus his act of raping Annette remaining unconsummated.

In her conversation with Rainborough before this scene, Annette honestly admits that she is not greatly reflective, quite opposed to John who insists on this quality in himself, and its truth is confirmed in every chapter he participates in, where we always find him deep in his thoughts. Thinking is the quality of the strong, according to Nietzsche (1968). Spinoza (1994), too, harking back to Aristotle, underlines the role of reason in man's flourishing and happiness. For Deleuze and Guattari (1994), too, conceptualizing is one of the most serious activities in which man should involve himself (it is the basic task of the philosopher). This is the point of difference between Annette and Rainborough. When Annette asks him what he does, his answer is: "I work in an office, and I do other work as well," and by "other works" he means nothing but "Thinking" (Murdoch, 2000: 126). Annette's character is revealed to us in her comment on John's words: "I think it must be difficult to think. [...] Whenever I try to think I just day-dream" (Murdoch, 2000: 126). When she decided to leave the Ringenhall College, Annette had this capability to some extent, but the problem with her is that she cannot maintain the forces of her desire in balance.

She wavers midway because she is not gifted with the power of thinking, so much as Rainborough is.

The climactic point in the novel is Mischa's party, in which almost all the major characters (except for Nina, the Polish brothers, and Mrs. Camilla Wingfield) participate. After the party is spoiled, Mischa takes Annette in his car to the seashore. First, Annette is fairly joyful, "in a daze of beatitude" (Murdoch, 2000: 199). When Mischa puts his arm around her shoulder, symbolically "A drop of water fell [from the wet leaves above their heads] on to Annette's shoulder and ran down between her breasts" (Murdoch, 2000: 199). Annette for a moment feels she possesses the strength to affect Mischa and be the dominating force in this encounter, but she is wrong:

"He looked so melancholy that Annette wanted straightaway to take him in her arms. She felt, and with it a deep joy, the desire and the power to enfold him, to comfort him, to save him. [... But] Mischa withdrew his arm from her shoulder and looked at her or past her with a patient vacant look. [...] Annette did not dare to touch him." (Murdoch, 2000: 199)

Before the sea, the powerful enchanter becomes one with the sea and the whole nature ("becoming-imperceptible," to use Deleuze's term), totally forgetting about Annette's presence, to the extent that she thinks she is standing there alone, feeling "suddenly in danger" and being "yet more afraid" (Murdoch, 2000: 201). This appalling state of Mischa drives her to the point of utter despair, insofar that loudly crying and with a sense of pain, "Annette breaks his communion with the sea by plunging into it herself" (Woo, 1974: 125). This she does with the aim of attracting Mischa's attention and awake him from his trance. However, without showing any pity and gentleness toward Annette or even caring much about her, Mischa coldly takes her hand and brings her out of the water, calling her "little idiot" (Murdoch, 2000: 202). Annette is now "beyond thought and feeling," willing "nothing but to be left alone" (Murdoch, 2000: 202). She seems to have experienced a moment of sudden manifestation, an epiphany. She takes us to the pre-personal plane of sense, where no subjective consciousness or perception predominates. As she enters this mood, we too are separated in the narrative from her as the center of consciousness and subjectivity. Mischa cannot be overcome by Annette:

"Again she had the feeling that he was not looking at her, that he was looking past her or through her." (Murdoch, 2000: 203)

He has the power to produce in her two absolutely opposite affections in the course of only a few minutes, namely, joy and sadness or happiness and wretchedness.

During the party, trying to make amends for the attempted rape, Rainborough had affectionately told Annette:

"as one grows older one realizes that life has a great many random elements. One result of this is that there are a great many ways in which we can hurt and startle other people to whom we wish only good. For beings like us, patience and tolerance are not virtues but necessities." (Murdoch, 2000: 189)

By this, the philosophical Rainborough is expressing the idea that there is no such thing as free will and that we can never have any control over what we do, because everything that happens in nature is necessary. Therefore, Rainborough seems to imply, there is no choice except for accepting and heartily welcoming one's fate (*amor fati*): it is necessary to tolerate calmly what nature keeps in store for us. However, Annette's unthoughtful answer goes no further than:

"When I'm patient, [...] I'll be dead" (Murdoch, 2000: 189). She has not learned the basic lesson of the School of Life yet.

Annette's decision to take her own life toward the end of the novel suggests her suffering from *ressentiment*: "She had hoped for visions, but none had come" (Murdoch, 2000: 218). Though entering the right path in the beginning, she deviates by turning reactive in her encounter with Mischa. She happens to become enchanted by transcendent forces ("visions"), and that is why when she realizes they are not going to increase her power and make her life meaningful, she experiences immense distress. She no more loves life but rather denies its virtual powers. For her, life is now nothing but a "farce" (Murdoch, 2000: 245), and she intends to put a proper end to it. There is nothing left that could bring her out of this situation.

