Second Language Learning and Teaching
Issues in Literature and Culture

Mirosława Buchholtz *Editor*

Alice Munro

Understanding, Adapting and Teaching

Springer

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Reading and Interviewing of Alice Munro

Mirosława Buchholtz

Abstract This chapter takes stock of various responses to Alice Munro and her fiction in North America and Europe, in popular culture and social media, among literary critics and journalists. It addresses two ways of approaching Munro: by reading her fiction and by interviewing (or rather reading interviews with) the author. Mirosława Buchholtz explains the rationale of the whole project and outlines its structure. She present the volume as an effort to counteract hasty judgmental attitudes that dominate in short popular publications and to counterbalance them with academic (and yet highly readable) accounts of three kinds of activity at the interface of scholarly research: adaptation, editing, and teaching.

Nobel-Prize Laureates have often used the occasion of grand formal lecture at the gala in Stockholm to proclaim their literary manifestos. William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow, or Toni Morrison come to mind immediately as examples. Alice Munro's absence at the ceremony and the missing lecture were at that time blamed on her physical frailty. However, her admirers received something else instead, a video interview, which from its place on the Swedish Academy's website could be viewed by audiences all over the world at a time and in circumstances convenient to them. One might argue that what seems to be a mere substitute for a lecture is in fact much better suited to Munro's literary art than a formal ex cathedra speech. Although good interviews usually thrive on information and generation gaps, as well as on cultural, social, political, and perhaps many other kinds of difference, and although power relations in an interview are almost by definition skewed, the form of interview relies on the democratic assumption of approachability, to at least create such an illusion. In fact, an average reader is as likely to converse with Alice Munro as s/he is to shake hands with a British monarch. And yet, in the Nobel-Prize interview a representative of an average reader sits face to face with the famous and celebrated author and asks questions to which the author responds politely and, as it seems at least, with her heart on her sleeve, especially when she talks about her mother. This is a particularly moving moment and the one

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when the author's hands tell a story as evocative and desperate as her tongue. Like Munro's fiction, the interview is dialogic and antiauthoritarian but, also like her fiction, it opens the floor, rather than settling questions.

1 The Art of Interview

The illusion of sitting face to face with Alice Munro is almost perfect. At no point does the viewer see her interlocutor, though the shadow of his splayed fingers, sometimes armed with a pen, appears several times, evoking a horror movie. Most of the time we can see the author in a wicker chair and against the backdrop of bookshelves and a window with the view of her front yard (the front of a parked blue car is also immortalized in the vignette, people and cars are seen passing by). Occasionally, in short video films Alice Munro is surrounded by other people, as for example, during a walk in Ontario, or on a visit to Munro's bookstore in Victoria, BC, or else she is presented in older photographs which illustrate her memories. A male voice with a distinguishable, but by no means obtrusive, foreign accent asks questions off the screen, skipping from one topic to another, though giving special attention to two issues: the social background and the female perspective.

He begins by encouraging childhood memories, and the author recalls her first exposure to "The Little Mermaid," her effort to adapt the story to suit both her emotional needs and her sense of justice as they were at that time. She tells him (and the viewers) how she used to make up stories during her long walk to school. Asked about her woman's perspective, Munro offers a balanced response on the advantages and disadvantages of being a girl. Although men were doing important work as she was growing up, women had the freedom to read and tell stories. The interviewer does not seem to have an eye or ear for nuance, and chooses to pigeonhole Munro not only as a female voice, but also as a specialist in small-town Canadian life. Several other questions concern the technicalities of writing: getting started, handling a writing crisis, experiencing self-doubt, throwing stories away, or reworking them. The interviewer also wants to know what is the effect of growing older on her manner of writing and if Munro would have become an entirely different writer had she completed her university degree. Certain questions keep reverting, reformulated and yet always exhibiting somewhat childlike bluntness. For example,

> *Were you an early feminist?*
> I never knew about the word "feminism", but of course I was a feminist, because I actually grew up in a part of Canada where women could write more easily than men. The big, important writers would be men, but knowing that a woman wrote stories was probably less to her discredit than if a man wrote stories. Because it was not a man's occupation. Well, that was very much in my youth, it's not that way at all now.
> […]
> *And you were brought up in a working class home?*

> Yes.
> *And that's where your stories start as well?*
> Yes. I didn't realize it was a working class home, I just looked at where I was and wrote about it.
> […]
> *You seem to have a very simple view on things?*
> Do I? Well, yes. (Munro & Åsberg, 2013)

The brevity of some responses is indeed quite telling, and so also is Munro's body language—her smile, her laughter, and little gestures. She is nothing else but charming, even though the viewer can sense at times a certain irritated amusement of someone who has seen strange behaviour and knows how to react. It is no wonder that referring to the interview in a short essay for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Müller (2013) criticizes the interviewer and praises the Laureate. He observes the modest background of her apartment ("One can hardly say she lives in luxury," he writes), notes the little foundational myth narrated at the beginning of the interview (the story of how little Alice became an author while reformulating Hans Christian Andersen's tale), and praises Munro's youthful charm, which helps her make the best of the silly questions she receives during the interview. The form of interview in itself creates the atmosphere of spontaneity and intimacy, as Müller observes, but the gap between the interviewer and the interviewee is enormous. One can add that the man who sits in front of Munro is perhaps not intentionally disrespectful, but hasty and shallow, in other words, exhibiting the qualities that mark our time. Müller takes exception in particular to the obsessive reduction of Munro to the sphere of women's writing, even though, as she patiently explains, she did not even know the word "feminism" at the outset of her writing life and she rejoices at audiences that are not segregated according to their gender identity. Very much like the interviewer, though, Müller takes Munro's working-class status for granted.

It may be sheer coincidence that some, especially female, commentators on Alice Munro's fiction have also chosen the form of interview or—more generally speaking—dialogue. This is true about Sulej and Chutnik (2014), who exchange their observations in the Polish weekly *Wysokie obcasy* [High Heels] and Doris Kleinau-Metzler, who interviews the Berlin author Judith Hermann in the October 2013 issue of *a tempo*. Chutnik is a feminist writer and activist, whereas Hermann made a name for herself as the author of short stories. Chutnik does not play the role of an interviewed author in her exchange with Sulej, whereas the roles are distributed more traditionally and hierarchically in the case of the German duo.

With the youthful joy of reinventing the wheel, Karolina Sulej volunteers the definition of Munro's writing as "slow literature," and thus an analogy to slow food, slow life etc., but in English "slow" may also suggest slow-witted, which is not true about Munro's fiction and would do the author injustice. Sulej means, quite innocently and quite apart from the challenge of intercultural communication, the kind of literature that requires the reader to slow down, look closer, admire the detail, open up for the moment of pleasure. In other words, it is not literature in itself that is slow, but the way of reading. She sees Munro as an antidote to all literary fashions and her fiction as a textbook to empathy, which only reveals

Sulej's own needs as a reader. Munro's stories hurt, she argues, but they also sensitize the reader to reality. Chutnik does not seem to agree with the simplistic idea of slowness, though she makes no explicit statement to this effect. She does not see in Munro's fiction a nostalgia for some simple, neatly organized world. Instead Chutnik notices the germ of anxiety in each of Munro's characters. She describes that germ as vague and somewhat repulsive. Although the two conversationalists seem to talk at cross purposes, they agree that Munro's books are not meant to be read at one sitting, or—metaphorically speaking—devoured with rapacious eagerness. Too much of her fiction at one gulp might be, as they conclude, nauseating.

Judith Hermann's responses to Doris Kleinau-Metzler's questions—questions which are short and self-effacing at first and then longer and more personal—are less definitive than Sulej's or Chutnik's. In a self-searching manner, Hermann describes the evolution of her understanding of Munro's fiction at different stages of her own life. She tells a heart-rending story of her daily struggle to pick the right words and combine them in a right way, a struggle coupled with diminishing self-confidence. She gives examples of Munro's stories which moved her—usually because of some immediate relevance to her own life. To her, the word "instead" is crucial in the way Munro narrates human lives. Although apparently spelling disappointment, the substitute for something expected or desired brings consolation. She does not refer to the interview, but she might as well quote it as an example.

Despite the sincerity of responses, neither Munro nor the women commenting on her fiction offer a key or a password, or a definitive statement that can help us understand anything beyond their own current state of mind. There is no other way to Munro's fiction than reading and rereading it, following perhaps in the footsteps of earlier readers, but also daring to step aside, stop, and stray.

2 The Art of Reading

Just hours before "a lavish ceremony in Stockholm," at which Munro's daughter Jenny was to collect the award on the author's behalf, *The Guardian* hastened to report that at 82, Munro was "too frail to fly," and instead of a formal lecture, gave a 30-minute video interview, in which she "shared her joy at receiving the $1.3 m (£790,000) prize, and thoughts on being the 13th woman to win it" (Bury, 2013). The obsession with figures is evident in the introduction to the short *Guardian* article. The journalist clearly expects that the readers would like to know, first, how old the winner is, and second, what is the exact amount she won (in two currencies). She throws in some Nobel-Prize statistics and information about the running time of the interview for good measure. What then follows is a collage of quotes from the interview, focusing in particular on the Laureate's rural and female experience.

It may have been such a reductive summary that led a certain author—once-popular, urban through and through, and male to the point of being a mysoginist—to tweet that Munro was "so completely overrated." When other twitterati ridiculed him in response, the man who at 51 still wanted to live up to his

self-image as a cynical city brat, admitted to feeling like he had "beaten up Santa Claus." Someone asked Alice Munro for comment about being overrated, quoting the name of the critic. She asked "Who?" in response, implying apparently that she had never heard and/or could not care less. Social media have indeed changed the forms of communication beyond recognition in terms of speed and range, but—like traditional journalism—they also rely on succinct message and iconic presentation, again reducing people to stereotypical figures that come in pairs, often binary oppositions, such as: hick versus urbanite, Santa Claus versus Ebenezer Scrooge, housewife versus professional author.

There is a way though to wrench oneself free from the grip of hasty judgment. The traditional scholarship offers a healthy antidote in its reliance on the habit of careful study and of setting aside as far as possible one's inescapably located knowledge. The present study is a shared effort to understand Alice Munro's fiction, not in its entirety (an impossible feat), but rather by piecing together bits and pieces to come closer to the recognition of why and how she appeals to readers in various parts of the world. Some contributors seek to answer the question of how Alice Munro's fiction has been shaped by film adaptations and editorial procedures. Finally, a practical question is addressed of how her fiction has been or may be taught. The volume is accordingly divided into three parts that mirror the tripartite structure of the title: Understanding, adapting, and teaching.

In Part I entitled "Understanding" four scholars approach Alice Munro's fiction from a variety of perspectives to shed light on selected stories, but always with the intention to see also and as far as possible the bigger picture. **Dorota Filipczak** assumes, after Coral A. Howells, that "gender awareness" is crucial to Alice Munro's writings. She explores in her article the way in which gender and space are managed in "The Albanian Virgin" and argues that by examining a rigid division into male and female worlds in the traditional Albanian society, Munro brings to light the only exception that violates sexual segregation: the construction of a sworn virgin. Unsexed as a result of her own decision, approved by the patriarchal world, the sworn virgin who consorts with men is looked at in the article from the perspective of Judith Butler's critique of gender. Filipczak addresses the question of whether the construction confirms Butler's stance or undoes her "undoing" of gender. According to Filipczak, Munro is acutely aware of prohibitions and taboos that beset women in her own country, and creates a Canadian character who is then albanized to be later reclaimed and canadianized anew. The character's story is mediated to the reader due to the framing provided by the narrator, a bookshop owner preoccupied with Mary Shelley, whose take on gender and space is both reflected and subverted in the choices of Munrovian women.

Jędrzej Burszta focuses on the narrative techniques and attempts to pinpoint the uniqueness of her short stories. He examines the ways in which Alice Munro constructs the identity of her characters, which he sees as a process of weaving together the past and the present. Throughout the years, he claims, Munro has perfected her own individual brand of the short story, which led some scholars to the conclusion that she singlehandedly created a new quasi-genre, the so-called "Munro-type" short story (which since has influenced other writers). In his essay

Burszta seeks to connect the author's specific style of writing (e.g. literary influences of American literary regionalism, especially the Southern group and Flannery O'Connor), the narrative construction of her pieces, with certain themes interlocking with the general concept of "identity," in order to prove Alice Munro's originality and importance in the contemporary literature.

Magdalena Ładuniuk offers her reading of "Amundsen" as a key to the understanding of other stories by Alice Munro. She begins by arguing that the setting of "Amundsen" (included in *Dear Life*) comes as a surprise in the context of other Munrovian stories. The town of Amundsen is not only literally covered with snow and unpleasantly cold, but it also has a name that rings many bells: that of the legendary Arctic explorer. Although Munro's Amundsen is located only about 200 km away from Toronto, the connection she establishes between this small town and the Arctic is not accidental. Ładuniuk reflects on Munro's "Amundsen" as the story employing the metaphor of the Arctic exploration to comment on human relations, a technique she sees as typically Munrovian. She presents protagonists who undertake important missions, yet at some point become unable to continue or are forced to retreat. Unlike the eponymous Roald Amundsen, she argues, Munro's characters tend to be unfulfilled explorers who repeatedly fail to accomplish their life objectives.

Tomasz Sikora reads a selection of stories from *The Progress of Love* (1986) building the general interpretative framework around a literary (and, perhaps, epistemological) convention that he chooses to call Gothic Realism. The first part of the essay is a discussion of the proposed term (as applied to the work of Munro), mostly in connection to the notion of ambivalence, such as that described by Freud in his famous essay *The Uncanny*, i.e. the ambivalent relationship between what is "(like) home" and what is alien or "unlike home." In particular stories, Sikora finds many different kinds of ambivalence, which leads him to the conclusion that in the Canadian writer's work no positivity is ever pure and free of a "drop" of negativity. At the same time, however, "Munro's writing seems to offer a sense of astonishment over the fact that despite nothingness—there is the richness of the empirical world; despite fate—there is the openness of everything that happens; despite negativity—there is a positive bond (let us call it love) which somehow keeps people together."

Part II entitled "Adapting" consists of three essays on film adaptation and one essay on editing. **Ewa Bodal and Nelly Strehlau** study the 2013 adaptation of "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage." They begin with the observation that despite the critical acclaim and popularity Alice Munro's works have been enjoying for decades, the number of television and film adaptations of her stories has been surprisingly scarce. Their main aim is to explore the transition from the pages of Alice Munro's short story entitled "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" (first published in 2001 in the collection of the same title) to its 2013 film adaptation *Hateship Loveship*, directed by Liza Johnson. To that end, they juxtapose the short story and the film, analyzing the changes within the plot, the setting and the depiction of the characters from the original to its adaptation.

Emilia Leszczyńska focuses on the 1994 television adaptation of *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), offering a careful reading of selected scenes and characters. She is particularly interested in the circumstances that help the protagonist develop as a writer. The narrative of Del Jordan emerges in Leszczyńska's comparative reading of the book and the film as a *Künstlerroman* which culminates in the epiphany that writing amounts to living. **Paula Suchorska** also studies the adaptation of *Lives of Girls and Women* (1994), but she chooses as a point of reference Agnieszka Holland's *Washington Square* (1997) based on Henry James's novel of the same title. She explores the development of the two female protagonists, Catherine Sloper and Del Jordan, from weak and innocent girls to independent women. In her nuanced reading, Suchorska points out both similarities and differences between the protagonists, their role models and opponents.

The aim of **Grzegorz Koneczniak**'s article is to discuss Alice Munro's literary activity within selected aspects of editorial and textual studies explored by Konrad Górski (1895–1990) in his major book entitled *Tekstologia i edytorstwo dzieł literackich* [Textual and Editing Studies into Literary Works]. Górski's study addresses textual and editorial terms, research methodologies, and field-specific descriptions predominantly with reference to Polish literary heritage. Koneczniak argues that the manner in which the Canadian short-story writer has cooperated with her editors and literary agents gives contemporary validity to Górski's editorial and textual theories initially developed in 1956.

The challenge of teaching Alice Munro's fiction is the focus of attention in Part III of the present book, which consists of essays and interviews approaching the subject from a variety of perspectives. **Héliane Ventura**, whose contribution to Alice Munro studies has been immense, explores a theoretical perspective whose applicability to teaching literature is undeniable. The relational method which she employs in her reading of selected stories—Munro's earliest and latest narratives—allows her to prove that rather than merely opening the door to rural Ontario, Munro's fiction throws wide open the gates of world literature, inviting comparison with the works of William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, or James Agee. **David Staines**, the editor of the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro* (2016) shares his experience of teaching Canadian literature first in the United States and then in Canada, even though, as he observes, he has never taken a course in Canadian literature himself. The field developed and began to flourish relatively recently thanks to scholars such as Staines.

These two contributions are followed by four interviews. The questions I pose may sound similar or the same, but the answers are not, which shows how different the ways of reading and interpreting of Munro's fiction may be. In one case, I juxtapose the interviews with two scholars from different generations and different parts of the world. **Keiko Beppu** has made a name for herself in Japan and outside as a literature scholar and successful translator of Anglophone books, including fiction and non-fiction by Henry James. **Anca-Raluca Radu** had the benefit of studying Canadian fiction in Germany before becoming a university teacher herself. In the other case I place together two interviews with very experienced Polish scholars both of whom are first and foremost experts in American literature:

Agnieszka Salska and **Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich**. Their responses not only provide information about their own experience, but also contain many helpful ideas for current and future teachers of literature.

In the article following the interviews, **Grzegorz Koneczniak** analyzes and interprets empirically collected data on essays and theses, written by students at major Polish universities, in order to determine the presence of Alice Munro in the subjects explored in diploma projects at the BA, MA, and PhD levels. Similar to Professor Ronnie D. Carter's enormous archive research into theses on English studies in Poland, Koneczniak extracts—from the online catalogues of Polish universities—data on diploma projects on Munro's life and works. The scope of his research also includes essays and theses published on the website of the Polish Association for Canadian Studies.

Finally, **Mirosława Buchholtz** addresses the question of whether Munro's fiction teaches a "lesson" or conveys a "message." Analyzing and comparing two of Munro's stories: "The Office" and "To Reach Japan" and using Henry James's "The Lesson of the Master" as a point of reference, Buchholtz points to authorship, or agency in general, as a crucial issue in Munro's fiction (and life) and hence an important, though by no means straightforward, lesson for her readers.

There have been and will no doubt come many more books on Alice Munro. Recent publications include, for example, a volume which proves that students can not only enjoy reading Alice Munro's fiction but also write publishable essays on it. Eva-Sabine Zehelein, the editor of *For (Dear) Life: Close Readings of Alice Munro's Ultimate Fiction* (2014) encouraged fourteen students who participated in her seminar on *Dear Life* in the winter term 2013/2014 to write essays on the stories included in Munro's la(te)st volume. The result (available also at least in part as a Google Book) will certainly prove helpful in further teaching beyond its original setting at the University of Regensburg. The volume edited by Zehelein is a commendable effort especially as it hinges on close reading, which is where all serious scholarship should begin. Further insights are to be expected from the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro*.

Our book is addressed to teachers and students who have read or intend to read Alice Munro's fiction, would like to compare notes with other readers, and find new ways of approaching one of the most fascinating authors of our time, who in her quiet unassuming way keeps reading and interviewing us in her fiction.

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Part I
Understanding

Gender and Space in "The Albanian Virgin"

Dorota Filipczak

Abstract Beginning with Coral A. Howells' claim that "gender awareness" is crucial to Alice Munro's writings, Dorota Filipczak explores the way gender and space are managed in one of the most unusual stories in the Canadian writer's output "The Albanian Virgin." Examining a rigid division into male and female worlds in the traditional Albanian society, Munro brings to light the only exception that violates sexual segregation: the construction of a sworn virgin. Unsexed as a result of her own decision, approved by the patriarchal world, the sworn virgin who consorts with men is looked at in the article from the perspective of Judith Butler's critique of gender. Does the construction confirm Butler's stance or does it undo her "undoing" of gender? Acutely aware of prohibitions and taboos that beset women in her own country, Munro creates a Canadian character who is then albanized to be later reclaimed and canadianized anew. Her story is mediated to the reader due to the framing provided by the narrator, a bookshop owner preoccupied with Mary Shelley, whose take on gender and space is both reflected and subverted in the choices of Munrovian women.

1 Introduction

According to Coral Ann Howells, "gender awareness" is one of the "distinctive features" of Alice Munro's fiction (1998, p. 144). Munro, who came from a traditional and emotionally repressed community in Ontario, first set out to test the limits of socially constructed femininity in her debut volume of short stories *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), where she analyzed the collision between the role of a mother and wife and that of a writer. The female writer and narrator of the story entitled "The Office" utters memorable words in a conversation with her husband:

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> A house is all right for a man to work in. He brings his work into the house, a place is cleared for it; the house rearranges itself as best it can around him. Everybody recognizes that his work *exists* [...] A woman who sits staring into space, into a country that is not her husband's or her children's is […] an offence against nature. (Munro, 2000, p. 60)

The quotation immediately alerts the reader to the fundamental injustice at home where the above state of things is simply natural and is hardly ever questioned. Couched in post-Victorian imaginary, the passage describes the man as the one who ventures into the outside world and brings a part of it (his work) into the household, where his privilege cancels everyone else's needs. The house becomes his other costume; it is more informal, supple and pliable, which comes as no surprise, for the passage culminates with a comment on the woman: "She *is* the house; there is no separation possible" (Munro, 2000, p. 60). So it is the woman who "rearranges" herself around the man, becomes his harbour and the womb in which he will experience renewal. The passage proves that the society has not gone too far from the era of "the angel in the house," an ideal which certainly affects the female writer's position. The description of her idleness—she "sits staring"— is certainly negative, whereas the space she is staring into is not connected with her husband or children and therefore strengthens the sense of her being dangerously cut off from her moorings, maybe even sliding into an unwanted and disturbing psychological state.

Del Jordan, from Munro's only novel *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), begins to question the supposedly natural state of things when she is a teenager. At this age, unhampered by life choices, she can still afford naive optimism. She distances herself from her mother's failure to be a success in defiance of circumstances, because as a woman of a younger generation, Del takes success for granted. She will not heed maternal advice:

> I felt that [my mother's advice] was not so different from all the other advice handed out to women, to girls, advice that assumed that being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same. (Munro, 1990, p. 147)

The reader can immediately sense the stereotypes that the narrator of the previous story collided with. Being "damageable" was a specifically female condition in Victorian times, hence "self-protection" was called for, especially when it came to unmentionable sexual issues. Men, like the protagonist's husband from the story "The Office," can go out and are "supposed" to do it. It does not really matter what kind of experience they have, it can always be "shucked off," the colloquial phrase here stressing the casual or even unwelcome kind of experience, which remains on the outside. It is easily discarded, rather than internalized and turned into a damage. Del's response to the obvious injustice is phrased in the words of spontaneous teenage rebellion: "I had decided to do the same." Unlike the narrator of "The Office," Del will run a risk and fly in the face of the socially accepted constructions of femininity in order to defy them because of their limitations. These two women

illustrate the basic concern of many Munrovian heroines: "gender awareness" and the ensuing refusal to accept the post-Victorian double standards in light of which freedom to shape one's own life comes naturally to a man, but is denied to a woman.

A similar motif reappears in a completely different guise in a short story entitled "The Albanian Virgin" (*Open Secrets*, 1994), where Munro sets out to examine the gender agenda in the Albanian society of the 1920s, by writing about a Canadian tourist named Charlotte who becomes a member of an Albanian clan when her guide is shot by local mountaineers. According to Munro's biographer, the author did research into Albania and adjacent countries, and she modelled Charlotte on a librarian captured c. 1900 by Albanian "bandits" (Thacker, 2011, p. 432). Charlotte's misadventure provides her with access to the rigidly divided worlds of women and men, respectively, in the community of the Albanian mountaineers, for whom gender segregation is so explicit that the sexes do not even eat together, and the fact of sharing a bed at night is either denied or turned into jokes out of embarrassment. It seems that Munro, who consistently returns to the issue of what is and what is not accepted in a woman in the West—whether in the small-town reality of Ontario (Jubilee in *Lives of Girls and Women*) or the backward atmosphere of the unnamed city (in "The Office")—has found an interesting point of reference in a exotic and additionally exoticized context.

2 Charlotte/Lottar as a Woman in Transit

Munro begins her short story in a significant way: "[i]n the mountains, in Maltsia e madhe, she must have tried to tell them her name, and 'Lottar' was what they made of it." The sentence spells out the basic difficulty encountered by the Canadian character, i.e. her failure to stick to her foreign identity among strangers. Actually, Lottar, as we know her, is the heroine of a story told by an elderly woman (called Charlotte), who befriends Claire, the narrator. Claire has just separated from her husband in London, Ontario, and seems to be enjoying a room of her own, having set up a bookstore in Victoria, BC. Claire now spends most of her day in the space that used to be an enclave of male privilege in Victorian times, a space full of books that are not just supposed to please the common taste, but include sophisticated works not necessarily meant for average customers. The bookstore attracts an unusual couple, Charlotte and her husband Gjurdhi, who seem to be poor, though they face their condition with dignity and denial. It is Charlotte who comes to claim the reader's attention because of her way of dressing, her idiosyncracies and her assertive confidence. Lottar, the heroine of her story, is her younger version, as the name suggests. She is a female traveller who experienced a cultural shock while being away from the Empire, to which she belonged in her own conviction.

When Lottar's horse panicks at the sound of a shot and the female traveller falls and wounds her leg, the clan have to face "an embarrassing mistake" because they did not mean her to be a victim of their attack. As a nameless Franciscan explains to her, the death of her guide was the result of the blood feud between his family and

that of the attackers. The country is ruled by the traditional law (called *Kanun)* which sanctions vendetta; therefore, the mechanism of revenge operates in every generation of the family involved in the crime from the past. The Franciscan is a mediator between the two worlds, that of the men, with whom he can consort because of his sex, and that of the women, whom he can visit and talk to because of his role. Also, he can speak Italian, which is the only foreign language Lottar knows. Thus he becomes her informant and counsellor during her stay in Albania. Lottar slowly forgets her English, and learns "the language of the Ghegs," migrating mentally into a different discursive world. This is reflected in the change of name, which the clanswomen pronounce differently. Symbolically, the name Charlotte (her official self) becomes amputated as she loses her Canadian identity. But the name is also extended by means of a new syllable, exteriorizing a sequel to the past that seems lost in the telling.

It is interesting that after her accident Lottar is transported on a stretcher tied to the horses' backs into the clan's territory, where she is handed over to an old woman called Tima, who dresses her wound. The place is described as an "outbuilding of the big house, called the *kula*. It was the hut of the sick and dying. Not of giving birth, which these women did in the cornfields, or beside the path when they were carrying a load to market" (Munro, 1994, p. 82). The comment points to the lack of special care for women in childbirth. Childbirth can take place anywhere; there are no special places for the woman in labour. She can travail on the road literally, a traveller who can find herself giving birth in an unknown area or during domestic chores. In a different way than the protagonist of "The Office," the Albanian woman in labour "*is* the house" literally. The baby she is about to have is equal to "the load" she may be carrying to the market. Both must be taken care of by her alone. In contrast to birth, it is death that claims the attention of the community and is allocated a special space away from the living. Thus, death, which involves both sexes, is given a higher status than delivery, which involves a lonely woman often outside the house. The fact that the injured Lottar is placed in the "outbuilding" means that she is already in transit, moving either towards death or a change of status; at this moment she is a liminal figure on the periphery of the community.

Being in transit has many other meanings in Munro's texts. The narrator of "The Office" leaves home in search of a room of her own where she could write undisturbed, for at home her needs are incompatible with the demands her partner and children make on her. Similarly, Del insists on going out like a man in order to experience the world. In this she subconsciously repeats her mother's choice to go "on the road" (Munro, 1990, p. 54). Much as Del resents the fact that her mother sells encyclopedias, Del also hits "the road" in order to gain knowledge of the world rather than remain at home. Even before her mishap, young Lottar also refuses the shackles of convention connected with the travel in the company of respectable and dull people who "worried about being in strange places—what had they come for?" (Munro, 1994, p. 84). What bothers Lottar most is that her companions may have summoned Dr. Lamb from England to meet her, and an unwelcome marriage prospect already looms in sight. She is ready to run the risk of an expedition into the unknown with the guide in order to disrupt the monotony of imperial routine.

When Lottar recovers, she can move to the part of the house occupied by the women, and she is from then on constrained to take part in various household chores. Here she notices another detail that begs for attention. The Albanian women do not sit down in order to do the knitting. This is done on the way to the spring, in transit. An analogy can easily be spotted here. A woman who is involved in a creative effort, be it maternal, like giving birth, or practical though on the verge of artistic creation, has to be on the move. It is the woman's being on the road that matters, rather than the product of her body or her hands, which should "never be idle" (Munro, 1994, p. 87), according to the saying of the clan. This prevents the local women from experiencing the condition described by the narrator of "The Office." They cannot sit "staring into space, into a country that is not [their] husband's or [their] children's" (Munro, 2000, p. 60).

It is the custom of Albanian women to compete with one another in who is going to carry the heaviest load to the market or achieve something else that is equally difficult. Munro observes here a regulatory mechanism that plays into male hands, for while women compete and work incessantly, the men do nothing in particular, and whatever they do is not the women's concern. While women decorate the clothes they sew or knit for the men, their recipients clean the guns or ornament them, and take part in the blood feuds which punctuate their lives. Munro trivializes the *Kanun* which still has power over remote parts of Albania. Men go to the killing with "a lot of laughing, singing and firing off the blanks." Women are not allowed at their councils or on their expeditions. The only serene moment Lottar recalls is when young girls and broad women bathe together in the river after harvesting tobacco. It is then that there is a lot of merriment; they splash water on one another and treat Lottar as their equal. The fun combined with hygiene seems to be the only time of freedom and carelessness.

3 Sexing the Space

It is not accidental that Claire, who is the listener to the story, wrote her MA thesis on Mary Shelley's later novels. In fact, she is much more taken with "the impetuous Mary" and women who surrounded her. Thus the bookshop owner is really a researcher into the life and fiction of yet another woman who had to combine her passion for writing with the female role, an undercurrent that flows throughout Munro's fiction, as we have seen in "The Office" and *Lives of Girls and Women*. Mary Shelley's take on Gothicism, moreover, involves the effects of gender segregation and their being reflected in space and movement, which is also the Munrovian concern. *Frankenstein* illustrates the drastic separation of the private world of female experience and the public world of men (Mellor, 1988, p. 116). Men can travel, gather experience and cultivate their minds, while women stay enclosed in their private emotional space. Men can also err dangerously and confess their errors, sympathy and absolution being granted to them as a matter of course. Women, in turn, are exempt from the dangerous knowledge that might render them

unsuitable as guardians of innocent lives they will eventually mother. Munrovian heroines claim a similar right to err while making their choices outside home. They need to create a space of their own making rather than hold on to the one that has been charted out for them.

While the space inhabited by local people is managed in a different way in "The Albanian Virgin," men and women will not travel together. A woman carrying "the load" to delivery has nothing in common with a man who has to avenge his kin or travels to a council connected with another blood feud. While men and women could share the same space physically when eating or being on the move, they would not communicate or remain together then. Their perspectives would never meet, because the community has invested in regulatory mechanisms that keep the male and female worlds apart. Thus Charlotte/Lottar is bound to confront the world where the female role is as circumscribed as in the conventional, imperial reality that she left of her own will in order to err dangerously.

4 Beyond "Gender Trouble"

Considering Claire's concern with Mary Shelley's life and works, it is not surprising that she is avid to listen to the story of a female traveller and absolute gender segregation in Albania. However, in Albania there is an amazing exception that Lottar becomes aware of:

> One night, when Lottar served one man his food […] she noticed what small hands [the guest] had and hairless wrists. Yet he was not young, he was not a boy. A wrinkled, leathery face, without a mustache. She listened for his voice in the talk, and it seemed to her hoarse but womanish. But he smoked, he ate with the men, he carried a gun. (Munro, 1994, p. 89)

The "man" in question is a woman dressed like a man, and therefore accepted as an equal in the male company. "His" voice can be heard in the talk, even though women are not permitted to participate in the exchange. This is how Lottar discovers the Albanian social construction of a virgin, that is, a woman who renounces her traditional female role and sexuality. After such a woman puts on male clothes, she may not only perform male tasks but also consort with men, and enjoy the pleasures of togetherness and conversation but without a sexual relationship. It seems that the total elimination of sexuality is meant to prevent the possibility of unclassifiable liasons. A woman referred to as "he" after becoming a virgin is no longer an adequate partner; a liason with her might be seen then as homosexual. Thus precautions seem to have been taken to exclude the behaviour that would be unacceptable in a traditional society. The construction of Albanian virgin does not overlap with Judith Butler's performative model (1999, p. xv). Referring to Butler, Young and Rice state that "unlike the drag queen the change of dress for sworn virgins inaugurates" (2012, p. 69) the transformation into a man. It is neither heterosexual nor lesbian. Thus it cannot be easily accommodated by Butler's concept of "undoing gender," which suffers from limitations connected with the

lack of crosscultural perspective. While Butler's repository of concepts is anchored in the Western culture of Europe or America, her approach fails to register the cultural and historical diversity of both continents. Albania is a case in point. While territorially European and quite old, the concept of the Albanian virgin eludes easy classifications. Sanctioned by the traditional code of Albanian law, the *Kanun,* the construction of the virgin is the only way to bridge the gap between the segregated worlds of men and women. This is how a woman can enter the male space, by forsaking the communal space of women, and their concerns, labour and emotions.

5 "The Gender of Choice"

Sarah Salih notes that Butler warns against understanding gender performance as a voluntary and theatrical act of choice. Salih quotes the following from *Bodies That Matter:*

> If I were to argue that genders are performative that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its right place at night. (Butler qtd. in Salih, 2001, p. 35)

And yet Munro repeatedly insists upon the theatricality of gender, disguises and costumes. It is particularly clear in the various rites of passage that her heroine Lottar undergoes within one day. First, when she is dressed as a bride, Lottar finds herself

> disappearing into a white blouse with gold embroidery, a red bodice with fringed epaulets, a sash of striped silk a yard wide and a dozen yards long, a black-and-red wool skirt, with chain after chain of false gold being thrown over her hair. (Munro, 1994, p. 91–92)

The choice of words is highly relevant, for Lottar "disappears" into her new costume. Her hair is dyed black, and her face is sprinkled with flour. The excessive artificiality of this folk look is supposed to petrify her into an Albanian bride poised to marry a Muslim on the strength of an arrangement between the clan and the man in question—all without Lottar's consent or even knowledge of what is happening. But for the intrusion of the domineering Franciscan who disrupts the preparations, the marriage would have gone ahead. Instead, upon the priest's urging, Lottar agrees to become a virgin and thus avoid compulsory marriage. The wedding dress is taken off, and Lottar dons "men's trousers, worn and with no braid, and a shirt and a head scarf" (Munro, 1994, p. 93). The clothes are plain and practical enough; they also allow uninhibited movements. Lottar is freed from the burden of womanhood at the cost of losing her right to give birth to sons, the clan's priority as far as women are concerned.

Since she now belongs to neither sex, Lottar cannot stay with either women or men. She has to mount a slope where she resides in a provisional shelter, and is given the job of minding and milking the sheep. Lottar thus combines female

preoccupation through the connection with milk, and male freedom of movement. Even if men visit her to give advice, share a cigarette, talk and laugh with her, she spends her nights alone. Nobody will ever venture into her bed. Nor will she experience the togetherness of communal sleep with the women. Of the females, she is visited by girls only, who come over to get the milk, and who become quite "wild" in the absence of their mothers. Men never appear at the same time as the girls, but much later, seemingly to relax, but also to offer Lottar small gifts. Interestingly, this is the only acceptable way she can experience togetherness and sharing in the male company. Yet, she has to be adequately defeminized to enable the luxury of relaxed communication between the two sexes. Her clothes and carelessness of image are a part of that, and so is her casual lifestyle. The bonus of the situation for Lottar is that the priest often visits the men who come to talk to her.

It is interesting to juxtapose passages from Munro's story against the actual cases of Albanian virgins documented in journalism. Demick (2011, p. 95) provides an example of Sema Brahimi who "decided to become a man" at the age of fourteen. Her family and friends began to refer to her by means of masculine pronouns, while she confessed to a journalist "I've not had a bad life as a man." Dresscode was a very important element of her metamorphosis; Sema/Selman wore a suit to "his" brother's wedding and had chosen a wife for him. The woman who decides to become a virgin does not have to be one in the technical sense of the word, but it is the decision to take a vow of chastity that turns her into one. In other words, the decision is not determined by physical factors, but by the woman's personal choice, and it is perhaps the only choice she is allowed to make in order to defy patriarchy on the strength of male approval. The reasons why women embrace this role are connected with the avoidance of an arranged marriage or a decision to fill in the void in the family left by the death of the father. Also, women who give birth to girls only are not highly respected. Hence, it is not unusual for a girl in a family of many girls who has a living father to become a virgin. Thus the decision is not a question of following one's non-normative sexual desire or subversive practice. It is a rational act of will that strengthens the gender segregation. It takes place because the welfare of the family or a female individual threatened with unwanted wedlock occasionally requires an exception that is strictly controlled by the patriarchal law.

