

Ghaffary, Mohammad; Ramzi, Melika

Art as immanent liberation : a Deleuzean study of the role of art in Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn*

Brno studies in English. 2023, vol. 49, iss. 1, pp. 113-127

ISSN 0524-6881 (print); ISSN 1805-0867 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2023-1-6>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.78901>

License: [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Access Date: 02. 12. 2024

Version: 20231123

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

ART AS IMMANENT LIBERATION: A DELEUZEAN STUDY OF THE ROLE OF ART IN IRIS MURDOCH'S *THE UNICORN*

Brno Studies in English
Volume 49, No. 1, 2023

ISSN 0524-6881 | e-ISSN 1805-0867
<https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2023-1-6>

MOHAMMAD GHAFFARY AND MELIKA RAMZI

Abstract

Art has a critical place in Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn* (1963) where it is closely intertwined with freedom. However, to date this aspect of the novel has been largely overlooked. The present study adopts a Deleuzian approach to examine the liberating role of art in this novel as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of "minor art" can shed new light on the novel's thematic structure. The present study shows the effects of (minor) literature and music on the protagonist, namely Hannah Crean-Smith. This study, then, offers a Deleuzian reading of the intertextual relations in *The Unicorn* to explore the potential of the other texts addressed in the novel and to investigate their impact on actualizing Hannah's will to power. The results show that the virtual powers of the novel Hannah reads, together with her interest in music, de-subjectify and liberate her from the bounds of familialism and organism.

Key words

Becoming; Deleuzian criticism; intertextuality; minor art; The Unicorn

1. Introduction

Art and artistic expressions have vital roles in leading people along with their understanding of their forces and the world around them. Iris Murdoch (1919–99), the Irish-British author and philosopher, was interested in art and reflected it in many of the characters she created in her various works in order to show the mechanisms of art, its problems, and its impact on the issue of freedom (Slaymaker 1992). What is important, however, is that not all art gives rise to degrees of freedom. Suppose works of art are treated as instruments in line with the standards established by the hegemony of society's dominant order – what the French Poststructuralist thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) term "majoritarian" standards. In that case, not only would art affirm dominant ideologies and conventional values, but it would also become a chief obstacle in the path of freedom and deterritorialization. Therefore, to understand how art works, we need to make a distinction between majoritarian and minoritarian art, the latter synonymous with "true art" in Deleuze's philosophy.

In general, Deleuze is a philosopher searching for new possibilities in life, which he defines as “the active force of thought” (Deleuze 1983: 101). One of the main questions in his life-affirming philosophy is how thought can open up new aspects of life and maximize its forces (May 2005). Works of art – namely painting, music, cinema, and literature – engender life-force and eliminate majoritarian, organizational, and representational impositions on thought (Deleuze and Guattari 1994).

Murdoch’s seventh novel, *The Unicorn*, originally published in 1963, is a narrative alive with various traces of art, in particular literature and music, although there are no “artist” figures among the *dramatis personae*. The protagonist of the novel, Hannah Crean-Smith, the lady imprisoned in the castle, is highly interested in art, which arguably functions as a crucial element in shaping her character. In the relevant scholarship, to date, no critical study has aimed at analyzing how the literary texts Marian Taylor, the governess, and Hannah read together, or the musical pieces that Denis Nolan, Hannah’s page, plays for her impact upon Hannah’s will to action and her sense of freedom. Thus, given that freedom is the main thematic concept in Murdoch’s novel (Ghaffary and Ramzi 2023), the present study, utilizing Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor art” and its disorganizing power, seeks to investigate the liberating role of art in the fictional universe of this novel and shed new light on the novel’s treatment of the problem of freedom.

2. Review of Literature

According to Claire Colebrook (2015), a Deleuzian reading does away with considering a text’s being or concentration on stable, transcendent grounds that “sees the truth of *what is*” (195; emphasis in the original). A Deleuzian reading, instead, attempts to realize the “becoming” of the text in question, without seeking to establish a judgmental, strict, or universal interpretation. Thus, instead of asking what the text means, one is led to wonder what it does and what forces it generates (Colebrook 2015). Put differently, reading a text is not intended to uncover a set of truths behind words hierarchically but to read rhizomatically in the middle and open new possibilities for the percepts and affects one can experience. Reading in the middle or “in-between,” as Ian Buchanan and John Marks (2000: 7) call it, that is to read unaffected by external rules and strict orders, helps one to find ruptures in the dominant discourse and dismantle it – something that what Deleuze and Guattari (1986) term “minor literature” is capable of.

Minor literature and, by extension, minor art is a way of using language in a defamiliarized and foreignized way in order to “decode” it and detach it from the discourse of the majoritarian (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 48), so that language could not represent established ideas but rather could unsettle the dominant language of the civilized, stabilized humanity. Moreover, minor literature abolishes organizational presentations of the existing people and “sows the seeds of [...] the new people to come” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 381), a people yet to come and yet to be coded, bodies that will resist the majoritarian discourse.