In order to make her suicide more impressive, Annette invites Hunter, Calvin, and Rainborough to her hotel room for a party, during which she has planned to commit suicide by taking two bottles of sleeping-tablets she had found in Rosa's house. While the guests are talking and drinking, Annette, having drunk several glasses of gin, goes to the bathroom and takes the tablets. However, interestingly enough, by an effective structural irony, what was supposed to end the farce turns out itself to be a complete farce, since she has mistaken milk of magnesia for sleeping-tablets. Though she is too drunk rather than too sick, she becomes almost comatose. The guests who have realized her problem is not serious call a doctor and, at the same time, Annette's parents, whom Rosa had earlier informed by a letter about their daughter's condition, arrive on the scene and arrange for transferring Annette to a hospital. Thus, all apparently ends well, and in a later chapter toward the close of the novel we see that Annette's first course in the School of Life is now complete. In the end, Annette is enchanted by the immanent powers of life and no more by external bodies. She has accepted her fate, the necessity of all that happens in the world (against Murdoch's belief in contingency in her philosophical writings), and the essential fact that there is no such thing as freedom of human will in a world where all that exists is one adequate Substance, namely, Nature, and only those shall be blessed and happy who admit this vital fact and love their fate. We watch the calm Annette in the train with her parents "*flying southwards through Europe*" (Murdoch, 2000: 281; emphasis added). Now, she has found "a line of flight" through which she will be able to deterritorialize herself, escaping the enchantment of external bodies and transcendent ideas and becoming different again:

"Annette was absorbed in watching the landscape. A house, a dog, a man on a bicycle, a woman in a field, a distant mountain. She looked upon them all enchanted, lips parted and eyes wide." (Murdoch, 2000: 283)

Expressing a somewhat similar understanding of this scene, Byatt (1994) stresses that Annette's

"vitality [is] completely restored, having made a recovery from her contact with the muddle and enslavement of human relations." (58)

Each of the things Annette enthusiastically observes indicate one plane of nature. Annette is saying "Yes" to all this, finding deep pleasure in her life and the world around her.

Thus, it is a mistake to think that Annette ends up in wretchedness, dropping out of the School of Life, though she is the victim of a set of unfortunate events, including "unrequited love, attempted rape, sexual molestation, and one failed suicide" (Duncker, 2000: viii). It is true that after Mischa ignores her, she becomes afflicted with nihilism and *ressentiment*, but this is "active

nihilism,” since she is now convinced that she should affirm the force of life and that there is always a chance to actualize one’s virtual powers. At the end of the day, she comes to accept her fate.

Duncker (2000) offers a similar statement regarding Annette’s destiny but her argument is evidently simplistic and fallacious: she claims Annette “saunters out of the novel, cheerful and pleased” because she is simply one of the unreflective women in Murdoch’s novels who do not take the world seriously and, therefore, the traumas of the world do not affect them deeply (viii; see also xii). Tawakuli Sullivan (1986) believes that in the end Annette returns “*no wiser*, to the exact point where she started” (75; emphasis added) and that “Annette never really knows who the enchanter is, and can never, therefore, flee from him” (77). Perhaps, the strangest (and weakest) argument advanced by this transcendentalist critic is the following, for which she offers no textual evidence or cogent structural / characterological reason: “I am convinced that Murdoch sees her ingenue [= Annette] as among the permanently enchanted” (78). Stephen Laurence Edwards (1984) argues that the novel is about the degrees of enslavement rather than those of freedom and that it is illustrated in the sub-story of the “naive” Annette (59-61). Chiho Omichi (2010) holds that the novel “ends rather pessimistically” since “no one is ultimately ‘saved’” (28), and Ellen Abernethy Ashdown (1974) states that

“Annette’s renewed vitality does not affirm life as it is obviously intended to do because Annette undergoes no process of growth.” (98)

The latter contradicts her own statement later by claiming that in the end we see Annette “now ‘enchanted’ with the life around her” and “eager to meet” the world “rather than to shut it out” (Ashdown, 1974: 100).

Annette is a figure who “finds zest in rootlessness” and “Her surname, Cockeyne, suggests a nowhere place free from the problems of ordinary life” (Martin & Rowe, 2010: 29). If she cannot endure being entangled in a static identity or territory and everyday concerns, it owes to her ability to ponder about her life and its true value, as our analysis of the opening of the novel reveals. From the very opening, we see her deeply involved in reflecting upon her own condition and contemplating the meaning of life, and if eventually she manages to “saunter out of” all those unfortunate occurrences cheerfully, that is because she comes to appreciate the immanent value and logic of life. Compared with Rainborough, she is perhaps, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology (1994), a figure of “percepts” and “affects” rather than “concepts.”