6 Conclusion: Out of the Closet

As she has parted with other costumes, Lottar is bound to part with the costume of the "sworn virgin." The Franciscan arrives at an unusual time of the day in order to see her alone and convince her to leave the place in his company. He escorts her to Skodra to hand her over to a bishop. Upon Lottar's request that she might stay in his house and do the chores, the Franciscan refuses because it is impossible for a priest in Albania to have a female servant. Sworn virgins can journey alone on male business, but not with a priest. Hence Lottar is referred to as his male servant. Also, he insists that Lottar should not speak.

When Lottar re-enters the previous identity, she can hardly speak her own language. Significantly, a tub is brought out into the yard for her to bathe in outside the British Consulate. This invites a comparison with her residing in an outbuilding for the sick and the dying on the territory of the clan. She is a liminal person. Also, she must be appropriately groomed to be returned to the previous condition. "Her clothes taken away. Probably burned. Her greasy black, vermin-infested hair cut off" (Munro, 1994, p. 109). Again, Lottar steps out of the role defined by her disguise to find out that a holiday from her previous self has estranged her completely. When she prepares to embark and cross the ocean, she finds out that the nameless Franciscan, whom she tried to summon uselessly in longing and farewell after they parted, is now waiting on the dock.

In Canada Charlotte and Gjurdhi are disrobed from their costumes totally. They have both made a cultural transit. She stopped being a sworn virgin from the Albanian community. He stopped being a priest and became her husband. A city-dweller who is Claire's customer refers to the couple as the Duchess and the Algerian; both wear cloaks, and their unusual choice of clothes always attracts attention. At some stage Claire visits their apartment, but when she tries to track them down much later, they are no longer there. Have they discarded their cloaks and gone out in search of their new selves? Claire will never know. Neither fitted in with the conventions in a rather traditional city. Charlotte was too much of an intellectual, as Claire found out during their conversations, while Gjurdhi was too much of an exotic stranger. According to what is predictable, they shucked off another experience and moved on "proud," to recall Del Jordan's youthful comment. Like Del at the end of *Lives of Girls and Women*, they vanished into the open space of their own making which defies the closure connected with fixed identity.

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Images of Past and Present: Memory and Identity in Alice Munro's Short-Story Cycles

Jędrzej Burszta

Abstract Munro's narratives are characteristically intense and condensed character studies, intimate and psychological portraits of women and men, frequently embedded in the dynamic clash between individualism (e.g. figures of outsiders) and community (family, small town setting, etc.). Arguably Munro dedicates the form of her stories to their content, referencing in different works similar narrative patterns and tropes, for instance the theme of home-coming, and the tension arising from contrasting lifestyles (modern and "urban" vs. "rural" and narrowed-minded). She constructs her characters' identities by interweaving images of past and present in multi-layered narratives of individual memory. In this chapter Jędrzej Burszta analyzes several short stories (grouped together according to their themes), while focusing in particular on the three-story cycle in her 2004 collection *Runaway* ("Chance," "Soon" and "Silence"), a psychological study of the character of Juliet carried out over a number of years, in which the writer deals with many themes that have been reoccurring in her work since the publication of her debut collection.

1 Introduction

This essay focuses on selected material from Alice Munro's extensive body of work, specifically three larger pieces—short-story cycles told by a single narrator, and therefore more similar in structure to a traditional novel. The first part of this essay examines two of Munro's earlier distinguished collections, the whole-book story sequences *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978, also known under the American title *The Beggar Maid*), with particular emphasis on the relation between memory and identity, while the second part provides a reading of a three-story cycle published in the more recent collection *Runaway* (2004): "Chance," "Soon," and "Silence."

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Munro's stories are characteristically intense and condensed character studies, intimate psychological portraits of women coming to terms with their complicated life histories, significantly embedded in the dynamic clash between individualism and society, and its profound influence on one's life. The liberating force of distancing oneself from either family—or, to a larger extent, childhood community, both in psychological and geographical terms—marks a turning point in many of Munro's stories, especially those which are part of bigger story cycles that follow a single protagonist's attempts at making sense of the world. The omniscient narrators of these stories recount their troubled upbringing in order to provide insight into their identities, and understand the sources of later troubles, misfortunes, anxieties and failures. For Munro, childhood remains a defining phase of life, the time when one's character is shaped, since everything that happens to the child protagonists—everything the child observes, records, or chooses to ignore—becomes the basic experience of identity-formation. As Murphy (2009, p. 49) points out in her essay on memory and identity in Munro's fiction, the Canadian writer's characters "struggle to forge their identities in a crucible of connections: of one place to the next, of the past to the present, and of one sexual being to another," to a large extent echoing the autobiographical nature of Munro's writing. The way Munro handles the characters' efforts—the process of (re-)discovering and understanding their identities—links together images of past and present in a multi-layered narrative of individual memory, a theme which will be further explored in the following pages.

1.1 Lives of Girls and Women

Del Jordan from *Lives of Girls and Women* and Rose from *Who Do You Think You Are?* are both retrospective narrators, a common feature in Munro's short stories. Their narrations exemplify the tension that arises from contrasting the young, naive observer from the past (the narrated) with the adult storyteller (the narrating), who is reflecting on her upbringing from a distance of time. She is distanced from the story but also invested in it. The nature of the short story allows the author to transgress the traditional linearity of the novel, as Munro masterfully demonstrates in *Lives of Girls and Women*. The young-girl-as-narrator shifts between being an active participant in the events she is recalling, someone possessing agency, and being a passive, nonetheless remarkably attentive observer. She acts in the past, but narrates in the present. What does she see? The world of adults, naturally, whether consisting of members of her close family, or the small-town or rural communities of southern Ontario, the setting of most of Munro's fictions.

The story of Del Jordan, told through eight intertwined short stories, chronicles the young girl's coming-of-age, the process of "growing up to be a disillusioned but wisely maladjusted adult" (Bowering, 1979/1980, p. 4), and is regarded as one of Munro's works that is most explicitly immersed in feminist sensitivity. *Lives of Girls and Women* examines the depth of socially constructed gender discrimination

forced upon the individual—a young woman—by relatives, closest neighbors and school friends, institutionalized religion and, ultimately, culture and society. In *Alice Munro: Paradox and Parallel*, W.R. Martin identifies the novel as "a study of Del's social, sexual, emotional and intellectual growth and maturation—brought into some coherent or accepted relation with one another" (1987, p. 63). All of the connected stories take place in a small town in rural Ontario sometime during the 1940s and 1950s. The young Del tells the stories of the people in her life: her mother, an ambitious and well-educated woman trying to find an expression for her ambitions among the small-minded community, as well as her aunts and uncles, neighbors, friends from school and lovers. Although the stories generally follow a chronological order, moving through the years to show the narrator's growth, each one is also organized according to a particular theme, frequently an epiphanic moment or some revelatory detail shedding new light on past events. Sometimes a theme which is introduced in one story is then further developed in one of the following sequences, thus arranging the cycle in a thematic progression. The chronology is challenged by the narrator's growing sense of self-reflection, "as Del endlessly invents and reinvents personae for herself, some of them idealised and imaginary, some of them created in resistance to the role models offered by her mother and the women in her family and social community" (Howells, 1998: 33). For instance, Del's internal struggle with coming to terms with the notion of death, first introduced in the story "Heirs to the Living Body," which tells of her uncle Craig's funeral, is later expanded in "Age of Faith," where the protagonist attempts to find an answer in religion. *Lives of Girls and Women* is ultimately a subtly arranged extensive character study of Del, reflected through different interactions and connections with other people from her childhood—a recurrent theme of the Nobel Prize winner's writing.

Interactions with other people are followed by constant connections between the past and the present. Del, the omniscient voice that narrates her own story, tries to establish a connection between memory and identity, a difficult process that seldom brings satisfactory results, as "the problems inherent in such connection provide the central conflicts of Munro's fictions" (Murphy, 2009, p. 45). This inner conflict is symbolically evoked in the final pages of "Heirs to the Living Body." After her uncle's death, his two younger sisters, Aunt Elspeth and Aunt Grace, burden Del with an uneasy task, compelling her to make a promise that she will continue her deceased relative's life-long project: a chronicle of local history. For years Uncle Craig worked on a manuscript that detailed the intertwined connections between the history of Wawanash County and their own family tree. Del approached his tedious work with distrust and reserve, self-reflectively forming a silent protest against the unwanted commitment:

> Nobody in our family had done anything remarkable. They had married other Irish Protestants, and had large families. Some did not marry. Some of the children died young. Four in one family were burned in a fire. One man lost two wives at childbirth. One married a Roman Catholic. […] And to Uncle Craig it seemed necessary that the names of all these people, their connections with each other, the three large dates of birth and marriage and death, or the two of birth and death if that was all that happened to them, be discovered […]

> and written down here, in order, in his own large careful handwriting. […] It was not the individual names that were important, but the whole solid, intricate structure of lives supporting us from the past. (Munro, 1983, p. 26)

Uncle Craig's enduring obsession with meticulously chronicling the lives of his family sheds light on the relationship between the past and the present, and the narrator's critical stance towards it. At first Del agrees, although reluctantly—indeed, as a child who does not yet have the strength to actively oppose her older relatives—and accepts the assigned task of protecting and carrying on her uncle's research, presumably continuing to register the unremarkable lives of her family. The manuscript is passed on to her ceremoniously, not unlike a priceless artifact or sacred script. However, she quickly forgets about it, and stashes it away in the cellar, only to find out some years later that an unexpected flooding of her family home had destroyed the precious document. The narrator recognizes that she did not even check how severe the damage had been, or if anything could be saved, her sole commentary being only that the manuscript was "a mistake from start to finish." In the concluding paragraph of the story Del thinks about her aunts, now two elderly women, and their unquestionable faith in her willingness to act as a transmitter of tradition: "I thought of them watching the manuscript leave their house in its padlocked box and I felt remorse, that kind of tender remorse which has on its other side a brutal, unblemished satisfaction" (Munro, 1983, p. 53). The girl is liberated from the forceful pressure of her family's history, an experience that at the same time frees her from the fixed and constricted identity transmitted through tradition, here imagined as some useless heritage, a set of dates, names and events entirely removed from her own life.

Del Jordan's ambivalent reaction to the fate of her uncle's chronicle may be seen as an expression of her will to separate from her own complicated upbringing. Through the numerous events she meticulously describes, the small details of everyday life seemingly not related to each other, sometimes even unimportant or vague, the protagonist of *Lives of Girls and Women* deconstructs her identity, disembodies it into smaller parts and particles—which also include the biographies of other people. In her narration, not only stretching over many years but also narrated from the specific perspective of an adult reflecting on an adolescent, the past becomes a tapestry of different experiences. Although Munro never reveals what has happened to the narrator in her adult life, only hinting at some possibilities (e.g. Del becoming a writer), many of the childhood proceedings that she describes function as self-realizations or little epiphanies, often harsh lessons learnt and incorporated into her own life, a material that is critically used to form her own identity.[1]

[1]As W.R. Martin acknowledges in his analysis of the novel, and as other scholars have written about more extensively (e.g. Moss, 1977, pp. 54–68; Rasporich, 1990, pp. 32–88), sexuality is a central theme for Alice Munro, particularly the young heroines' first sexual experiences. This theme, however, in many ways crucial for reading Munro's fictions, is only signaled here, and will not be further addressed in this essay.

1.2 *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Munro's fourth collection of stories, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, is constructed in the form of a *Bildungsroman* consisting of ten short stories centered around the protagonist Rose. Similarly as in *Lives of Girls and Women*, each story depicts a separate episode from the narrator's life. The theme of identity is explicitly stated in the title of the collection, a question relating to the complexities of Rose's life, especially with regard to the relation between her past—here once again the narrator is engrossed in her childhood and adolescence years—and her present, following a composition which begins and ends in the same place: the small rural town Hanratty, located in Ontario, the essential milieu of Munro's imagination.

Rose spends her childhood years living in an impoverished home with her father, stepbrother and stepmother. The stepmother, in turns a central or a marginal figure in Rose's recollections, remains a constant point of reference in the protagonist's identity-forming process—sometimes a negative role model, other times a person with whom Rose feels the closest connection, despite their strained relationship. Mother figures, and the antagonistic relationships between mothers and daughters in general, is a popular theme in Munro's writing. Rose and Flo's relationship is full of tension, and can be described as competitive and unapologetic, fueled by a much-invested interplay between attraction and repulsion. The sources of their conflict are lightly sketched from the beginning; whether because of the persistence of an unmentioned conflict over the abusive father and husband, painfully characterized in the opening story "Royal Beatings," or because of later events coinciding with the protagonist's decision to pursue a life not accepted by her stepmother. The reader follows Rose's complex biography, spread out not only over many years, but also entrenched in spatial transitions, as travel in Munro's fictions is often equated with transgression, psychological and emotional change experienced on the deepest level, including, for example, the notion of travel as a marker of the female protagonist's first sexual experience. The stories catalogue Rose's accomplishments: she finishes school, goes to college, marries the wrong man, gives birth to a daughter, divorces, pursues several career paths (actress, drama teacher, presenter), and finally, in the closing titular story, returns home in the wake of Flo's illness and death.

The narrative arc of *Who Do You Think You Are?* relies on the growth of Rose's character, which, as Brad Hopper states in his book-length study of Munro's fiction, is what "makes the difference between a true short-story cycle and merely a collection of stories written with little or no pre-planning of the collection as a whole" (2008, p. 59). The episodes or sequences provide glimpses into different periods of Rose's life, and invite readers to engage with the question raised in the book's title. Rose's identity is tested against different circumstances, recalled through memories critically reassessed and poised against each other. Her quest for individualism is inherently and openly feminist (for more on Alice Munro as feminist, see: Rasporich, 1990, pp. 34–36, 59–69), engrossed in the interplay between past and present emotions. For instance, a traumatic experience of abuse may be downplayed

by intersecting a young girl's memory with her present-day consciousness, as in the story "Wild Swans," where a potentially transgressive sexual experience is described in a distant, dry style reinforced by ambiguity.

Two major relationships cast a shadow on the narrator's adult life. Flo functions as a critical assessor of Rose's successes, an embarrassing reminder not only of where she came from—the working-class rural periphery of the country—but also of the people she left behind, who sometimes remain a critical voice sounding in her head. In "Spelling," Rose invites Flo to join her at a reception after some film ceremony during which she was to receive an award. Contrary to her expectations, her stepmother arrives at the party, dressed in bad taste and, to the protagonist's utmost horror, wearing a wig—an embarrassing symbol of her family's social status. Rose's past haunts her throughout her life, although rarely can she comprehend this influence in a given moment; the narrating woman is much more aware of these conditions than the narrated girl. While studying in college, the heroine rents a room in the house of Dr. Henshawe, an influential figure in the college community. The mental and spatial dissonance between life *here*, among the educated, intellectual middle-class, and *there*, among her working-class relatives, comes as a surprise to Rose, who gains insight into her own social identity. This journey of self-realization is painful, for it changes not only the way she feels about herself, but also how she remembers her past:

> Before she came to Dr. Henshawe's, Rose had never heard of the working class. […] Dr. Henshawe's house had done one thing. It had destroyed the naturalness, the taken-for-granted background, of home. To go back there was to go quite literally into a crude light. Flo had put fluorescent lights in the store and the kitchen. There was also, in a corner of the kitchen, a floor lamp Flo had won at Bingo; its shade was permanently wrapped in wide strips of cellophane. What Dr. Henshawe's house and Flo's house did best, in Rose's opinion, was discredit each other. […] Poverty was not just wretchedness, as Dr. Henshawe seemed to think, it was not just deprivation. It meant having those ugly tube lights and being proud of them. It meant continual talk of money and malicious talk about new things people had bought and whether they were paid for. It meant pride and jealousy flaring over something like the new pair of plastic curtains, imitating lace, that Flo had bought for the front window. That as well as hanging your clothes on nails behind the door and being able to hear every sound from the bathroom. (Munro, 1979, pp. 70–71)

Quite suddenly in Rose's eyes, little common things she remembers from home become a sign of class distinction. She becomes class-conscious; moreover, her initial reaction is embarrassment, although limited primarily to representations of material culture. Among other complications that arise in her life outside home, Rose's second important relationship with Patrick, her college boyfriend and later husband, has similar significance on the troubling process of identity-shaping. As the narrator states in the opening sentence of the story "Beggar Maid," "Patrick Blatchford was in love with Rose," a statement which in a way reveals the main theme of the short story—Rose's reluctance to accept his feelings, and her own ambivalence towards him, which both rest in part on her newly awakened class identity. Patrick comes from a rich family owning a chain of department stores in British Columbia. As their shy romance begins to develop, Rose invites him for a visit to her hometown, after having undertaken a similar trip to his parents. During

their stay at Flo's home, she is once again confronted with the feeling of shame, one more epiphanic moment that weaves together her past and present: "She was ashamed of the food and the swan and the plastic tablecloth; ashamed for Patrick, the gloomy snob, who made a startled grimace when Flo passed him the toothpick-holder; ashamed for Flo with her timidity and hypocrisy and pretentions; most of all ashamed for herself" (Munro, 1979, p. 90). Only at this moment does Rose recognize the distance existing between her family and his, which is most apparent in language: the way her relatives talk by shouting, the accent, pronunciation, the things people say "like lines from the most hackneyed rural comedy."

Rose, "the beggar maid," does however accept, at least to some extent, her heritage—her social identity. In a style typical of Munro, the story unexpectedly sails into the future, providing a glimpse into the protagonist's thoughts and feelings on past events. The narrator signals the emerging acceptance of her roots—and, moreover, the social dissonance they so often evoke—commenting on her past cowardice in being comfortable "with her people." With a slight satisfaction the narrator reflects: "Years later she would learn how to use it, she would be able to amuse or intimidate right-thinking people at dinner parties with glimpses of her early home" (Munro, 1979, p. 91). It may seem that in the case of Alice Munro, the notion of class distinction is inseparably linked with the label of a "regionalist writer," not only frequently applied to her by critics and literary scholars, but adopted by the author herself, perhaps even more willingly than that of a "Canadian writer." In her study of the writer, JoAnn McCaig connects Munro's penchant for setting her stories in rural sceneries with the important individual experience of being a writer who arrives on the literary scene from outside of the Canadian literary establishment. Once more the notion of the center and margin comes to mind. McCaig argues that "Munro's regionalism could well be linked to her own sense of marginalization arising from an (imagined or actual) inferior class position; in other words, in the 'plurality of selves' that define the author function, one important 'self' in Munro's self-construction as author is that of a person lacking certain socioeconomic advantages" (2002, pp. 41–42). Like her heroine, the young Munro, in the years before she achieved recognition, also experienced a feeling of being disconnected, being an outsider, an intruder from the geographical and cultural peripheries.

Alice Munro's work is traditionally associated with the writings of American regionalist writers, especially Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty or Flannery O'Connor (Rasporich, 1990, pp. 121–158). The author of *Dance of the Happy Shades* indeed focuses on locality, envisioning a region as a place that is geographical as well as it is mental, cultural, and ultimately an anthropological space of meaning that also holds the possibility of transgressing particular spatial divisions in order to bring out the universal qualities rooted in local contexts. Munro's characters are inseparable from their surroundings. Munro's regionalism not only mythologizes southwestern Ontario, but also serves as a genesis of her (predominantly female) protagonists' identities; as Beverly Jean Rasporich convincingly sums up, their "evolution begins in the Orenoch swamp, the Wawanash River, the dusty roads and red brick houses, and Munro and her characters are drawn back,

almost compulsively, to review the country of their origins" (1990, p. 122). The theme of home-coming is central for *Who Do You Think You Are?* Rose, an outsider for her entire life, returns to Hanratty after Flo's death, and the final stories in the collection deal almost exclusively with the tension arising from her resettling in a once familiar context now transformed and reappropriated by her own memories. The modern "urban" way of living represented by Rose and contested by the small-town folk clashes with the "rural" narrow-mindedness, isolationism, patriarchy, black-and-white way of thinking—in the end, all of the negative connotations that Rose had come to associate with her home region. Munro's heroines are, however, flawed; no matter how hard they resist any connections with their place of origin—as Rose has done, spending much of her life traveling between different cities, opposing the traditional sedateness characterizing rural life with her mobility—they always return, partly led back by nostalgia, a hopeless attachment to their "country of the mind." Although at some point Rose disregards her stepmother's fondness for cherishing memories from "a time long ago," stating that in her view "present time and past, the shady melodramatic past of Flo's stories, were quite separate […]. Present people could not be fitted into the past" (Munro, 1979, p. 10), and although she had tried to cut off her roots, abandon her heritage, in the end she comes back to the place she despises, the people she hates, and the identity she spent her whole life rejecting. The construction of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is similarly repetitive as its protagonist's story, and the titular question resurfaces from time to time, like an annoying reminder that, despite everything, in Munro's gothic world identity haunts you not unlike a ghost: "Who do you think you are? This was not the first time in her life Rose had been asked who she thought she was; in fact the question had often struck her like a monotonous gong and she paid no attention to it" (Munro, 1979, p. 200).

2 "Chance," "Soon," and "Silence"

In 2004 Munro published her eleventh collection of short stories entitled *Runaway*. Along with the other five separate pieces the book also consisted of a hundred-page cycle, a trilogy of stories "Chance," "Soon" and "Silence." The triptych revolves around the character of Juliet and provides an intricate psychological portrait of a woman set over the course of several decades. Although, when compared to previous book-length short-story cycles described above (or *The View from Castle Rock* from 2006), this three-piece narrative may seem much less demanding on the reader, and most certainly is much less complex in terms of construction or investigated themes, it is nonetheless another instance of Munro challenging the tradition of the short story genre by enhancing it with in-depth characterization more proper for a novel. It is perhaps sufficient to reference Brad Hopper's observation on the specific quality of the writer's peculiar choice of structure:

> A short-story cycle has inherent attractiveness, even a cycle comprised only of three stories: demonstrating how stories can work together for enhanced impact and depth in their total effect and at the same time avoiding the crowdedness often felt in novel chapters; at the same time appealing to readers who tire of the usual stop-start of a standard story collection wherein the component stories have little in the way of linkages. (Hopper, 2008, p. 139)

I would add to this remark that the short-story cycle composition also enables the author to construct a bigger narrative arc that reflects upon the stories as separate entries as well as interrelated parts that constitute a larger whole, more multifaceted insights into a particular character. They may be read individually, as each builds upon a certain climax—although, as it is often in Munro's case, no obvious resolution is offered to the reader. Only when read in its entirety does the cycle acquire a more nuanced and perhaps more significant conclusion, one that can be established on a closer examination of the protagonist's lifelong journey. The stories work well together primarily because they share the common heroine, but unlike a novel, the structure of each individual story rests upon a chosen theme, a detailed case study of an event in her life, which may then progress further, or return in an expanded form in another story. The jumps in time, the movement between episodes from different time periods, enables the author to reveal crucial turning points, or re-contextualize the character's past actions, providing a link between seemingly distant incidents. The final pages of this essay will focus on the prevailing theme present in the *Runaway* cycle, in a direct continuation of the examination of the same problematic identified in the stories of Del and Rose: identity-shaping as a difficult and ultimately unsatisfying process of weaving together the past and the present, a never completed work of recognition and search for self-acceptance.

"Chance" introduces the character of Juliet, a twenty-one-year-old postgraduate student working on a Ph.D. in Classics. The story takes place in the year 1965. Juliet decides to accept a temporary teaching position in a remote small town, essentially wishing to distance herself, at least for some time, from the academic community. In just a few words Munro brilliantly sketches the nature of sexism that her protagonist is exposed to at the university, with male professors explicitly stating their displeasure with the fact that a young girl, not a boy, is interested in classic languages, since: "If she got married […] she would waste all her hard work and theirs" (Munro, 2004, p. 86). The plot of the short story concentrates on Juliet's train journey to Vancouver, during which she meets Eric, an older fisherman from the coast. Momentarily intrigued by each other, the pair spends the night together. Six months later a letter arrives at her school, inviting Juliet to visit the man, now a fresh widower. Juliet uses the opportunity—her "chance" signaled in the title—and travels to the coast, only to find out that Eric's situation is much more complicated, as he lives surrounded by a network of sympathetic women; nevertheless, their relationship flourishes.

This provides a necessary back-story for "Soon," in which, four years later, Juliet returns to her Ontario hometown for a visit at her parents' house, together with her thirteen-month-old daughter, Penelope. The story revolves around the tension that comes to the surface when Juliet is subjected to the conservatism of her previous surroundings, the small-town community of the late 1960s. Its inhabitants,

neighbors and old high-school friends, express—directly or indirectly, albeit in both instances without any delicacy or empathy—their dismissal of Eric and Juliet's "love child," born outside of marriage. In a interesting scene in which she is chatting with an old acquaintance from school, the heroine experiences a flood of contradictory emotions, having realized that in her native milieu she is now perceived as "a woman displaying the fruits of a boldly sexual life. Juliet, of all people. The gawk, the scholar" (Munro, 2004, p. 170). The conflict between the gender roles imposed by society and the woman's individual path, positioned in the historical context of 1960s changing models of culture and society, reinforces the story's underlying message of self-liberation. Juliet experiences an identity crisis. She sees herself in the eyes of others, cast into a marginal or even liminal position of a double outsider, a perspective that grants her a sudden clearness and double-consciousness. Her past and present identity are no longer corresponding—she is forced to search for a new understanding of herself.

Munro attunes the form of her stories to their content, and thus "Soon" weaves together two separate, albeit closely related narrations: Juliet's memories from childhood and her present-day interactions. Her relationship with her parents, Sara and Sam, serves as a connection between these two planes, or rather a sign of disconnection, since the young mother quickly comes to a sad realization: she has become an embarrassment for her parents. They feel ashamed of her *modern* life choices (symbolically represented by a painting she bought for them, too modern and aesthetically insulting to be hung on the wall), especially since her "scandalous" behavior had most probably cost her father his thirty-year career as a teacher in the local school. In a similar vein as in *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro enlists religion as one of the constraints of individual freedom, here represented by a supposedly friendly pastor, an acquaintance of her mother, who confronts Juliet and tries to pressure her into feeling guilty. Juliet finds herself isolated from her family and torn apart by her willingness to address their doubts on the one hand, and her new-found sense of freedom on the other. In the final passages of the story, she is unable to promise her sick mother that she will come back to visit her anytime in the foreseeable future—"soon," as the title of the story alludes. In the closing coda the reader learns that Sara passed away shortly after the events of the story, and Juliet wonders on her stubbornness—her final act of disobedience, of not giving her mother a simple promise, which "[t]o Sara would have meant so much—to herself, surely, so little" (Munro, 2004, p. 207). In yet another flashforward, the narrator mentions finding a letter she had send to Eric during her stay at her parent's house, a fabricated consolation story. In the letter Juliet presents a false account of the visit, self-consciously ignoring and censoring all of the unpleasant remarks and situations. Her emotions, again, are made more lucid thanks to the insightful distancing of time, and evocatively encapsulate the underlying theme of "Soon":

> She wondered at the sprightly cover-up, contrasting with the pain of her memories. Then she thought that some shift must have taken place, at that time, which she had not remembered. Some shift concerning where home was. Not at Whale Bay with Eric but back where it had been before, all her life before.

> Because it's what happens at home that you try to protect, as best you can, for as long as you can. (Munro, 2004, pp. 206–207)

The third story, entitled "Silence," takes place many years later, and moves through several decades, offering only brief glimpses into Juliet's later life. The short story deals with the character's reaction to a mysterious and devastating disappearance of her daughter Penelope, now a woman in her twenties. The reader is informed that Penelope left for a retreat of sorts, initially planning to go away only for a couple of months. As time passes, Juliet, now worried about her daughter's absence, meets the leader of a spiritual, alternative community her daughter had joined, but learns nothing about her whereabouts. The short story moves into the future several times, portraying the protagonist's struggle to come to terms with her situation. Why was she abandoned? The only sign of life she receives throughout the years from her missing daughter are unsigned birthday postcards. One day she accidentally meets one of her daughter's old friends Heather, who informs her that Penelope is living happily in the North and has five children. "Silence" ends with the now middle-aged Juliet trying to find a new purpose for her life, a disillusioned, lonely woman who, despite all her efforts, cannot understand the reasons why her daughter chose to leave her without any explanation. There is no final resolution—the mystery remains unsolved, as both the reader and Juliet are left to wonder on the girl's motivations: "She keeps on hoping for a word from Penelope, but not in any strenuous way. She hopes as people who know better hope for underserved blessings, spontaneous remissions, things of that sort" (Munro, 2004, p. 264).

As it was already noted, the three stories shed light on each other. Juliet's uncomfortable relation with her mother depicted in "Soon" may be seen as a key to understand her daughter's choice to run away. The picture remains blurred also because of the focus on Juliet's perspective—her daughter is presented only through the few memories. The reader never learns about Penelope, just as her mother cannot truly understand her. The various sequences, for example, the train journey, the first meeting with Eric, their later marriage troubles, Juliet's different career paths, can be read as clues for interpretation: perhaps meaningless recollections, or perhaps the key to unravel the mystery. Munro leaves it for the reader to assemble the distinct pieces.

The short-story cycle included in *Runaway* meditates on the meandered ways in which a person's past interlocks with her present. Through the character of Juliet, portrayed with subtlety and vagueness, mostly by referring to her thoughts and emotions, Munro seems to argue that individual life, each choice and decision (even the most trite and apparently inconsequential, like a decision not to talk with an upset stranger, as in "Chance") have an everlasting effect. Moreover, perhaps the biggest difficulty lies in separating their influence on us and on others. In these stories identity becomes a burden, something that even if chosen freely, composed according to one's wishes, nonetheless remains dependent on other people. Juliet is constrained by her relations with other people. She feels at odds with the social conventions, regulations and demands represented by the academia, family, her home town, and finally, her absent daughter. Any attempt to maneuver between the

conflicting sides eventually becomes pointless and meaningless, an unsuccessful attempt at self-identification.

The truth becomes unspeakable, and sometimes the past does not reflect on the present, leaving only "silence." In the last story Juliet examines memories of important moments from her life in order to find an answer, to break this "silence" with some epiphany still hidden from view, a reason or explanation. In the final passages of "Silence," Juliet seems to accept her responsibility, even though she did not find any answers in her past—only hints, glimpses of meaning scattered around in the stories. Ultimately she blames herself for Penelope's absence, reflecting how she, Juliet, has always chosen intellectualism over spirituality, and her own happiness and self-satisfaction over anyone else's. In the end, however, Juliet is left without a resolution, a cruelly open ending to her narration—an unspoken monologue of the abandoned mother:

> You know, we always have the idea that there is this reason or that reason and we keep trying to find out reasons. And I could tell you plenty about what I've done wrong. But I think the reason may be something not so easily dug out. Something like purity in her nature. Yes. Some fineness and strictness and purity, some rock-hard honesty in her. My father used to say of someone he disliked, that he had no use for that person. Couldn't those words mean simply what they say? Penelope does not have a use for me. Maybe she can't stand me. It's possible. (Munro, 2004, p. 263)

3 Conclusion

This paper examined the connections between memory and identity present in Alice Munro's short-story cycles. The underlying theme of "making sense of the world"—finding one's identity among the many identities imposed by society, history, tradition—is, as it was argued in reference to the respective short-story cycles, inherently linked with a wider reflection on the anthropological character of space. The small-town and rural settings of southern Ontario are spaces of identity: touchstones of history filtered through the context of locality and individuality. Munro's female protagonists—Del Jordan, Rose, and Juliet—go on feminist quests, to quote Beverly Jean Rasporich's observation, in an attempt to challenge society's expectations of their place, both in the past, as observant and mature child and adolescent narrators, and in their present circumstances, as middle-aged women coming to terms with the results of their search (1990, p. 32). Through her choice of the short story as a genre, the Canadian writer presents miniature and at the same time highly elaborate and sophisticated portraits of her characters, intensified and expanded by the constant time shifts, the weaving of memories from different times, which provide a vehicle for critical reinterpretation. In the end, what lies at the center of these stories is the feminist experience of unmasking the real selves hidden under social roles imposed on the heroines, a detailed process of self-realization,

maturing, passing through different stages and rites of passage, to ultimately find one's identity freed of constraints and tradition—indeed to find the voice of the artist Alice Munro.

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Missions and Explorers: "Amundsen" as a Key to Reading Alice Munro's Other Stories

Magdalena Ładuniuk

Abstract In this chapter Magdalena Ładuniuk offers her reading of "Amundsen" as a key to the understanding of other stories by Alice Munro. She begins by arguing that the setting of "Amundsen" (included in *Dear Life*) comes as a surprise in the context of other Munrovian stories. The town of Amundsen is not only literally covered with snow and unpleasantly cold, but it also has a name that rings many bells: that of the legendary Arctic explorer. Although Munro's Amundsen is located only about 200 km away from Toronto, the connection she establishes between this small town and the Arctic is not accidental. Ładuniuk reflects on Munro's "Amundsen" as the story employing the metaphor of the Arctic exploration to comment on human relations, a technique she sees as typically Munrovian. She presents protagonists who undertake important missions, yet at some point become unable to continue or are forced to retreat. Unlike the eponymous Roald Amundsen, as Ładuniuk argues, Munro's characters tend to be unfulfilled explorers who repeatedly fail to accomplish their life objectives.

1 Introduction

Stories of survival, encounters with wild nature and exploration of virgin territories occupy a large space in Canadian imagination. A close relationship with wilderness has been rooted in Canadians' experience from the beginning. The first white people who came to Canada faced great challenges. Confronted with the vast areas of uninhabited land, they typically assumed one of the two roles identified by Margaret Atwood as a Settler or an Explorer (1996, p. 113). In *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Atwood introduces and explains the difference between the two: "Each of these categories involves a primal encounter with the land, but the encounters are different in kind. A Settler is a man who

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attempts to clear a place for himself out of the land. An Explorer is a man who travels through the land for the first time, without settling in it" (1996, p. 113). The concepts of Settlers and Explorers have their origins in Canadian pioneer history, yet both figures have been employed, transformed and deconstructed by Canadian artists ever since.

Alice Munro is one of the contemporary writers who frequently draws on this concept. However, in her writing, a figure of Explorer appears much more often than that of Settler. Munro is fascinated by change and the unexpected progress of events. Her characters are always in search of something, be it directions, answers to a question or love. Munro's stories tend to "exemplify the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, whose narrator/protagonist develops greater wisdom and understanding in the course of the narrative by dint of several educative experiences and often painful lessons" (Duncan, 2011, p. 20). Thus Munro's typical character is an Explorer. According to Atwood, an archetypal Explorer is "looking for something specific […] in which case his exploration resembles a quest; or he may just be mapping out new territory, seeing what is there. At any rate, he is venturing into the unknown" (Atwood, 1996, p. 113).

By using masculine pronouns, Atwood makes the figure of an Explorer a man, which supports the traditional belief that "the role of the wanderer and hero is exclusively male" (Tolan, 2010, p. 167). According to this stereotype, women can undertake some kind of missions, yet they do not become actual Explorers as women are generally connected with domestic life and remain dependent on other people. Rejecting this stereotype, Munro repeatedly casts women in Explorer roles. Her protagonists are unique as they face challenges, which combine characteristics of both male and female missions. These Explorer protagonists set off on journeys, traditionally associated with men. These journeys turn into quests which constitute a "hybrid of the traditional masculine quest (solitary, moving outward) and the feminine quest (retaining connections to home and significant others)" (Tolan, 2010, p. 176). Yet, the mission's final discovery is reserved for women only. Munro's men rarely learn something new.

This paper reflects on Munro's "Amundsen" as a story employing the concept of an Explorer. It analyzes the author's references to Arctic exploration and aims to identify their role in the text. It also examines missions undertaken by the protagonist of "Amundsen" in relation to the mission pattern representative of the archetypal Explorer: journey, followed by quest and concluded with discovery. Finally, the paper attempts to indicate that most of Munro's protagonists comply with this exploratory pattern as they tend to pursue their goals in the three abovementioned steps. Thus, "Amundsen," with its allusions to the Arctic, may serve as a key to reading Munro's other stories in which the theme of exploration is not as evident, yet always present.