Recently, Dorothea Olkowski (2019) has put forward a new understanding of freedom in Deleuze's thought, employing the term "freedom's refrains" to refer to refrains' power of escaping from territories and forming new territories through constant deterritorializations, which means to escape the organized boundaries defined by the prevailing system by and through musical refrains. In other words, machines move from one assemblage to other assemblages. Assemblages are dynamic and rhizomatic connections that produce nonhierarchical, resistant, and creative interactions among various elements, resulting in the formation of new potentials (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Machines also become free when they surpass all terrestrial assemblages by entering a new plane, which is the cosmos (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). The "refrain" is repetition with a difference, an expression of the eternal return of difference (Deleuze 1994). Refrains follow the logic of the rhizome in both music and lyric poetry. They are not arborescent, rather they are more like multi-stemmed rhizomes that can link to any other point (Gallope 2010), which is a way to avoid the repetition of the same through constant deterritorializations and reterritorializations, as in reaction to a deterritorialization, either new territorial borders are constructed or old ones are strengthened. Nevertheless, refrains adhere to Nietzsche's dice-throwing rule (Gallope 2010): although tossing the dice is an act of free will, the hand that throws is helpless to influence where the dice will land. It is left up to fate, resulting in the reterritorialization of a previous deterritorialization. Deleuze (1983) contends that interpreting the eternal return starts with the dice toss at the moment of its return and, therefore, "the dice-throw is tragic. All the rest is nihilism" (36). He further explains that tragedy, contrary to nihilism, is joyful and life-affirming.

The previous studies of *The Unicorn* have not dealt with the liberating power of art in this novel. Most studies have only focused on biographical and transcendent readings of Hannah (see Charpentier 1984; Medcalf 2000; & Read 2019) despite the fact that Murdoch's philosophical concepts are parodied and deconstructed in significant parts of *The Unicorn* (Backus 1986). In an attempt to understate the relevance of the parallels between *The Unicorn* and Madame de Lafayette's *The Princess of Clèves* (the novel Marian and Hannah read together), Linda Kuehl (1969) notes that it is misleading to compare Hannah to the princess of Clèves since the latter is a genuinely tortured character who ultimately "chooses" isolation after tormenting herself between obligation and conscience (355). However, when one compares the causes of Hannah's with the princess of Clèves's pains, there are a number of similar circumstances that show Hannah is not necessarily less afflicted by the oppressive powers in her life. Furthermore, a self-decided form of seclusion, as stated in Kuehl's words (1969), can be a way to assert one's power in life instead of letting others decide for one. When it comes to the narrative structure, Kuehl (1969) claims this is circular since the characters never change their minds about anything. This would be equivalent to an eternal recurrence of the same in a Deleuzian sense. The current research aims to show that if the text is read immanently, progress does occur and that in the end what eternally recurs is different. The section that follows provides a review of the previous Deleuzian readings of Murdoch's works.

As yet, Deleuzian concepts have not been analyzed in *The Unicorn*, and the Deleuzian approach has been only adopted to study Murdoch's early novels. The present study's attempt at presenting a Deleuzian reading of this novel could be seen as an addition to exploring Murdoch's fictional universe from a Deleuzian perspective initiated by Mohammad Ghaffary and Alireza Anushiravani (2016). They adopt Deleuze's ethical theory for analyzing the meaning of life in Murdoch's *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956), focusing on a character who in the end succeeds in escaping majoritarian structures through the recognition of the "immanent force of life" (182) in a reactive society. In his study of Murdoch's *The Bell* (1958), Ghaffary (2019) analyzes how the two major characters find a line of flight to escape restrictive societal rules. Ghaffary (2019) concludes that Murdoch's text is a "becoming-text," that is, there is no pre-given, single meaning in or behind the text. On Ghaffary's (2021) Deleuzian reading of Murdoch's *The Sandcastle* (1957), William Mor's "dis-organ-ization" is not self-initiated; rather, "other external forces provoke him to take the road" to becoming-active (229). The most recent Deleuzian reading of Murdoch's fiction focuses on *The Unicorn* and the issue of freedom. Ghaffary and Melika Ramzi (2023) investigate how an absolute freedom remains impossible to the characters in life as bodies are constantly coded and organized by the dominant system, and how an ultimate becoming can be achieved in taking one's own life. A de-subjectified body, Hannah functions as a deterritorializing producing machine that is in the process of becoming different, escaping the enclosed organization and, consequently, turning into a body without organs (BwO) (Ghaffary and Ramzi 2023). The current research provides a similar analysis of Hannah's progression toward becoming-active in a restrictive society. However, it is necessary to point out that art, in addition to the bodies surrounding her, plays a key part in providing Hannah with the possibility of experiencing a new kind of existence which is to be examined in the following section. Moreover, the present study adopts the idea of becoming to investigate how the intertextual links result in *The Unicorn's* becoming-text.

3. Results

"Intertextuality," the interaction between multiple texts in the form of the "actual presence of one text within another" (Genette 1997: 2), plays a significant part in the process of text production. Intertext can be conceived of as a manifestation of "rhizome," a concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (2004), a phenomenon with a multiplicity of signification (Fox 1995). From an intertextual vantage point, *The Unicorn* can be treated as a rhizome that makes new connections possible, increases the territory of the text, and deterritorializes one's flow of reading, so that instead of approaching the novel as a being-text that contains several fixed meanings to be realized, the active reading practice can allow it to enter the process of "becoming-text," a term employed by Ghaffary (2019: 122) in his Deleuzian reading of Murdoch's early fiction. To this end, the following sub-sections explore aspects of intertextuality and its impact on Hannah's becoming different and her resistance to the dominant system.