4. Conclusion

To speak in terms of the fairy-tale genre, with which the present novel bears an intertextual relation, the figure Annette at first regards as the “prince” of her story (Mischa) turns out in the end to have been indeed the “enchanter,” presenting himself under the guise of a “savior.” However, Annette manages to escape him and break his “spell” by recognizing the real savior, which is nothing other than the “knowledge” of the virtual powers and the positive, immanent force of life. She finds out that no external body or transcendent force can ever make her life really meaningful and, thus, be deemed as a savior. The same occurs to Nina the dressmaker, a one-dimensional character whose essence is depicted in the narrative discourse by the simple epithet “dressmaker.” But Nina’s destiny is different from Annette’s, in that the former is a weak, reactive individual unable to realize how she might live her life, thereby denying life altogether and taking her own life. That is why Nina is a “perpetual serf” (Byatt, 1994: 44). Nina considers

Mischa as the prince-figure of her life and, though she gradually discovers he is the very enchanter, she is incapable of fleeing from him safely and deterritorialize herself, because she cannot discern the real savior. Contrary to Annette, Nina never gains the knowledge of her virtual powers and how she might have actualized them. Briefly put, she is never able to shift from reactive or passive “morality” to active or noble “ethics.”

Taking a biographical approach to the novel, Byatt (1994) reads Nina’s character in the light of Murdoch’s interest in the ideas of Simone Weil, the French thinker (1909-43), especially those expressed in *The Need for Roots* (1949). Byatt (1994) writes:

“Weil’s book [...] is a study of the need of the community to provide a place for people to live and to be someone, to have roots and not to be anonymous.” (47)

Indeed, such transcendent readings, which follow the rules of slave morality, fail to heed the fact that, in order to survive, rather than having a static identity, Nina needs to gain the power to *become* different in herself and able to create and recreate her own table of values. She needs to realize that anonymity is but a positive quality, namely, becoming everybody, impersonal, and one with the world — emancipated from the enslaving forces of subjectivity, imposed by the reactive society.

In her philosophical writings, Murdoch supports a Platonic philosophy of life and love (Spear, 2007: 11); nevertheless, a resistant Deleuzean reading undermines such transcendent bases for reading her literary *oeuvre* and deterritorializes her texts. Almost all the previous readings of this novel depict power and desire for power as evil, malign, and corruptive (see, *inter alios*, Ashdown, 1974: 90; Mohan, 1977: 2-3; Stubbs, 1977: 348; Carson, 1979: 12; Edwards, 1984: 54; Kane, 1984: 9; Devi, 1996: 132 & 134-35 & 143; Martin & Rowe, 2010: 30), partly because they content themselves with applying Murdoch’s philosophy to her fiction, in this case her view of “the existential reality of evil as a necessary consequence of power” (Tawakuli Sullivan, 1986: 73), another idea she learned from Weil (Kane, 1984: 12). Instead of defining the “will to power” as a positive, immanent, impersonal desire that places the individual in a process of constant becoming and moves him/her toward gaining more power and mastery over the other, these transcendent readings depict the will to power as a “demonic” drive to be avoided in favor of an altruistic “attention” to the other’s individuality,ⁱⁱⁱ which means nothing but submitting to the reactive morality of the slavish / base that promotes such passions as asceticism, selflessness, pity, and remorse.

A Deleuzean approach, thus, illuminates other aspects and layers of Murdoch’s novels that have so far remained unexamined, including the ethical evolution of the characters and, as we saw in the case of Annette, their vacillations between the goodness and badness of their encounters and, finally, whether or not they are able to fulfill their desire for strength and adequacy and actualize their virtual potentials. As Claire Colebrook (2002) states, “Deleuzean criticism is [...] in its early days” and “the consequences” of Deleuze’s thoughts for “literary studies have yet to be spelled out” (150).

Notes

- i. Oddly enough, there are critics, like Zohreh Tawakuli Sullivan (1986), who take the Minotaur as representing Calvin Blick who has his workshop in the cellars of Mischa's labyrinthine house. Such a perspective has its roots in the traditional, biographical approaches to this text, which define Mischa and Calvin as evil or demonic forces simply because they are strong or desire more power. Cf. Elizabeth Annette Woo (1974), who maintains that Mischa is the Minotaur and that Annette is attracted to him because "she sees [him] as a lonely misunderstood creature, like the Minotaur" (!) (129).
- ii. There is, of course, more to this allusion to the Minotaur. For example, A. S. Byatt (1994) relates it to Hunter Keep's concern about the fate of those refugees "born" east of the FPE line, including Nina the dressmaker and Stefan Lusiewicz, who face the imminent threat of deportation.
- iii. This is Murdoch's moral vision, presented in her theoretical works; see Murdoch (1997 a & 1997 b).

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