2 "Amundsen"

The story "Amundsen" included in Munro's collection *Dear Life* (2012) is a retrospective account of events which took place in the small town during the Second World War. Vivien Hyde, the story's narrator and protagonist, comes to Amundsen to teach tuberculosis-stricken children in the local sanatorium. There, she meets Doctor Fox, a lung surgeon, and soon falls in love with him. Their relationship remains a poorly guarded secret for a few months, after which they decide to make it official and get married. Unexpectedly, Dr. Fox changes his mind minutes before the ceremony. He confesses that he is not ready for marriage and sends the heartbroken Vivien back to Toronto. On her way back, the teacher one more time meets Mary, a girl from Amundsen who plays an important, yet enigmatic, role in the story, as well as in Vivien's relationship with the doctor.

2.1 Journey

Journey and movement are a recurring theme in "Amundsen." In the background of the story, the Allied Forces are gradually getting closer and closer to Berlin. Munro's characters are not static either. The story's composition revolves around different types of journeys. The very first scene depicts Vivien on a train and her arrival in Amundsen. Later in the story, Vivien and Dr. Fox go on a journey together—they make a car trip to Huntsville, the town where they are planning to get married, but they break off their engagement instead. After this incident, Vivien is forced to make another trip back to Toronto, but this time in solitude.

The story both starts and ends with Vivien literally travelling by train, yet the central part of the story is Vivien's metaphorical journey, "the journey into the unknown regions of the self, the unconscious, and the confrontation with whatever dangers and splendours lurk there" (Atwood, 1996, p. 113). This journey starts at the teacher's first encounter with Dr. Fox. Then, he hands her an introductory note signed with the meaningful expression: "Bon Voyage" (Munro, 2012, p. 39), which foreshadows Vivien's humiliating departure from the town, but also marks the beginning of her struggle in the story. The narrator's metaphorical, yet laborious and exhausting, journey becomes the main theme in "Amundsen."

Munro makes several references to Arctic exploration in the story. What instantly catches Vivien's attention in Dr. Fox's enormous book collection are volumes such as: "*Explorations of the Amazon and the Arctic. Shackleton Caught in the Ice. Franklin's Doom*" (p. 48). The name of the town—the place is not only literally covered with snow and unpleasantly cold—also serves as a hint that evokes the legendary Arctic explorer and scientist, Roald Amundsen. The Norwegian made a name for himself as the leader of the first expedition which traversed the Northwest Passage—a treacherous marine connection between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, a place that claimed hundreds of victims over the four centuries

before Amundsen's successful attempt in 1905 (Delgado, 2006, pp. 24–26). Although Munro's Amundsen is located only about 200 km from Toronto, the relationship the writer establishes between this small town and the hostile Arctic is not accidental. As in the Far North, every action undertaken in Amundsen's harsh environment requires a lot of determination and mental strength.

The story's setting is created to resemble the Arctic scenery. The coldness in the story is overwhelming. The shivery atmosphere can be felt from the story's first paragraphs, from the first minutes of Vivien's stay in Amundsen. When she disembarks from a train, she is stunned by the raw beauty of Amundsen's landscape:

> Then there was silence, the air like *ice*. Brittle-looking birch trees with black marks on their *white* bark, and some small, untidy evergreens, rolled up like *sleepy bears*. The *frozen* lake not level but mounded along the shore, as if the waves had turned to *ice* in the act of falling. And the building, with its deliberate rows of windows and its *glassed*-in porches at either end.Everything *austere* and *northerly, black-and-white* under the high dome of clouds. So still, so immense an enchantment. (Munro, 2012, pp. 32–33, emphasis mine)

This short description is loaded with words relating to cold, such as "ice," "frozen," "austere" or "northerly." Thus, Vivien's first account of Amundsen is only outwardly full of admiration and delight. Actually, instead of an intended praise of the town's romantic remoteness, her description indirectly communicates a disturbing feeling of gloom and isolation. This feeling remains present throughout the story, as Vivien gradually discovers that in Amundsen everything is cold—not only the weather, her room and food, but especially the people.

Vivien receives a cold welcome in the sanatorium. Although she is here to take up a seemingly respectable post of a teacher, she is not even allowed to enter the building through the front door. This first encounter with the cook, who later turns out to be Mary's mother, is narrated in an impersonal passive voice, which from the beginning builds a distance between Vivien and other characters: "Nothing more *was said* until we entered the kitchen at one end of the building. […] I did not get a chance to look around me, because attention *was drawn* to my boots" (Munro, 2012, p. 33, emphasis mine). A moment later, while waiting for Doctor Fox, the teacher is left in a cold, dark cloakroom without any company. She notices that it is "like being punished at school" (p. 33). This comparison is soon reinforced by Mary when she jokes "I don't know what they put you in here for" (p. 34). The negative associations of the sanatorium with punishment, prison and isolation emphasize Vivien's awkward situation and foretell her difficulties with finding a place for herself in this hostile environment.

2.2 Quest

At the train station, Mary's mother notices that Vivien looks as if she was lost (Munro, 2012, p. 33). The teacher denies the suggestion, yet the woman is actually right. Vivien is lost in a figurative sense. She finds herself in a completely new

place and she does not have any specific plans for the future. In the past, she intended to continue her studies, but for some unknown reasons she changed her mind and came to Amundsen. She never mentions her past and the life back in Toronto. Her journey is an evident quest in search of a new identity.

2.2.1 Vivien's Quest Number 1

Becoming a teacher is Vivien's first idea to start a new life. She comes to Amundsen with the purpose of educating children in the sanatorium. Yet, her expectations and plans turn out to be not very realistic. She admits she draws her knowledge about tuberculosis from Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* and she is enchanted with Amundsen's landscape because it reminds her of the Russian novels she once read. Vivien's eagerness and idealism, being probably a result of both fondness for romantic literature and her young age, influence the teacher's relations with other characters in the story. In comparison with them, she appears to be inexperienced and naïve. Her remarks about Amundsen's beauty sound nonsensical to the people who are "too sick or too busy" (Munro, 2012, p. 33) to spend their time appreciating nature. Sanatorium workers look at Vivien with disdain:

> There's the teacher. What's she up to?
> She's looking at the lake.
> What for?
> Nothing better to do.
> Some people are lucky. (p. 42)

Even the nurses' aides, who are approximately Vivien's age, show no sign of understanding or wish to befriend her, which comes as a surprise to the teacher. She complains: "They didn't have the least interest in me. They didn't want to know what Toronto was like, […] and they did not care how my teaching was going or what I had done before I came to work at the San" (p. 38). Therefore, Vivien resigns from social interaction with adults and decides to devote herself entirely to the children in the sanatorium.

Initially, she channels all her energy into teaching. Determined to achieve her educational goals, she does not get discouraged even by the doctor's peculiar, impersonal note regarding her classroom objectives:

> Usual notions of pedagogy out of place here. […] Better not a lot of stress. That is, testing, memorizing, classifying nonsense.
> Disregard whole grade business entirely. […] Actually very simple skills, set of facts, etc., necessary for Going into the World […]
> Drawing Music Stories preferred.[…] Challenge to keep between stress and boredom. Boredom curse of hospitalization. (p. 39)

Both the teacher and the children realize that by following the doctor's rules, their school is only "a pretend school" (p. 40), that patients do not actually learn anything here. Vivien quickly notices that "there was a shadow of defeat over the improvised classroom" (p. 40). Thus, she makes a special effort to change it. For a short time

her lessons start to resemble those known from traditional schools. However, her idealistic visions are soon confronted with the grim reality. Once her ambitious teaching methods are mocked by Doctor Fox, she loses her whole enthusiasm and resumes the old routines. After this incident she confesses: "The building, the trees, the lake could never again be the same to me as they were on that first day, when I was caught by their mystery and authority" (p. 42). At that point in the story Vivien seems to give up teaching; her first quest ends with failure.She has not found personal fulfillment in being a teacher. Yet, she soon finds herself a new occupation.

2.2.2 Vivien's Quest Number 2

Soon after the unfortunate lesson, Vivien starts to reveal a growing interest in Doctor Fox. She begins by making solitary jaunts to the town, wondering which of the neat houses belongs to her employer. Although she does not reveal the purpose of these trips, she evidently searches for information about the doctor. She mentions in a seemingly casual way that she has learnt from the aides about Fox's single state, but the enquiry is indeed a part of her deliberate plan. She later confirms that when she tells the doctor a cunning story of her imaginary boyfriend in the Navy who, as she admits only to herself, can be easily torpedoed by the enemy if the relationship with the doctor develops. The way Vivien treats Fox clearly signals her new intentions—although she failed as a teacher, she now hopes that she "at least might turn out to be a woman with a man" (p. 52).

Vivien hopes that she will find fulfillment in love and marriage. Yet, her idea of becoming Mrs. Fox is doomed to failure from the beginning. The disaster in the doctor and Vivien's relationship is foreshadowed by Munro's hints dropped every now and then in the story, for instance when the doctor declares that he "prefer[s] to work alone" (p. 48) or when he proves that a vow means nothing to him and that every promise (including marriage proposal) can be easily "un-promised" (p. 47). Nevertheless, Vivien is so determined to accomplish her goal that she seems to miss all the warning signs. She does not suspect anything, even when the doctor asks her to keep their relationship secret and to discontinue their meetings for a while. Yet, Vivien's biggest mistake is ignoring the importance of Mary in the doctor's life.

Munro does not give much information about the origins of Mary's complex relationship with Doctor Fox or about her background. Vivien meets the girl on the first day in Amundsen, and instantly learns a few facts about Fox from her. Mary tells her also that she used to maintain a close bond with the doctor, but now they have grown apart. The doctor remains a main topic of Mary and Vivien's several conversations in the story. There is never mention of Mary's father, only the mother, who runs the sanatorium kitchen. The absence of the father opens an interesting possibility that Mary is Fox's daughter, which would explain their close relations. The girl calls the doctor Reddy—a nickname that sounds very close to "daddy." Also, she frequently expresses admiration for and unconditional devotion

to the doctor. Throughout the story, Mary struggles to attract the doctor's interest and receive some signs of affection from him.

Mary's cry for attention reaches its peak in the scene when she unexpectedly visits Doctor Fox while he is having dinner with Vivien. The girl bursts into the house wearing a specially designed stage costume and starts singing her part from the late-nineteenth-century comic opera *Pinafore* (Gänzl, 1986: 131) she has prepared for school drama:

> I'm called Little Buttercup,
> Dear Little Buttercup,
> Though I can never tell why.
> But still I'm called Buttercup,
> Poor Little Buttercup
> Sweet Little Buttercup I—. (Munro, 2012, p. 54)

Her desperate performance is very meaningful as she clearly identifies herself with Poor Little Buttercup—Mary feels miserable; she has been rejected by both the doctor and Vivien, who missed her concert at school. Yet at his house, Doctor Fox once again ignores her entirely. He reacts only when the girl starts singing the second part of the song and salutes him, suggesting that he is like the Captain of the Pinafore. This can be read as a humorous reference to his position in the hospital, where he is surrounded by exclusively female staff, but it can also allude to the doctor's frequent love affairs. The second option seems more plausible, especially since Mary adds that he has "one eye crooked to the other" (Munro, 2012, p. 55), which suggests dishonesty and infidelity on his side. The doctor's angry reaction also reveals that he understands her implied meaning.

However, Vivien again fails to read the signs. She perceives Mary as her rival, as someone with whom she has to share Fox's time and attention. Thus, she sees the doctor's rejection of Mary as something positive for her. After the scene in which the doctor insults Mary and shows her the door, Vivien confesses: "[h]e had been brutal. It shocked me, that he had been so brutal. To one so much in need. But he had done it for me, in a way. So that his time with me should not be taken away. This thought flattered me and I was ashamed that it flattered me" (p. 56). Vivien fails to notice that Mary is not her adversary, but actually a reflection and a prediction of her own fate. The brutal rejection of Mary's feelings, demonstrated when the doctor tosses all the heart-shaped cookies she baked for him into the snow, foreshadows the equally brutal rejection of Vivien's feelings at the end of the story. BothVivien and Mary used to have very similar hopes for the future, both longed for the doctor's love, as Vivien notices: "[b]oth of us wanted only one thing. We wanted the doctor to turn around and stop ignoring us" (p. 54). However, both of them finally suffer a humiliating defeat. Neither finds what she was looking for. The outcome of their quests is best summarized in Mary's words at the end of the story, when she asks Vivien ostensibly about a basketball match score: "We lost, didn't we?" (p. 64).

2.3 *Discovery*

Vivien's confrontation with the curiously hostile Amundsen and its inhabitants resembles the missions of the great Arctic explorers. She comes to the town to pursue her idealistic vision of teaching, and she ends up with a more pragmatic plan of getting married. Eventually, instead of educating others, she takes a vital life lesson. She learns important things about herself, about relationships with other people, and also about her sexuality. She experiences her first romantic affair and senses that "[f]alling in love is a process of discovery which opens up hitherto unknown territory" (Howells, 1998, p. 45). For Vivien, who undergoes sexual initiation in the story, this new territory is sex. At first, she is genuinely surprised by her passion, yet she later learns to celebrate her new-found sexuality; in the final scenes of the story her lust becomes almost uncontrollable when she fantasizes: "[r]ight now, I believe I could lie down for him in any bog or mucky hole, or feel my spine crushed against any roadside rock, should he require an upright encounter" (Munro, 2012, p. 59). This new awareness of her own body is one of Vivien's most crucial discoveries in the story.

However, the most important lesson comes many years later, when Vivien accidently meets Dr. Fox on the street in Toronto. Then she is suddenly struck by a feeling that "[n]othing changes really about love" (p. 66), that she still loves this complicated man. Nevertheless, despite this crucial discovery, Vivien's mission remains a failure. The story's ending defies the conclusion of a "traditional quest narrative, in which the hero sets out on an expedition and returns triumphant" (Tolan, 2010, p. 164). Vivien acquires a deeper understanding of her emotions, but typically for Munro, the "narrator neither finds comfort in nor derives any benefit from the new knowledge she gleans" (Duncan, 2011, p. 20). The information about permanence of her love is only a burden for Vivien, who, although many years have passed since she left Amundsen, still feels exactly the same as on that depressing day when she was rejected by the love of her life.

3 "Amundsen" as a Key to Reading Munro's Other Stories

"Amundsen" represents a new kind of Explorer narrative. Its protagonist is not an Explorer in the traditional sense of this term; she does not participate in an expedition discovering new lands, nor is she threatened by wilderness or other dangers of the natural world. The character of her mission is less spectacular and more personal. She serves as a figure of the New Explorer, an explorer of her own inner self. This type of a protagonist has been typical of Munro's fiction for years, yet it is "Amundsen" that finally draws attention to the strong similarities between the author's various protagonists and archetypal Explorers. Thus, the story can be perceived as a key to reading Munro's other stories, the ones from *Dear Life*, as well as those included in the previous collections. The key is a figure of the New Explorer and a three-step mission she (occasionally he) pursues.

3.1 Journey

Journey is the first stage in every Explorer's mission and it also marks the beginning of Munro's *Dear Life*. The collection's opening story, "To Reach Japan," is an account of a lengthy train trip from Vancouver to Toronto. Greta, the story's protagonist, mentions also her husband's move from Czechoslovakia to Canada during his childhood, which for him was a very important journey. Movement remains a recurring theme in the whole collection. In "Leaving Maverley," Leah abandons her religiously orthodox family to start a new life elsewhere; also the story's narrator changes address after his wife's death. "Haven" makes a literal reference to going on a mission—the narrator's parents travel to Ghana to work there for a year while the girl moves into her uncle's house. Jackson from "Train" makes his escapes from one place to another throughout the story. Mother and her daughters in "Gravel" move to live in a trailer outside the town after the divorce. "In Sight of the Lake" describes Nancy's disturbing, dream-like travel in search of a doctor. Gwen, the character in "Dolly" works as a travelling salesperson, yet the central part of the story is devoted to the narrator's spontaneous escape from her husband, followed by a quick return.

The theme of movement and travelling keeps reappearing not only in *Dear Life*, but in Munro's writing in general. The author sends her characters on numerous journeys, whether it is to a place only a few miles away from home ("The Love of a Good Woman," "Vandals"), or an exotic country on a different continent ("Jakarta," "The Jack Randa Hotel," "The Albanian Virgin") or even outer space ("Spaceships Have Landed"). As noticed by Tolan, "many of [Munro's] predominantly female protagonists feel the compulsion to leave, to envision life elsewhere" (2010, pp. 161–162). A journey frequently marks a new stage in their lives. And although the protagonists' attempts to escape the past are not always successful ("Runaway"), they constitute a vital part of the New Explorer's mission. In Munro's fiction, a literal journey is always connected with a metaphorical one—a journey in search of self-discovery and self-definition.

3.2 Quest

Munro's use of the quest motif has already been closely examined by Fiona Tolan in her article "To Leave and to Return: Frustrated Departures and Female Quest in Alice Munro's *Runaway*." Tolan analyzes Munro's female quest in relation to the traditional male one, and she finds both similarities and differences between them (2010, p. 163). "Amundsen" also exposes this contrast. Unlike a traditional Explorer, Munro's Explorer searches for things that are invisible to the naked eye. She embarks on a quest to find happiness, fulfillment or satisfaction. The source of these qualities is as a rule unknown to the protagonist, who has to pursue a quest to locate it. The character of a quest and its progress depend on the individual

approach of the Explorer, yet the outcome is rarely successful. Munro's New Explorers have problems with achieving their goals because they constantly struggle between pursuing their own ambitions and complying with the standards imposed on them by the conservative society. It is difficult for them to find a balance between "a quest for self-definition, and the parallel, seemingly contradictory recognition of the persistent pressures of home and family" (Tolan, 2010, p. 163). Finally, they often choose to devote themselves to only one of these two alternatives.

3.3 Discovery

The final stage in the Explorer's mission is a discovery. In Munro's stories, discovery frequently comes in the most unexpected moment, being a surprise for both the character and the readers. In the introduction to the new edition of *The Moons of Jupiter*, the author reflects on the final scenes of "The Turkey Season" and uses the term "a queer bright moment" (Munro, 1986, p. xv) to denote this particular point in her stories, when a protagonist experiences a sudden revelation. Duncan defines "a queer bright moment" as a point, when "the core of [Munro's] narrative—a crucial scene, or image, or narrative comment—is made salient and memorable; it will often throw some light on a mystery, although it will not entirely unravel or resolve it. The adjective 'queer' seems appropriate because it suggests the strangeness and obliqueness of the insight, or illumination" (2011, p. 74).

In "Amundsen," Vivien experiences such a classic Munrovian "queer bright moment" when she discovers that, despite the lapse of time and the humiliation she experienced, she is still in love with Dr. Fox. This technique of inserting an abrupt epiphany into the story has already become one of Munro's trademarks, frequently used in her fiction. "Corrie" ends with the protagonist's shocking realization that it was actually her lover, not the servant, who blackmailed her. Eve in "Save the Reaper" feels stunned when she accidentally learns that her beloved daughter does not enjoy her company. Bea, the protagonist of "Vandals," is too perplexed by her discovery to openly admit that she knows about Ladner's pedophilia and his relationship with Liza. A "queer bright moment" draws attention to the fact, which was previously overlooked or ignored by a protagonist. However, the discovery of this fact is usually painful, and by no means can it be interpreted as the Explorer's success.

4 Conclusion

The traditional literal Canadian Explorer described by Atwood no longer matches the problems of the contemporary world. A new type of a metaphorical Explorer, meeting the needs of today, had to be invented in fiction. The New Explorer created

by Munro is typically a woman who does not embark on spectacular expeditions into wilderness; her mission revolves around everyday problems and personal dramas instead. The New Explorer's journey does not resemble a meticulously planned Arctic voyage; it is often a desperate escape or a result of a decision made on the spur of the moment. Her quest is also different from the traditional one—the New Explorer does not look for a new land or anything material; she is rather in search of her own identity. Unlike the traditional Explorer, the New Explorer always makes a final discovery, however, her quest's outcome remains exclusively personal—it does not bring glory to the Explorer or benefit to humanity. Thus, Munro's Explorer never becomes a hero.

Since Alice Munro's stories usually take place in the moderate climate of Southern Ontario towns and villages, "Amundsen," with its striking coldness and evident references to the Arctic, may seem as rather untypical of the author. However, it is actually the story that serves as a logical key to reading many of Munro's works, especially those from *Dear Life*, the author's latest book, and according to her announcements, the last one in her career. The finale of the book consists of four extraordinary pieces that "form a separate unit, one that is auto-biographical in feeling" (Munro, 2012, p. 255). The presence of "Amundsen" in this particular collection is very meaningful. It invites the readers to re-examine Munro's literary output as a literature of exploration of the cold world. With herself as the Explorer, who after decades of fearless explorations uncovering the deepest secrets of a human heart, finally ends her mission. Or at least she attempts to.

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‘Shockingly Like, and Unlike, Home’: Gothic Realism in *the Progress of Love*

Tomasz Sikora

Abstract In this chapter Tomasz Sikora offers a reading of selected stories from Alice Munro’s collection *The Progress of Love* (1986). The general interpretative framework is built around a literary (and, perhaps, epistemological) convention that the author chooses to call Gothic Realism. The first part of the study is a discussion of the proposed term (as applied to the work of Munro), mostly in connection to the notion of ambivalence, such as that described by Freud in his famous essay *The Uncanny*, i.e. the ambivalent relationship between what is “(like) home” and what is alien or “unlike home.” In particular stories the reader finds many different kinds of ambivalence, which makes the author conclude that in the Canadian writer’s work no positivity is ever pure and free of a “drop” of negativity. At the same time, however, Munro’s writing seems to offer a sense of astonishment over the fact that despite nothingness—there is the richness of the empirical world; despite fate—there is the openness of everything that happens; despite negativity—there is a positive bond (let us call it love) which somehow keeps people together.

By 1986, when the collection *The Progress of Love* appeared, Alice Munro’s position within the literary landscape of Canada had been well established, as proved by the fact that she had won the all-important Governor General’s Award for Fiction twice, in 1968 and 1978. But it was not until her sixth book, *The Progress of Love*, that her work gained a broader international recognition (cf. Thacker, 2005, pp. 422–431). Not only did it earn her a third Governor General’s award, but also it continues to be counted as one of her greatest literary achievements. The eleven stories included in the collection have much in common with the stylistic and thematic features of her earlier fiction, but both critics and readers delighted in the undeniable finesse of her mature literary artistry.

It would be easy, too easy, to confine the work of Alice Munro to the ghetto of “women’s literature.” I hasten to add that personally I do not consider the term “women’s literature” in any way diminishing, yet in practice that label often suggests (in contexts other than feminist) that we deal with a literature of lesser quality,

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or at least a literature addressed to "women" rather than to the "general public." Even the titles of Munro's collections (*The Progress of Love* or the earlier *Lives of Girls and Women*) may make prospective readers expect somewhat sentimental stories about love, life and women's experience. I am as far as possible from erasing this specifically female element from the writer's work. Most of her characters and narrators are women, of course—women who are well aware of the social roles they are made to play and the male privilege they hardly ever have access to. It is obvious that, alongside the family background and the material status, gender largely determines the characters' social status, life choices and emotions. However, I am cautious not to fall into the trap of essentializing "women's experience," all the more since, as I argue below, the very category of experience turns out to be highly problematic in Munro's fiction.

1 Gothic Realism

The term I find most useful to frame Munro's work is Gothic Realism. It is not an established term in literary studies, to be sure, compared to, say, Magic Realism. It was used by Mikhail Bakhtin in his analysis of Rabelais's work, but then he quickly dropped it (cf. Pan'kov, 2001, p. 52). In Anglo-Saxon criticism the term appears, however ephemerally, in the context of some Gothic elements in American (and not only American; cf. Backus, 1999, pp. 144–170) literature. It is used once, for example, by Allan Lloyd-Smith to point out how American Gothic was affected by the primitive life conditions of the early European settlers, who had to struggle with natural forces (Lloyd-Smith, 2004, p. 113). (An iconic representation of this American Gothic tradition is to be found in Grant Wood's famous 1930 painting "American Gothic.") The term "Gothic" itself is used widely in reference to Alice Munro's fiction quite often (see below), but "Gothic Realism" is not. I have been able to trace two MA theses on Munro[1] that admittedly contain the term "Gothic Realism" in their titles, but do not clarify or define the term in the course of the argument. Labelling is not at all what literary scholarship is or should be about, to be sure (nor has it ever been my purpose), but placing Munro's work in the framework of what I choose to call Gothic Realism seems a good starting point (one of many possible) for a reading of the stories included in *The Progress of Love*.

The element of realism in Munro's fiction (which may be seen as a continuation of the documentary tradition in Euro-Canadian literature) is as undeniable as it is problematic. Problematic enough to make some critics (notably Hutcheon, 1988)

[1] A. Belyea, *Redefining the Real: Gothic Realism in Alice Munro's* Friend of My Youth, Kingston, Ontario 1998 (MA thesis available online: www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk3/ftp04/mq31181.pdf); E. Vancoppernolle, *Haunted Families: Gothic Realism in Alice Munro's* Too Much Happiness, Ghent 2010 (MA thesis available online: http://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/001/457/832/RUG01-001457832_2011_0001_AC.pdf).

situate her work within postmodern metafiction, i.e. literature that self-consciously questions its own ability to represent reality and instead explores the limitations and traps of the linguistic-literary medium that it employs. According to refined realist assumptions, even if literature cannot aspire to a faithful rendition of "objective reality" (this task is mostly left to science), then at least it can be a record of some truth(s) of "human experience"; as Raymond Williams remarks, literature is often defined as "full, central, immediate human experience" (Williams, 1977, p. 46). However, what is necessary for such a notion of literature to make sense is the assumption that language is a tool reliable enough to describe human (or any) experience. Both of these elements—the truth of experience and the adequacy of language (narration)—get thoroughly deconstructed, to invoke a somewhat worn-out term, in Alice Munro's writerly practice, which is a feature that she shares with many other contemporary writers. "Experience" turns out to be merely a mixture of facts, interpretations, (ambivalent) affects, misunderstandings, imaginary projections, fantasies and mis-remembered (if not simply made-up) events. It is impossible to construct from such material coherent characters–persons of the traditional realist type, i.e. carriers of a unified psyche or identity and hero(in)s of their teleological storylines, even if some characters from Munro's stories do provisionally create such auto-narrations and believe in them.[2] Neither "experience," nor the language through which it is communicated, can grant any degree of certainty concerning one truth or another, let alone any general "truth about (wo)man," hence the oft-repeated attribution of deep epistemological scepticism to the work of this Canadian writer. Yet this scepticism never prevents one from sensually savouring the world in all its detailed richness, from experiencing the intensities of various—always unique—moments of life, or from relishing in the element of language and narration itself.

If Munro's prose may be called "realistic," then, it is not simply because of its "regionalist" attachment to small-town life in southern Ontario, but chiefly because its driving impulse comes from close observation of human behaviour, or the world in general, and not—as is the case with the writers who are most consistently associated with the postmodern label—from playing around with literary conventions or from intertextual allusions; it is not, to be sure, a literature of exhaustion that does nothing but play with the pieces. That is why, despite the elements of metafiction and narratorial manipulations, postmodernism is not the key term in my discussion of Munro's fiction. It is, rather, a specific brand of gothicism that seems to me a more relevant category, in reference to both the narrative world and the formal level. As I demonstrate below, Munro's short stories are shot through with

[2]In a sense Munro's stories are anti-psychological, or at least they go far beyond traditional psychologism. This is particularly evident in passages where characters disconnect from their feelings (e.g. Trudy from "Circle of Prayer"), from their motivations (e.g. Colin from "Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux") and other elements of the so-called inner life. The psyche is both familiar and alien at the same time (as everything else in Munro's fiction), while identity is just a rather accidental resultant of many intersecting factors.

moments of negativity (aggression, death drive, murderous intentions)[3] as well as moments of desire—motifs that may be described as thoroughly gothic, at least as far as gothicism is approached from psychoanalytically inspired positions. At the formal level, gothic literature has always leaned towards some formalist excess, often bordering on the grotesque or even self-parody, which legitimizes the claim that the Gothic somehow anticipated the postmodern play with metafiction (cf. Mishra, 1994, p. 20). Despite the persistence of documentary realism in Munro's fiction, such excessive elements may easily be found there as well, alongside the use of unreliable narrators.

Significantly enough, the short outline of the Canadian Gothic (dominated as it is by female authors) proposed by Coral Ann Howells opens with a quote from an interview with Alice Munro: "The part of the country I come from is absolutely Gothic. You can't get it all down" (Howells, 2007, p. 105). Howells goes on to say that the writer is "a key figure in contemporary English–Canadian Gothic writing" (p. 105), and her stories, set in remote parts of Ontario, emphasize the strangeness of life. This "domestic Gothic," however, as the critic asserts, is not the only mode of gothicism in Canadian literature. I do not have enough space here to characterize the Canadian Gothic at large, suffice it to say that it is often linked with the overwhelming presence of nature, or even space itself, as well as the country's complicated colonial past, its regional and racial/ethnic diversity and the unstable or incomplete construction of a unified "nation." Justin D. Edwards (who, strangely, never mentions Munro in his *Gothic Canada*) extends this catalogue by adding Canada's "peripheral position […] with respect to the centers of power" (Edwards, 2005, p. 164). In Munro's fiction peripherality is further emphasized by the settings of her stories, which, despite their apparent ordinariness, harbour an infinite potential for gothic secrets and grotesque figures. It is in those "claustrophobic small towns," Howells claims, that the protagonists of Canadian gothic narratives are entrapped, while "city streets become psychological labyrinths inhabited by dissident and alienated outsiders" (Howells, 2007, p. 113). This description could be convincingly applied to the atmosphere of many of Munro's stories.

The Gothic is variously related to psychoanalysis, so much so that some scholars consider Freud a particular kind of a "gothic writer" in the tradition of Ann Radcliff, Matthew Lewis and Mary Shelley (Edmundson, 1997, p. 7). The term that is almost obligatorily invoked in the context of gothic literature is the Freudian *uncanny* (*das Unheimliche*), i.e. the anxiety that gets activated whenever that which is familiar, ordinary and homey suddenly turns alien, unfamiliar and potentially dangerous (Freud, 2001, p. 931). It is not just elements of the external world that can trigger this sensation—one can also get the feeling of being a stranger to oneself. The motif of familiarity and domestication corresponds well to Munro's preoccupation with

[3]Often, but not always, the negativity in question is a "female" one. In "White Dump," for example, Isabel points out that the Poetic Edda abounds in bloody scenes that involve women, especially murderous mothers. One such character cuts her children's throats and serves their blood mixed with wine to her husband.

the everyday. She does not create characters that are literally and evidently monstrous or extraordinary (as is the case with another gothic writer from Ontario, Barbara Gowdy); instead, the characters and situations in her fiction are nothing out of the ordinary, bland if not banal at first sight. But it is in this apparently boring sphere of everydayness—which is certainly not gender-neutral, considering how the quotidian and the domestic have been relegated to the feminine sphere—that Munro detects layers and layers of uncaniness.

While the links between gothicism and psychoanalysis and those between Munro and gothicism are well documented, to claim that her short stories are just an illustration of psychoanalytic tenets would be an unfair and indefensible reduction of the richness and finesse of her writing to an external body of theory. Munro's fiction and psychoanalysis are incompatible insofar as the latter aspires to a comprehensive hermeneutic explication of human behaviour, motivation and experience. When reading Munro, one will not find much use for the castration complex, the id-ego-superego dynamics and other theorems whose aim is to systematically explain the working of the human mind. Nevertheless, a general vision of the human being that one can derive from Munro's oeuvre seems at least partially parallel to that proposed by psychoanalysis. According to this vision, human beings are, above all, what they imagine themselves to be. This is not to say that a distinction should be made between the false world of phantasms and the deeply hidden truth about oneself; rather, phantasms (and the narrations woven around them) are the very stuff that our "true self" is made of. But besides the fantasy that our world is and that we are, something else is at work, something that transcends our individual psychic structure and experience, something more "primordial" that has a life of its own, beyond our control, and that intersects the trajectory of our conscious experience and shatters the imaginary composition that constitutes our individual *Umwelt*.[4] In psychoanalysis such destabilizing forces are referred to as drives, the principal of which (in late Freud) is the death drive, intimately bound up with the sexual drive. In Munro's fiction these forces could be described more accurately as "geological" ones, to recall the suggestive metaphor used in "Fits," where the murderous instincts inscribed in interpersonal relations are compared to periodical volcano eruptions. We may make our life choices, live according to our principles and remain aware of our affects and desires, but many, if not most, things happen as if "on their own," as if beyond us, which is tantamount to a deterministic vision of life. How things happen is Munro's main interest; as she explains in an interview, it is not simply the "what happens," but rather the "how everything happens" that is truly astonishing (Knopf Doubleday interview, 2010). And this "everything" happens in strange and inexplicable ways: reality is an undeciphered hieroglyph, and human behaviour is, at the end of the day, unexplainable, despite postivistically interpreted psychoanalysis.

[4]Coined by Jakob von Uexküll, the term *Umwelt* refers to a "subjective-self-world" (cf. Uexküll, 1987, p. 148), or the world as it emerges meaningfully and experientially to an organism.

One notion that seems to apply very well to Munro's fiction is that of incommensurateness. Our experience is incommensurate to what happened around and within us, our capacity to understand is incommensurate to the world, and our language is incommensurate to both an expression of our experience and a description of reality. Even the characters from the stories are in most cases at odds with the situations they find themselves in and with their life stories. Incommensurateness is an inherent conceptual ingredient of yet another aesthetic-philosophical category that I wish to mention, i.e. the sublime. Defined mostly as through the paradoxical urge to understand and express something that infinitely exceeds the capacity to understand and express, the sublime has been recognized by Lyotard (1984) as one of the key concepts pertaining to the aesthetics of the postmodern. What I am referring to, however, is not the kind of sublime that (as Vijay Mishra put it) Gothic turned into psychology, but rather—in the case of Munro's work—an experience of the sublime that derives from the epistemological vertigo triggered by the details of everyday life. It is accompanied by the awareness of the inadequacy of language and the unreliability of any representation. If, as Justin Edwards has it, the Canadian Gothic is largely a postcolonial trope, the act of representation (which includes narration) can be interpreted as an attempt to colonize reality and experience, an attempt always doomed to fail—and to be made again. It is that failure that is an important source of Gothic anxiety. Let us recall that the impossibility to "get it all down" is precisely what gothicism means to Munro. Just as Freud made attempts to domesticate (or structure) the abysmal psyche and restrain its dark forces, so representation makes futile attempts to domesticate and restrain the sea of everyday reality, of the incessant "everything happens," within and without the human mind. That reality can never be truly domesticated and that all domestication is temporary and precarious is what keeps triggering the gothic uncanny that Munro registers so studiously.

It is my contention throughout this article that Munro's gothic realism could be described as a literature of un-domestication and inherent representational deficiency. The former term refers us back to the notion of the *unheimlich*, which in Freud's semantic analysis may become indistinguishable from its apparent opposite, the *heimlich*. More generally, the question of ambiguity and the precariousness of meaning is another link between the Gothic and psychoanalysis: in both nothing is completely the thing it seems to be. Un-domestication is the constant movement between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the attempt to colonize reality (conceptually, affectively, narratively, etc.) and the impossibility to fully make reality one's home. The more we try to domesticate and map reality, the more cracks and puzzles in the narrations we make. In other words, the more Munro brings us closer—in keeping with the realist or documentary tradition—to the realities of her small-town characters, the more we experience the subtle but persistent force of defamiliarization. Hence the impression of the unavoidable insufficiency of representation (let me quote Munro again: "You can't get it all down"), which is not merely a postmodern literary convention, but rather a fundamental tenet that sets limits to knowledge, representation and communication. The characters and narrators in Munro's fiction try hard to fill the missing cracks in representation, adding things to their own or other people's histories in accordance

with their fantasies, anxieties and desires, which does not, in the end, bring them (or us) any closer to eliminating the fundamental ambiguity of both language and experience.

In the remaining part of the chapter I look more closely at some of the stories collected in *The Progress of Love*, even though, considering the logic outlined above, a closer look may lead not to clarification and recognition, as expected, but to discovering an infinite multitude of recesses, unrevealed secrets, places that refuse to be known and fixed into a discourse. As Ajay Heble asserts, the stories from the collection

> promote and undo reality at one and the same time; they tease us with expectations of accuracy, objectivity, truth, and linguistic transparency, only to show us that events which pose as accurate, objective, true, and transparent are fictions of self-knowledge, narratives constructed by a narrating figure whose authorial subjectivity can no longer go unquestioned. (Heble, 2009, p. 57)

My most elaborate analysis is devoted to the opening story, which is considered one of the most important, not least because it gave its title to the whole collection. Next, I refer to most of the other pieces, although, due to their multilayered complexity, a more detailed discussion would take up too much space here. The main interpretative framework I use is based on the notion of gothic realism, as outlined above.