3.1. Hannah and *La Princesse de Clèves* (The Princess of Clèves)

Reading novels and poems are among Hannah's favorite hobbies when Marian is in her room. In a letter to Geoffrey, her ex-boyfriend, Marian mentions that when she is alone with Hannah, they read *La Princesse de Clèves* (*The Princess of Clèves*), a French psychological novel allegedly authored by Madame de Lafayette (1634–1693) and first published in 1678. The reason why Hannah is interested in this novel, which is quite significant, has apparently not been dealt with in previous studies, except for Stewart (2002), who remarks in passing that reading *La Princesse de Clèves* and Paul Valéry's "Graveyard by the Sea" (1922) adds an atmosphere of sorrow and enchantment to the narrative, a position that shall be challenged by the findings of the present Deleuzean study.

The story of *La Princesse de Clèves* takes place during the reign of King Henry II and is about the princess of Clèves and her relationship with the duke of Nemours. When she arrives at the court, the prince of Clèves falls in love with her at first sight, and they marry instantly. However, she later meets the duke and falls in love with him at a ball. Then, she wonders whether to tell her spouse about her feelings. When she seeks guidance from her mother, the latter advises her not to, but when the duke writes her a love letter, she chooses to inform her husband about the situation, with the latter dying of grief shortly after. Afterward, she asks the duke to forget her, and they never unite. In this novel, Lafayette depicts the idea of arranged marriages or marriages that are "inspired by gratitude rather than desire" (Allentuch 1975: 194) in the court of France in the seventeenth century. According to Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (1998), *La Princesse de Clèves* is the first psychological novel that focuses on the "inner consciousness" of a female hero (33).

Before comparing the female character of *La Princesse de Clèves* with Hannah and dealing with the possible reasons why the latter is reading it, another question may arise in the reader's mind: Is Hannah ever allowed to read a piece of literature that contains ideas of freedom or anything that would cause her to rebel against her guardians? Seemingly, at least Gerald Scottow and Violet Evercreech, the representatives of "majoritarian" standards as defined by Deleuze and Guattari (2004), are oppressive rulers with no interest in reawakening Hannah from her slumber. In fact, they are quite sensitive even to any type of paper that arrives at Gaze; for instance, both Marian and Effingham Cooper doubt if their letters are censored whenever they want to send or receive them. Accordingly, the reason why such repressive bodies as Gerald and Violet do not make any objections to Hannah's reading *La Princesse de Clèves* with Marian can be that their understanding of Lafayette's novel is quite traditional, moralistic, and trivial, such that they assume Hannah will be ashamed of having betrayed her husband. In Deleuze's ethics (1983), the moralizing sense of shame keeps a body powerless and inactive, favoring the oppressive forces. It is highly noticeable that Hannah and the princess of Clèves appear to share certain features: first, they both marry at a young age; second, their arranged marriages are encouraged by their parents, who attempt to impose the Oedipal triangulation – a structure that intends to interrupt desiring-machines (Deleuze and Guattari 2009) – on their daughters; third, they

both fall in love with someone other than their husbands; fourth, their reputation and honor are highly judged by their families and society; fifth, neither of them is truly understood by the other characters in the novel, although the others constantly look at them; sixth, neither of their stories follows the traditional formula of a fairytale happy ending despite their fairy-like atmosphere and setting; and, finally, their inner voices are never described, and an omniscient narrator's consciousness continually filters their discourses, which complicates their subjectivation. This is why the implied reader can never discern how the princess of Clèves and Hannah internally react to their traditional marriages.

It is possible to offer two opposing transcendent and immanent readings of the princess of Clèves's story. On the one hand, a transcendent reading would regard it as the story of a virtuous, nice young lady who marries the young prince of Clèves at the age of sixteen and, in spite of falling for the duke, resists her desire and remains faithful to her husband even after his death. This can be one of the main reasons why Hannah's guardians do not find any trouble in Hannah's reading this novel: by reading the novel not only will Hannah see what a loyal and virtuous wife must be and stay in isolation, but she will also feel guilty and remorseful for having betrayed Peter Crean-Smith, her husband. Thus, as mentioned above, Violet and Gerald contend that this novel's educational, moralizing purpose suppresses Hannah's voice and any possible vital or, in Deleuze's (2004) terminology, "virtual" powers. Commenting on *La Princesse de Clèves*, Albert Camus (1970), the French Existentialist philosopher, asserts that the idea of love is so depicted in the novel as to teach how passion can put one in danger and to show how an unhappy marriage brings one less pain than passion does and, further, Camus considers this as a conscious act on Lafayette's part. Following Camus, Marianne Hirsch (1981) argues that in Lafayette's novel passion is shown "as loss of self" (79).

On the other hand, an "immanent" reading of *La Princesse de Clèves* would depict how courageous the princess becomes as the story unfolds. The point is that, as Colebrook (2010) explains, the act of Deleuzian reading is not essentially "to recreate oneself, using the text as a mirror or medium through which one repeats already habitual orientations;" instead, what occurs in reading a text is that the reader confronts "relations, potentials, and powers not [one's] own" (4), which refer to both the virtual and ethical powers of reading. Indeed, literature is a means of facilitating this encounter, opening up new possibilities "of" and "in" life. Therefore, on an immanent reading, *La Princesse de Clèves* offers no value judgments whatsoever, as it is "moral without moralizing" (Hubbell 1971: 34). This novel can be read "ethically" in a Deleuzian sense, in which case although the princess of Clèves has no affair with the duke, she confesses to the prince of Clèves her love for another man and also after her husband's death she confidently dares to reveal to the duke her love for him and still refuses to marry the duke. Put differently, she learns to decide and speak for herself despite familial, moral, or social demands.

Thus, following this reading, contrary to Camus's (1970) and Hirsch's (1981) understandings, the princess of Clèves's passion leads to building confidence and finding a voice to resist the domination of the oppressive patriarchal ideology

(through her husband, her beloved, or her mother). In fact, what causes her pain is the sense of duty instilled in her by society and her mother – the sense of being a “nice” wife. Furthermore, to show the defect in Camus’s (1970) assertion about Lafayette’s authorial intention, one may argue that it is impossible to read a text in order to figure out what the actual author (from a Foucauldian viewpoint, a constituted being representing the privileged discourse) is suggesting, since serious literature is not a restricted medium for conveying practical information or moral messages. Instead, a text is immanent to life, in the sense that it generates something within itself rather than representing something external to it. It creates new connections, develops new ways of becoming, and sees things differently. Deleuze and Parnet (2007) observe that the ultimate aim of writing is “becoming-imperceptible” (45). Accordingly, authors become different in the process of writing, and considering a fixed identity for them would be impractical.

Similarly, in *The Unicorn*, back in the old days, when Hannah slept with Philip Lejour, she said no to Oedipality and became “anti-Oedipal,” in the Deleuzian sense, by denying the prescribed identity of a “nice, young lady.” Actually, becoming anti-Oedipal makes “schizo-flows” free to escape the borders of the Oedipal territory (Deleuze & Guattari 2009). In doing so, Hannah puts herself in danger of being obliterated or “reterritorialized” back into the system of morals – something that eventually happens to her. Philip’s character is analogous with the duke in his ceaseless, voyeuristic tendencies. Philip spends his days with his field glasses, gazing at Gaze without making any attempt to meet or emancipate Hannah, and so does the duke in Lafayette’s novel. Hannah realizes that Philip has been watching her all these years. According to Deleuze’s philosophy, Philip’s type of love counts as Oedipal since an Oedipal body merely dreams of the beloved instead of acting and wishes the beloved to be no more than a symbol of love in a fairytale; consequently, its sick desire remains unproductive and unrevolutionary (Deleuze and Guattari 2009; their account of Oedipal and schizophrenizing love is opposed to Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic view; see Ghaffary and Alizadeh 2021). In Chapter Twenty-Eight, when Philip comes to meet her, Hannah for the first time gains confidence and speaks “as a queen, one who highly disposes of herself” (Murdoch 2000: 223) when she decides for her life. Eventually, in this scene, Hannah is able to speak up. Now, she is expressing her wishes since she is developed and has woken up, as she has put away her sense of “resentment” toward Philip (Murdoch 2000: 224). This is remindful of the Nietzschean-Deleuzian notion of *ressentiment* (resentment), which makes reactive forces triumph over a body’s desire, so that passivity and negation can overcome activity and affirmation – hence, a form of nihilism (see Deleuze 1983).

Resentment having been defined, now the consequence of Hannah’s lack of resentment for Philip shall be discussed. In the epiphanic moment of refusing Philip’s confused Oedipal love, Hannah protects her individuality and asserts her power by saying no to dependence on his body to achieve freedom and escape Gaze. According to Deleuzian ethics, this is a vital step for Hannah to resume her becoming powerful and active. In a sense, she finds Philip weak, passive, and unsuitable when it is revealed that he has not yet decided what they will do when they go through the gates. Put differently, he is not powerful enough to help

Hannah move toward what Deleuze and Guattari (2004) term a “smooth space” – a space in which revolutionary forces develop.

In this scene, as a protest against and disengagement from conventional, optimistic love stories in which women have been assigned the role of an exchange object, Hannah’s performance is an expressive act of defiance. For this reason, contrary to Elizabeth Annette Woo’s (1974) claim that Hannah becomes “the object of courtly love” (104), she not only does not become one but this cannot be termed “courtly love.” According to Deleuze and Guattari (2004), courtly love is immanent and selfless, whereas Philip reveals himself to be nothing more than a voyeur. It seems that Hannah is adamant about not allowing herself to be dominated and ruined by the unpleasant game of fleeting pleasure since, unlike productive desire, unproductive pleasure, as Deleuze (2001) argues, fixates a body and organizes it. As Hannah points out, Philip has just come to “watch” her (Murdoch 2000: 225). On this account, unlike Genevieve Hutchings Trench’s (2000) claim that Hannah is becoming Christian, she actually rejects Philip not because the Christian sense of right and wrong dictates that abandoning the castle with him would be an unforgivable sin but because her reasoning warns her of the repercussions of doing so, namely putting her life in the hands of a man who has no idea what he would do next. Both when Hannah was first sent to the castle seven years ago and when she was forced back to it after a fruitless escape attempt, external forces, in the form of what Deleuze and Guattari (2009) call “familial and moral codes,” kept her in the prison-like castle. Nonetheless, this time, after seven years, similar to the princess of Clèves, Hannah takes a bold action and puts an end to being stuck waiting for Philip.