2 The Progress of Love?

The opening story, "The Progress of Love," ushers the reader straight into the world of Munrovian gothic realism. Just as in many other stories by Munro, the narrative weaves together a number of threads and events—remembered, heard, partly made up. Instead of one protagonist's story, we get fragmentary insights into the lives of three women: the first-person narrator Euphemia (Fame), her mother Marietta and Marietta's mother. In my reading, the metaphor that lends coherence to the whole narrative is that of a drop of black ink in a glass of white milk, which is an illustration that Euphemia's mother uses to warn her against the sin of hatred. (The narrator, fascinated by the image, confesses she felt the urge to test whether this was true in practice, but what prevented her was the thought of the wasted milk.) Milk activated a series of associations, such as maternity, feeding, care, home, femininity, generational continuity, and also, due to its colour, with "purity"—for example the kind of purity that Marietta strove to cultivate out of piety. Setting aside the interesting association with writing and drawing, and thus with creating representations, black ink points to, on the one hand, dirt and contamination, often bound up, in Christian contexts, with corporeality (think of the important moment in the narrator's life when her eccentric aunt Beryl compares the girl's breast to a cow's teat), and on the other hand to the negativity which is inscribed into interpersonal relations as well as an individual psychic structure, a negativity that can

manifest itself through hatred (as suggested by Marietta's metaphor) or shame—that "sickening," self-destructive shame that the narrator felt when faced with her mother's grief and the story of her broken heart. Another, but related, metaphor of negativity mentioned in this context (as well as in other key moments of the narrative) is some unspecified poison which, as the narrator says, "had touched my mother's life." The idea of that mysterious poison becomes more clear once we notice that the word is used emphatically, twice, in the passage that describes little Marietta's errand in search of her father after she witnesses her mother's (real or pretended) suicide attempt. The poison that is brought up in this passage refers to a group of men she passes by and the vileness that spreads out from them. Those connotations have certainly been installed in the girl's mind by her mother, whose life was broken, as one may guess, by her husband's extramarital affair.

By distancing herself from (male-related) dirt, Marietta identifies with the idea of purity, as evidenced by her extreme piety. However, it is a kind of purity that turns out to be toxic and egoistic, as it makes her insensible to the needs and feelings of her daughter. One could say that, in keeping with the Derridian logic of the *pharmakon*, it is precisely the *excess* of purity that leads to its own contamination. Marietta's mother puts her to a tough test when she performs a suicide scene in front of her. Marietta, in turn, recklessly burns a large amount of money inherited from her hated father (notice the purifying symbolism of fire), and thus nearly deprives Euphemia of the chance to get an education and have a better life (it is only thanks to her own persistence that she manages to achieve that in the end). What we see, then, is a recurring pattern, not to say a family curse (a motif that will return in "The Queer Streak"): marked by unhappiness, Marietta's mother has passed down to her daughter (in her milk?) the poison of victimhood, hatred, shame, repulsion, indifference and betrayal (the possibility of a mother's suicide is for a child a betrayal as painful as a husband's infidelity to his wife, if not significantly more so). Later Marietta betrays Euphemia, who pays her back by running away from home, a detail that is mentioned in passing as late as in the penultimate paragraph.

The central question, from this perspective, is whether Euphemia succeeds in finally breaking the vicious circle, which would indeed amount to the progress of love promised in the title. There is much to confirm such a reading: as in many other stories from the collection, we cannot fail to notice Munro's emphasis on how social manners have changed over a few decades. Euphemia remarks in passing that she is divorced and that she and many others live in various "setups" nowadays, in contrast to her parents' and grandparents' generations for whom marriage was more like an irreversible destiny. Likewise, many contemporary women characters that appear in other stories live out of the marital bond. Consequently, the opening story may be read as a record of the weakening of patriarchal norms and institutions that leads to women's growing sense of freedom and more equal relations between the sexes. As the narrator concludes, thanks to the growing recognition that people do split up and have every right to do so, "moments of kindness and reconciliation" are more common and "more valued" (Munro, 1986, p. 30–31). Euphemia seems to be less bound to suffering and resentment; at one point she declares she feels that the

vicious circle of suffering ("the stories, and griefs, the old puzzles"; Munro, 1986, p. 14) inscribed in her mother's and grandmother's life could be broken at last, since she herself has no daughter, only two boys, who (just as Euphemia's brothers in relation to their mother) remain completely unware of those invisible streaks of (self)destructive negativity. Even the narrator's name, despite her dislike for it, suggests an optimistic reading: the Greek word *euphemia* refers to "words of good omen."

The "progress of love" could thus be understood as an escape from something that to many seems to be a force of destiny. Fate is a most interesting word: etymologically related to Euphemia (as well as her adopted revision of it, Fame), but also to *fabula* or story. In Latin *fatum* refers to "things spoken" (by gods) or an oracle, so that which has been said (or written) takes on the force of an inevitability. The element of fatalism is a recurrent motif in Munro's fiction. For example, Marietta's mother's oft-repeated statement that her heart was broken had a sense of finality: "That was the end of it. Those words lifted up the story and sealed it shut." To free oneself from fatalism, one must be able to tell one's (or another person's) story differently, to redefine oneself, perhaps beginning with adopting a new name, as Fame does. As the story progresses, we do witness her change: having realized that the memory of her father "protecting" her mother as she puts the notes in the stove, is not "strictly speaking" true, Fame stops telling the story to people, though at the same time she admits she has not stopped believing in it. It is not, however, the infidelity to the facts that makes her stop repeating the story, but a different kind of epiphany: she realizes she should not expect others to look at events the way she does. When recounting the money-burning episode for the last time, Euphemia defines love as the unconditional protection of the loved one, which, however, happens at the expense of another person (herself, in this case). And so even though she still believes in her own apocryphal version of the story, she might be able and willing to tell her story otherwise. As passed on to the reader, the story does not contain any definite condemnation or an unconditional consent; there is, instead, the acceptance of the lack of acceptance, i.e. recognizing people's right not to accept other people's behaviour. This vindicates, to some extent, Marietta's mother's attempted (or pretended) suicide, Marietta's treatment of Fame, and, finally, Fame's escape from home, which allowed her to write her own script for life. One could thus conclude she has succeeded (as her aunt Beryl has) in pulling herself out of the misery which marked her family's past.

One more lesson can be learned from Euphemia's epiphany: every *fabula* or narrative has its loops, puzzles and aporias that simply cannot be resolved within the limits of that very same story; they can only be repeated infinitely (this repetitiveness is perhaps closest to the notion of fate). When Euphemia returns to her family house for the last time, she is divorced with two boys and a real-estate agent who puts up the house for sale. Her partner Bob Marks gets a few glimpses into the history of the house through her stories and the layers of paint and wallpaper that, like in a palimpsest, cover up the previous stories one by one. Granted, Fame tells her story differently, yet to what extent can it be treated as a "good omen"? In other words, how reliable is Fame as a narrator, especially since she herself admits to

making adjustments to her stories? She even seems to encourage people not to look at her story the way she does. A sceptic might say the changes in social manners that apparently give Fame and other women more freedom are no deeper than the change of her name or the colour of her hair. The narrator, let us recall, innocently confesses near the story's end that she has been dyeing her white hair for years. An attentive reader will notice that the motif of hair colour has been brought up earlier in the narrative: Fame's mother was happy when her hair turned white, because it ceased to resemble her father's hair that way. One could speculate, then, to what extent Fame's habit of dyeing her hair is a result of her equally hateful attitude towards her mother. Or, more generally, to what extent her own life, just as Marietta's, has been stained with hatred (just a drop of ink stains a whole glass of water), a hatred that the narrator never acknowledges. This reading seems to be corroborated by Euphemia's escape from home around the same age that Marietta experienced conversion. Betrayal, escape, breaking up, the spectre of suicide and other manifestations of negativity are an inseparable part of social existence, despite any conceivable "progress of love." Figuratively speaking, no nutritious (maternal) milk is possible without a drop of poison in it.

3 Ambiguities

The remaining pieces in the collection abound in other manifestations of negativity, while the narratives are similarly open-ended and ambiguous. In *Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux*, for example, the reader gets an insight into the relationship between two brothers, the protective Colin and the strange, or childish, Ross. What has determined their relationship for the rest of their lives is an incident from their childhood when Colin accidently fired a gun and nearly shot Ross. The third-person narration, which uses free indirect speech among other devices, sticks with Colin's version in which he does not remember pointing a gun at his brother. He refuses to believe this. Instead, he remembers a pool of blood on the ground by his brother's head, even though he knows rationally that there was certainly no blood, as Ross was not hurt at all. If Colin snatched the gun from Ross's hands, it was only to protect him. What is more, Colin blames his younger brother for the cruel prank: by falling to the ground, Ross must have meant to scare Colin. This game of provocation-murder-protection continues in their adult life: when Ross resolves to equip the car he is assembling with an engine that is too big for the car and thus not safe for driving, Colin faces the dilemma whether to forewarn his brother or let him build the car of his dreams, especially since the engine cost Ross a small fortune. The two hats from the title (worn by Ross in the opening scene possibly with a view to provoking Colin into the role of his protector) could be read as a metaphor of some duality or ambivalence which (from a Freudian perspective) is inscribed into the actions and motivations of the characters. Does Ross attempt to make his brother a murderer, or is it Colin who unconsciously seeks to kill his brother, in spite of the role of his protector that he has ostentatiously taken on? And are the

roles of protector and murderer so easily and clearly distinguishable? What deserves special attention in the story, in my view, is Colin's state of mind right after the gun incident. The sudden invasion of negativity into everyday life knocks him out of his usual social role, his personal identity or even his sense of reality. In one of her memorable metaphors, Munro compares Colin's feelings to a "photograph split and rolled back, so it shows what was underneath all along. Nothing" (Munro, 1986, p. 81). One may recall here the basically psychoanalytic vision of our psycho-social existence where fantasies and representations conceal the fundamental nothingness of what Jacques Lacan called the Real. An encounter with Nothing reveals that everything in the world of humans—language, events, actions, representations—is contingent and arbitrary. Reality has no grounding, no anchor.

Murderous instincts as an indispensable and inherent element of human relationships is, in my reading, the central concern in the story "Fits." It is the only piece in the collection where an actual murder-suicide happens: an average neighbourhood man kills his wife (with or without her consent) and then kills himself. The masterly narration paints a vexing picture in which murder-suicide is nothing but a natural extension of the aggression and negativity inscribed in everyday family relations, or—to employ psychoanalytic terminology—of the unconscious causative force called the death drive (cf. Sikora, 2013). Obviously the Gilmore people would not agree: the slaughter that took place in the Weebles' house arouses emotions which make it possible for "normal people" to distance themselves from such an extreme and incomprehensible event. The disbelief, abject repulsion, sensationalization and other reactions serve to foreclose the possibility of their own negativity, which seems to be one of the prerequisites of social life as such. That the emotions are accompanied by a "ghoulish" fascination with the morbidity of the incident proves, on the one hand, that negativity occupies a central place in the structure of the human psyche (as gothicism-psychoanalysis would have it), and, on the other hand, consolidates the collective subject (the "Gilmore people") on the side of positivity, or, to be more precise, around the illusory sense of being essentially different from the Weebles. Much of the shock comes from the fact that the Weebles' essential difference (after all they were not "Gilmore people," but outsiders who just bought a house in Gilmore) was barely noticeable at first, but revealed itself forcefully through the murder-suicide.

Peg, the neighbour who found the dead bodies (and who is not exactly a "Gilmore person" either, despite having lived there for quite a long time), clearly stands out from the rest of the community. She is the only person who seems not to be shocked, as if the murder-suicide itself and her discovery of the bodies was an everyday occurrence. Her behaviour is as incomprehensible to the Gilmore people as the unexpected and tragic death of the Weebles. Paradoxically, it is the ordinariness of Peg's behaviour that becomes utterly strange and undecipherable, which only emphasizes the ordinariness of the murder-suicide. Everything that happens, the story seems to suggest, is ordinary, except according to some affective semiotics (and pragmatics) of social life some events and behaviours are read as unthinkable. Or else—which essentially amounts to the same thing—everything is precisely **extraordinary**: everyday life provides us with puzzles and hieroglyphs no less

impenetrable than the enigmatic death of the elderly couple. This conclusion is further supported by the experience of Peg's husband. Disconcerted by the discovery that Peg lied to him when she said she had turned back as soon as she spotted Mr. Weeble's leg stretched out into the hall (whereas she must have come close enough to get her coat stained with blood), Robert sets out on a long walk. At some point he notices strange, monstrous shapes, which, when seen from close up, turn out to be simply abandoned old cars. Closeness (also in the sense of "the close ones") offers one a sense of familiarity and safety, but at the same time it is a boundless source of uncanniness, strangeness and, every now and then, an erupting death drive, the way volcanoes erupt.

In another story, "Eskimo," negativity is less dramatic. Mary Jo feels an unexplainable wave of aversion towards the other passengers on the plane. Knocked out of her usual life routine, she also realizes that her attachment, or love, to Dr. Streeter (whom she always defends from the attacks of his feminist daughter)—in particular her attachment to his authoritative voice—are in fact arbitrary and artificially sustained feelings. She might as well hate him with "pure" hatred, indeed, except this possibility is too terrifying to be seriously considered. In other words, the protagonist holds on strongly to a particular version of herself and a particular life script, which seem legible to her and make her a "good person," not least because of the meticulously foreclosed hatred or negativity. None the less, disgust, aversion and disapproval cannot be fully erased, nor can desire. Mary Jo eagerly watches a young Eskimo woman (that is how she chooses to call herself, even though "Inuit" would be a politically correct equivalent) kiss and lick her Metis partner and her reaction is a mixture of disgust and desire. Perhaps her key confession is that she discerns in Dr. Streeter's voice and even breath an "incurable sadness" that stems from utter obedience, a passive, almost fatalistic, acceptance of the given order of things. (One could recall here the quote from the Icelandic Poetic Edda which concludes the story "White Dump" as well as the whole collection: "It is too late to talk of this now: it has been decided" (Munro, 1986, p. 309). Mary Jo ascribes this sadness to men (women, as the narrator states in free indirect speech, cannot understand it), but actually she herself remains faithful to her social role: a white Canadian, a woman, a nurse, a subordinate, and a good caring person. Obedience to Dr. Streeter's peremptory voice is, more generally, an obedience to set cultural categories that make the world relatively legible, stable and predictable. However, an encounter with otherness (her own, that of other people or the world at large) lays bare the contingency of those categories: the Eskimo remains as hieroglyphic to Mary Jo as Peg was to the Gilmore people. Mary Jo's strange dream also indicates how limited is her self-knowledge and how reality—treated by the rational Western mind as mostly knowable, predictable and to some extent controllable—is as "mysterious" as the unfathomable logic of a dream.

It is worth noting that "Eskimo" is the collection's only story which may be read as a direct and somewhat ironic comment on multiculturalism, an issue that has taken a central place in contemporary discourses in and about Canada. Crucial for conceptualizing multiculturalism are such notions as difference, otherness and alienness, and thus, by association, familiarity, domesticity and sameness. Munro retrieves the

gothic potential of multiculturalism and demonstrates how sameness and alienness overlap, interpermeate, reflect each other and sometimes become indistinguishable. Against Dr. Streeter's anticipated xenophobia, Mary Jo says (or would say, given the hypothetical nature of the opening scene) that Japanese faces hardly seem foreign any more. Yet when she tries to guess the ethnicity of the passengers sitting across from her, who look "Asian" to her and somehow familiar, she considers Chinese or Japanese, and in the end makes up a larger-than-life, exotic story in which the man is a "Khan" from a remote Afghan village, and the girl is one of his many wives in the harem. After she learns, somewhat to her relief, that the man and the girl are both Canadian, the puzzle seems solved for a while, but in fact it only gets more intricate. The apparent "closeness" of the Eskimo and the Metis, who hold Canadian passports, as Mary Jo does, does not help her understand the girl's puzzling behaviour. What Munro seems to emphasize in the story is a fundamental incommunicability of individual experience, the inscrutability of motivations and the incompatibility of different conceptual grids whose aim is to make the world legible. The alienness that is inscribed in the experience of multiculturalism is, for Munro, an extension of the alienness and strangeness of anything at all—from the most familiar and obvious to what we perceive as very distant and exotic. The exotic may in an instant turn out to be extremely close, as evidenced by Mary Jo's sudden desire that gets triggered, against her will, by observing the Eskimo girl. In more abstract terms, every distance has its unexpected moments of closeness, just as every closeness has its moments of alienation and distance.

Desire is one of the recurring motifs (as well as motives) in *The Progress of Love*, most visibly in "Lichen" and "White Dump." Invoking again the conceptual apparatus derived from psychoanalysis, one could conclude, on the basis of Munro's stories, that desire is propelled by phantasms, and that whatever the content of particular phantasm, ultimately it is always grounded in the fantasy of complete fulfillment, a promise of celestial enjoyment (or, in Lacanian, *jouissance*). For example, the protagonist of "Lichen," David, pursues his ever changing phantasms. Yet each of his "stars" (significantly his ex-wife's name is Stella) becomes, after a while, abjectly stale (that is the word he uses when he tells Stella, in passing, that the women whom one no longer desires, get a particular smell). A similar degradation is reflected in the title metaphor: the pubic hair of one of his lovers that she sees in a photograph that David proudly shows to her remind her of moss or lichen. A week later, the sun-faded photograph will become even more evocative of lichen, and her earlier association will prove true. In the closing story, "White Dump," Isabel tells her adult daughter about her extramarital affairs, placing most emphasis on the moment when the sheer *possibility* of starting a sexual relationship becomes a real option. It is, in sense, a moment of overcoming fate, or the irrevocability of certain life scripts, a moment of opening up to whatever may come, even if the consequences may be sore, such as divorce, trauma or moral condemnation. Troubled by a sense of emptiness in her apparently happy marriage, Isabel comes to see, through her affairs, the promise of fulfillment, the promise of a "white dump" like the pile of white candy she remembers from childhood. Illusory as it is, the promise is no more so than that of "family happiness." Like Orion, the

mythical hunter in pursuit of the Pleiades, who is mentioned at the end of the story, or like David from "Lichen," Isabel seems to be following her own sweet phantasm, which leads her into "illicit territory." As the narrator remarks, in a very Munro-esque way, the territory turns out to be "shockingly like, and unlike, home" (Munro, 1986, p. 307).

4 Love and Fate

The metaphor of the white dump can be contrasted with the heavily fatalistic Icelandic mythology that Isabel's mother-in-law, Sophie, specializes in. The collection ends with the Edda quote mentioned before: "It is too late to talk of this now: it has been decided." We thus return to the motif of fate that I brought up in my reading of "The Progress of Love." Fate is sealing a story shut; it is the conviction that things must be as they are and they cannot possibly be otherwise (recall Dr. Streeter's sadness). It has been decided, one is doomed to repeat a scheme, to act in accordance with a given script (in psychoanalysis the scripts that determine our later behaviour and relationships were written in early childhood). But is it really too late to talk of this? Is it not possible for a story which, driven by its internal logic, seems to head for its inevitable conclusion (as it does, for instance, in "Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux" and "Miles City, Montana") to be told otherwise? Writing as such, putting something down, seems to contain an element of fatalism (as some say, everything is already "written above"), but on the other hand it is exactly literature, with its boundless repertoire of different ways of telling a story, that is the best proof of the infinite open-endedness of the ways thing happen, of the ineradicable impossibility of closure. True enough, something may have been spoken (Latin *fatum*) or decided, but for Munro nothing can ever be "spoken" to the very last word. If so, if there is always more to be said, if it is necessary to progress with narration, then fate—construed as the acting out of ready-made scripts—loses its sinister power.

Munro's fiction does acknowledge the inevitability of various forms of negativity, which I have linked up with her particular use of gothicism as both a literary convention and a certain existential-epistemological stance. Nevertheless, such acknowledgement is not tantamount to fatalism, but rather it is a conclusion drawn from an impartial observation of the world. There exist, both in the social world and in individual psychic worlds, slow tectonic movements that occasionally lead to sudden and random disasters. Despite a recognition of the nothingness which lurks behind everything that happens and everything that we experience, Munro's vision is certainly not nihilistic. On the contrary, her work expresses wonder that despite nothingness—there is the richness of the experiential world, despite fate (or self-replicating schemes)—there is the open-endedness of "what happens" and, consequently, of narration, despite the incommunicability of experience—there is language, and despite the negativity inherent in human existence—there is a positive bond (let us call it love) that somehow keeps people together.

No positivity is pure and free from a drop of negativity that permeates it—hence the recurrent motif of ambiguity. Each positive, life-giving substance contains a poison, each purity is contaminated by dirt, and each familiarity harbours strangeness. Even life as such, or perhaps particularly life, is by definition infected with negativity, as illustrated by the first-person narrator's reflection in "Miles City, Montana." During a funeral she recollects from childhood she experienced the sickening epiphany that adults are somehow implicated in a child's death, they give consent to it, if only by the sheer fact that they bring children into existence. To put it bluntly, by giving life, they simultaneously give death. Consent is inscribed in the symbolic order which regulates social life and predicts, with the force of fate's verdict, that whoever is born must die. He or she must also be buried according to a ritual and mourned in order to be "properly dead." Only the drowned boy's father appears to the girl to be exempted from that all-encompassing order. He is a social outsider for whom his son's death is simply something that happened, just as anything happens, just as a dog might drown—without being entangled in the complex web of meanings, rituals and rationalizing narratives. In this sense, the boy's father is the only "innocent" person at the funeral, precisely due to his indifference; as the townspeople conclude, the boy drowned because he was not properly cared for and loved by his father. Whoever loves is guilty.

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Part II
Adapting

Hateship Loveship, Adaptation

Ewa Bodal and Nelly Strehlau

Abstract Despite the critical acclaim and popularity Alice Munro's works have been enjoying for decades, the number of television and film adaptations of her stories has been surprisingly scarce. In the present chapter, Ewa Bodal and Nelly Strehlau explore the successfulness of the transition from the pages of Alice Munro's short story entitled "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" (first published in 2001 in the collection of the same title) to its 2013 film adaptation *Hateship Loveship*, directed by Liza Johnson. To that end, they juxtapose the short story and the film, analyzing the changes within the plot, the setting and the depiction of the characters from the original to its adaptation.

Although Alice Munro's works have long enjoyed both critical acclaim and popularity among readers worldwide, the number of television and film adaptations based on her short stories has been surprisingly scarce. Aside from television plays and films produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Company in the 1970s and a 1983 short film based on *Boys and Girls*, feature adaptations of Alice Munro's fictions are only a handful. These include Ronald Wilson's *The Lives of Girls and Women* (1994), Anne Wheeler's *Edge of Madness* (2002, based on "A Wilderness Station"), Sarah Polley's highly praised *Away From Her* (2006, based on "The Bear Came Over A Mountain"), Mani Haghighi's *Canaan* (a 2008 Iranian production based on "Post and Beam"), and Liza Johnson's *Hateship Loveship* (2013, based on "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage").

In the present essay, we discuss the last movie on the list, that is, the most recent Munro adaptation to date—*Hateship Loveship*, directed by Liza Johnson and written by Mark Poirier. The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2013, and enjoyed a limited cinematic release in the United States in April 2014. It features an all-star line-up of actors, including Nick Nolte, Guy Pearce, Hailee Steinfeld (2011 Academy Award nominee for her role in *True*

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Grit) and, playing the main part, Kristen Wiig (known to American audiences from her role in *Bridesmaids*, as well as from her time as a cast member of the popular television variety show *Saturday Night Live*). The film has garnered mixed reviews, from praising (O'Malley, 2014) to cautiously positive (Chang in *Variety*, 2013, A.O. Scott in *The New York Times,* 2014) to disappointed (D'Angelo in *The A.V. Club,* 2013). Wiig's performance has generally been the most praised element of the film, with Dana Stevens (*Slate*) calling her casting "a revelation" (Stevens, 2014), although D'Angelo has conversely commented that "[i]f Kristen Wiig isn't the very last name on the list of viable candidates for [the role], she's surely somewhere in the bottom 5 %" (D'Angelo, 2013).

Adaptations can be said to enjoy something of a double life; on the one hand, an adaptation should be a separate work standing on its own merits, but, on the other hand, it is inevitably a derivative work, which will frequently be perceived as such by the audiences. Indeed, as Hutcheon (2006, p. 21) posits in her *A Theory of Adaptation*, "[p]art of both the pleasure and the frustration of experiencing an adaptation is the familiarity bred through repetition and memory." Arguably, an adaptation may be a successful production on its own while failing in terms of faithfulness to the source material, may only succeed as a derivation, or may result in success on both accounts. When in his 1999 study entitled *The Modern Novel and Film*, Andrzej Weseliński discusses issues connected with analysing adaptations, he focuses a large part of his attention on the notion of fidelity:

> In most cases, the discourse on adaptation has centred on questions of fidelity of the film version to its literary original. […] The very notion of fidelity is a complex and elusive one. Film critics often make a distinction between being faithful to the "letter" and to the "spirit" or "essence" of the source work. The former can easily be established, but the latter is difficult to determine because a film version can be faithful to one aspect of a given literary work without being faithful to another. (Weseliński, 1999, p. 25)

Similarly, Mary Snyder, having provided an overview of critical approaches to the subject of adaptation in her work *Analyzing Literature-to-Film Adaptations. A Novelist's Exploration and Guide*, a number of which criticise analyses concentrated on fidelity, comments that "fidelity/infidelity analysis can illuminate why certain scenes might have been used in the film, but weren't in the book, or why certain scenes were retained in the film and some almost 'as is'" (Snyder, 2011, p. 251). It has to be emphasised that thorough fidelity does not always bear results when transposing a work from one medium to another. In order to achieve success, the creators of an adaptation may sometimes need to forego faithfulness to the source material; in such a case, it may be worth asking questions regarding the changes made from the original work to its adaptation, as well as the effect they have on the meaning of the final product. In this essay, we attempt to diagnose the successfulness of the transition from the pages of Alice Munro's "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" to the screen version of Liza Johnson's *Hateship Loveship*. To that end, we discuss the changes made to the plot by providing a summary of both the short story and the film; further, we analyse the

transformations undergone by the characters, as well as the impact of the change of setting from 1950s small-town Canada to contemporary United States.

Alice Munro's short story begins *in medias res*, with Johanna Parry arranging a shipment of furniture by train to a small town named Gdynia in Saskatchewan, where she is also heading. She follows that endeavour by purchasing an elegant dress in the local high-quality clothing store, Milady's; as Johanna reveals to the owner, she might soon be getting married in that particular dress (Munro, 2002, p. 11). A few days later, she departs on the train, leaving her heretofore employer, Mr. McCauley, only a short note, in which she terminates her employment and informs him about taking the furniture to his son-in-law, Ken Boudreau. A segment narrated from Mr. McCauley's perspective reveals that after his daughter's death, Ken had not only already taken a number of loans from him against the value of the furniture, but that he also recently requested another sum of money. The man assumes that Ken has "enlisted Johanna in his scheme […] [to] g[e]t hold of the furniture as well as the check" (p. 21). Yet, as it turns out, Ken is not complicit in the plan, and Johanna herself has fallen victim to a prank played on her by two teenage girls: Ken's daughter Sabitha, and her friend Edith. Having obtained a letter that Johanna has written to Ken, the girls concoct a reply, and then for some time keep up the fraudulent correspondence in Ken's name, leading Johanna to believe that the man has romantic feelings for her. While both Sabitha and Edith enjoy making fun of Johanna, their friendship soon falls apart, as Sabitha becomes more involved in fashion and various fads of the day (such as drinking iced coffee), and Edith focuses on her education.

On arriving in Gdynia, Johanna discovers that Ken is seriously ill with bronchitis. She takes care of the man, nursing him back to health. At this point in the story, the readers may find themselves bracing for the seemingly inevitable reveal of Ken never having written the letters: however, this resolution never occurs. When Ken finds Johanna's bankbook, the "impressive" sum written therein "add[s] a sleek upholstery to the name Johanna Parry" (p. 48); soon, he begins to consider the woman "a net beneath him, heaven-sent, a bounty not to be questioned" (p. 51). Thus, he never asks the reason for Johanna's arrival, whereas Johanna also never discusses the letters she believes they have exchanged. Within a few days of her arrival, she begins to take charge of Ken's life, suggesting that he sell the hotel he owns and find a better place of employment (p. 52). She finds herself happy taking care of Ken; she reflects about the "brisk sense of expansion and responsibility," as well as "such a warm commotion, such busy love" that she experiences (p. 53).

The story ends after Mr. McCauley's funeral. It is revealed that Johanna and Ken are now married, and have a son named Omar (p. 53), while Sabitha lives with her mother's cousin in Toronto. The final paragraphs of the story are narrated by Edith, who thinks about Johanna and Ken's marriage with dismay, baffled at the idea of "being responsible for the existence on earth of a person named Omar" (p. 54).

Liza Johnson's film follows the plot of the short story to a large extent, albeit presenting it in a chronological order and in a contemporary American setting. *Hateship Loveship* begins with the death of Johanna's (Kristen Wiig) previous employer and her coming to work for Mr. McCauley (Nick Nolte). On her very first

day, Johanna meets Ken (Guy Pearce), his daughter Sabitha (Hailee Steinfeld) and her friend Edith (Sami Gayle). Soon after Ken's departure from the town, the correspondence begins; in the film, the girls create an email account in order to facilitate the process. Significantly, in the story the readers are initially unaware of the deceitful nature of the correspondence, much like Johanna; conversely, in the chronological telling of the adaptation, the cruel prank is revealed for what it is from the outset and it is only the protagonist who is deceived by it. However, the friendship between Edith and Sabitha falls apart when the latter inadvertently tells other girls that Edith cannot afford the class trip to Washington, DC. While Sabitha is away on the trip, Edith writes the final email to Johanna on her own, which leads to Johanna packing her things, shipping out the furniture, and leaving to meet Ken in Chicago. As in the short story, she finds the man ill and starts taking care of him; here, however, the similarities end. After Ken wakes up, he immediately starts inquiring after the reason for Johanna's coming, leading to the following exchange:

> Johanna: Didn't you get my email?
> Ken: I don't have email.
> Johanna: Who sent your emails?
> Ken: I don't even have a computer. (*Hateship Loveship*)

Understandably, this news devastates Johanna, who wants to leave Chicago at once; having followed her to the bus stop, Ken convinces the woman to stay, at least temporarily. Thus, Johanna continues to take care of Ken and his surroundings; gradually, the two grow closer, spending more time together and exchanging life stories. Eventually, their relationship becomes intimate. Yet, it should be noted that it is far from the relatively unproblematic state described in the short story: for instance, Ken has a substance-abuse problem and steals money from Johanna in order to buy cocaine.

Meanwhile, Mr. McCauley and Sabitha remain unaware of what has happened with Johanna (and the furniture), as the woman has only left them an oblique note. In the wake of Johanna's disappearance, Mr. McCauley develops a relationship with a middle-aged bank teller, Eileen (Christine Lahti), a character created especially for the purposes of the adaptation. It is only when Sabitha calls her father several months later and Johanna answers the phone that the truth of the situation is disclosed. When Ken and Johanna come to return the furniture to Mr. McCauley, the woman initially attempts to confront Sabitha regarding the letters; then, however, she convinces Ken to take the girl to Chicago for the rest of the summer. Once there, Sabitha attempts to engage Johanna in friendly gossip and helps her in cleaning the motel; when Johanna faints during their work, it turns out that she is pregnant. This disconcerts Ken, who believes they cannot afford to have a child. Nevertheless, the two soon get married, with Johanna wearing the green dress she bought before leaving for Chicago, and seemingly with Sabitha's blessing as she accompanies them during the ceremony.

The film ends with Sabitha's graduation, attended by Johanna and Ken with their son Omar. After the ceremony, Johanna overhears Edith telling a guest about her

plans for the future. On noticing Johanna, Edith asks her, "What do you want?" The woman smiles before replying, "I already have what I want."

As evidenced in the summaries above, much of the plot in the later part of the film constitutes a departure from the source material. This can be partly attributed to the necessity of expanding the short story plot in order to fill the running time of the film; to that end, the film provides the audience with an additional plotline involving Mr. McCauley's relationship with Eileen, as well as expands Sabitha's presence in the narrative, especially in relation to her grandfather and Johanna. The largest change, however, lies in the film revealing the central secret of the story. Arguably, the plot might have appeared contrived had the secret remained maintained; indeed, it seems impossible for Ken not to ask about the reasons for Johanna's appearance, or for Johanna not to mention the emails they supposedly exchanged. Yet, at the same time, this alteration ultimately also changes the overall meaning of the narrative, shifting its centre of gravity. In Munro's version, the story overtly revolves around the notion of the unknowability of fate (see Munro, 2002, p. 54), a theme present also in other fictions by this author (see, for example, "Silence" from *Runaway*, 2004, or "Amundsen" from *Dear Life* 2012). The paradoxical love story lying at the heart of the page version of "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" has been transformed into an adaptation that reads as perhaps less naive and hopeful, but also more predictable: although the hurtful prank leads to a surprising love connection, the characters' decisions still seem to be driven by plot contrivance and, despite *Hateship Loveship* being an independent production, they belong in the land of Hollywood simplification. Additionally, one element retained from Munro's story whose presence seems somewhat baffling in the film is the furniture, travelling from Iowa to Chicago and back to Iowa, only to eventually return to Ken and Johanna's motel in Chicago during the final credit sequence. In fact, it might appear that the furniture's fate is supposed to be endowed with more symbolism than it actually carries; it is especially the first occurrences of the motif that may leave the viewer confused with regard to its significance.

Some consideration should also be given to the characterisation of the main figures of the story and the film. While in the short story Munro portrays Johanna as a socially awkward, difficult person, she is also shown to be capable and enterprising, well-aware of the economic climate of the day. In a scene taking place after the purchase of the green dress, for instance, Johanna is depicted considering the way to save the elegant clothing store, Milady's, from potential bankruptcy (Munro, 2002, p. 15); in fact, she is savvy enough to recognise that it is "grandmothers and aunts" who should be "pull[ed] in" in order to buy "fancy baby clothes" (p. 15). Similarly, it does not take the protagonist long to assess the value of the hotel Ken owns, and devise a plan for him to garner as much money as possible from its sale. In this and other endeavours, Johanna is portrayed as a decisive woman, determined to achieve what she has intended. By contrast, in the film the protagonist seems almost painfully withdrawn; in one of the film's reviews, she has been deemed to have a "cipherlike passivity" (Hornaday, 2014). Unlike in the story, Johanna does not appear to take control of the situations in which she finds herself; rather than assume initiative, she tends to go with the flow of what is happening around her.

There is one small, but telling alteration that may be seen as emblematic of changes to the character: in Munro's story, it is Johanna who tasks Sabitha with mailing letters to Ken, albeit she addresses the envelopes herself, not trusting the girl's handwriting (Munro, 2002, p. 30); in the film, Edith offers to mail Johanna's letter, almost snatching it out of the woman's hand. What is more, Johanna, as depicted in the film, seems to be a less than astute judge of character, falling for Ken's charm at the slightest of instigations; the resulting fascination with the man can be viewed as somewhat desperate, resulting from her overwhelming loneliness visible, for instance, in the scene where she attempts to learn kissing by practicing with a mirror; this alteration is especially striking when compared with Johanna's fairly sober opinion of him in the literary version of the story.

Another character to undergo a thorough transformation for the purposes of the film is Ken. In the short story, he is a veteran of World War Two, an ex-airman, drawn into trouble mainly due to his "not being able to say no to a friend" (Munro, 2002, p. 48). Johanna assesses him to be "a fine-looking, flighty person in need of care and management" (p. 53). While the narration points to drinking alcohol as part of Ken's problems, it also suggests that the inability to find place for himself in the post-war reality lies at the core of the situation. Indeed, in a short segment from Ken's perspective, he refers to "the idea that life should be a more heroic enterprise than it ever seemed to be nowadays" (p. 49). Yet, it appears that although weak-willed, the man is not beyond redemption; as has been mentioned, he gratefully submits to Johanna's guidance, allowing his life to be put back in order by—to borrow a phrase from another Munro story—"the love of a good woman." The film presents Ken in a much darker light. In one of his first scenes, the man is shown rummaging through Mr. McCauley's cabinet in order to steal some of his prescription medication. It is later revealed that Ken has served a jail sentence for drunk driving and causing the accident that killed his wife. Moreover, while Ken owns (or claims to own) a motel, he seems to rely on borrowing large sums of money from people, including his father-in-law and girlfriend, Chloe, in order to fuel his cocaine habit; as has already been said, he also steals some money from Johanna. In his early dealings with Johanna, Ken takes advantage of his charm to manipulate her; later, he takes joy in the idea that Mr. McCauley is "freaking out" due to Johanna's surprising disappearance (*Hateship Loveship*). While he eventually starts to change for the better under Johanna's influence, the process is gradual: when the woman realises she is pregnant, she tells Ken that he needs to become sober, revealing that she is well-aware of his continuing habit. Yet, in the final scenes of the film, taking place after the child has been born, the two have an argument about missing money; it is implied that Johanna believes Ken spent the sum on drugs.

An interesting point to note is that while Sabitha and Edith essentially exchange personalities between the page and the screen, their uneasy friendship remains probably the most faithful to the story, as well as perhaps the most "Munrovian" element of the film. In the story, Edith is the quieter and more reflexive of the girls, while Sabitha is described as the more fashion-conscious and outrageous of the two; in the film, Sabitha becomes the more withdrawn one, her personality bearing the brunt of the difficult family situation. It is thus Edith who, in the screen version,

makes attempts at discussing the "shocking" subjects of sex and masturbation with the clearly uncomfortable Sabitha. At the same time, however, their relationship matches that in the story in "spirit" if not in "letter," including the fact that the tensions between the two girls stem from their belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds. This class dynamic belongs to frequent motifs in Munro's fiction, recurring, for instance, in *Lives of Girls and Women* or *Who Do You Think You Are*.

Paradoxically, the issue of the change of context—that is, the time and the place—in which the respective narratives happen remains perhaps the most ambiguous one among those discussed in the present essay. On the one hand, the plot of the film may not seem tremendously affected by this alteration, as Munro's "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" can be perceived as, at its essence, an intimate story taking place at a personal, rather than global or even local, level. In such a reading, the change of setting may appear insignificant as long as the relationships between the core players are retained. On the other hand, however, abandoning Munro's small-town Ontario and Saskatchewan of the 1950s means abandoning little touches with which the story is imbued, such as references to Eastern European immigration to the area (Munro, 2002, p. 4), or the evolving socio-economic situation of the town. What is more, while the change of the time of action may facilitate some elements thereof, the prank played by Edith and Sabitha becomes as a result not only an act of bullying, but also ascribes to the Internet phenomenon of catfishing, perceived by some to be a cybercrime on the rise.[1] Additionally, it may seem that not all elements of the plot have undergone transposition to a contemporary setting equally seamlessly; the prolonged lack of communication between Sabitha and her father, in the era of mobile phones and the Internet, as well as the traceless disappearance of Johanna in the times of ubiquitous CCTV cameras come to mind as two of the most ready examples. Finally, the very construction of Johanna's character seems to be out of time. As A.O. Scott comments, "[e]ven in Ms. Munro's story […] Johanna carries an air of anachronism," while in the film, he claims, "she seems like a creature from another time, a Victorian servant out of Charles Dickens or Charlotte Brontë" (Scott, 2014). It is quite telling that Ken's girlfriend refers to Johanna derisively as "Little House on the Prairie" (*Hateship Loveship*), describing her conservative mode of dressing as well as her behaviour.

In a conversation with Barry Hertz, Liza Johnson, the director of *Hateship Loveship*, declared that she worked closely with the film's scriptwriter, Mark Poirier, "to make sure the script retained the point of [Munro's] story—to keep the tone as honest as we could" (Hertz, 2013). As the present analysis shows, this aim has perhaps not been fully met in the film version of Alice Munro's text. The alterations made to the plot, the depiction of some of the characters, as well as to the setting of the story results in significant departures of the film from Munro's story. In comparing the endings of the two versions, one may notice that in Munro's story,

[1]It might be noted that had the film version of the prank remained connected with non-electronic mail, its perpetration by the girls would be considered a federal offence in the United States.

the apparently inevitable catastrophic exposure of the underlying deception is overcome by chance as much as it is by determination and hard work. Indeed, it is Johanna's decisiveness that transforms her life and Ken's for the better as much as the letters do; what could have been a source of shame becomes a source of paradoxical happiness, as the girls' efforts to harm Johanna backfire. Conversely, the film provides no such clean resolution and its conclusion remains ambiguous; the declarative "happy ending" for Johanna seems undermined by the fragile nature of achieved harmony. It should be emphasised that the last scenes of the film suggest that Ken may have already relapsed in his addiction, and even his marriage with Johanna was forced by the pregnancy.

The film may be praised for rendering visible some specific Munrovian elements, such as class conflicts or ambiguous relationships between female characters; additionally, it can provide an incentive for the viewers to explore Munro's oeuvre [as evidenced by Lena Dunham's (2014) essay for *Zoetrope: All-Story*]. At the same time, *Hateship Loveship* appears incapable of transposing other themes present in Munro's short story, changing its overall tone and even its essence. It is probably the abbreviation of the title of the short story to the title of the film that is the most emblematic of the issues connected with the adaptation: while some qualities are retained, what remains is, nevertheless, an altered and simplified version of the story.

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Del Jordan: Becoming a Writer

Emilia Leszczyńska

Abstract This chapter is devoted to a comparative study of Del Jordan, the protagonist of Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (Penguin Books, Toronto, 1971) and her cinematic equivalent in the film adaptation released in 1994 (Ronald Wilson, *Lives of Girls and Women*, Paragon Entertainment Corporation). In both Munro's short-story cycle (or novel, as some prefer to view it) and its film adaptation, the heroine tries to become a writer. Emilia Leszczyńska studies crucial elements of this evolution: people, relations, and events in Del's live that lead to the epiphany which wakes up her creativity.

1 Alice Munro's *Künstlerroman*

"One's real life is so often the life that one does not lead" (Douglas-Fairhurst, 2011, p. 1). Robert Douglas-Fairhurst begins his book *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* with this quotation from Oscar Wilde. These words accurately describe the situation of Del Jordan, the protagonist of Alice Munro's short-story cycle entitled *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), who tries to become a writer. In 1994 the book was made into a film by Ronald Wilson. This essay focuses on the figure of Del, as presented in the film, with occasional references to Munro's original text. It offers an analysis of people, their mutual relations, various events, and other elements of Del's life that, when combined, lead to the moment of epiphany, which inspires her to write and makes her realise that being a literary artist is her destiny.

When Alice Munro received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013, a *New York Times* literary critic Michiko Kakutani wrote an article describing the most salient features of her work. The article, published on October 10th, 2013, indicates that *Lives of Girls and Women* has many qualities that are characteristic of Munro's writing.

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Kakutani argues that Alice Munro's stories are frequently "set […] in small-town and rural Canada and often focused on the lives of girls and women" (2013). The topic fits perfectly, being the title of the collection. The setting is also typical—Jubilee is a small town, which can be too easily associated with boredom, conservatism and narrow-mindedness, yet for Del it becomes an amazing source of inspiration for her writing, although she needs some time to notice Jubilee's potential. "Conflicting imperatives" (Kakutani, 2013) are also present, as Del's mother represents "responsibilities," while the protagonist's need to write is a "promptin[g] of [her] own hear[t]." Kakutani also states that "some of Ms. Munro's characters embrace change as a liberating force that will lift them out of their humdrum routines, or at least satisfy their avid curiosity about life." Even if her routine is not tiring for Del and she does not need to be rescued from it, her curiosity about life leads to writing which, in turn, gives Del satisfaction and changes her life significantly. One more important characteristic of Alice Munro's works mentioned by the *New York Times* critic is the omnipresence of narrators and the fact that even if Alice Munro's characters are not professional writers, they very often tell stories. "[Storytelling is] an essential tool for ordering and making sense of their lives" (Kakutani, 2013). In the film *Lives of Girls and Women,* storytelling is the focal point of the plot. First of all, events in the film are shown from the perspective of the present, and "present Del's" narration introduces the viewer into the life of "Del from the past." Secondly, stories, the process of writing them, and the act of viewing the world through them, are important for the heroine. As a result, the film emerges as a story about telling stories.

Lives of Girls and Women portrays a young woman living in a small town in Canada, for whom writing and storytelling are important activities. In fact, many critics define Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* as a *Bildungsroman*, a book describing "the processes by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs of life" (Cuddon, 1999, p. 82). *Bildungsroman* has a subtype which categorises *Lives of Girls and Women* even more precisely, namely, *Künstlerroman*, the story of becoming an artist.

2 People Around Del

Since the protagonist's relations with her family, friends and other inhabitants of Jubilee constitute a prominent part of her life in the book, the film gives them a considerable amount of attention. The most important figures worth noting include Del's mother Ada, Del's best friend Naomi, and Del's boyfriend Garnet French. Also important are Art Chamberlain, who is an ex-lover of the Jordans' boarder, Fern, and an almost absent yet extremely significant relative—Uncle Craig.

Ada Jordan works as a seller of encyclopaedias, and since she goes from house to house, she is well known to the majority of inhabitants of Jubilee. She is the person who inspires her daughter to seek knowledge and to study as hard as possible, in order to win a scholarship and go to university. She puts pressure on

Del because she was unable to gain higher education herself for economic and social reasons: her mother died and she had to become the keeper of the house. She "spent two miserable years keeping house for [her father and brothers]" (00:14:17) and educating herself, using her mother's old books, before running away and managing to get a place in a boarding house in exchange for housework. Ada teaches Del how to "have faith in [her]self" by giving the example of her own first day at school, when she volunteered to read a Latin text and was laughed at, as her self-taught pronunciation was far from perfect. At that moment, Del leaves the kitchen without saying anything and goes to her room (00:15:15). Mrs. Jordan projects her dreams and plans onto her daughter. She also tries to protect Del from being unhappy and leading a miserable life, but the example of the Latin class she gives is, for Del, an example of making oneself ridiculous rather than being a paragon of courage and determination.

Another key characteristic of Ada Jordan is her hatred of places like the Flats Road. The Jordans' Flats Roads farm lies between the town and the countryside, belonging to neither of these places. Ada, with her rationality and ability to find a definition of everything, seems to be unable to tolerate this inbetweenness. As a result, she persuades her husband to rent another house, one located in the centre of Jubilee. She justifies the decision by the fact that Del needs to "acquire confidence" (00:16:00), and there is no chance of this happening when the family lives on an isolated farm. Apparently, Ada is fully aware of her daughter's problems with self-confidence, yet she fails to see that she is one of their major causes. This becomes evident when she visits Del's classroom to advertise her encyclopaedias, and students laugh at her, at the same time ridiculing Del, who suffers from their mean jokes for some time after Ada's visit. Leaving the school building on that evening Del says that "the roots of [her] teeth ache with shame" (00:13:10). This is an example of how she uses literary language and metaphors in describing everyday situations. The heroine sees the specific mixture of "eccentricity and innocence" in her mother. Ada Jordan does not know that others laugh at her and sees nothing wrong in her own behaviour. The scene of the house-warming party organised by Ada after she moved into town shows this prominently. The ladies play charades (00:19:21), and Ada is as devoted to the game as a child would be. She is enjoying herself, even though the faces of her guests clearly show disapproval of her behaviour, which is neither elegant, nor lady-like, nor serious. Del's mother does not even notice that people are critical of her. Del feels ashamed, but she probably also admires her mother's freedom, as Del aims at expressing it herself—for instance when she jumps into a haystack.

What distinguishes Ada from most of the people living in Jubilee is her progressive and rational mind. A few examples of her liberal opinions will be presented in this section and following ones. It is important to mention in this context Mr. Jordan and his relation with both his wife and daughter. He sees that his daughter has been "blessed with a good brain" (00:05:50), but he also feels that she should not show it too much to poorer, less educated relatives, and he makes a point in warning Del—mildly—about the possibility of being perceived as a strange and conceited person. Mr. Jordan also attempts to defuse his wife's progressive public

statements, which is visible in their conversation before Uncle Craig's funeral, when Del's mother is talking about organ transplantation (00:24:52). It is worth noting that, while expressing her views, Ada is applying lipstick in front of the mirror, which does not seem to match the serious and scientific topic she is discussing. According to Lizbeth Goodman, Helen Small and Mary Jacobus, women were "traditionally equated […] with irrationality, silence, nature and the body," whereas "the male correlatives" included "reason, discourse, culture and mind" (1996, p. 117). In this scene, however, Ada symbolically connects scientific ideas associated with men, with a typically feminine beauty routine, thus threatening to break the traditional gender binaries. When Mr. Jordan says that "ideas like that might upset some people" (00:25:22), Del's face clearly shows embarrassment. Del should not witness such exchanges of opinions between her parents. Shortly afterwards, though, the viewer can see that Mr. Jordan does not try to curb his wife's free thinking just because he is simply against her, or because he defies an argument that he does not understand (i.e. the idea of organ transplantation). When he hugs his wife and explains to her—with some resignation, which is crucial—that his family's Christian beliefs are non-rational, it is obvious that he understands Ada and tries to protect her from people who may attack her for her liberal ideas. He also sees, just like Del, that Ada does not notice when others laugh at her and sometimes strongly disapprove of her words and behaviour. Both Mr. Jordan and his daughter are embarrassed when Ada shows Mr. Chamberlain a photograph of Michelangelo's statue of David. For some people an image of a naked man can be and is embarrassing, yet Ada treats it simply as a work of art. Even though a discussion about the statue of David could be an everyday situation in the world of educated people, for the majority of inhabitants of Jubilee this is inacceptable, or at least funny.

The group of generally less educated and more conservative relatives, friends and neighbours of the Jordans is well represented by Aunt Elspeth and Aunt Grace. They both focus on kitchen work and walk on tiptoes around Uncle Craig, who is a writer. The important fact about uncle Craig is that he is not writing a novel or any other creative piece; instead, he is recording the history of the region, noting "every birth, every death, every accident" (00:07:19). From Del's perspective, the atmosphere of respect for Uncle Craig's greatness created by the aunts is a parody. The two women admire him even though they are incapable of estimating the artistic value of his evidently boring project. A male writer is a god to the two simple-mided women, who walk silently past his room, and prevent everyone from interrupting his work. It seems like too much fuss for Del, who does not admire Uncle Craig's work, but when she starts working herself, she gets distracted and irritated by her mother, who stops near the open door to look at her daughter working at the typewriter (00:58:50).

In the same conversation in which both aunts express their admiration for Uncle Craig as the chronicler of the region, they criticise Ada as a housewife by noting Del's wrinkled blouse (00:08:21). The implication they make is that education and Del's mother's self-improvement are a waste of time, and Del should rather take care of what she looks like—in short, ironing clothes is more reasonable than

reading encyclopaedias. The traditional model of the family, in which women perform household duties and men provide financial support still prevails in Jubilee, whereas in Del's family the mother works and seems to support the household and be in charge of all major decisions—such as renting a house in town. Del's views on the role of an artist, writing and ironing are different, just like her opinion about the usefulness of education, but she does not take offence easily. Instead of trying to change her old aunts' worldview, she decides to add something to it by showing them a simple act of joy. She takes a break from her kitchen duties and jumps into a haystack, encouraging both elderly ladies follow her (00:09:04).

Uncle Craig is almost absent in the film, but he plays a very important role for Del in her process of becoming a writer. It is so for two reasons, one being the consequence of the other. Uncle Craig must have seen a writer in Del, either with his own eyes or he could have understood that she has such inclinations from what others were saying about her. As a result, before he dies he expresses the wish that all his work should go to her. This wish is accompanied by the hope that she could finish his history of the region (00:57:58). The protagonist does not want to accept this obligation, and she gathers up her courage to announce that she prefers writing fiction and stories, at which her aunts express their surprise and hope that she does not write any stories about them. Apparently, fiction writing is not as commendable as compiling catalogues of buildings raised in the neighbourhood within a given year. Del does not feel discouraged, though, and she starts using Uncle Craig's typewriter immediately. The inheritance of the typewriter is a milestone on the heroine's way to being a novelist. Once she becomes its owner, she begins to write openly, rather than in secret. Before, she was hiding her notebook under the bed when she heard her mother coming, but when she receives the typewriter, she starts working downstairs, where she can be easily seen by family members.

The next figure who matters to Del and has a considerable influence on the formation of her character is one of her classmates and her best friend, Naomi. Just like Fern, Naomi is one of those people with whom Del can simply laugh without having to listen to criticism, preaching or both. Naomi is much more down-to-earth than Del; for instance, when she gets pregnant and admits that she tried to get herself an abortion at home, Del, raised by a mother who kept emphasizing women's self-respect, tries to persuade her friend that she does not have to get married, but Naomi says she "might as well [do it]" (01:21:48). Such a mixture of willingness to sacrifice one's happiness and freedom, combined with carelessness and the "might as well" attitude shocks Del, but she probably also sees that her mother's gloomy predictions could become reality also in Del's own case: dreams and freedom can quickly be replaced with taking care of a child and performing the duties of a housewife.

Art Chamberlain is probably the most controversial character in the film. Rumour has it that he had a love affair with Fern, and this is why she had been expelled from a music conservatory, despite the fact that she was a promising student, having quite a good voice. Interestingly, when Naomi passes the rumour to Del, the protagonist goes home to tell her mother "I'm not in life, I just watch it" (00:36:07). In this moment the viewer can see that Del needs to feel alive and she

looks for a thing that would make her feel so. She is fascinated, in a way, even with events and situations that are perceived as immoral by the majority of the society. She may feel, subconsciously, that the thing that will make her feel alive will also trigger writing. Another thing that fascinates Del and repulses her at the same time is the precise opposite of life—death. She is interested in the dead bird she finds behind her aunts' house (00:10:23), but at the same time she hates going to Uncle Craig's funeral and she strongly refuses to look at his body lying in the coffin. In the end though, she approaches the body and looks at it (00:32:24), which becomes another new experience.

The first scene in which Mr. Chamberlain becomes a prominent character is the one when Del comes home and he is sitting in her parents' living room, apparently as a guest of Fern's. When Del asks for a drink he responds he "cannot give [her] a drink for nothing" and makes her ask for it, kneeling in front of him and "begging like a good little doggie" (00:40:13). Del performs this "trick" for him, drinks from the glass he is holding, and then the man quickly touches her breast. It can be assumed that Del is aware of the symbolic meaning of the situation, in which she is kneeling in front of a man, allowing him to gain power over her, both literally and metaphorically. The assumption is based on the fact that Del sometimes talks about sex and eroticism with Naomi, reading books borrowed from Fern as they are both at the age at which girls start to explore their sexuality (00:37:48). In fact, the quotation from the women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* that can be found on the back cover of the 1990 edition of *Lives of Girls and Women* published by Penguin Books classifies the collection of short stories as a work dealing with "the sexually awakening female [put] under glass." In the scene with Mr. Chamberlain, Del enters into some kind of erotic relation, for now symbolically, with a man for the first time. Later on that day she does what many girls do—she sits in front of her mother's vanity table, playing with her hair and trying to look more mature and sexually tempting. This is another sign of her awakening sexuality.

After she agrees to go into Fern's room to look for letters from Mr. Chamberlain as he asks her, Del notices that "Mr. Chamberlain had assumed, without any trouble, that there was treachery in [her]" (00:43:03). It does not seem to make her feel bad, though, the tone of voice with which she says it suggests obviousness of the statement, and almost enjoyment, as if finally something was starting to happen; as if being bad was better than being undefined. Therefore, the presence of Art Chamberlain in Del's life contributes to the formation of her self-definition. He also provides her with some experience she needs to collect as a candidate for a novelist. When Mr. Chamberlain masturbates in front of Del, she is observing him, since he clearly wants her to do so. Del's facial expression is showing surprise, but not really shock, just a bit of embarrassment and, at the end, something like impatience—she stands near Mr. Chamberlain with her arms folded and her eyebrows slightly raised with surprise and disbelief, as if she could not believe that anyone would need another person to see them in such a moment. In that forest, she scores one point in the game with Mr. Chamberlain, which is a symbolic fight for dominance between a man and a woman. He scored one point making her beg for a drink and touching her breast, now he allows her to equal the result. He makes her watch him, and the

person who watches has the power over the one who is being looked at. As Laura Mulvey argues, power is closely associated with observation and the person who is looking at others has power over them (1975, p. 452).

Fern Doherty, the Jordans' boarder, teaches Del some freedom—she does not seem to care too much about what other people think about her—yet she also shows Del indirectly what may happen if a woman lives too freely. The rumours passed to Del by Naomi, about Fern having a child with Mr. Chamberlain, upset the heroine. She seems to be angrier about people's talking than about the possibility of Fern being immoral. However, when Ms. Doherty leaves Jubilee to start a new life some time later, Del is quite realistic and a bit brutal, saying that Fern is going to seek for another boyfriend and that she is getting fat, while Ada in her response focuses on Fern's great voice which can give her a chance to earn a living as a singer. Ada then says that "There is a change coming […] in the lives of girls and women, but we've got to make it come. You know, all we've had until now, was our connection with men" (00:48:39). Ada tells her daughter not to get distracted by a man, since that makes a woman's life belong to that man in fact (00:49:45). The girl does not allow her mother to impose such beliefs on her too easily, though, and she asks, a bit impatiently and rhetorically, as if she knew the right answer better, whether boys never get distracted (00:49:47). This impatience might be caused by Ada's remark that Del should "use her brains" to avoid having children too early, and no child likes hearing that he or she was some kind of a distraction in life of his or her parent. What Ada is probably trying to say is that she does not want her daughter to become an uneducated housewife, but at the same time she presses Del too hard to study and avoid boys, intimidating her, since in Ada's stories and examples life seems to be a constant struggle for power with less educated people and with men. Mrs. Jordan's sad monologues, which make Del roll her eyes, are full of warnings and descriptions of difficult moments from her own youth. Del's mother does not show her daughter the joy of life, but fortunately Del has it in herself, and she has other people around her, such as Fern and Naomi, with whom she can have lighter, more joyful conversations. Del, apparently impatient with her mother's preaching, suggests that there are contraceptives, so the avoidance of men is not the only way of not getting pregnant, but her mother responds that it is a matter of self-respect (00:50:04). Ada's feminist ideas and constant pressure make Del decide "without even thinking about it, […] to do what men did instead: go out and take all kinds of experience" (00:50:14).

Mrs. Storey, another representative of the community of Jubilee, contradicts what Ada says about boys not being distracted by girls, and she offers Del evidence that what her mother says is not the sole truth, but just an opinion, which depends on a point of view and previous experience. In an awkward speech, Mrs. Storey suggests that Del should not have hopes to marry her son, since Jerry is to go to university for years to develop an academic career and he is not supposed to marry. Jerry is Del's classmate and friend, and the viewer knows that Del is far from having any such hopes, but at least Mrs. Storey, with her funny monologue, which concludes with a very intrusive and rude suggestion, gives the heroine a good material for a few paragraphs of her future novel. She mentions that she saw many

cases of boys who had to sacrifice their careers for girls who got pregnant, which, she thinks, is not fair, so she suggests Del's mother should take care of her daughter's safety—and also her own son's safety, as she sees it—and get Del a diaphragm to protect her from getting pregnant (00:50:59).

This is how Jerry's turn to be described has come. There are a few scenes in the film that show his character well. For example, Jerry, trying to show Del the difference between his intellect and hers, asks her what she thinks of when she is looking at the moon. As Del cannot find a good answer quickly enough, he says that "when a boy looks at the moon, he thinks of the universe, its immensity, its mystery. A girl thinks 'I must wash my hair'" (00:52:34). Despite being extremely intelligent—as his mother boasts, his IQ places him in the "top quarter of the top 1 % of the population" (00:50:40), Jerry seems to be completely serious when he says this, which shows his male chauvinism. He is generous enough to admit that Del may be in a minority, but his judgement is that for most of women "everything is personal" (00:52:47), which means that he traditionally associates emotions with women and rationality with men (Goodman, Small, & Jacobus, 1996, p. 117). Later, Del finds a perfect answer for Jerry and she makes the point in saying that when she looks at the moon, she is thinking of both, the universe and washing her hair. Just like her mother, by saying this Del connects womanhood with rationality and crave for knowledge typically associated with men, even if she does so in the form of a joke. This is what suddenly makes Jerry kiss Del (00:55:34).

Garnet French is best characterised by events he causes in Del's life, so he will be described in greater detail in the following section. To quickly sketch his character, it must be said that he is a labourer, belonging to a social class quite different from Del's. His education is much more limited, so are his financial resources. He spent time in jail. All these factors make Del's mother disapprove of him altogether. Moreover, instead of motivating Del to study to be able to go to a university, he seems to be doing the opposite, distracting her just before her final exams. It must be admitted, though, that the protagonist allows him to distract her. There are signs showing his true, dominating, self-centred and shallow nature, and Del's reactions show she sees them, yet she refuses to take them into consideration. Such is the case when she asks him about his thoughts (01:19:47) after they had sex, and although she expects something romantic—especially from a man of a last name like his—what he has in his mind is how to repair the old car of which he is the proud owner.

3 Events

Many events have already been described and their significance for the formation of Del's character has been noticed along with descriptions of the people who participated in them. However, there are a few more general situations, such as Uncle Craig's funeral or Del's relationship with Garnet French that should be described in a separate section.

Uncle Craig's funeral, apart from giving Del another experience that results from her looking at the uncle's dead body, is another opportunity for the protagonist to contrast her own opinions with those of her mother. Additionally, she has a chance to talk to her cousin, Ruth, who won a scholarship in high school. When Del asks Ruth what university she attended, probably hoping to hear some advice, her aunts giggle, as if she told a joke, and explain in a tone that suggests the obviousness and rightness of the choice that "[Ruth] turned the scholarship down, dear" (00:26:20). The reason was that she wanted to stay at home, and Del's mother later comments that she was simply afraid to move beyond the safe domestic life. Ada also adds that this "sums up the entire family" (00:29:10).

After a fight with Mary Agnes, another of Del's cousins, who, as some other members of the family, is trying to persuade or even force the protagonist to "come and see Uncle Craig" (00:27:15) in his coffin, Del is put to rest into her uncle's office. "Surrounded by his things [she] saw his life. He had made a world for himself out of writing things down" (00:28:25). Del lightly touches his typing machine, with some sense of admiration, as if it was some mystic item. In fact, for her, it is—this is what helps her, not only technically but also symbolically, to start writing her novel. It must be emphasized that the typewriter as an item and a symbol is absent in Munro's original story, and its absence becomes first visible in the office scene.

When Ada comes to the office to see how her daughter is feeling, a confrontation takes place, and this time the topic of Del and her mother's conversation is religion. No wonder it plays an important role for Del. Ada is an agnostic and her beliefs have already had influence on Del's life. For example, when they moved into the house in Jubilee, Naomi's father said Naomi could not go to Del's mother's party, as Mrs. Jordan was an atheist. When Del explained that Ada was an agnostic, Naomi did not see the difference (00:18:45), and neither did her father. As a result, Naomi simply could not spend the evening with Del. When the mother comes to see how Del is feeling after the fight with Mary Agnes, the protagonist asks her whether Uncle Craig has already started to decay and whether his soul left his body through the eyes (00:28:15). This question is probably the first sign of Del's religiousness. Ada, guided by rationalism, asks where Del gets her ideas, and her daughter responds with the question, "Where do you get yours?" (00:29:30). This is the first situation the viewer can observe in which Del is openly questioning her mother's way of thinking. Before, she would only look embarrassed, but she would not start a discussion. Ada admits she does not know anything about the soul, and no one does, so she cannot discuss this notion (00:29:36). Then Del asks what the Bible says. Even though Ada discredits the Bible by giving the example of the Beatitudes that include a blessing for the poor, and she saw no blessing in being extremely poor when she lived with her mother and father, Del will later feel the need to engage in religious practice. Ada says that the clearest memory she has of her mother is "the back of her head, bent over her bed, praying" (00:30:25). The fact that Del's grandmother was a "religious fanatic" may explain the reason why Ada is now so antireligious. This, in turn, may be the reason why Del, brought up by an agnostic mother, feels the need to act against the things she has heard so many times

and to try to experience the presence of God, either to prove something to her mother or maybe to collect experience, just as she did when watching Art Chamberlain masturbate. When one listens to Del's final conversation with Garnet and her response to his ideas about baptising her, one is probably more inclined to think that the episode with religion was more of an experience, than a manifestation of true belief. At Uncle Craig's funeral, though, the viewer can only see the beginnings of Del's interest in religion. When she later shares with her mother the plans to go to a revival meeting, Ada is quite surprised and slightly disappointed that her daughter inherited this religions inclination after her grandmother (00:59:55), but she does not try to stop Del from experiencing a new thing.

When Del goes to the Revival Meeting of the Baptist Church she does not know what outcome it will bring. Rhythmical music and joyful lyrics make her engaged in the singing at once and she visibly enjoys the event. However, there is another thing, far more important than religion, which changes in her life on that May evening. Among the participants, Del notices a boy with whom she exchanges but one look, and then he suddenly disappears only to come and stand just next to her. As the camera moves away from them, it is striking that Del is significantly shorter than Garnet French and as he is well-built, he seems to be twice as big as she is. As early as during their first meeting it is visible that he will try to control her and gain power over her—the symbolism of their bodies' postures is striking (01:01:26). Another sign of that occurs when Garnet is touching Del's palm with his finger, and when she moves her hand away, he repeats his gesture. Finally she gives up and allows him to cover her tiny palm with his hand (01:02:14). The fact that he changes his place during a religious meeting just to come closer to a girl and the old chewing gum glued to the wooden bench that Del finds can be seen as early indicators of how false some people's religiousness can be. Later it will become more prominent in Garnet's behaviour, as he will try to force Del to get baptised. There are also a few minor situations showing his attitude and her reactions to it, such as the scene in which she is reaching for a bottle of beer and he says, in a patronising voice, that "no good ever come of a girl who drunk beer" (01:08:56). However, Del had decided to "go out and take all kinds of experience," so as she cannot have some beer, she asks Garnet what jail was like. The only answer she receives, though, is: "Jail was jail" (01:09:06). He is not willing to share the story with her.

When Garnet is packing some heavy bags on his truck, Del admires his physical strength with a dreamy smile (01:08:26). He stands as a contrast to Jerry Storey, who is an intellectual and quite dependent on his mother (Del discredits him in the conversation with Ada—who apparently would love to have him as a son-in-law—by saying that he cannot even choose his socks without his mum (00:57:07)). When Jerry kisses Del, he performs somewhat automatically, in a neutral attitude, as if he just wanted to try it and see how it feels and what it is like. There are no emotions visible, no engagement, and when he finishes, he resumes eating his toast, leaving Del quite disappointed, surprised and impatient, as if spending an evening with Jerry was actually a waste of time (00:56:14). Her pose, the folded arms, resemble the one she assumed as she watched Mr. Chamberlain's self-erotic act. Jerry seems to be yet another man who uses Del for his own pleasure or, rather, in the case of

Jerry, just to try something new. Being passive, Del still can gain a new experience that may be later utilised in the writing process. Del's attitude to Garnet is different, though. She is emotionally and physically engaged in the relationship, for the first time losing focus in studying, to her mother's dismay. Although, asked by Ada, Del says she does not want to be the wife of a poor physical worker and she does not want to end up stuck in a small town for life (01:10:55), she continues the relationship, choosing sexual pleasure instead of preparing for exams. However, the viewer is not sure if it is really a choice, a conscious one. Del is rebelliously asking her mother whether she cannot do what she wants (01:10:53), yet she does not really know what it is that she wants. She has her happy time with Garnet, chooses not to study, yet as the results of her exams come, and it is clear that she failed at receiving university scholarship, she seems devastated (01:23:06).

The scene in which Garnet is trying to force Del to get baptised can be seen as the climax of the film (01:24:32). Del refuses to undergo the "ceremony," trying to rationally explain that as she does not want to get baptised, the ceremony would be void. This argument does not convince her opponent. As in Garnet's church baptising is performed by immersing a person into water, he is using his physical strength to put Del under the water, nearly drowning her. When he allows her to breathe for short moments, he is accusing her of not taking him seriously and seeing herself as "too good" for him or for the religion (01:24:36). This is what helps Del see his true nature.

4 The Surroundings

Although people and events help Del evolve as a writer, inventing stories is in fact an instinct. Looking at the world around her, for instance at her dog or flies at a window (00:05:04), Del arranges literary descriptions in her thoughts, and she says "I took what I saw around me and found a way of nudging it into whatever story I was in the middle of" (00:05:15). This is the proof that she has the soul of a writer. Writing has always been present in her life, only she did not know how to make it important, how to make it the essence of her existence, to build a "world for herself out of writing," just as her uncle had done. She also says a thing that proves that she kept analysing her own writing attempts and the general mechanisms and procedures of writing: "when [she] wrote things down they were never as good as when [she] wrote them down in [her] head" (00:23:20).

The second significant factor which helped Del to develop as a novelist was nature. It is interesting that when Garnet makes her uneasy by saying that they should marry and have a baby, she seeks refuge in nature (01:23:46). Going to the shore of a nearby lake or a river, she looks at the surface of the water that mirrors her face and when she puts her hand into the water to wash her face with it, the image becomes symbolically disrupted before being restored after a short moment. This scene may be interpreted as a symbol of Del's life, from the moment when she became self-conscious and started exploring her feelings and sexuality, through the

disruption brought by Garnet, and back to stability, this time marked by Del's consciously chosen path. The restoration is emphasized by the fact that the very first scene in the film was very similar—the viewer can see Del washing her face in the river (00:00:20).

Nature is the frame of the whole film, which starts and finishes by showing greenery. The first words the viewer hears concern the river that flows near the Jordans' farm: Del says that it "flew through [her] veins, but [she] didn't know it at the time and what [she] wrote then was not about [her] own world" (00:00:25). The last shot visible is filled with trees near Del's house in Jubilee. Nature plays an important role in the middle of the film, too, as it was already mentioned—it acts as a shelter for the protagonist when she confronts Garnet.

5 Becoming a Writer

"As I walked to Jubilee, I repossessed the world. Trees, houses, fences, streets, jumped out of me as if suddenly real, unconnected to the life of love. I felt my own self—ironic, isolated—begin to breathe again" (01:26:14), says Del after she manages to free herself from Garnet's grasp, and those words prove the importance of this climactic scene and all the previous events that led to it. Entering the house, Del looks at her mother, sleeping on the porch with a book on her knees, and as she passes near her she is smiling mildly but with triumph and self-pride, as if saying, "I finally know what I want." Then Del starts looking at job advertisements and says, "The future could be furnished without love, or scholarships. I could get on with my real life" (01:27:35).

The last scenes of the film show Del with her typewriter, and the last words the viewer can hear are: "It did not occur to me that I would suddenly become so greedy of Jubilee. I had to, without delay, write things down. Lists! But no list could hold what I wanted. I wanted everything. Every layer or speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together—radiant, everlasting" (01:28:55). Finally, Del has managed to find the real life she was looking for, which made her able to write. Or maybe it was the writing that made her feel fully alive?

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"There Is a Change Coming […] in the Lives of Girls and Women." Del Jordan's and Catherine Sloper's Ways to Independence

Paula Suchorska

Abstract This chapter offers a comparative analysis of two film adaptations: Agnieszka Holland's *Washington Square* (Dir. Agnieszka Holland. Hollywood Pictures, The US, 1997) and Ronald Wilson's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1994a, b) in terms of the development of their female protagonists, Catherine Sloper and Del Jordan, respectively, from weak and innocent girls to independent women. Paula Suchorska begins by discussing the ways in which Henry James and Alice Munro depict female protagonists in their works. She then focuses on the presentation of the main characters, their relations with other women and the role of men in their lives in the two film adaptations. She discusses the factors that have a significant impact on Del's and Catherine's ways to independence, arguing that each of them reaches a different stage of freedom.