Therefore, there is a reasonable possibility that Hannah has acted against Philip’s sick desire, having been influenced by Lafayette’s novel which has raised “ethical,” rather than “moral,” questions in her. Moral questions limit one to the constraining “ideology of *ressentiment*” (Deleuze 1983: 121), to slave morality, and to the evaluative judgment of whether something is good or evil. By contrast, ethical questions have no fixed, evaluative foundations. Literature and, by extension, art is creative and allows one to perceive things one has never experienced before. In one way or another, the becoming-other of minor literature results in new percepts, affects, and “a bloc of sensations” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164) because it undermines majoritarian discourses by forming radically new assemblages and creating revolutionary and innovative lines of becoming beyond perceptions and affections of a fixed identity. Indeed, with the help of this function of literature, Hannah breaks the majoritarian expectation that she should remain submissive and follow what Philip decides. Furthermore, minor literature offers new possibilities for experience on a plane of immanence, and minoritarian writers avoid developing fixed attitudes since judgments appear to suggest organization (Buchanan & Marks 2000). In *The Princess of Clèves* and Hannah’s reading of it, the question of bringing into existence replaces moral-driven judgments.

This reading further rejects A. S. Byatt’s (1994) argument that Hannah’s “passive suffering” (see also Trench 2000) is not quite religious but “an obsessional neurotic fantasy” in Freudian terms (The Unicorn section, para 32; for a detailed Freudian analysis in this regard, see Byatt 2012). To be positioned as neurotic,

however, restrains Hannah in the Oedipal structure of the “daddy-mommy-me,” a term used by Deleuze and Guattari (2009: 51) to show the “holy” Oedipal triangle that encloses schizo (as opposed to neurotic) forces in themselves. Besides, if one takes a step further from neurosis to psychosis, as Deleuze and Guattari (2009) encourage a body to do, one notices the desiring-production behind a body’s operation. In Hannah’s case, she is more of a psychotic than a neurotic, in that neither the implied reader nor any of the other characters (e.g., Effingham, who tries to encode Hannah’s role as a mother) succeed in identifying her. Thus, opposing psychoanalysis, schizoanalysis reconceives psychosis in a positive sense just as Hannah, in certain parts of the novel, frees her desiring-machine instead of suffering passively. Deleuze and Guattari (2009) critique psychoanalysis, which along with capitalism strives to control desire and not to set it free. Deleuze and Guattari (2009) indicate that desire is a social rather than a familial concept. To put it in their own terms, “schizophrenic id” in schizoanalysis replaces “neurotic ego” in psychoanalysis (Bogue 2001: 83). In the end, art forms – such as fiction, poetry, and music – empower Hannah to become more active and help her develop her own singular ethics, examples of which are further demonstrated below.

3.2. Poetry and Music: Toward Constituting an Active Body

Poetry and music touch Hannah, make her activate her virtual capacities, and deterritorialize her through the act of listening, which can be explored in light of Deleuze’s concepts of minor art and refrain (*ritournelle*). During the musical evening at Gaze, when Hannah listens to Denis singing “O, What If the Fowler My Blackbird Has Taken!” (Murdoch 2000: 138), it is as if Hannah were listening again to something that has happened over and over again in her life. The song is part of a traditional Irish ballad lyric credited to Charles William Dalmon (1896), the British poet. Denis sings the following lines:

O what if the fowler my blackbird has taken?
The roses of dawn blossom over the sea;
Awaken, my blackbird, awaken, awaken,
And sing to me out of my red fuchsia tree.

O what if the fowler my blackbird has taken?
The sun lifts his head from the lap of the sea –
Awaken, my blackbird, awaken, awaken,
And sing to me out of my red fuchsia tree.

O what if the fowler my blackbird has taken?
The mountains grow white with the birds of the sea,
But down in the garden forsaken, forsaken,
I’ll weep all the day by my red fuchsia tree. (Murdoch 2000: 138)

In this song, the speaker cannot hear the blackbird singing from the tree, and they become concerned that the bird hunter has captured the blackbird. The

song has an aubade feeling because of the lamentation, loneliness, woundedness, and dread of having lost the bird. Throughout the novel, it can be noted that both Gerald and Philip are hunters, although it is unclear which one of them Hannah recalls when she hears the term “fowler,” if not both of them. Hannah has been captured twice, once by Philip and the other time by Gerald, who has treated her no better than a hunter would. Hannah is being guided on how she might live by this song, and its musical power of deterritorialization drives her to a musical smooth space, where she discovers what Nick Nesbitt (2010) refers to as a “Deleuzian plane of musical immanence” (178).

Consequently, it is not so much about interpreting or figuring out what that piece means. It is more about looking at what it does and how it changes Hannah’s worldview. Hearing this song takes Hannah from the realm of hierarchy that reigns supreme at Gaze to a plane or plateau of pure immanence where she is “becoming-bird,” the blackbird that wakes and sings. The bird refrain can be regarded as what Adrian Parr (2010), in Deleuzian terms, describes as “a territorial sign” (70). Accordingly, these refrains push a body to the edge of a territory, forcing one to reassess the surrounding boundaries. This song, in particular, is also akin to pastoral poetry in that it incorporates aspects and characteristics of nature, rather than a social framework within which flows must be regulated, organized, or fixed. Listening to this form of music, thus, causes Hannah to connect to a natural environment in which her body’s possibilities may be further acknowledged, like a bird with wings to fly away, as the song reaches these lines: “Awaken, my blackbird, awaken, awaken, | And sing to me out of my red fuchsia tree” (Murdoch 2000: 138). Additionally, music “disembodies bodies” and captures forces (Deleuze 2003: 54). This occurs to Hannah when the deterritorializing power of the refrains shatters her sense of subjectivity and transfers her to an imaginative and virtual realm that frees her from her actual time and place by reinforcing her becoming-imperceptible. In fact, her becoming is facilitated by the audible forces of music.