1 Female Characters in Henry James's and Alice Munro's Books

Despite the fact that the gap between the dates of birth of Henry James (1843–1916) and Alice Munro (b. 1931) is almost one hundred years, these two writers have much in common in terms of presenting women in their works. There is no denying that James's portraits of women became an inspiration for numerous female writers, such as Willa Cather and Edith Wharton. Significantly, his perception and presentation of women reflected his relations with women: his mother, sister, friends and acquaintances (see Coulson, 2007). Moreover, he realized very soon that marriage was not for him, but "how much the frustration which his novels always ultimately express can be related to this [his single status] it is unwise to surmise" (Swan, 1952, p. 21). The writer's strong attachment to his mother is visible in his *Autobiography* and one of the entries in his notebooks, when he emphasises that

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"she was exquisite maternity" (Swan, 1952, p. 20). Apart from that, he views his mother as embodiment of patience and wisdom (Swan, 1952, p. 20). If these words are analysed in the context of Hélène Cixous's binarism concerning women and men, in which, for example, patience is feminine, but wisdom is associated with the latter (Moi, 1986, p. 210), James's mother seemed to have both female and male characteristics—oppositions, which are typical of several protagonists of the writer's fiction. In James's works published especially during the so-called major phase of his writing activity, the readers can notice his tendency to write about young girls, who seem to be

> vulnerable, and yet firm; malleable and yet essentially themselves; timid and yet daring; at times loving and yet somehow unreachable; capable of deep silences and long looks and unexpected declarations; innocent and yet with some nameless knowledge all their own. Sometimes almost a blank, such figures are nevertheless often the magnetic centre of the works in which they appear. (Tanner, 1979, p. 8)

According to Tanner, one character fitting this description is Verena Tarrant—the protagonist of *The Bostonians*, the initial idea of which was to explore "the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf" (Tanner, 1979, p. 8). This clash of internal oppositions and complexity of emotions makes James's protagonists interesting for readers. Furthermore, the characteristic feature of his several heroines is the, already mentioned, innocence (Tanner, 1979, p. 8) mirrored in their behaviour, which is associated with the special, sophisticated treatment of their sexuality by the author since "in his fiction, James never even uses the word 'sexuality'; only rarely do we even find the older 'sex'" (Stevens, 1998, p. 3). Stevens claims that in this way James strove to avoid any scandals, which could affect the reception of his works (p. 8). Apart from that, the author tended to provide the readers with psychological portraits of his characters, focusing on their feelings and states of mind (High, 2006, p. 91). One of the heroines fitting this description is Catherine Sloper from James's *Washington Square* (1880) as "for all her apparent dullness, and shrinking modesty and fear of her father, [she] is the most interesting, […] most human and moving figure in the book" (Tanner, 1989, pp. 33–34).

Alice Munro also draws on her own life. Several protagonists of her short stories experience events resembling episodes from her own life (Wajda, 2013). Similarly to the author, her female protagonists, e.g. Del Jordan from *Lives of Girls and Women*, frequently come from the rural parts of Canada, and writing constitutes an important part of their lives. Autobiographical motifs are visible in Munro's works to such an extent that the author of her biography, Robert Thacker, entitled his book *Alice Munro. Writing Her Lives* (Wajda, 2013). Munro often claims, however, that her stories resemble her own life only in form and not in content (Wajda, 2013), which can mean that she incorporates only the frames of her real experience, such as divorce or illness, into her works, but all details are fictional. Moreover, although the author places her characters in different times, as some of her stories are set, for instance, in the 1940s and others in the 21st century, she makes them all universal by focusing on their daily experiences and domestic lives (Kakutani, 2013).

Nevertheless, according to Michiko Kakutani, Munro's heroines are frequently involved in various types of internal conflicts, such as whether to follow reason or desire, to devote themselves to home and family or be free (2013). This is one of the reasons why the protagonists often decide to change their lives, as in the case of the main character of *Lives of Girls and Women*.

2 Adaptations

Film adaptations of novels have been created since the beginning of the cinema. Although they remain very popular among viewers, they are frequently criticised for their unfaithfulness to the original texts (Zatlin, 2005, p. 150). On the other hand, what is emphasised by those who champion adaptations, for instance, Geoffrey Wagner, is that, in fact, they can benefit from modifications which make particular features of the books more evident (Zatlin, 2005, p. 155). This is true in the case of both *Washington Square* and *Lives of the Girls and Women* since in the film adaptations of these two masterpieces, the protagonists' struggles for independence are portrayed as even more dramatic and emotional thanks to, for example, music or acting. These elements, which novels lack, have a significant impact on the viewers' perception of the characters.

While analysing female depictions in films, the perspective of gender studies is potentially useful as it helps distinguish between favourable and pejorative images of women as well as it states possible reasons for such division. According to Michael Ryan, women traditionally embody "danger, uncontrolled bodily urges, and madness, while men are linked to reason, courage, and independence." These features are maintained also in today's cinema due to dominating male control over it (2007, p. 132). To illustrate his claim, Ryan explains in his *Literary Theory. A Practical Introduction* that it is difficult to find in modern films a heroine who possesses power and is depicted in a favourable way (2007, p. 132); if a woman is too strong and powerful, she is depicted as evil for in this case she poses a threat to male identity (2007, p. 132). Thus, as long as a woman is subordinated to a man, she is presented in a positive light. In my opinion, this tension is present in both *Washington Square* and *Lives of Girls and Women*.

Washington Square, directed by Agnieszka Holland and released in 1997, was not the first adaptation of this famous novel as it was preceded by a highly acclaimed play of 1949 entitled *The Heiress*, with Olivia de Haviland playing Catherine (Alvarez, 2002). However, what distinguishes the modern version from the older one is the script written by Carol Doyle, who followed James's work closely, including the dialogue and the most important events with only minor changes (Garbowski, 2007, p. 126). According to Christopher Garbowski, "one of Holland's major challenges" was to present "Catherine's transformation. James makes it fairly clear that aside from a few dialogues, this event is largely internal, thus highly undramatic" (2007, p. 128). Garbowski claims further that to delineate the protagonist's change and to emphasise her innocent and romantic nature, the

director decided to use the amazing music (p. 128) composed by Jan Kaczmarek, which is of great value in the film, especially the romantic song "Tuchiamiuna vita" with the lyrics of Salvatore Quasimodo performed by Catherine and her suitor together in one of the scenes. The main roles in the film were entrusted to Jennifer Jason Leigh playing Catherine Sloper, Albert Finney as her father, Dr. Austin Sloper, and Ben Chaplin as Morris Townsend, Catherine's lover. Roger Ebert, one of the reviewers of *Washington Square*, notices that Leigh frequently plays strong women, for example in *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, *Kansas City* or *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*, while Catherine Sloper is a complex and "recessive" figure, which must have posed a challenge to an actress (1997). Yet, "Leigh doesn't muffle her lines, and her body language, which has had a life of its own in other performances, is perfectly integrated with Catherine's galumphing, self-effacing personality" (Guthmann, 1997).

Lives of Girls and Women was directed by Ronald Wilson, famous for such TV series as *East Enders* and *London Embassy*, and released a few years before Holland's adaptation—in 1994—in the form of TV movie. The main roles were played by Tanya Allen as Del Jordan, Wendy Crewson as her mother and Dean McDermott as Garnet French, Jordan's lover. It is worth noticing that while the adaptation was shot in Canada, Alice Munro's homeland, Canadian television did not broadcast it until 1996 (Internet Movie Database). Although the film was not as popular as *Washington Square* and it was prepared specifically for TV, and not cinema, it is not worse in any respect. It was realised in different ways, but, in my opinion, it is still successful since, as Garbowski claims, "an ambitious adaptation […] does contain a focus" (Garbowski, 2007, p. 126), and such a focus in *Lives of Girls and Women* can be Del's transformation into a mature and independent woman. Moreover, Wilson's adaptation is worth watching as its coherent narration supports the claim that Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* is a collection of stories closely linked by the same protagonist.

3 Film Depictions of Del Jordan and Catherine Sloper

Del Jordan and Catherine Sloper have several features in common. First of all, their film depictions are faithful to those from the works written by Munro and James, respectively, since the directors expressed the heroines' most important features, such as their good nature. Secondly, in accordance with gender studies theory, the two protagonists are portrayed in a favourable light for they are delicate and sensitive and for this reason they do not pose any threat to men. Moreover, in each adaptation, the main character's natural development is presented, although only Catherine is shown as a child at the beginning, whereas Del's story begins when she is already a teenager and attends high school. However, initially both heroines are innocent and naive, which is visible especially in the case of Catherine and her body language. She is a clumsy person; for example she does not know how to behave properly (0:08:50) and she cannot dance (0:13:25). Apart from that, her innocence

is also transparent in one of the first scenes, when she is so afraid when asked by Aunt Lavinia to sing a song that she cannot make a sound and only pees (0:06:30). What is more, Catherine resembles the canary in a cage that is presented in one of the shots (0:07:35), as due to "claustrophobic domesticity of [the] heroine's household and economic stand" (Alvarez, 2002), she cannot develop and remains under her father's control. It is only her first party and the meeting of Morris Townsend (0:12:30) that stimulate her to develop and broaden her horizons, although she still remains innocent. This may be illustrated, for instance, by the scene when she is afraid of staying alone with Morris since it is inappropriate (0:23:52). By contrast, Del's initial innocence is reflected in her spontaneity, as in the moment when she jumps into a haystack without any particular reason but for fun, and provokes her aunts to do the same (0:09:05). Another example can be found in the scene in which the heroine and her handicapped cousin, Mary Agnes, find a dead bird. Del is afraid of touching it (0:10:45). Subconsciously, she sees the decaying animal as a threat to her purity.

Moreover, both protagonists' initial appearance is crucial and reflects to some extent their personalities; for instance, in one of the first scenes, Catherine wears a dress which seems to be rich, but is too big for her (0:04:50), which may be another sign of her naivety since a rich dress cannot compensate for her lack of beauty. She has the same problem with an evening dress she chooses for her first party; although Catherine does her best to look good, she is overwhelmed by its blue and yellow colours and all the frills (0:09:15). The viewers realize that the protagonist would do anything to please her father, which proves that Dr. Sloper controls Catherine's entire life. Similarly, at the beginning, Del does not look attractive when she wears a classical outfit chosen by her mother: a white blouse, a long skirt and hair-ribbons (0:05:54). She does not realize her own attractiveness yet.

Furthermore, what is common for both heroines is that they are under a strong influence of their parents—Catherine under her father's, Dr. Sloper, and Del under her mother's, Ada, although in different respects. The former one embodies conservative thinking and stunts his daughter's development; far from giving her emotional support, he frequently criticises her in a cruel way. Dr. Sloper does not care for his daughter, he rejects her; yet, he wants her to be obedient and he does not allow her to be her own woman. Similarly, Ada Jordan also tries to control Del's life; for example, she exerts pressure on her daughter to gain a scholarship and go to university and she does not want her to be in a relationship with her boyfriend, Garnet French. However, the motifs of her actions are completely different from Dr. Sloper's as she wants the best for Del and she attempts to protect her with all possible means. Neither of these extremes leads to the teenagers' development. Nevertheless, when the heroines become older and they start to experience life without constant parental control, they try to evolve and become independent women. Their way to independence is undoubtedly influenced by significant events in their lives and the people who surround them.

4 Other Women

Both Del and Catherine look for role models. In Del's case, the obvious self imposing role-model is her mother, Ada, who is a good-natured woman, but one who wants her daughter to fulfil her own ambitions, for example of getting a scholarship and going to university since it was impossible for Ada to do so for economic reasons (0:13:40). This is also the reason why Ada attempts to make Del's life easier and insists on moving to the town (0:16:00). As Walter Martin describes her in his *Alice Munro: Paradox and Parallel*, Ada is "always earnest, rational and well-informed, but humourless and unironic" (Martin, 1987, p. 61). Thus, Del's mother is characterised by some male features, which are reinforced by the fact that she sells encyclopaedias, which Brad Hooper calls a "male-type job" (2008, p. 26). Mrs. Jordan also claims that providing children with knowledge is the best a mother can do for them (0:03:30). This may be interpreted as a sign of Ada's progressive thinking and her desire to break with the traditional view of women and children's upbringing. Initially, Del not only admires her and is obedient, but also she "share[s] [her] mother's appetite for knowledge" (0:02:45); for example in the scene in which she takes one of the encyclopaedias Ada sells and starts to recite the names of the American presidents (0:02:45). Nevertheless, she is unable to meet all her mother's expectations, like in the scene at the party when Ada asks her to tell the guests when Caesar lived and Del does not know; yet, Ada still reassures the ladies that she does (0:21:10), which may be seen as one of the first flaws in their relation. At the same party, the protagonist seems also to be a little ashamed of her mother's behaviour since Ada tries hard to entertain her guests, while they are apparently bored with her games (0:19:49). Moreover, Del starts to write in secret (0:05:17) and this may be interpreted as the first sign of Del's attempt to develop her own identity, beyond Mrs. Jordan's control. Furthermore, Ada continuously compares Del to herself, especially in order to demonstrate that her daughter should be happy as she is in a much better situation than her mother was when she was at her age. This can be illustrated, for instance, by the scene before Uncle Craig's funeral, when Del does not want to go there and Ada tells her that she does not want to either, but they have to and then provides an example of herself by saying that she had to participate in her mother's funeral (0:24:06), which was even harder for her. While the plot is developing and Del is getting older, she feels increasingly frustrated and in one of the scenes she says: "I am not in life. I just watch it" (0:36:00), which may be the reason for changing her attitude towards her mother. The heroine begins to question some of Ada's beliefs and she is not entirely obedient anymore. For instance, Mrs. Jordan frequently repeats that she should not let men distract her; otherwise, she will lose her own life (0:49:30), but Del lets Garnet distract her and that is why she does not concentrate on studying for her exams. Consequently, she is not given a scholarship and disappoints her mother, which has a significant impact on their further relation, which is apparently colder than it was at first.

Another female character who influences Del's change is Naomi, her friend, with whom she discovers the world of men. As the girls are growing up, they become fascinated by boys and their bodies in particular. Although initially it seems funny to them, they start to read together about male organs (0:37:45), gossip about the boys from their class (0:34:06) and later they swap comments on their sexual experiences (1:20:15). It is significant that the girls do not talk about love or relationships, but about physicality, which is the most interesting aspect for them. It can be noticed that Del can talk to Naomi about everything she cannot talk about to her mother, since Ada Jordan cares for her daughter's intellectual and moral development, but boys and sexuality are the taboo subjects between them. Ada does not understand that Del is growing up and is attracted by men. With Naomi's help, the protagonist becomes mature in a physical sense and discovers her femininity, which is an important step on her way to be an independent woman. Significant in this case is the girls' conversation almost at the end of the film, when the viewers have an opportunity to learn, for instance, Del's attitude towards pregnancy and marriage for she tells Naomi, who is expecting a child, that she does not have to marry if she does not want to (1:20:15). This example demonstrates how the protagonist has changed and how independent her thinking has become. Moreover, according to Brad Hooper, "[h]er reactions to the pregnancy and impending marriage of her girlfriend is certainly antidomestic" (Hooper, 2008, p. 28), which proves that she does not want to live in a traditional way imposed by the society and culture, but her own, and she has courage to talk about it.

Apart from the protagonist's mother and her friend, a less significant, but still important, role in her development is also played by Fern Dogherty, her aunts Grace and Elspeth, as well as her cousin Ruth McQueen, who make her think of her own life. First of all, thanks to Fern, Del can observe that men do not always make women happy, as in the scene when having left Fern only a note, Mr. Chamberlain breaks up with her (0:46:23). The woman is disappointed and leaves the town (0:48:12). Crucial in this moment are two sentences uttered by Ada Jordan; firstly, she claims that "breach of promise"—a legal term referring to a civil wrong in common law jurisdiction under which men (but not women) could be punished by the law for breaking an engagement—"is a degradation to a woman" (0:46:50). Although Ada feels sorry for Fern, she views the law as degrading. "There is a change coming, Del, in the lives of girls and women" (0:49:04), Ada adds, which may mean in the context of the previous sentence that women will soon cease to be degraded by both men and the law. It may also foreshadow Del's upcoming future. Reactions to Fern's case reveal the difference between Ada and Del. After Fern's departure, Ada claims that she was fed up with men (0:48:53), whereas Del replies that Fern is putting on weight (0:48:57), which suggests that the protagonist has already discovered the power of appearance and she thinks that this is the reason why the woman is still a single. By contrast, while analysing the images of Del's aunts, Grace and Elspeth, the viewers may notice that they stand for the voice of the past and conservative thinking, for instance when they give the protagonist the unfinished chronicle written previously by Uncle Craig and one of them says that she could finish this piece, Del replies that she enjoys writing fiction (0:58:15), which is the source of consternation

visible in the aunts' faces. In their days, women were supposed to care for home and family. Writing was "a form of work long denied to [them]" (Goodman, Small, & Jacobus, 1996, p. 109). According to Brad Hooper,

> [t]he two great aunts, sisters, step to the fore to become, in their eccentric but meaningful ways, the vehicles by which the narrator gathers an increasing awareness of traditional male and female roles and how she will respond to those roles as she grows older and wants her own choices to make about the forthcoming nature of her own adult life. (Hooper, 2008, p. 21)

In other words, the aunts make Del realise the traditional division between male and female spheres and influence her further decision to reject it. What is worth mentioning is the fact that Ada frequently crosses the boundary between these spheres, which proves her progressiveness; not only does she sell encyclopaedias, but also she is for birth-control (0:06:27). Similarly, Del seems to be encouraged to break with the tradition and that is why the contrast between her way of thinking and her aunts' becomes transparent. Finally, a short, but a significant role in Del's change is played by her cousin, Ruth McQueen. From their conversation the viewers can learn that Ruth had a chance to get a scholarship and go to the university, but she declined it and decided to stay at home (0:26:10). On the one hand, this can be interpreted as the rejection of progress and the intention to maintain the traditional view of women. On the other hand, thanks to Ruth, Del can realise that going to a university is not the only possible way of living and she does not have to go there if she does not want to.

Although not surrounded by as many women as Del Jordan, Catherine Sloper also changes to some extent under female influence. The protagonist of *Washington Square* grows up without a mother, who is usually an essential person in a young girl's life since she can teach her daughter basic behaviours, rules and natural processes from a female perspective as well as shape her personality and femininity. Nobody is able to replace the mother's presence to Catherine, which may be one of the possible reasons for her naivety and clumsiness. Moreover, unlike Del Jordan, the protagonist of *Washington Square* does not have any friend with whom she could speak. Nevertheless, she has Aunt Lavinia, who has an impact on the heroine's life and further change. In Holland's *Washington Square* this character, played by Maggie Smith, is almost exactly the same as described by Henry James:

> Mrs. Penniman was a tall, thin, fair, rather faded woman, with a perfectly amiable disposition, a high standard of gentility, a taste for light literature, and a certain foolish indirectness and obliquity of character. She was romantic; she was sentimental; she had a passion for little secrets and mysteries — a very innocent passion, for her secrets had hitherto been as unpractical as addled eggs. (James, 2009, p. 15)

Due to the fact that she spends plenty of time with Catherine, her niece could be influenced by her romanticism to some extent. Moreover, Lavinia cares for the girl's good manners, for instance in the scene when she does not want Catherine to run to her father, but behave as a young lady (0:07:52). When the protagonist meets Morris, Lavinia attempts to help them, although the viewer may suspect that she is herself infatuated with the young man. For example, in the scene in which she asks Morris Townsend for a curl of his hair for her niece (0:50:55), she eventually does

not pass it on to her, but decides to keep it (0:55:35). Catherine trusts her aunt and that is why she allows her to take care of Morris while she is travelling through Europe with her father, but after her return, her lover breaks up with her and this is when the heroine accuses Lavinia of causing her unhappiness (1:25:45). She claims that the aunt was cruel to her and her father is right when he says that Lavinia destroys everything on her way (1:25:42) since, despite her having apparently good intentions, she talked to Morris about Catherine so many times that the man has grown tired of her (1:26:15). Nevertheless, on the basis of this scene, the viewers may also draw the conclusion that the argument between the two constitutes only a pretext for Catherine to release her negative emotions after being abandoned by Morris Townsend.

5 Men's Roles

Although the above-mentioned examples demonstrate the influence of other women on Del's and Catherine's development and beliefs, it is mainly men who stimulate their change directly. In Del's life several men are crucial, but it is quite surprising that her father does not belong to them as he is almost invisible in the film. The viewers can easily notice that he is dominated by his wife, Ada, who makes the decisions, for instance, in the scene in which she decides on their moving to town and Del's father does not have a choice but to agree, even though he does not seem to be fully convinced (0:16:33). Moreover, he is absent through a greater part of the adaptation and the viewers know nothing about his relationship with the daughter. Paradoxically, his absence may have a significant impact on Del's life in terms of psychology for, according to Jacques Lacan, the father is "a necessary mediator between the child and the mother" (qtd. in Sharpe, n.d.). Thus, the father's absence can have a damaging effect on the child's relations with the mother, which may be seen as one of the reasons for Del's flawed relationship with Ada.

Another vital man in the protagonist's life is Mr. Chamberlain, who is the object of fascination for Del and Naomi, which can be illustrated by the scene in the library, when the girls look at him furtively and gossip about his private life (0:35:00). Significantly, the protagonist cannot believe that Mr. Chamberlain lives with Fern Dogherty as though they were married (0:35:40). Furthermore, it is Mr. Chamberlain who provokes Del to discover her sexuality in a physical sense since he is the first man to touch her body (0:40:30) as well as to show her male orgasm (0:45:40). It may be said that the heroine loses her innocence with him as, according to Hooper,

> Fern's boyfriend is a significant though certainly not heroic catalyst for Del's catapult into adult sexuality. He makes inappropriate and secretive sexual advances, to which Del responds positively; he is a predator and manipulator. On the other hand, Del is exploiting him as well, for her new sexual exploration; she is using the 'material' available to her. (2008, p. 26).

By contrast, a man who exerts an influence on Del's character is Uncle Craig. In the film he appears only in a few scenes and the viewers know him only as Grace and Elspeth's brother and the chronicler of the county (0:07:13). It is only posthumously that uncle Craig has a crucial impact on Del's view of writing, which is evident in the scene when the heroine stays alone in his office and admires his writing devices and papers. At this moment she says that: "surrounded by these things I saw his life. He had made a world for himself out of writing things down" (0:28:33). This particular event may be seen as a foreshadowing of Del's future.

Moreover, the protagonist's change is influenced by her relations with Jerry Storey and Garnet French, who represent completely different values. The former one is Del's school-friend and initially they have the same plan for the future: they both intend to get scholarships and go to university. Jerry is bright and has potential for academic career, but at the same time his mother controls his entire life, which is visible in the scene when she tells Del that Jerry would be studying for years and she would not allow him to get married (0:51:16). The friends are close to each other and it may be said that Jerry attempts to be Del's voice of reason, for instance when he gives her advice on studying on the day before exams, while she is absorbed by the affair with Garnet (1:11:40), or when he protects her in the cafe when one of Naomi's mates attempts to seduce her (0:54:40). Hooper claims that "the romance that [Jerry] and Del begin has its basis in intellectualism not sensuality. Their sexual expressions with one another are clumsy. He is patronizing toward her, proving what Del's mother had warned her was the prevailing male attitude in general society: that women have no brains" (Hooper, 2008, p. 27). This statement may be illustrated by the scene in which Jerry says that "for a female everything is personal" (0:52:50), which expresses his view of female emotionality as opposed to male rational thinking. This may be also the reason why Jerry looks after Del like a parent rather than a boyfriend. Whereas Ada Jordan likes Jerry Storey (0:56:44), Del feels ambivalent: there is no passion between the two, which is particularly visible in the scene when Del is trying to seduce Jerry, but, due to his lack of experience, he does not know how to kiss her and, having touched her once, he returns to eating (0:55:37).

By contrast, the heroine's relationship with Garnet French is completely different as it is full of excitement and passion. Moreover, the man's background differs also from that of Jerry since Garnet comes from a large, poor family, works as a farm hand and, more importantly, spent some time in prison. Starting from the first meeting with Del in the church, he attempts to seduce her physically (1:01:20) and keep her interest in him. Consequently, the protagonist apparently falls in love with him and begins to be distracted from her studies, although her mother warned her against boys (0:49:30). Furthermore, their conversations undoubtedly lack the intellectual value which was common between Del and Jerry, and, surprisingly, they are not romantic either. Garnet does not say that he loves his girlfriend and it seems that their relation is based on discovering their physical sexuality rather than serious, deep feelings, which may be illustrated by the scene when, after intercourse, Del asks her lover what he is thinking about and he replies that he must repair the muffler in his car (1:19:50). As their affair is developing, Garnet invites

Del to his house, introduces her to his family, and suggests that she will be the next Mrs. French (1:15:30). Then, while they are bathing in a lake, Garnet attempts to persuade the heroine that she should be baptised and when she refuses, he starts to drown her (1:24:15). Fortunately, Del is unscathed, but this event becomes in fact her symbolic baptism since she breaks up with Garnet and decides to change her life and devote herself to writing (1:29:00). Moreover, this scene may be also interpreted as a female fight for independence and freedom. Hooper emphasises that "Del stands her ground." To be baptised "is not something she wants to do, and she finds within herself a determination to resist even him [her boyfriend]. Her precocious individualism has blossomed into a mature, adult strength of character" (Hooper, 2008, p. 28).

Only two men are significant in Catherine Sloper's life: her father, Dr. Sloper, and her lover, Morris Townsend, who, like Jerry and Garnet in *Lives of Girls and Women*, can be contrasted with each other since both of them have a crucial influence on particular aspects of the protagonist's life. First of all, Austin Sloper does not care for his daughter's feelings. He only wants her to be loyal. It may be said that he succeeds to some extent as Catherine is strongly devoted to him, for example, in one of the scenes she waits for her father's return from work and as soon as she sees him, she runs quickly downstairs to greet him and take off his shoes (0:04:23), which can be interpreted in this case as a symbol of her respect and obedience. Furthermore, it is also crucial that a few years later the heroine does exactly the same (0:08:20) and it means that she still behaves like a child and nothing has changed in her life. Dr. Sloper remains a very authoritarian father and attempts also to interfere in Catherine's private life. He does not accept Morris as a potential son-in-law and does everything to prevent his daughter's marriage. Although he thinks that his actions are justified as in his opinion Morris wants to marry Catherine for money, he is hypocritical in this matter since he also married Catherine's mother for financial reasons (0:36:30). Moreover, Tony Tanner claims that even if Dr. Sloper "is a clever, correct, and even just man, he is also a sadistic and ruthlessly cold one, bringing the abstract notions of geometry to bear on the delicacies and suffering of human feelings. He causes his daughter a great deal of pain—and he doesn't mind, as long as he keeps her from Townsend" (Tanner, 1989, p. 33). Austin is cruel to his daughter when he seeks to discourage her from marrying Morris Townsend, for instance, when he tells Catherine that he will disinherit her if she acts against his will or that it is awful that her mother sacrificed her life for Catherine (1:07:20), which is extremely humiliating. Moreover, Dr. Sloper frequently manipulates his daughter, as in the scene in which he tells her that she will deeply hurt him if she meets Morris (0:53:35). In this case he takes advantage of Catherine's naivety and her devotion to him. Nevertheless, his daughter stays with him to the end, which is another sign of her loyalty.

Catherine's chance to become independent from her father comes with Morris Townsend, who represents different values and style of living. While Dr. Sloper embodies reason and conservatism, Morris stands for freedom and liberalism due to his travels around the world and business plans. He seems to have fallen in love with the protagonist, which is visible in the scenes when he compliments her

(0:16:00) and when he kisses Catherine for the first time (0:33:00). Thanks to Morris, Catherine changes as she becomes more confident and courageous. She decides to marry her lover even if her father disinherits her (1:10:00). The protagonist is ready to devote herself to a man in the name of love for it is a chance for her to feel appreciated and happy as a woman. Moreover, she transfers some of her feelings towards her father onto Morris, which can be illustrated by the scene when Catherine is running to greet Morris Townsend in a similar manner as she used to greet her father (1:10:22).

However, although Morris cares for her and shows his feelings towards her, it turns out that it is only a game and he is very similar to the doctor since he also manipulates Catherine, but for different reasons; he pretends to love her only to gain profits. According to Katarzyna Taras, both men objectify Catherine and treat her as a "mirror." The idea comes from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: "[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (Woolf, qtd. in Taras, 2005: 208). Both Dr. Sloper and Morris Townsend take advantage of Catherine to emphasise their perfection as the woman is completely devoted to them (2005: 208). When she changes to become a more confident, independent woman, her father and lover do not need her anymore (2005: 209–210). As a punishment for her disobedience, Dr. Sloper decides to disinherit his daughter and, in consequence, Morris Townsend breaks up with her and leaves the town (1:29:10). Taras claims also that Morris disappears out of fear of her independence. Even if Dr. Sloper had not disinherited her, independent Catherine would not have allowed her lover to control her fortune (2005: 209). This experience has a vital influence on the heroine's further life as it makes her stronger: she is firm, calm and beyond her father's control. Moreover, these events change her attitude towards love and men.

6 Life and Independence

The analyses above demonstrate how Del Jordan and Catherine Sloper developed and which factors brought about the change. The viewers can see that their personalities have been shaped by the environment, for example, the people who live closely to them and their life experience, particularly their relationships with men. Each protagonist after breaking up with a lover has to look for a new sense of life and having found it, she becomes an independent woman, but, as it has already been mentioned, each of them succeeds to a different extent. Firstly, Del Jordan chooses her own way of living when she discovers that "future could be furnished without love or scholarships" (1:27:40) and she eventually feels free—independent from conventions and men. Previously, the protagonist listened to many voices: of Garnet, who stands for the voice of love, her mother, who is the voice of progress, and Jerry, who represents the voice of reason, but eventually she rejects all these voices and starts to live in her own way, which means devoting herself to writing

(1:29:00). When Del breaks up with Garnet, it is like enlightenment for her as she ceases to be dependent on him as well as to be "distracted" by him. Moreover, the protagonist eventually realises that her relationship with Garnet French was a form of imprisonment. When she leaves him, she can breathe again, she gets back her identity and she can "get on with [her] real life" (1:27:40). The protagonist can fully understand her mother's words about being distracted by men and losing one's life (0:49:30). Apart from that, Del stops caring for conventions and she begins to write openly, which is her own way of experiencing the world as well as maintaining her female identity. This may be exemplified by the last scene, when the protagonist says: "I [have] to, without delay, write things down" (1:29:00). Significantly, she wants to write about "real life," which reflects Alice Munro's beliefs as she is frequently claimed to be a realist writer (Martin, 1987, p. 60). Furthermore, W.R. Martin adds that "[i]t is not merely the history of a bright young girl, but of a young girl who is becoming an artist, and that is a different matter. She is gaining perspectives of history, prehistory, the universe and eternity, and thus being prepared for her career as artist" (1987: 73). Owing to the fact that Del has decided to devote herself to writing, she regains the control over her own life after having been distracted by the man since "writing is more than a form of work, it is also a means of expressing identity" (Goodman, Small, & Jacobus, 1996, p. 110). Moreover, writing becomes for the protagonist a form of escape from a male-dominated world and return to her own, real world. Finally, when Del starts writing openly and regains her identity, it makes her a happy and independent woman. In the last scene of *Lives of Girls and Women*, the viewers see her smiling and optimistic (1:29:00).

Similarly, in Catherine Sloper's case, breaking up with the boyfriend is also a turning point in her life. It is again unhappy love which provokes the protagonist to change and, in spite of her suffering, Catherine becomes at the same time courageous and confident. Her attitude towards her father changes as well—she is still loyal to him, but she is not afraid of him and she does not allow him to manipulate her, which can be illustrated, for instance, by the scene when Catherine looks after her ill father. When he asks her to promise that she will not marry Morris Townsend after his death, she makes no promises (1:36:50). When Dr. Sloper dies, Catherine learns that he disinherited her some time earlier and she will keep only the house where she has spent all her life (1:38:30), but she does not regret it. On the contrary, she seems to feel relief, which may be caused by the fact that money was the reason for the failure of her relationship with Morris and, consequently, made her unhappy; therefore, now she can feel free. Moreover, Catherine has become her own woman for she can now decide whether she wants to get married or not. According to Tanner: "[t]here are women who are unmarried by accident, and others who are unmarried by option" (1979, p. 9) and Catherine Sloper belongs to the latter ones. Although men are present in her life, like Dr. Ludlow, who proposed to her, she refuses to become his wife (1:34:45). Apart from the heroine's decision to remain single, she has also established a kindergarten at her home, which can be seen as an attempt to fulfill her maternal instinct. Thus, Catherine proves that she does not have to be married to realize her femininity and she lives in the way she has chosen—in this way she has become an independent woman. The heroine does not need men,

and particularly Morris, to live anymore, which is transparent in one of the last scenes, when Morris Townsend arrives in the town after many years, visits Catherine and asks her if they can be friends, but the protagonist replies that she does not want to be his friend and although she does not hate him, she forbids him to come to her again (1:45:59). This moment provides the viewers with the image of a strong and independent woman. It is doubtful, however, that Catherine Sloper is happy since at the end of the film, the viewers can see her sad face as she is playing "Tuchiamiuna vita," which reminds her of Morris (1:47:00). She is thus a contrast to Del Jordan. As Tanner emphasises, "[t]hat problem of liberty for oneself, and confidence in another, is to run all through James's work: confidence in the self can make for freedom; confidence in another is necessary for love and lasting relationships—can the two kinds of confidence be joined without sacrificing one to the other? Here is a typical Jamesian problem" (Tanner, 1989, p. 37). In Catherine's case, connecting these two kinds of confidence is not possible; her own liberty and independence mean that she will not put trust in any other person, especially a man. Both cases presented above constitute very good examples proving the thesis that independence does not mean always the same and, moreover, that it does not guarantee happiness to a woman.

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Works by Alice Munro in Textual and Editorial Scholarship: Through the Prism of Konrad Górski's Study

Grzegorz Koneczniak

Abstract The aim of the present chapter is to discuss Alice Munro's literary activity within selected aspects of editorial and textual studies explored by Konrad Górski (1895–1990) in his major book contribution entitled *Tekstologia i edytorstwo dzieł literackich*. The title of the book can be translated as "Textual and Editing Studies into Literary Works," and the volume deals with the textual and editorial terms, research methodologies, and field-specific descriptions predominantly with reference to Polish literary heritage. However, Grzegorz Koneczniak argues that the Canadian short-story writer and the manner in which she has cooperated with her three editors or literary agents give contemporary validity to Górski's editorial and textual theories initially developed in 1956.

The following article is an attempt to find a correspondence between selected aspects of Alice Munro's literary activity and Konrad Górski's *Tekstologia i edytorstwo dzieł literackich* [Textual and Editing Studies into Literary Works],[1] a book which is a substantial contribution to textual and editing scholarship, particularly in Poland. Although the original edition of Górski's book was published in 1956 (Strzyżewski, 2011, p. viii), I would hypothesise that some editorial methodologies offered by Górski are still applicable when analysing Munro's oeuvre and, specifically, the process of literary creation. Even a cursory look at the manner in which the Canadian Nobel-Prize winner frequently modified versions of her short stories—as will be illustrated on the basis of selected observations, statements, comments and opinions—can be treated as an invitation to a more methodologically-oriented editorial discussion of Munro's oeuvre and the way she shaped it.

I will use Górski's work as a major point of reference; thus, some biographical information concerning the Polish textual and literary scholar is required. As read in Mirosław Strzyżewski's "Sztuka edytorska—uczucie bez wzajemności" [Editorial

[1]My translation of the title—GK.

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Art: Unrequited Affection] (see Note 1), an introduction to the 2011 edition of *Tekstologia*,[2] Górski—"outstanding specialist in the Humanities, expert on literary studies, editor, and Professor at the universities in Vilnius and in Toruń (Poland)"[3]—was born in 1895 and died in 1990 (Strzyżewski, 2011, p. viii). Google Book Search (data retrieved from https://www.google.pl on 5 July 2015), the Internet browser tool which I often access to assess and make use of the availability of selected book sources, returns 415 results. The books written and edited by Górski—in the snippet view or with no preview given—prove his significant contribution to the textual preservation of works by Adam Mickiewicz (the most acknowledged Romantic poet of Poland) and other Polish authors, as well as indicating Górski's versatile research interests in editorial and literary studies. His *Tekstologia i edytorstwo dzieł literackich* has not been translated into English; thus, the present essay also aims to familiarise the reader with the context and basic tenets contained within the pages of Górski's book.

Strzyżewski points out the original title of Górski's book: *Sztuka edytorska* —"editorial art" in English, which "refers to the craftsman activities performed by an editor. The objective of the activities is to prepare a literary work for print. At the same time, the original title is a metaphor of the creative character of work done by a textual scholar or a literary historian, who—with detective-like meticulousness and inquisitiveness—gives his or her attention to each line and seemingly insignificant detail […] to convey possibly the most accurate meaning to the contemporary reader" (Strzyżewski, 2011, p. viii). As Strzyżewski notices, for Górski it is the text and textual scholarship that should be the focal points in philological research.

There are a few reasons for which the literary activity of the Canadian Nobel-Prize winner and the creative result of such an activity can be discussed by means of selected aspects of Górski's theories of textual and editing scholarship. The first underlying reason is "textual awareness" which seems to go hand in hand with Munro through her creative development, and has been noticed by scholars in sources written within the academia or for the general public. The second reason relates to the possibility of applying some features of Munro's creativity for illustrative purposes in book history—seen as an academic discipline and given by Górski "the primary role in textual- (2011, p. 47) and, at the same time, editorial-scholarship activity" (2011, p. 210). Górski postulates that book history should be considered along with such "secondary sciences" as "history of writing, and in particular Paleography," "bibliographical studies," "history of authors' lives" and linguistics (Górski, 2011, p. 47). The final reason is the extent of availability and typographical as well as graphic layouts of Munro's works, which again has frequently been noticed in various sources, even in the *Wikipedia* entry on Munro's life and oeuvre (Munro, n.d.).