This being said, there could be another way to read the song. It is possible that Hannah identifies with the song’s speaker, whose blackbird is taken away. On this reading, by sobbing all day beside the red fuchsia tree, the speaker and, in consequence, Hannah are “becoming-animal” or, more specifically, becoming the bird whose voice has been lost. This can be justified by the way the song is formed and the way its three refrains sound like a birdsong (“awaken, awaken” and “forsaken, forsaken”). Actually, they sound like the repetitive tones that a bird makes. Here, desiring a bird leads to obsessing over it and becoming it. After the last line of the song, Hannah screams out in anguish and moans at the song’s final line: there arises “a sort of howl, the scarcely human cry of a soul in agony” as she is dragged away (Murdoch 2000: 139). Frederick P. W. McDowell (1963) perceives this as a bad trait in Hannah, feeling that she loses her sense of self and descends farther into a frenzy. On a Deleuzian reading, however, Hannah’s loss of a cohesive self opens up new forms of existence; thus, her unsteadiness helps to make it difficult for the majoritarian forces to recognize her. Hannah discovers liberation by truly abandoning her sense of self with the aid of music. She is emancipating herself from human forms for the time being. Hannah’s howling is a ferocious,

high-pitched, ambiguous scream that blurs the distinction between human and animal cry, that is neither codable nor signifying by the standards of the English language. Furthermore, it signals the desire that has been imprisoned in her by what Colebrook (2014) refers to as “moralizing normatively and rigid identity politics” (75), but now this life force has found a way to break through.

Every refrain in the song ends with the word “sea” as the final word of the second line. It is followed by a semicolon the first time, a hyphen the second time, and a comma the third time. The significance of these three punctuation marks lies in the fact that there is a little pause each time the word is uttered. Going to the sea or, even worse, swimming in it is prohibited in the village, as shown by the warning given to Marian: “No one swims in the sea. It’s far too cold. And it is a sea that kills people” (Murdoch 2000: 12), despite the fact that Alice Lejour, Philip’s sister, used to swim there frequently and never drowned. The sea here embodies nature, the positive power of life, and the dominant system tries to keep potential bodies out of it. Entering the sea “requires the engagement of one’s own body with a body of water” (Culter and MacKenzie 2011: 53; see also Deleuze 1994), which is why not only the sea but also a salmon pool is a threat to such a system, since flowing water and the fish’s movements remind one of the possibilities of swimming freely and moving forward against the sea waves and becoming-active against the waves of life. In other words, the water instructs the body how to activate itself.

Another intriguing aspect of the song is the repetition of the term “fuchsia,” which is repeatedly restored in the refrains. In the next chapter of the novel, when the escape plan fails and the automobile is stopped in a “clump of fuchsias” (Murdoch 2000: 146), the importance of this term and its potential influence on Hannah become noticeable. It is indicative of how Hannah must have been reminded of the territorial motifs and fixed limits at Gaze by the word “fuchsias.” In keeping with Peter Wolfe’s assertion (1966), this novel exhibits “a poetic realization of setting” (184), demonstrating how the characters’ emotions are closely linked to the outer environment. As a result, fuchsias display the territory’s boundaries, and their picture evokes the road to the outer world.

From a Deleuzian vantage point, music defies the *doxa* of representation and traditional thinking methods in several ways as it is a breach of “common sense and good sense” (Hasty 2010: 3). It serves as an excellent expressive medium for thinking in unconventional ways that cast doubt on the concepts of subjectivity and unity. When musical instruments are performed during the musical evening, Violet and Gerald, assuming a state of domination and absolute power, do not move their gaze away from Hannah and sit close to her, as if they had already recognized the menacing influence of music. A. Clare Brandabur (2016) refers to the way they sit around Hannah as forming a “semi-circle” (301). This mode of sitting is reminiscent of the way the audience sits in an orchestra where the musical performance is preplanned and a conductor leads the directions. For Deleuze and Guattari (2004), such a Western classical music style gives rise to “a transcendent plane of organization” (313), as opposed to an immanent plane of consistency. Hence, in sitting in a semi-circle, Violet and Gerald may intend to assert their control over the whole show.

Nonetheless, Violet and Gerald are soon stressed out because they cannot force an image on music or figure out how to encode it. The reason they are not affected by music and, as shown previously, by literature is that “the race summoned forth by art [...] is not the one that claims to be pure [= the majoritarian] but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, and irremediably minor race” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 109). For example, Gerald once states that he just knows the sorts of birds he can shoot, indicating his complete lack of empathy for the birds and his preference for fulfilling his own appetite. In fact, Violet and Gerald are trying to reterritorialize Hannah, so that she will not be in a perpetual flux of becoming.

It is interesting to note that, following the musical evening, Hannah is no more referred to as “Mrs. Crean-Smith” in any dialogue or Marian’s and Effingham’s thoughts (indirect and free indirect discourses); instead, she is simply referred to as “Hannah.” This difference in how she is addressed or referred to carries considerable weight because she is no longer defined by her relationship with Peter, as though she were no longer tied to a marital scale. In the Deleuzian sense, this shift signifies her becoming free of familialism so that, to be addressed, she would no more be limited to familial ties and the codes of nuclear family – the social institution responsible for obstructing the free flow of desire and relegating immanent becoming to transcendent being (Deleuze and Guattari 2009).