[2]In the present study I will shorten the Polish title for clarity.

[3]Translations of passages from the 2011 edition of Górski's book, preceded by Strzyżewski's introduction, are mine—GK.

In order to explain the significance of "textual awareness," which is the first of the aforementioned reasons, it is essential, I would contend, to refer to the basic definition of textual scholarship. Górski's *Tekstologia*, despite the fact that the book was originally published in the 1950s, is still an important source of information. As stated by Górski, "textual scholarship is a set of philological studies whose aim is to ascertain the quality of the text which conveys the writer's intention as well as tracking the particular phases of how the text developed" (2011, p. 6). As a matter of fact, Górski is interested in texts which were created in the distant past. Their material forms were frequently annotated by the author or the editor, damaged—or partly damaged—by external factors, and such texts have survived in more than one version, each striving to be the author's primary original (for details, see Górski, Chaps. 5–10). What is crucial in such understanding of textual scholarship is apparently the historical distance between the time the author created his or her text as intended, the period the text was subject to modifications and changes within and beyond the author's scope of influence, and, finally, the time the textual scholarship is supposed to reconstruct the pure original version.

Strzyżewski comments that, in "contemporary literary studies, the connection to modern (Renaissance) philology, whose principal scope was defined by the art of text criticism (textual scholarship), the art of accurate edition (editorial scholarship), and the art of comprehension (hermeneutics), is lost" (Strzyżewski, 2011, p. vii). He observes that literary scholars have become more interested in their attempts to impose new schools of interpretation, analytical and methodological approaches and other—not necessarily literature-related—theories upon literary texts (Strzyżewski, 2011, pp. vii–viii). Along these lines, the status of the text—faithful to the author's intention as much as possible—"sinks into oblivion" in literary analysis and interpretation (Strzyżewski, 2011, p. vii). Such a state of affairs is Strzyżewski's justification for having prepared and published the new edition of Górski's book (Strzyżewski, 2011, p. viii). To some extent, it would be difficult to find appropriate arguments to refute Strzyżewski's stance. His point is accurate especially in terms of such broad theoretical and critical approaches as postcolonialism and psychoanalysis, in the case of which there might be a threat of levering the actual literary text out of the interpretative basis. Yet, as literary scholars would argue, it is rather a matter of common-sense ability of judgement whether the given interpretation still illustrates a particular understanding of the literary work or whether it leads to the appearance of a "textual growth" which no longer resembles the "original literary work" (Strzyżewski, 2011, p. viii).

I would contend that there is one more crucial point in the current relevance of Górski's textual and editorial considerations, and this is related to their artistic quality noticed by Strzyżewski with reference to the first edition of the book and its title. My argument is that Munro is an example of a writer who gives validity to *Tekstologia i edytorstwo dzieł literackich*. The history of Munro's creative and editing process reveals her rather elusive authorial intention. Her cooperation with

her literary agents and publishers illustrates why textual and editorial activity should be seen in terms of creative art.

As noted by Górski, textual scholarship is a significant dimension of philological studies (2011, p. 6; cf. p. 1), and this should be linked to the way in which Munro created her short stories and which has generated interest as regards their textual and editorial features. This interest is visible even in the *Wikipedia* entry on Alice Munro. The mention of *Wikipedia* as a reference source may cause some objection on part of academic researchers; nevertheless, I would argue that the entry on Munro, apart from the detailed biography of the writer and extensive bibliography of her works, offers a hint of textual and editorial awareness with which Munro is endowed (Munro, n.d.). By way of illustration, in the section titled "Creating New Versions," Munro's activity of frequently rewriting her works is presented from the perspective of Anne Close and Lisa Dickler Awano, the former being her editor. The latter, bearing in mind authorial changes introduced to the short story "Wood" (Munro, n.d.), refers to Munro as "a tireless self-editor" (cited in Munro, n.d.). On the basis of Awano's text "Kindling the Creative Fire: Alice Munro's Two Versions of 'Wood,'" published in 2012, the following editorial features of Munro are given in the entry: the short-story writer

> rewrites and revises a story, in this case returning to it for a second publication nearly thirty years later. In this case, Awano says, Munro revised characterizations, themes and perspectives, as well as rhythmic syllables, a conjunction or a punctuation mark. The characters change, too. Inferring from the perspective they take on things, they are middle-age in 1980, and in 2009 they are older. […] The 2009 version is made up of eight sections instead of three in 1980, and it has a new ending. (Munro, n.d.; see also Awano, 2012)

Other texts are also subject to authorial and editorial alterations. These include, for example, such texts as "The Progress of Love," "The Children Stay" and "The View from Castle Rock" (Munro, n.d.).

The editorial profile of Munro can bring to mind Górski's "cases of textual work," presented in Chap. 5 of his *Tekstologia* (2011, pp. 51–55) and explored in the consecutive chapters (2011, pp. 57–174). I would contend that Munro's short stories enumerated in the previous paragraph can illustrate, and further complicate, such textual and editorial problems as "selection of the basic edition for ascertaining the [primary] text" which will be faithful to the author's intention (Górski, 2011, p. 96). As a matter of fact, the quote is the title of the second section (2011, pp. 96–104) of Chap. 7, in which the textual scholar discusses the case of there existing more than one printed and autograph version of the same text. Although Górski analyses the works written in the past (in relation to the time he published his study), I find a close correspondence between his points and Munro's practice of rewriting the same work. In the future, the following question may pose some difficulty to Munro scholars: "Which of the versions available" is the text the "Canadian writer intended?" In addition, I would contend that Górski's "cases 3 and 4" (2011, p. 117), which address the problem of "autographs and copies controlled by the author" (2011, p. 117) discussed in Chap. 8 (2011, pp. 117–150), whose title has been

presented above in the split quotation, can also have some validity as regards Munro's rewriting activity.

Furthermore, with respect to Munro and her creative development, "textual awareness" transpires in distinctive features of the relationship she has had with her editors, literary agents or publishers. One figure has already been mentioned in the *Wikipedia* entry: Anne Close. In the same entry, yet in a different section-titled "Career," the name of the second person is given: Douglas Gibson, with whom Munro has cooperated for a long time (see Munro, n.d.). The third figure, Deborah Treisman, appears in some other texts. At this point, I deem it crucial to refer to Górski's discussion of editing studies in Chap. 12 (2011, pp. 209–228). Although his analysis of editing scholarship is spatially limited to Poland, as visible in the title of the chapter, some theoretical concepts which address editorial problems are not Poland-specific.

One of such concepts is the term "editor,"[4] the meaning of which, as Górski argues, "can be conveyed by means of the word 'publisher'"[5] (2011, p. 209). Górski continues that the sense of

> the last word is ambiguous and colloquially related to the concept of the publishing institution for the most part. In such reasoning the "publisher" is understood as the "publisher-entrepreneur," who, having received a completed text, makes it ready for print, organises the technical process of its production and commercial circulation; in that way, he or she deals with the editing and printing work, and distributes the text for sale (2011, p. 209).

However, Górski is aware of another meaning of the word "publisher"—one which conveys the idea of the term "editor": "a person whose task is to provide the publishing institution with the flawless edition of the text and in compliance with the author's creative intention" (2011, p. 209). As regards Munro's texts, the concepts of the "editor-publisher" and the "author's creative intention" are quite complicated and frequently discussed by critics and scholars of Munro's works, especially after the Canadian writer received a Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013.

On the Internet one can find the post released by Hawthorne Books: "On Editing Alice Munro, Who Has Three Editors: Deborah Treisman at The New Yorker; Douglas Gibson at McClelland & Stewart; And Anne Close at Knopf" (December 17, 2012). Having followed the post to its target article about the three figures, although the direct hyperink was broken, and browsing the Internet for still further information on each of the editors or publishers in Górski's understanding as well as on the role they have played in the development of Munro's literary creativity, I found thought-provoking views on their collaboration with the Nobel-Prize winner. In articles and interviews accessible on the Internet either all of the editors express their opinions or they independently give their individual statements. In the article "Editing Alice Munro" (MacDonald, 2012), to which the

[4]Górski uses the Polish word "edytor."

[5]Górski uses the Polish word "wydawca."

aforementioned post leads, the roles of each of the editors are defined: it becomes obvious in the article that each of the figures has contributed his or her part in shaping Munro's activity. Their contribution and significance is expressed in the following passage:

> And yet Munro has not one, not even two, but three editors, all of whom have a hand in guiding her work: Deborah Treisman at *The New Yorker*, where many of Munro's stories first see the light of day; Douglas Gibson at McClelland & Stewart, who has been Munro's Canadian editor since her 1978 collection, *Who Do You Think You Are?*; and Anne Close at Knopf, her long-time U.S. publisher. (MacDonald, 2012)

Deborah Treisman's role exemplifies Górski's second meaning of the word "editor-publisher," but her contribution should rather be perceived as personal—and even friendly—mediation or advice. Another article with the same title, "Editing Alice Munro," appeared in *The New Yorker* on 10 October 2013. In the text Treisman sheds light on details of the final stages of short-story creation, the editorial stage which is crucial as regards the authorial intention and could be discussed within Górski's concepts of textual activity. A description of how Munro's works underwent the process of completion are disclosed in the following opening paragraph of the article:

> Editing Alice Munro's stories is sometimes a lesson in feeling extraneous. As I'm preparing to tell her that the final paragraph isn't landing right, she is already faxing a new ending; as I mark up page 5, to show that something hasn't been properly set up, she is calling to say that she has put a new page 5 in the mail. Sometimes I see a paragraph on page 10 that seems an unnecessary diversion and cross it out; when I get to page 32, I understand why it was absolutely crucial to the story and have to retrace my steps. As we go through the proofs by phone, Alice throws each discussed page on the floor. Going back to an earlier scene requires scavenging. "I'll just put the phone down for a bit," she says. But the process is one of excitement and deep investment in the story at hand. Whenever she disagrees with a suggested edit, I virtually always see, afterward, that it was the correct thing to do. (I am using the present tense here, although Alice has officially retired from writing, because one can always hope. She tried to stop once before and somehow found herself having written another collection.) (Treisman, 2013)

The passage quoted may herald pursuing some traditional aim within textual scholarship in Górski's understanding: to examine the creative intentions of Munro as the author.

Connection between Douglas Gibson and Munro's literary activity, indicated in the *Wikipedia* entry on the Canadian writer's biography, is worth discussing as well. Gibson, who is Munro's editor-publisher, exemplifies two meanings of the expression given by Górski. The point can be supported by referring to the *Wikipedia* entry and the part in which it reads that

> Munro is noted for her longtime association with editor and publisher Douglas Gibson [Footnote with reference to *The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture* by Ruth Panofsky (2012)]. When Gibson left Macmillan of Canada in 1986 to launch his own Douglas Gibson Books imprint at McClelland and Stewart, Munro returned the advance that Macmillan had already paid her for *The Progress of Love* so that she could follow Gibson to the new company [footnote with reference to "Munro follows publisher Gibson from Macmillan," *Toronto Star*, 30 April

> 1986]. Munro and Gibson have retained their professional association ever since; when Gibson published his own memoirs in 2011, Munro wrote the introduction, and to this day Gibson often makes public appearances on Munro's behalf when her health prevents her from appearing personally [footnote with reference to "Alice Munro unlikely to come out of retirement following Nobel win," *CTV News*, 11 October 2013]. (Munro, n.d.)

In the same manner as Treisman does, Gibson acknowledges the fact that, in the case of Munro, the idea of "creative intention of the author" is complex. In the *Calgary Herald* article (2013) in which Gibson's statements on his cooperation and friendship with Munro are presented, it reads that "Gibson's main problem in the past few years has been to get Munro to stop rewriting. 'I'd say, "Alice, it's perfect. Don't change it. Just give it to me. Let me publish this. You've finished it. It's done," because she's such a perfectionist'" (Alice Munro's Nobel, 2013).

Anne Close does not obscure details of her cooperation with the short-story writer either. As read in Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg's article (2013), Close has worked with Munro since the 1970s (Trachtenberg, 2013). In contrast to Treisman and Gibson, contended on the basis of the previous texts, Close places more emphasis on the form of short-story (Trachtenberg, 2013), which, as has often been noticed, Munro brought to perfection (see Munro, n.d.). In her answer to the question "Did you expect that she [Munro] would eventually write novels?" (Trachtenberg, 2013), Close states: "I didn't expect it. I thought it might happen. But the stories were wonderful. You don't want somebody to give up something absolutely terrific for something that doesn't come. From a publishing point of view, she almost always doubled her sales each time we published her. The last three or four, no, but for a long time she did" (as cited in Trachtenberg, 2013). Close expresses her opinion that Munro would never have recourse to the form of the novel in order to convey her authorial intention: both in her short stories and in her literary portrayal of Ontario, there is space that can be filled with

> things that people don't write about. There's a story in her last collection about a young child whose mother is having another baby. Her mother hires extra help, a young woman who is already up and out in the world. I think almost every girl has had somebody like that in her life at some point, but nobody writes about that. Alice writes about the smaller parts of growing up, or marriage, or you're leaving somebody, and she does it so well that it is indelible. (Cited in Trachtenberg, 2013)

In addition, in MacDonald's article (previously quoted), Close touches on the fact that "Munro has an enormous appetite for revision, and she's especially prone to rethinking her final passages" (MacDonald, 2012). Similar to Gibson, she is of the opinion that her major role was to persuade Munro that a given short story is complete: "[t]hinking back on the process, both Gibson and Close agree their most valuable contribution is reassuring Munro that a story is done" (MacDonald, 2012). The roles played by the three figures prove the significance of the figure of editor-publisher explored by Górski, but the intimate dimension of the connection between Munro as the writer and Close, Gibson and Treisman as the facilitators in the process of shaping "the writer's creative intention" moves beyond Górski's idea of the editor-publisher. The passages quoted should serve as an introduction to research of Munro's works in the context of editorial and textual scholarship.

Book history, as a scholarly discipline, is another reference point at which Munro's oeuvre and Górski's theory of textual and editing studies meet. The very field of book history in Górski's book is treated rather on the margin. This negligible status probably has its origins in the fact that, in contrast to textual and editing scholarship, book history, considered a research-specific field of knowledge, has a shorter tradition. As read in *An Introduction to Book History*, the history of the discipline can be traced back to the first half of the twentieth century, and it moved into such research directions, frameworks, and theories as "New Bibliography," "new sociology," "socialisation of texts," "*histoire du livre*," or "communication circuits" (Finkelstein & McCleery, 2006, pp. 4–5). Notwithstanding the aforementioned research-specific concepts, the "book historian" still has to ponder over his or her answers to three questions, which are general, basic, but also thought-provoking: "What is a text?" "What is a book?" and "What is a medium?" (Finkelstein & McCleery, 2006, pp. 2–3).

The history of publishing Munro's short stories, different versions written by the author and, finally, difficulty in examining "the author's creative intention" suggest that finding the accurate answers to these questions is not a simple task. What is more, Alice Munro is an example of a writer whose works have appeared in diverse editions (cf. Munro, n.d.). Each version of the given short story contains different typographical and graphic characteristics (see MacDonald, 2012), which frequently is yet another realisation of the "author's creative intention." This makes the answers to the three questions even more complex, but, be that as it may, can be considered an invitation to carry on discussion on Munro's works, her editors-publishers, and their roles in the context of editorial and textual research.

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Part III
Teaching

The Question of Sources: Teaching Texts Versus Hypotexts

Héliane Ventura

Abstract In this chapter, Héliane Ventura, who has published numerous studies on Alice Munro and other Canadian authors: books, articles, edited volumes and guest-edited journals, including her most recent companion to Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades* (2015), explores a theoretical perspective whose applicability to teaching literature is undeniable. The relational method which Héliane Ventura employs in her reading of selected stories—Munro's earliest and latest narratives—allows her to prove that rather than merely opening the door to rural Ontario, Munro's fiction throws wide open the gates of world literature, inviting comparison with the works of William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, or James Agee.

Gérard Genette has suggested that a text is a palimpsest, in the sense that it necessarily retrieves and incorporates fragments of anterior texts which are consciously or unconsciously, avowedly or clandestinely, reformatted under a newer guise. Alice Munro's texts are pre-eminently palimpsestic and the joy of teaching her short stories often lies in the possibility of exhuming her sources and analysing her texts versus the hypotexts she sometimes secretly or allusively resorts to, through the most consummate art.

In this paper, I will use two examples, derived from her first and last published stories, which hopefully will shed light on her palimpsestic method. I mean to supply a brief panorama based on illustrative instances of the way Munro can be taught through a transnational perspective, which does not prioritize national literature and the regional locale she is often associated with, but centers contrariwise on the forays she makes into what Goethe calls "world literature." Through this perspective which fosters a trans-chronic, trans-spatial and trans-cultural reading of texts, I will try and suggest the astonishing range of literary allusions she deploys and I will ponder the ultimate effects of her intertextual and relational poetics.

"Walker Brothers Cowboy" is the first story of Munro's first published collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, dating from 1968 and begins with the narrator's father's question: "After supper my father says: 'Want to go down and see if the

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lake's still there?'" (Munro, 1968, p. 1). This opening line strangely echoes the first line of James Agee's famous novel, *A Death in the Family* (1957): "At supper that night, as many times before, his father said 'well s'pose we go to the picture show'" (Agee, 1957, p. 11). The first chapter of Agee's novel was first published as a short story and presents an initial moment of complicity between the father and his son Rufus as they walk together for an evening out at the cinema. Munro's story retrieves this moment of togetherness by providing a similar proximity between father and daughter as they walk towards Lake Huron. The emotion we experience at reading about the young narrator's outing with her father, Ben Jordan, cannot but be heightened when we think of the other outing which is secretly encapsulated and half concealed behind it, the last walk between Rufus and his father who will shortly afterwards be killed in a car accident.

Another similarly poignant instance of intertextuality which modulates into intersemioticity can be found in the portrait that is given of the narrator's brother: "We leave my brother in bed in the little screened porch at the end of the front verandah, and sometimes he kneels on his bed and presses his face against the screen" (Munro, 1968, p. 1). This child's face pressed against the screen seems to be directly drawn after a portrait to be found in an anterior volume of James Agee's, *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*. In that volume which brings together Agee's texts and Walker Evans' photographs, there stands out the picture of a little boy named William Fields sitting on a bed peering through the railing (see Library of Congress reproductions http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92522120/). This little boy looks like the narrator's brother's spitting image. Walker Evans's photographs have been taken at the same period as the literary tableau described by Munro in the summer of 1936, in the wake of the Great Depression. In Agee and Walker's Alabama, the economical and ecological situation is desperate: farmers are unemployed, dust storms erode the soil and ruin the crops. In Munro's Ontario, the narrator's father finds it hard to make both ends meet. He has abandoned fox farming and turned to peddling goods for the Walker Brothers Company: "It keeps the wolf from the door. Keeps him as far away as the back fence" (Munro, 1968, p. 13). The reader is led to establish a relationship between the photograph in Alabama and the literary portrait in Ontario and to reconfigure Munro's enterprise against a larger context than the local one.

Munro's first story has been granted a large critical coverage in Canada and elsewhere and yet to my knowledge, it has never been approached through the relational method that brings into meaningful contact one text with another or several others, not to speak of one context with another. In a recent essay, Gerald Lynch reveals that "there was a Walker Brothers grocery store just down the street from where [his] large family lived in the south end, the poor part of Sarnia, Ontario" (Lynch, 2015, p. 22). The local reference, important as it is, should not blind us to the multi-layered play of allusions encapsulated in the name given to the narrator's father's company. The "Walker Brothers" is not only the name of a grocery store in Ontario. It is also, among other possibilities, the name of three popular singers (who were not brothers at all) but were originally from the United States, immigrated to Great Britain, and rose to fame in "swinging London". Today they seem to regain favour and their songs from the 1960s were heard on French radio during this very

summer of 2015. That Munro should have chosen the name of these singers for her narrator's father's company is particularly interesting, if we think of the way Ben Jordan is described throughout the story as singing songs in the car for the amusement and delight of his children. By giving the obscure pedlar, who finds it hard to make both ends meet, the name of famous singers, Munro is covertly playing ironic and compensatory games with her character and with her readers. She creates a complicity that comes from the decoding of clandestine clues, which extend worldwide. British or European readers, born after the Second World War and a little versed in the pop culture of the sixties, can hardly fail to recognize the link between the pedlar's name and that of the popular singers who immigrated to swinging London. It is a teacher's delight to reveal such relationships to the students.

The female protagonist in the same story is called Nora Cronin, an old flame of the narrator's father, possibly the first woman he fell in love with when he was still a young man, to whom he is surprisingly paying a belated visit in the company of the children he has had with the woman he later married. The name of the female character has unleashed a great deal of critical response: Hall Blythe for example has pinpointed the similarity between Cronin and crone and delineated a portrait of the woman wearing a flowered dress with green poppies as a somehow manipulative and dangerous witch (2007, p. 115). Onomastics are a tell-tale sign and an interesting entry point into Munro's works as some of her characters' names are echoing with literary resonance. It so happens that Nora is the name of the main female protagonist in Henrik Ibsen's play *The Doll's House* (1879), a play which features a woman who walks out on her husband in order to make sense of herself and of everything around her. Nora Helmer has been viewed as a protofeminist whose awakening caused scandal at the time when the play was first produced on stage because, in her rebellion against the doll-like existence she was condemned to, she left behind not only her husband but also the children she had with him and whom she loved. As a woman intent upon her independence, Nora Helmer is a far cry from Nora Cronin. We might go as far as saying her trajectory is the exact opposite. Nora Cronin is unmarried and lives in her mother's house, sacrificing her life to the well-being of the blind and invalid old lady. Her itinerary, from being jilted by Ben Jordan to staying in the farm, caring singlehandedly for her mother, is one of self-denial leading to self-sacrifice. Nora Cronin does not try to reach self-fulfillment: she dedicates herself to her mother's life and forfeits her own right to leading a life as a wife and a mother. As such she cannot but be compared with her Norwegian namesake, if only because she has made an opposite choice.

Another clue to the relationship between the two figures is provided with the motif of dancing. Nora Helmer happens to dance a Tarantella in a very seductive way at her neighbour's party and she arouses her husband's desire before walking out on the life he offers her. Her seductive dancing can be regarded as the shadow performance hovering behind Nora Cronin's attempt at dancing with Ben Jordan. Nora Cronin does not dance the Tarantella and does not manage to enlist Ben in her performance. She is left to dancing with his daughter, the daughter he has had with his legally wedded wife and she renounces in the end a performance which does not bring her any satisfaction.

The visit Ben Jordan pays Nora Cronin which is the main object of the story is an enigma: why does he visit the woman he still loves and did not marry? Why does he bring his children with him? Why does he refuse everything she suggests, a dance, a dinner, even another visit with his wife? This is the type of conundrum Munro so cunningly leaves her reader to solve and there is probably not one single solution to be found but to exhume the counter example that Munro is undoubtedly playing with, the Norwegian instance of the woman who left home to fulfill her existence, is to begin to grasp some of the secret shades the Canadian short story writer is dancing with. It is also to begin to understand the clandestine strategy she favors; she appends around or against her own characters, canonical figures who entertain with them a relationship of greater or lesser proximity and who either shed light on or problematize further the contemporary issue she synchronizes with the past. Nora Cronin is the twentieth century self-sacrificing character who renounces the possibility of taking the road that Nora Helmer had opened because, like Maddy, her counterpart from "The Peace of Utrech" in the same volume, she cannot take her life and go away. Nora Cronin suffers from a paralysis of grief which is the exact opposite of Nora Helmer's lack of inhibition. Munro borrows a canonical figure of the past, and changes the character's trajectory to make it to go into reverse. She performs very subversive reversals, toppling former scenarios to delineate new portraits which go against the grain and challenge our understanding of characters.

The final example I would like to investigate is drawn from the last stories in the last volume Munro has published so far. Of this set of four stories, Munro has said they it was "the first and last–and the closest—things I have to say about my own life" (Munro, 2012, p. 255). I will specifically examine the story entitled "Night" because it is one of her most poignant instances of autobiography. In this story Munro reveals that she was afraid of being responsible for an attempt on her baby sister's life.

This episode of incipient madness recorded in "Night" is primarily presented as circumscribed in a series of midsummer nights. The allusion to Shakespeare's play cannot be by-passed if only because the short story displays a similar structure, with a disruption of order followed by a return to harmony after a spell of madness. The narrator's experience at night among the maples, the beech tree, the elm tree, the oak tree in Ontario is implicitly set in parallel to the green wood outside Athens, where the two lovers, Hermia and Lysander, flee except that the protagonist does not attempt to flee the tyrannical law of the father, but her own tyrannical drives and depends on her father to put her right. Munro's story reverses the Shakespearian hypotext and does not highlight the green world as a space of renewal, a matrix from which one emerges rejuvenated. It is a darker story, including a brush with fratricide, and the description of a canker eating away at the heart of a family unit.

This night story is more exactly "a night piece" implicitly fashioned after E.T.A. Hoffmann's tales, in particular the volume entitled *Die Nachtstücke* (*The Night Pieces*) from 1817 and, like Hoffmann's night pieces, it is about the essential connection between literature and madness. The first immediate clue which enables the reader to exhume the transatlantic connection of the story is derived from the title: Munro's piece is indeed a night piece but it so happens that "Night" immediately comes after a story entitled "The Eye", which features the supernatural look

that the Laidlaw family maid is supposed to have cast on the young Alice from her deathbed. The contiguity of the story entitled "The Eye" with the story entitled "Night" is not contingent. In the first story of Hoffmann's *Night Pieces*, the young Nathanael lives in fear of having his eyes burnt by "The Sandman," a fear which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy since he eventually sees the eyes of the sandman in the crowd and jumps from on high to his death, in order to be reunited with his evil-seducer, his last words being "pretty eyes, pretty eyes".

A number of additional clues attest to the influence of "The Sandman" on Munro's night piece. For instance the narrator describes herself making fun of her younger sister and putting her mother's old caked rouge and powder on her face so that it gave her "the look of a freakish foreign doll" (Munro, 2012, p. 274). In "The Sandman," a Professor of Physics called Spalanzini proves capable of creating a doll, named Olimpia, who bears such a life-like semblance that she is mistaken for his flesh and blood daughter. Upon seeing the doll, Nathanael falls in love with it and abandons Clara, the young woman he was betrothed to at an early age. By comparing her little sister Catherine, whom she wants to strangle, to Olimpia, the simulacrum created by the professor, the narrator problematizes further the co-extensivity between life and death. Instead of trying to bestow animation upon inanimate matter, the young protagonist is intent upon reversing this trajectory and proceeding in the opposite direction. She wants to return to the origin of the spark of life not to light it up but to extinguish it. She is under the influence of deadly delusions which are not only similar to the ones experienced by the young Nathanael, but also by Robert Wringhim, the protagonist of James Hogg's most famous novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) which is almost co-temporal with E.T.A Hoffmann, *Night Pieces* (1817).

In Hogg's novel as in Munro's story, a devilish agency is responsible for prompting the character to commit murder upon the closest family members. Robert Wringhim, deluded by Gil-Martin, yields to the temptation and murders his own brother and his own mother. The young protagonist of Munro's story does not act out her murderous fantasy; she returns to the world of sanity, cured from an evil influence that her father knowingly dispels and the story which narrates her temptation performs a very striking act of literary reverence. Taking her cue from her ancestor, Munro fashions her story as a simultaneous confession and a memoir, but she does not choose to mediate her tale through a fictional character. On the contrary, she stage directs her own private memoir and confession, placing her own self in the lime light and creating confusion between distinct ontological levels. She erases the distinction between life and literature, to try and articulate a fit of insanity, which she re-inscribes in the genealogy of the Romantic enterprise and in the genealogy of her own family. Her declared ambition is to be truthful to what she experienced in real life and her truthfulness results in an articulation of madness which resonates with some of the major works from world literature across the ages. She not only reclaims her patrilineal descent from James Hogg but she also reclaims her descent from a character from his most famous novel. She makes her persona the heir to her cousin's fictional character.

She intertextualizes her life in a dizzying manner. For instance, the story begins with a snowstorm, a motif which is indigenous enough in Canada yet it should be

remembered that Hogg wrote a description of a terrible snowstorm, which was first published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, while Emily Brontë began her most famous novel *Wuthering Heights* in the midst of a raging storm. In *The View from Castle Rock* Munro alludes to both Brontë's and Hogg's storms and even wonders whether Emily was influenced by James (2006, p. 24). *Dear Life* is allegedly Munro's last volume and this set of four stories is the last one in her last volume. It is her final legacy to her readers, her final coming to terms with her process of fictionalization of her own life. It is her final pronouncement about her childhood and the structuring influence it had on the development of her oeuvre. By contextualizing the opening of the story against the background of a real snowstorm, she intertextualizes her life, breaking through the boundaries between life and literature. By so doing she simultaneously fictionalizes her life and brings her stories as close as possible to real life.

This breaking through the boundaries between life and literature is a metaleptic passage which can be regarded as a transgression with complex implications. Through the comparison of her sister to a freakish foreign doll Munro does not simply allude to E.T.A. Hoffmann's tales: she implicitly transforms herself into a female Pygmalion to-ing and fro-ing between life and death and treading on the dangerous territory of forbidden knowledge, a knowledge which is articulated to language, to the act of writing stories and its limitless possibilities.

Through the cultural reclamation they exhibit, Munro's stories synchronize the most remote contexts to those which are closest to her own. In the words of Genette (1982, p. 453) they accomplish Borgès' utopia: they contain all the books so as to create one single infinite book, and to teach Munro through an intertextual perspective is to introduce students to the infinite riches of literature.

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Teaching Alice Munro in Canada

David Staines

Abstract In this chapter the Canadian literary critic, writer, and editor David Staines, who is also Professor at the University of Ottawa, shares his experience of teaching Canadian literature first in the United States and then in Canada. He admits that as a student he did not have a chance to take a course in the field of Canadian literature, which has developed and begun to flourish thanks to scholars such as Staines, who is also the editor of the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro* (2016).

I have been teaching at the university level for close to fifty years, beginning in the United States and ending by returning to Canada. I started teaching while I was a graduate student at Harvard University; I went on to become an Assistant Professor at Harvard. Then I went on to teach and administer at the University of Ottawa (with interruptions when I taught at Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst). Though trained as a medievalist, I have taught Canadian literature too for about forty years, first in the States and then in Canada. While I have never studied Canadian literature, the field is immensely rewarding, especially now when so much of the world's best fiction comes from Canada.

In almost all my courses in Canadian literature, I have taught Alice Munro. I use *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) as an opening text in a history of the literature; this book makes a remarkable opening for a course which is going back through the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I often close such courses with a story from Munro's most recent collection, which I read aloud—then comment on, bringing the class back to where we began so many months ago. All the students, both women and men, relate easily to the world she is depicting, and I try to instill a sense of place in Munro, the impressive range of experiences she is describing, and a portrait of the artist, all of which emerges from this particular book.

Furthermore, *Lives of Girls and Women* is a collection of short stories which strikes me as typically Canadian, for the short story seems so important in the

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Canadian tradition. Stephen Leacock could never write a novel; he tried and failed; he seemed haunted by this shortcoming. But he did write *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), which tells the story of a small town not far removed from Munro's Jubilee. Munro is not apologetic for her employment of the short story; she holds the form dear to her. Other works like *Lives of Girls and Women* include Mordecai Richler's "The Street" (1969) and Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987).

Although Jubilee is rural, Protestant, and narrow, it also represents life. Munro roots herself in this little world and she sees all kinds of people on its streets. In capturing the town and its citizens, by sticking close to the world she knows, she recreates her world in literature.

Alice Munro in Japan and Germany: Interviews

Keiko Beppu and Anca-Raluca Radu

Abstract This chapter consists of interviews with two scholars from different generations and different parts of the world. Keiko Beppu has made a name for herself in Japan and outside as a literary scholar and successful translator of Anglophone books, including fiction and non-fiction by Henry James. Anca-Raluca Radu had the benefit of studying Canadian fiction in Germany before becoming a university teacher herself. Both contributors offer fascinating insights into Canadian literature as a subject of both teaching and scholarly exploration.

Canadian literature is a relatively recent field of study. To many scholars it was at first just an offshoot of their British or American literary studies. How did you approach or become aware of Canadian literature?

Keiko Beppu: It was via British and then American literature. In my time, so called Canadian literature was not classified as such. Only Atwood was known even in academia in Japan.

Who are your favorite Canadian authors?

Keiko Beppu: In order of preference, Atwood and Munro. Margaret Lawrence still remains virtually unknown. Beginning with the spread of post-colonial criticism, Joy Kogawa (Asian Canadian) came to be taught and studied.

What is in general the significance of literature in teaching of English to students whose first language is not English?

Keiko Beppu: While reading literary works, non-native students of English will learn to appreciate the effectiveness of expression. I believe they will also absorb

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the culture embodied in the language. So literature is an important part of teaching English.

Have you taught Alice Munro's fiction? Which stories did you choose? What was your students' response?

Keiko Beppu: I first came across Alice Munro's story in a collection of *Modern Short Fiction,* where she was included among English and American writers. I used the anthology in my course. It was the first and only time I taught Munro in class. But I recall students enjoyed Munro's story. It was "The Office" from her first collection *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968). It still makes me think of Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" (1963), even though Susan Rawlings is in many ways so different from Munro's unnamed narrator.

Intercultural competence is crucial in the era of globalization. How could the study of Munro's fiction promote such competence?

Keiko Beppu: Any writer, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or nationality, is crucially important for students to get intercultural competence in this time and the globalized world.

Can readers in Japan relate to her fiction?

Keiko Beppu: Yes, they can for at least one obvious reason. There is quite a large Japanese community in Canada. It's been more than 125 years since a group of Japanese people moved to Canada as immigrants and made it their home. I have recently read of a Mr. Tamura, who immigrated to Canada in 1877 and became a successful businessman. He established a trading company.

Do translations help in teaching and in general promoting Munro?

Keiko Beppu: Yes, I think so. It goes without saying, however, that the students should read the texts in the original first. Seven of Munro's major works (that I know of) have been translated into Japanese. This means that Munro has readers outside of academia here as well. To name a few, *The Moons of Jupiter, The Progress of Love, The Love of Good Woman, and Too Much Happiness* have all been translated, and most of them by the same translator, Ms. Yukimo Kotake 小竹由美子.

One way of approaching Alice Munro is by finding an analogue in another time, region or cultural tradition. She has been compared to and with a wide selection of authors, including Sherwood Anderson, Eudora Welty or Mavis Gallant. Do you find such comparative approaches promising?

Keiko Beppu: Both Anderson and Welty are good selection to compare and contrast with Munro. I should say Welty will peer with her very well as their characters are "ordinary people" rooted in locality, and daily lives. Again, this observation is only from what I've read of Munro's stories in *Vintage Munro* (2009).

Thank you.

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Please describe your teaching experience. Where have you taught? Since when? What kind of groups?

Anca-Raluca Radu: I have been teaching Anglophone Literature and Culture at the undergraduate and graduate level since 2004, first at the University of Marburg, and now at the University of Göttingen, Germany.

Have you taught Canadian literature from the beginning of your academic career or did you approach it via British or American literature?

Anca-Raluca Radu: I discovered Canadian literature by chance as a student of English Literature. Alice Munro's short stories were part of a course in literary analysis, and that was my first contact with a Canadian writer ever. Luckily, Marburg hosts a Centre for Canadian Studies, the director of which is Martin Kuester under whose supervision I wrote my Master's and PhD theses. A professor of English Literature with a pronounced research interest in Canadian Literature himself, Martin is an enthusiastic supporter of the study of CanLit as part of the English Literature programme. I thus developed a genuine interest in what seemed to be a very young field at the time, and this had a profound influence on my later research choices and interests. CanLit has made an on-and-off appearance on my syllabi so far, but I teach mainly British Literature and Cultural Studies.

Who are your favourite Anglophone authors?

Anca-Raluca Radu: Ian McEwan, Sadie Smith, and Julian Barnes.

And who are your favourite Canadian authors?

Anca-Raluca Radu: Alice Munro.

Have you taught Alice Munro's fiction? At what levels? Which stories did you select? What was your students' response?