4. Conclusion

The current study argued that recognizing intertextuality in *The Unicorn* leads to a richer reading experience as well as an awareness of the novel as a becoming-text capable of producing new chains of sense. It was also shown how the majoritarian forces are unable to comprehend ethical forces, presenting a critical chance for the minoritarian to become revolutionary and fight against moral standards and sick desires, as was shown in the case of Hannah. It was discussed that by not yielding to Philip’s illusive remarks, Hannah makes a decision for her own life that goes against the rules and wishes of the others. Thus, despite the fact that Hannah remains physically imprisoned at Gaze, in the final analysis she can be deemed free on account of having become active in the Deleuzian sense. In fact, minor literature and music expose to Hannah the ruptures at the heart of the dominant discourse and make it possible for such a potentially revolutionary force to dismantle the organizing system through deliberate death.

Moreover, it was shown that, virtually, Hannah’s desire to become different is almost kept alive by the affective, nonlinear machines of literature and music that create new percepts and affects in her. Literary, musical, and artistic creations in general lead to deterritorializations; nonetheless, in contrast to Marian’s notion that the only way to free Hannah is to “talk to her about freedom” directly (Murdoch 2000: 65), which never works throughout the novel, it was argued that it is through art, not preaching, that Hannah sees sparks of freedom.

The above findings imply that art is particularly relevant to the problem of freedom in this novel, which is why understanding the distinction between major

and minor art is important. Major art and majoritarian readings can constrain a body's potential, in contrast to minor art and minoritarian readings that affirm life and release a character and a text from the shackles of organisms and categorizations. Therefore, one can draw the conclusion that in order to arrive at an immanent comprehension and discover the virtual potentials of a text, both the intertexts and how critics approach them need to be minoritarian. The novel decentralizes the assumed function of formally conventional intertexts by deterritorializing the reading experience. In the field of Murdoch studies, analyzing intertexts and taking an ethical reading of them in line with how the characters change and become different shows how important it is to have nonrepresentational insights about what art can do to the way characters experience their surroundings. What further traces of the function of art and artists may exist in Murdoch's other works or works with similar fairytale and Gothic ambiance are fertile questions worth investigating.

References

- Allentuch, Harriet (1975) The will to refuse in *The Princesse de Clèves*. *The University of Toronto Quarterly* 44 (3), 185–198. <https://doi.org/10.3138/utq.44.3.185>
- Backus, Guy (1986) *Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Philosopher, the Philosopher as Novelist; The Unicorn as a Philosophical Novel*. United States: Peter Lang.
- Bogue, Ronald (2001) *Deleuze and Guattari*. London: Routledge.
- Brandabur, A. Clare (2016) *Time's Fool: Essays in Context* (B. C. Tharaud, Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Buchanan, Ian and John Marks (2000) Introduction: Deleuze and literature. In: I. Buchanan & J. Marks (Eds.) *Deleuze and Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1–13.
- Byatt, Antonia Susan (1994) *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch*. London: Vintage.
- Byatt, Antonia Susan (2012) *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*. London: Vintage.
- Camus, Albert (1970) *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (E. C. Kennedy, Trans., P. Thody, Ed.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Charpentier, Colette (1984) L'étrange dans *The Unicorn* d'Iris Murdoch [The stranger in Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn*]. *Études irlandaises* 9 (1), 89–94. <https://doi.org/10.3406/irlan.1984.2726>
- Colebrook, Claire (2010) Introduction. In: A. Parr (Ed.) *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Rev. ed.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1–6.
- Colebrook, Claire (2014) *Sex After Life: Essays on Extinction. Volume 2*. London: Open Humanities Press.
- Colebrook, Claire (2015) Deleuzian criticism. In: J. Wolfreys (Ed.) *Introducing Criticism in the 21st Century* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 195–214.
- Cutler, Anna, and Iain MacKenzie (2011) Bodies of learning. In: Guillaume, Laura and Joe Hughes (Eds.) *Deleuze and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 53–72.
- Dalmon, Charles William (1896) O, what if the fowler my blackbird has taken! In: W. H. Gill (Ed.) *Manx National Songs: With English Words, Selected From the Ms. Collection of the Deemster Gill, Dr. J. Clague, and W. H. Gill*. London: Boosey & Co., 115–117.
- Deleuze, Gilles (1983) *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (H. Tomlinson, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Deleuze, Gilles (1994) *Difference and Repetition* (P. Patton, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.

- Deleuze, Gilles (2001) Dualism, monism, and multiplicities (desire-pleasure-jouissance). *Contretemps: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 2, 92–109.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2003) *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (D. W. Smith, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2004) *Desert Islands and Other Texts* (1953–1974). (M. Taormina, Trans., D. Lapoujade, Ed.). New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1986) *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (D. Polan, Trans.). London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet (2007) *Dialogues II* (H. Tomlinson & B. Habberjam, Trans.) (Rev. ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1994) *What Is Philosophy?* (H. Tomlinson & G. Burchell, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (2004) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (2009) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (R. Hurley, M. Seem & H. R. Lane, Trans.). New York: Penguin Books.
- Fox, N. J. (1995) Intertextuality and the writing of social research. *Electronic Journal of Statistics*.
- Gallope, Michael (2010) The sound of repeating life: Ethics and metaphysics in Deleuze's philosophy of music. In: B. Hulse and N. Nesbitt (Eds.) *Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and the Theory and Philosophy of Music*. United Kingdom: Ashgate, 77–102.
- Genette, Gérard (1997) *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (C. Newman & C. Doubinsky, Trans.). Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Ghaffary, Mohammad (2019) The event of love and the being of morals: A Deleuzian reading of Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*. *Journal of Literary Studies* 35 (2), 105–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718.2019.1627109>
- Ghaffary, Mohammad (2021) The eternal recurrence of Oedipus: A Deleuzian reading of love and ethics in Iris Murdoch's *The Sandcastle*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 62 (2), 224–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2020.1790490>
- Ghaffary, Mohammad and Alireza Anushiravani (2016) “Entering the school of life”: A Deleuzian reading of Iris Murdoch's *The Flight from the Enchanter*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 8 (1), 173–185.
- Ghaffary, Mohammad and Ghiasuddin Alizadeh (2021) The tragedy of love: A study of love and death in Jacques Lacan's thought, with special reference to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 57 (3–4), 596–629. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.2021.2021827>
- Ghaffary, Mohammad and Melika Ramzi (2023) “‘The salmon's spring out of the water’: A Deleuzian reading of freedom in Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn*.” *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances (JALDA)* 10 (2), 227–244.
- Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. (1998) Lafayette's first readers: The quarrel of *La Princesse de Clèves*. In: F. E. Beasley and K. A. Jensen (Eds.) *Approaches to Teaching Lafayette's The Princess of Clèves*. Modern Language Association of America, 30–37.
- Hasty, Christopher (2010) The image of thought and ideas of music. In: B. Hulse and N. Nesbitt (Eds.) *Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and the Theory and Philosophy of Music*. United Kingdom: Ashgate, 1–22.
- Hirsch, Marianne (1981) A mother's discourse: Incorporation and repetition in *La Princesse de Clèves*. *Yale French Studies* (62), 67–87. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2929894>
- Hubbell, Janet Curby (1971) *La Princesse de Clèves and the modern reader* [Unpublished master's thesis]. United States: Emporia Kansas State College.
- Kuehl, Linda (1969) Iris Murdoch: The novelist as magician/the magician as artist. *Modern Fiction Studies* 15 (3), 347–360.
- Lafayette, Madame de (2004) *The Princesse de Clèves* (R. Ross, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.
- May, Todd (2005) *Gilles Deleuze: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- McDowell, Frederick P. W. (1963) "The devious involutions of human character and emotions": Reflections on some recent British novels. *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 4 (3), 339–366. doi:10.2307/1207285
- Medcalf, Stephen (2000) Introduction. In: I. Murdoch, *The Unicorn*. London: Vintage, vii–xx.
- Murdoch, Iris (2000) *The Unicorn*. London: Vintage.
- Nesbitt, Nick (2010) Critique and clinique: From sounding bodies to the musical event. In: B. Hulse and N. Nesbitt (Eds.) *Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and the Theory and Philosophy of Music*. United Kingdom: Ashgate, 159–179.
- Olkowski, Dorothea (2019) Freedom's refrains, Deleuze, Guattari, and philosophy: Introduction. In: D. Olkowski and E. Pirovolakis (Eds.), *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of Freedom: Freedom's Refrains*. New York: Routledge, viii–xxi.
- Parr, Adrian (2010) Deterritorialization / reterritorialization. In: A. Parr (Ed.), *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Rev. ed.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 69–72.
- Read, Daniel (2019) *The problem of evil and the fiction and philosophy of Iris Murdoch* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. England: Kingston University.
- Slaymaker, William (1992) Myths, mystery and the mechanisms of determinism: The aesthetics of freedom in Iris Murdoch's fiction. In: L. Tucker (Ed.), *Critical Essays on Iris Murdoch*. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 19–32.
- Stewart, Jack (2002) Metafiction, metadrama, and the God-game in Murdoch's *The Unicorn*. *Journal of Narrative Theory* 32 (1), 77–96. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.2011.0000>
- Trench, Genevieve Hutchings (2000) *Elements of medieval romance in Iris Murdoch* [Unpublished master's thesis]. United States: Indiana University.
- Wolfe, Peter (1966) *The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and Her Novels*. Missouri: University of Missouri Press.
- Woo, Elizabeth Annette (1974) *The enchanter figure in the novels of Iris Murdoch* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.

MOHAMMAD GHAFFARY was born in Iran in 1986. He received the Ph.D. degree in English Literature in 2016 from Shiraz University (Shiraz, Iran). In the same year, he joined the faculty of Arak University (Arak, Iran), where he is currently an Assistant Professor of the Department of English. His research interests include Structuralist and Poststructuralist literary theory, Philosophy of Literature, and Comparative Literature (esp. Adaptation Studies). Aside from publishing numerous essays in Persian and English in different academic and public journals, he has translated several books in literary theory from English into Persian.

Address: Mohammad Ghaffary, Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages, Arak University, Shahid Behesti St., Arak, Markazi Province, Zip code: 3815688349, Iran. [email: m-ghaffary@araku.ac.ir]

MELIKA RAMZI was born in Iran in 1997. She received her B.A. in English Language and Literature from Arak University (Arak, Iran) in 2019. She has recently defended her M.A. thesis in English Language and Literature at the same university. Her areas of interest include Philosophy and Literature, Poststructuralism, and Adaptation Studies.

Address: Melika Ramzi, Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages, Arak University, Shahid Behesti St., Arak, Markazi Province, Zip code: 3815688349, Iran. [email: ramzi_melika@yahoo.com]



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as image or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.