Anca-Raluca Radu: I have taught Alice Munro's fiction both as part of courses including multiple authors and as a single-author course. My course on short story theories from summer 2012 included a selection of individual stories from several volumes while in my graduate seminar "Alice Munro" from 2014 we read *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Open Secrets*, *The View from Castle Rock and Dear Life*. Most students responded positively to the stories and developed a genuine interest in Munro's work. They formulated challenging research questions for their term papers and engaged actively with her stories and the secondary literature in their seminar papers. One of them has even decided to write her final thesis on Munro's fiction. The most pervading reaction on students' part was that of being intrigued by the openness of the stories and taking their ambiguity to task. The assessment of these characteristics of the stories mainly fell into two categories: fascination with and pleasure in the playfulness of the texts, on the one hand, and the wish for more closure and answers, on the other. For the latter group the stories were often frustrating through their refusal to offer closure.

Would you think of Alice Munro as quintessentially Canadian? What is her place in your studies and teaching of Canadian literature?

Anca-Raluca Radu: Her work has evolved so much that I find it difficult to qualify it as "quintessentially Canadian" (or quintessentially anything else for that matter: regional, postcolonial, feminist, female, autobiographical, etc.). It may have been so at certain stages when it relied more heavily on the experience of the Canadian small town, but the early coinage of the critical term "Munrovian" to describe her work shows that what she has developed over the years is more of a singular, signature style and voice, easily recognizable by readers.

Intercultural competence is crucial in the era of globalization. How could the study of Munro's fiction promote such competence?

Anca-Raluca Radu: Interestingly, and surprisingly, too, students raised this question in a similar if not identical way when we were discussing "Lying under the Apple Tree" (*The View from Castle Rock*). Whereas some students assumed that apple trees and the experience of lying under them was universal indeed, others disagreed, suggesting that apple trees do not grow where they grew up so that the description of that particular episode in the story had appeared strange and unfamiliar to them. This debate led the discussion of the story into a completely new direction and we continued to address such issues of cultural identity based on further examples from the text, relying on students' intercultural understanding of the text.

Do translations help in teaching and in general promoting Munro?

Anca-Raluca Radu: I am not aware of anyone teaching Munro in German translation, but many German readers purchase and read her works in translation. Although I am not in a capacity to provide reliable statistical information about this, my impression from scanning people's bookshelves as well as bookstores in German cities is that translation has had great merits in promoting Munro in Germany. Her most prominent German translator is Heidi Zerning who has translated almost her entire oeuvre into German. Canadian literature is generally well received in Germany, as the list of German translations published by Astrid Holzamer on the website of the Embassy of Canada to Germany documents; and the study *Translating Canada: Charting the Institutions and Influences of Cultural Transfer: Canadian Writing in German* edited by Luise von Flotow and Reingard M. Nischik demonstrates.

What theoretical approaches to Munro's fiction do you find most fruitful from scholarly and from didactic perspective?

Anca-Raluca Radu: Genre theory (especially short story and autobiography), space theory, narratology, realism, feminism, age studies.

Are film adaptations helpful in interpreting or at least attracting students' attention to her fiction?

Anca-Raluca Radu: Students have found film adaptations of her stories rather disappointing with the notable exception of Sarah Polley's *Away from Her*, the adaptation of "The Bear Came over the Mountain." Some even confessed that they would not have wanted to read "A Wilderness Station" after watching *Edge of Madness*, for instance.

Shelley Scott, who teaches Theatre History, Canadian Theatre, Dramatic Literature, and Theory at the University of Lethbridge, explores in a recent article her own endeavor of staging Courting Johanna *by Marcia Johnson, which is an adaptation of Alice Munro's "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage." Involving students in amateur theatrical productions based on Munro's fiction seems promising. What do you think about approaching Munro through staging her fiction?*

Anca-Raluca Radu: This approach can prove especially fruitful. The stories themselves are composed of scenes of dramatic quality that would lend themselves nicely to staging. It is not the dialogues as much as the careful composition of such scenes, the detailed rendering of interiors or of natural settings, of spaces in general, the profound insight into characters' minds, or the subtle and incredibly perceptive description of inter-human relationships that render the stories adaptable to other media, such as film or the stage. There is definitely a visual, filmic, and dramatic quality to her writing.

Another way of approaching Alice Munro is by finding an analogue in another time, region or cultural tradition. Do you find such comparative approaches promising?

Anca-Raluca Radu: Always. Authors do not exist or write in a void, and they often consciously create a link between their work and other writers'.

Her fiction has inspired writing workshops (*e.g. The Attic Institute in Portland, Oregon*[1]) *and creative writing courses* (*e.g. Daniel Pena*[2]). *Are we to fear a wave of Munro imitators?*

Anca-Raluca Radu: I suppose that some authors might presume that Munro's fiction is easy to imitate because of its everyday material. However, I do not believe that Munro epigones stand a chance given the unique talent of their role model. Besides, readers are endowed with critical discrimination, and the question is why they would wish to read Munro imitations at all when there is so much original

[1]Retrieved from https://daostrom.wordpress.com/2014/06/25/summer-teaching-alice-munro-inspired-writing-workshop/.

[2]Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-pena/on-teaching-the-work-of-a_b_4084663.html.

Munro material available. So, no, I do not fear a wave of imitators. However, I find the study of Munro as a role model for aspiring writers very important. I cannot name a single author I have read and taught who did not study other authors' works and techniques in depth in order to establish his or her own authorial voice eventually. The purpose of such workshops should not be imitation as much as the study of famous authors in order to develop one's own individual style.

Which is your favourite book or story by Munro? Why?

Anca-Raluca Radu: There are few stories I do not find as accomplished as others, but I think that every story included in *Open Secrets* is a gem. "Child's Play" and "Face" (*Too Much Happiness*) as well as "Amundsen" and "Corrie" (*Dear Life*) are also among the stories I would single out as my favourites, but the list could go on.

Is there a Munro character or a scene in her fiction that you find particularly memorable?

Anca-Raluca Radu: Several snapshot-like descriptions of women: Louisa in "Carried Away" in the picture she has taken to send to Jack; or as she sits and dreams at the bus depot years later; Johanna getting ready to meet her so-called lover in "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage;" the heroine of "Amundsen" sitting in her fiancé's car listening to him breaking their engagement basically a few minutes before the wedding; and the image of the father of the young protagonist of "Night" smoking in the backyard in the middle of the night.

Thank you.

Teaching Alice Munro in Poland: Interviews

Agnieszka Salska and Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich

Abstract This chapter consists of two interviews with very experienced Polish scholars both of whom are first and foremost experts in American literature: Agnieszka Salska and Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich. Both professors not only generously share their own experience of reading and teaching Canadian authors, especially Alice Munro, but also offer many ideas that current and future teachers of literature will no doubt find inspiring and helpful.

Please describe your teaching experience. Where have you taught? Since when? What kind of groups?

Agnieszka Salska: I have thought British and American literature to groups of students of English since 1964; I also taught English as a second/foreign language to various age groups at different competence levels.

Have you taught Canadian literature?

Agnieszka Salska: I have never taught courses in Canadian literature.

Who are your favourite Anglophone authors?

Agnieszka Salska: I like many Anglophone authors and can't really come up with a preferential list. If pressed, at the top of the list I would place several poets, both past and contemporary.

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Who are your favourite Canadian authors?

Agnieszka Salska: Alice Munro. I have followed her work since I first encountered her story "Meneseteung" in *The Best American Stories of the Eighties* edited by Shannon Ravenel (Houghton Mifflin, 1990).

What is in general the significance of literature in teaching of English to students whose first language is not English?

Agnieszka Salska: That's a difficult question today when learning English as a foreign language is primarily motivated by the need of efficient communication for practical purposes. Only some students appreciate the role of literature as a way to knowing another culture and/or expanding horizons of their own experience. And only very few are interested in aesthetic and expressive subtleties of literary language, whether native or foreign.

Have you taught Alice Munro's fiction? At what levels? Which stories did you select? What was your students' response?

Agnieszka Salska: I did teach some stories by Munro (e.g. "Walker Brother's Cowboy," "Friend of My Youth," "Meneseteung" and others) as well as the whole of *Lives of Girls and Women.* The stories usually led to interesting interpretive discussions. Students respond to their open, ambiguous endings that invite them to juggle and multiply meanings.

Would you think of Alice Munro as quintessentially Canadian? What is her place in your studies and teaching of Canadian literature?

Agnieszka Salska: I do not know about "quintessentially Canadian." Rather, her stories emphasize for me the connection between the genre and "lives of submerged populations," to use Frank O'Connor's formulation. There seems to be an intimate relation between lives of American/Canadian provincial/small town communities and the short story as a form of fiction.

Intercultural competence is crucial in the era of globalization. How could the study of Munro's fiction promote such competence?

Agnieszka Salska: It seems to me that the study of any foreign author advances readers' intercultural competence.

Can readers in Poland relate to her fiction? Why? Why not? Which elements, motifs, characters are relevant to their cultural experience?

Agnieszka Salska: Students of foreign language departments in Poland tend to be predominantly female. Since Munro's fiction focuses so clearly on "lives of girls and women," they find it easy, it seems, to relate to her heroines and their problems.

Do translations help in teaching and in general promoting Munro?

Agnieszka Salska: I really do not know. I've never tried to teach Munro with the help of translations of her works into Polish though I have occasionally sent my students to Polish translations of Munro and asked their opinion about the experience of reading the text in translation vs reading the text in the original.

What theoretical approaches to Munro's fiction do you find most fruitful from scholarly and from didactic perspective?

Agnieszka Salska: I have mostly taught Munro as a contemporary master of short story and discussed with students the characteristics of her handling the form.

In his recent article, George Elliott Clarke offers an unusual African-Canadian perspective on Munro, punning in the very title of his article on her alleged "black bottom"? Is Munro's interest in ethnicity only in the eye of the beholder?

Agnieszka Salska: I do not think that ethnicity is Munro's characteristic interest.

Are film adaptations helpful in interpreting or at least attracting students' attention to her fiction?

Agnieszka Salska: Not really.

In your recent article "Place in Fiction: Alice Munro, Eudora Welty and the Tradition of American Small-town Stories" (2015) you employed a comparative approach. Do you find this approach fruitful?Why?

Agnieszka Salska: Yes, I do; in the sense that such comparisons highlight features of the short story that make the form especially attractive for writers exploring lives of "submerged populations."

Alice Munro's fiction has inspired writing workshops. Are we to fear a wave of Munro imitators?

Agnieszka Salska: Let's hope not.

Alice Munro is your favourite Canadian author? Why?

Agnieszka Salska: Her stories make ordinary experience and daily interpersonal relations intense and pregnant with inscrutable meanings…

Which is your favourite book or story by Munro? Why?

Agnieszka Salska: *Friend of My Youth* and *Open Secrets*, probably because they were my first books by Munro.

Is there a Munro character or a scene in her fiction that you find particularly memorable?

Agnieszka Salska: Almeda Joynt Roth of "Meneseteung" and her grape jelly:

> There, in the middle of the floor, is the cheesecloth bag hanging on its broom handle between the two chair backs. The grape pulp and juice has stained the swollen cloth a dark purple. *Plop, plup* into the basin beneath. She can't sit and look at such a thing.
> No one could have rendered more precisely an ordinary domestic situation and yet endow it with such intense aura of menace and revulsion…

Thank you.

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Please describe your teaching experience. Where have you taught? Since when? What kind of groups?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: I have been teaching for more than thirty years. I have taught at three universities, one in Białystok, and two in Warsaw: Warsaw University and SWSP (University of Social Sciences and Humanities). My groups have been students of English, previously almost exclusively Polish nationals, but in recent five to six years increasingly also students from other countries, mostly Ukraine, China, Turkey and Kazakhstan.

Have you taught Canadian literature from the beginning of your academic career or did you approach it via British or American literature?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: My approach to Canadian literature has been by including it in courses that were generally devoted to literature as a means of developing students' cross-cultural competence and English language skills, or as a response to their individual interests at the level of writing their diploma thesis. I have supervised student diploma theses concerning several Canadian authors: Margaret Atwood, Mordechai Richler, Lucy Maud Montgomery and Alice Munro.

Who are your favourite Anglophone authors?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: Among the classics I would probably go for Herman Melville and Jane Austen, among the more recent ones Bernard Malamud, and in contemporary literature, I guess it would be Paul Auster. I also enjoy reading Amy Tan, Margaret Atwood, Anita Brookner, Allegra Goodman, and Philip Roth.

Who are your favourite Canadian authors?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: My favourite Canadian author is, by far, Margaret Atwood. But I have also read, enjoyed and appreciated Mordechai Richler, Alice Munro and Anne Michaels. As a child I read and loved all novels of Anne of Green Gables.

What is in general the significance of literature in teaching of English to students whose first language is not English?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: There are two areas of significance: language competence and cross-cultural competence.

First of all reading literature improves students' linguistic skills. Literary texts expose them to diverse forms of language. When a piece of literary text captures a student's attention it encourages a longer contact with English. Reading quality fiction expands vocabulary and the range of language structures as good literature differs from other texts (such as those on the Internet, in popular culture or coursebooks) in its much richer use of vocabulary and diversity of linguistic forms. Literature may serve as an excellent starting point for class discussions, though turning the task of reading a literary text into a successful class is more difficult than it might seem—not all the students will have done the assigned reading and not all will have the ability (or willingness) to formulate their opinions.

The second reason why students should read the literature of the target language countries is that it contributes to the development of their cross-cultural competence. This can be done in a variety of ways. By learning about the literary canon, students understand better the values of the nation whose language they acquire, e.g. a glimpse at Walt Whitman's poetry shows the significance of democracy for Americans, while Jane Austen's or Brontë sisters' novels are perfect representations of the English class system. Reading contemporary fiction, in turn, provides a mine of information about the current condition of the country. Novels by Zadie Smith and Monica Ali show Britain turning into a multicultural society, and do it in a very exciting way. Mordechai Richler's *Barney's Version* can be read as a social study of the Canadian society in the post-War era. Similarly can Alice Munro's fiction illuminate students about Canadian society. Thus, for instance, in my own teaching I have used short stories by American writers (Walker, Tan, Castillo, Malamud, Englander, Mukherjee, Singh, Erdrich, and Silko) in a course specifically designed to increase students' awareness of the multicultural nature of the American society, thus developing their cross-cultural competence.

Have you taught (or do you intend to teach) Alice Munro's fiction? At what levels? Which stories did you (would you) select? What was (might be) your students' response?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: Alice Munro appeared in my own teaching in a BA diploma thesis of one of my students, and this experience has shown a great potential of the Canadian author for educational purposes at university level. The student who studied Munro's fiction under my supervision had first written an essay on Margaret Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman*, focusing on the protagonist's problems with her body and eating. Then, for the purposes of the longer work which is the BA thesis, we decided together to develop her thesis by adding two other Canadian authors, the classic Lucy Maud Montgomery, and Alice Munro. The

idea was to focus on gender roles and feminist ideas as represented by these three women authors. For her third chapter analyzing Alice Munro's texts, the student chose two short stories, "The Office" and "Haven." I think her reading and analysis of Munro's stories was a very good learning experience, and she captured the essence of Munro's writing—the absence of easy solutions and obvious answers. The student wrote in the Conclusion of her thesis: "The wife in 'Haven' lives most of her life completely dependent on her husband and only realizes at the very end of the story she does not need to be like everyone expects her to be and to fit in, and for the first time she simply, as it was put in the story, does not care, however, we do not know whether she will live by that thought" (Joanna Feruś, BA Thesis, 2015, SWPS Uniwersytet Humanistyczny). This experience of supervising the thesis where Alice Munro's fiction featured so prominently has encouraged me to suggest her fiction to future students. I may also include her stories in other courses, especially where the focus would be on the diversity of the Anglophone world.

Would you think of Alice Munro as quintessentially Canadian? What is her place in your studies and teaching of Canadian literature?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: I think Alice Munro's fiction is an evocation of twentieth-century Canada and yet, as a great many outstanding authors before her, of the rank of Czechow or Hemingway, Munro is universal. While she places her characters in the Canadian settings, she pictures them as psychologically plausible outside of these specific circumstances. Due to time constraints, the teaching of Canadian literature as a separate subject at Polish universities is often disregarded, but Alice Munro's fiction can find its way into the curriculum on both the grounds of how much it may inform the reader about Canada, after all a major country in the English speaking world, as well as simply because of its high literary quality, as a supply of excellent texts, with additional advantage of short format which may endear them to many teachers struggling with the problem of students unable to read assigned novels because it is time consuming and too challenging.

Intercultural competence is crucial in the era of globalization. How could the study of Munro's fiction promote such competence?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: The reading of Munro's fiction could be done for the specificity of the Canadian context. Canada is a major English-speaking country, with its own specificity, and yet because of time-constraints it receives little attention in the curriculum of English studies, where the focus is predominantly on the United Kingdom and then on the United States. Reading Munro's fiction can help to understand Canadians, surprisingly close to Europeans, though geographically next door to the U.S.

Can readers in Poland relate to her fiction? Why? Why not? Which elements, motifs, characters are (or might be) relevant to their cultural experience?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: Students of various nationalities who I teach could certainly relate to her fiction. Munro's focus on the uncertain position of women would appeal to female readers since most of my students come from countries where the position of women in the society is very much in a transitional stage (Poland, China, Kazakhstan, to some extent also Ukraine) and women have to negotiate their sometimes conflicting desires of a large family, a relationship, personal development and careers.

Do translations help in teaching and in general promoting Munro?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: Translations from the point of view of language teachers are very useful, but may also be counterproductive. We want students to read English language authors in the original versions and therefore it is a bit of a disappointment to see a student with a Turkish or Chinese version of Steinbeck… On the other hand, translation sometimes is the only way to get students to read longer texts since in the original versions these would be simply too difficult. Some of our students specialize in translation studies and there translations of literature are used in yet another way, as teaching materials in workshops and as material for students' BA and MA thesis in which they analyze the quality of translation. Alice Munro could be used in the last way in particular since her work has been translated into Polish.

What theoretical approaches to Munro's fiction do you find most fruitful from scholarly and from didactic perspective?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: Perhaps feminist approach and close reading would be most fruitful, but also cultural studies approach.

In his recent article, George Elliott Clarke offers an unusual African-Canadian perspective on Munro, punning in the very title of his article on her alleged "black bottom"? Is Munro's interest in ethnicity only in the eye of the beholder?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: Personally, I do not see ethnicity as playing a role in Alice Munro's fiction. So maybe indeed it is only in the eye of the beholder. I should add at this point, though, that I do not feel competent to comment on Munro's capacity to relate to the issue of ethnicity within the Canadian society, but I would like to quote from a study on her fiction showing an example of her subtlety in dealing with the issue. The analysis refers to the character of Myra from Munro's early story "Day of the Butterfly":

> Myra's ostracism is never overtly ascribed to her racial difference. However, the author gives a few tantalizing details that suggest that Myra's "difference" is in fact racial: her voice was "the lightest singsong" (*Dance* 100); Myra and her brother had "long smooth oval faces… dark, oily, shining hair" (101); Myra's hair is worn in long coiled braids *"as if*

> she was wearing a turban too big for her" (p. 101; my emphasis); she has a "brown hand" (105) and a "brown carved face" (110). Despite these clues, the ethnicity and country of origin of the family are never given. The *Chatelaine* artist who provided the illustration for an earlier version of the story interpreted Myra's ethnicity as South Asian, at least to the eyes of this observer. However, critics and readers of "Day of the Butterfly" read Myra as an "Italian immigrant girl" (Polk p. 104) or as the child of "Eastern European immigrants… Roman Catholic" (Thacker, "Clear" 43). As an experiment, I gave this story to three different but equally astute readers of my own acquaintance and asked them to name Myra's country or region of origin. I got three different responses: Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and India. (Joanna McCaig *Reading In: Alice Munro's Archives,* Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfried Laurier University Press 2002, p. 132).

Subtlety and ambiguity are indicated here, and these may explain George Eliott Clarke's stand referring to Munro's position on ethnicity.

Are film adaptations helpful in interpreting or at least attracting students' attention to her fiction?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: I am not familiar with film adaptations of Munro's fiction, but as a general approach, film adaptations are a useful technique in attracting students' attention to the literary text. They may create opportunities for more ways of dealing with the text.

Shelley Scott, who teaches Theatre History, Canadian Theatre, Dramatic Literature, and Theory at the University of Lethbridge, explores in a recent article her own endeavor of staging Courting Johanna by Marcia Johnson, which is an adaptation of Alice Munro's "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage." Involving students in amateur theatrical productions based on Munro's fiction seems promising. What do you think about approaching Munro through staging her fiction?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: I would totally support it, though experience tells me that in order to involve students in theatrical productions you need instructors who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about how to organize theatrical workshops and presentations. But Munro's texts, with their frequent emphasis on psychological relations, would lend themselves well to staging, and in pre-production period (or when staging is not the goal)—to class activities during which drama techniques are employed.

Another way of approaching Alice Munro is by finding an analogue in another time, region or cultural tradition. She has been compared to and with a wide selection of authors, including Sherwood Anderson, Eudora Welty or Mavis Gallant. Do you find such comparative approaches promising?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: I totally agree. The student's BA project which I described above was based on the principle of comparison, and the two authors with whom she compared Alice Munro were Lucy Maud Montgomery and Margaret Atwood. In the case of that project the idea was to focus on Canadian women

authors' writing, but it would certainly be possible to compare Alice Munro with other authors, either women writers, or authors specializing in short stories. Apart from the ones mentioned in the question I would think of Anita Brookner most of all, but one could go for writers from very different cultures: for instance Yiyun Li, Chinese author of short stories who shows seemingly insignificant lives and the strength of family relations in China and the United States, or Sokrat Janowicz, Polish-Byelarusian writer, who early in his career wrote remarkable short stories *Miniatures* focusing on the transition from rural to urban life in Eastern Poland. All three—Li, Janowicz and Munro show next generations, characters who need to move on, and yet are strongly linked to their family background. Time, region, cultural tradition are different, but the characters all struggle with the same—how do I carry with me what I was not able/did now want to leave behind. I believe there are lots of options for promising comparisons using Munro's fiction, and in international classes students (especially at graduate level) might look into their own national literature for inspiration.

Her fiction has inspired writing workshops. Are we to fear a wave of Munro imitators?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: From the teaching perspective using Alice Munro as a model could only be beneficial. It seems unlikely that by studying her style students would become imitators in a way that could be harmful to literature. Working on style with Alice Munro as a model can only help to write better, and to users of English as a foreign language—to understand the subtleties of English.

Do you count Alice Munro among your favourite authors? Why? Why not?

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich: She is certainly one of those writers whose fiction I will always gladly read. One answer to this is the quality of her style, but the other is my fondness for Canada, which I have visited several times and which has become to me one of the most intriguing and fascinating cultures in the world. So in my case Alice Munro has two ways to my reading preferences—as an excellent writer, and as a Canadian one.

Thank you.

Alice Munro at Polish Universities: An Analysis of Selected Academic Texts, Including BA, MA and PhD Theses

Grzegorz Koneczniak

Abstract In this chapter Grzegorz Koneczniak analyzes and interprets empirically collected data on essays and theses, written by students at major Polish universities, in order to determine the presence of Alice Munro in the subjects explored in diploma projects at the BA, MA, and PhD levels. Similar to Professor Ronnie D. Carter's enormous archive research into theses on English studies in Poland, Koneczniak extracts—from the online catalogues of Polish universities—data on diploma projects on Munro's life and works. The scope of his research also includes essays and theses published on the website of the Polish Association for Canadian Studies.

In the recent (2015) volume on Alice Munro in Polish, *Alice Munro: wprowadzenie do twórczości* (*Introduction to Alice Munro*), edited by Mirosława Buchholtz, the final section, contributed by Ewa Bodal, is entitled "Alice Munro—chronologia wydawnicza oraz adaptacje" ("Alice Munro: Chronology of Publications and Adaptations"). It contains detailed information on the publishing history of the Canadian writer's short stories, on the films based on Munro's works, and on the Polish translations of her short stories as separate pieces of literature (published, for example, in literary or academic journals) or in collected volumes (Bodal, 2015, pp. 411–432). The last aspect of Bodal's discussion, the Polish translations, is crucial to the present essay, in which I attempt to describe how Munro's works have also been placed in the Polish context, namely, in teaching at major Polish universities. Specifically, I intend to address the presence of Munro's short stories in students' theses.

On the basis of the research subjects chosen by students at the Department of English, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland), I would argue that interest in Canadian literature and culture is still eclipsed by students' curiosity as regards British and American authors, which will also be exemplified by referring to the data collected via Internet catalogues of other Polish universities. Nevertheless, apparently, the students' fickle research preferences take a

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Canada-oriented course once an eventful phenomenon arises. There was one: in 2013 Alice Munro, as a Canadian author of short stories, received a Nobel Prize in literature. The aim of the essay is to analyse and interpret the following empirically collected data: (1) essays (including diploma theses) on Canadian literature and culture (in search of Munro-related subjects), published on the official website of Polskie Towarzystwo Badań Kanadyjskich (Polish Association for Canadian Studies); and (2) BA, MA and PhD theses, written at major Polish universities, which concern Alice Munro's works and life. The data analysed in the second part of the essay are extracted from the APD catalogues [Diploma Theses and Dissertations Archives], which can be accessed via websites of Polish universities. The procedure was to enter "Alice Munro" in the subject search field and to focus on diploma papers which deal with Munro and her oeuvre. The data collected will enable me to answer the question concerning the presence of Munro in the Polish university environment in the context of teaching and students' Canadian interests.

The APD archives are now predominantly used to digitise and store information on students' diploma projects after they graduate from the given university. The APD archives also offer search possibilities via key words, titles, university units or even particular supervisors or reviewers; and thus they enable students to establish the proximate context of research subjects, works, authors or developments. In addition, such diploma archives have offered valuable resources for scholars interested in collecting, analysing and interpreting data on research and teaching tendencies both within the particular university or, more generally speaking, in Poland. Since 2007, with intervals, I have catalogued information on theses and dissertations defended at the Department of English, Nicolaus Copernicus University, and in 2010, I made the data concerning the years 2008 and 2009 available to Professor Ronnie D. Carter, who was then involved in the major research activity of compiling entries on theses written on English subjects in Poland, which, as a whole, would be published as "English Studies in Post-War Poland" (University Honors & Awards, 2015). In this respect, the present essay offers similar—yet much more limited (in their subject and temporal frames)—compilation, analysis and interpretation of a segment of data on English studies theses in Poland. I will use data collected on an individual separate basis so that the essay can have a self-reliant footing both in research material collection, analysis and interpretation.

For the basis of my study, in the first part, I selected the website of the Polish Association for Canadian Studies for two reasons: as the major Polish association established to promote Canadian culture and literature (see http://www.ptbk.org.pl/Home,37.html, n.d.), it gives access to essays and diploma papers on Canadian subjects written by students from various Polish universities (Students' Essays, n.d.) and it handles submissions of MA theses on Canadian subjects in the Nancy Burke competition (Aktualności, n.d.). The argument developed in the first part of my paper relates to the absence of Munro and her works in the two aforementioned respects.

On its website, the Polish Association for Canadian Studies has published nine essays and theses written by students, and none deals with Alice Munro. Students'

selections of Canadians authors whose works are analysed include Atom Egoyan, Roy Kiyooka, Michael Ondaatje, and Leonard Cohen (Students' Essays/Prace studenckie, n.d.); more general subjects addressed comprise Canadian perception of Poland (Students' Essays/Prace studenckie, n.d.), Polish soldiers in Canada after WWII (Students' Essays/Prace studenckie, n.d.; Adamczyk, n.d.), an analysis of films by David Cronenberg, and human rights in the Canadian context (Students' Essays/Prace studenckie, n.d.).

Munro does not feature in the titles of the Nancy Burke Competition winners either. The prize has so far been conferred on the following MA theses (on the basis of the data concerning the period 2009–present): "Coming Back to the Roots: Struggle against the Colonial Educational Legacy and the Process of Rediscovering Aboriginal Knowledge in Contemporary Canada" (Kamila Scheithauer, thesis supervisor—dr hab. Eugenia Sojka, University of Silesia University), "Traduire la littérature québécoise postmoderne: problèmes traductologiques dans la traduction du Vengeur masqué contre les hommes-perchaudes de la Lune de François Blais" ["Translation of Postmodern Quebecois Literature: Translation Problems in the Case of *Vengeur masqué contre les hommes-perchaudes de la Lune* by François Blais"] (Agata Sieroń, thesis supervisor—Professor Krzysztof Jarosz, University of Silesia), "Inuici kanadyjskiego rejonu Arktyki wobec postępującej zmiany klimatu i środowiska naturalnego na początku XXI wieku" ["The Canadian Inuit from the Arctic Region in the Face of Changes in Climate and the Natural Environment at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century"] (Sylvia Bezak, thesis supervisor—Professor Anna Reczyńska, Jagiellonian University), "Widziane oczami dziecka. Z syberyjskiej tajgi do kraju pachnącego żywicą" ["Seen from a Child's Perspective: From the Siberian Taiga into the Country Smelling of Resin"] (Alicja Śmigielska, thesis supervisor—dr. hab. Jan Lencznarowicz, Warsaw University), "Dialectique de l'aliénation dans les drames de Michel Tremblay" ["Dialectics of Alienation in the plays by Michel Tremblay"] (Jacek Mulczyk-Skarżyński, thesis supervisor—Professor Józef Kwaterko, Warsaw University), "United Church of Canada—Historia, działalność, problem" ["United Church of Canada: The History, Activity, and the Problem"] (Urszula Spolitakiewicz, thesis supervisor—Professor Anna Reczyńska, Jagiellonian University), "Identities on the Move: Dance Performance as the Embodiment of Culture and Social Organisation of the Tsimshian Nation" (Sabina Sweta Sen, thesis supervisor—Professor Wojciech Kalaga, University of Silesia), "La quête d'identité dans les romans d'Anne Hébert" ["Quest for identity in Anne Hébert's novels"] (Anita Zawisza, thesis supervisor—Professor Józef Kwaterko, Warsaw University), and "Pozycja Quebeku w kanadyjskim systemie federacyjnym a dążenia prowincji do uzyskania suwerenności" ["The Status of Quebec in the Canadian Federal System and the Attempts of the Province to Achieve Sovereignty (Joanna Staśkowiak, thesis supervisor—Professor Michał Klimecki, Nicolaus Copernicus University) (Aktualności, n.d.).

In addition, distinctions have been granted to "The Hipster in Three Contemporary Canadian Novels" (Jagoda Tuz, thesis supervisor—Professor Joanna Durczak, Maria Curie-Skłodowska-University, Lublin), "Processes of Dehumanization and Rehumanization of Canadian First Nations People in the

Context of Indigenous Methodologies. Study of the Work of Salish Writer Lee Maracle" (Jolanta Dziuba, thesis supervisor—dr hab. Eugenia Sojka, University of Silesia), and "Colonial and Postcolonial Representations of Potlatch Ceremonies of the Kwakwaka'wakws First Nations in Ethnographic and Cinematic Discourses" (Hanna Mrozek, thesis supervisor—Professor Wojciech Kalaga, University of Silesia) (Aktualności, n.d.). Thus, it can be observed that students' research interests in Canadian studies oscillate between historical and social issues presented in rather cross-sectional or large-scale dimensions.

Although none of the titles enumerated mentions Munro, the Polish Association for Canadian Studies at least promotes interest in the Canadian writer in other ways. It mentions on its website publications and conferences on Munro: the volumes edited by Professor Mirosława Buchholtz (and co-edited with Dr. Eugenia Sojka) and the conference held in Toruń in 2014 as part of the series "Culture and Space" (Aktualności, n.d.). We can also learn that Munro gave one of her books, with an autograph, for auction during the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity events (Aktualności, n.d.).

For the research basis in the second part, I chose APD databases of such major universities as Warsaw University, the Jagiellonian University (Kraków), Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the University of Silesia in Katowice (with the English-studies unit in Sosnowiec), the University of Łódź, and Nicolaus Copernicus Universtity (Toruń). The decision for selecting these particular tertiary education institutions was neither haphazard nor influenced by any external top university rankings, although the institutions are listed there (see, for example, Ranking Uczelni Akademickich, 2015, *Perspektywy*). The reason for the selection was, first of all, related to the fact that there exist Canadian studies centres which are affiliated with a given university (there are such centres linked to Warsaw University, the University of Łódź, the Jagiellonian University, Nicolaus Copernicus University, the University of Silesia) (Centres, n.d.). Additionally, the Faculty of English, formerly the School of English, of Adam Mickiewicz University, is commonly considered the most developed English studies university unit in Poland, and offers a Canadian specialisation for MA students (http://wa.amu.edu.pl/wa/, n.d.; History of the School of English, 2014).

The APD archives of the universities store data concerning BA, MA and PhD theses. The timespan of data collected and analysed in the essay is 2004–present; initially (up to 2012), information in the APD entry included the author's and the supervisor's names, the title of the work and the university unit at which the thesis was written. However, recently, the archives have been supplemented with key words (in Polish and in English), summaries (in Polish and in English), reviewers' names, and dates of project submissions. As can be expected, the information included in the recent entries will be particularly useful in the present essay.

Some APD archives of the universities selected for analysis did not return any results for the inquiry on "Alice Munro." I could not find any theses on Munro in the APD archive of the University of Łódź (https://apd.uni.lodz.pl/en/catalogue/, n.d.). The Jagiellonian APD archive did not return any results either (https://apd.uni.wroc.pl/catalogue/, n.d.). The APD archives of other universities returned

entries on theses on Munro's works; yet, the reason behind this may be more related to the research interest of a given thesis supervisor.

First, I will refer to the data retrieved from the APD archive of Warsaw University. It turns out that there has been only one diploma project dealing with Alice Munro ("Alice Munro," searched at https://apd.uw.edu.pl/catalogue/, n.d.). The title of the MA thesis is "Psychological Portraits of Women in Short Stories by Alice Munro and Mavis Gallant," (MA thesis by Marta Knieć, 2004, entry at https://apd.uw.edu.pl/diplomas/5795/) and it was submitted at the Faculty of Modern Languages. It is important to note that the study was written under the supervision of Professor Nancy Burke, who contributed enormously to the development of Canadian studies in Poland (as has already been mentioned, the Nancy Burke award is granted to the best MA thesis which relates to Canada). On the website of the Canadian Studies Centre, University of Silesia in Katowice, one can read that Professor Nancy Burke, who was born in 1935 and died in 2006, was affiliated with Warsaw University yet considered "the doyenne of Canadian Studies in Poland, a devoted literary scholar, academic teacher, as well as a mentor for many established and budding Polish-Canadianists" (http://csc.us.edu.pl/nancy-burke-university-of-warsaw/, n.d.). A similar description was given on the website of the Polish Association for Canadian Studies: "Professor Burke was the doyenne of Polish Canadian Studies. Through her Canadian literature courses at the University of Warsaw, her knowledge, her energy, her devotion to the study of Canadian literature she inspired the rise of Canadian studies in Poland and the foundation of the Polish Association of Canadian Studies" (Rzepa, n.d.). Both quotations prove Professor Nancy Burke's immense contribution to the development of Canadian studies in Poland. As regards the thesis on Munro (by Marta Knieć), it reflects a comparative perspective: the Canadian writer's short stories are juxtaposed—in the context of psychological and femininity themes—with those of another contemporary Canadian author who spent most of her life in France and died in 2014 (Mavis Gallant, n.d.). The two aspects—comparative approach and analysis of womanhood—have also been frequently explored in other theses as can be seen in other examples discussed in the present essay.

The date collected from the APD archive of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań ("Alice Munro," searched at https://apd.amu.edu.pl/catalogue/, n.d.) returned six titles of diploma projects: five written in English and one in Polish. The titles found are the following: "The Dances of Men and Women: The Relations between the Sexes in Alice Munro's Fiction" (MA thesis by Grażyna Chamielec, 2006, entry at https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/7176/), "Pride and Rebellion in *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence and *Lives of Girls and Women* by Alice Munro" (BA thesis by Karolina Rybiałek, 2012, no information on the supervisor given, entry at https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/65200/), "The Quest for Femininity on the Basis of *Lady Oracle* by Margaret Atwood and *Who Do You Think You Are* by Alice Munro" (BA thesis by Barbara Roszak, 2012, no information on the supervisor given, entry at https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/68822/), "Experimenting with the Gothic: Gothic Conventions in Alice Munro's Short Stories" (MA thesis by Aneta Piecuch, 2014, thesis supervisor—Professor Agnieszka Rzepa, entry at https://apd.amu.edu.pl/

diplomas/83920/), "Between Solidarity and Enmity: Relations between Women in Selected Short Stories by Audrey Thomas, Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood" (MA thesis, Karolina Rybiałek, 2014, thesis supervisor—Professor Agnieszka Rzepa, entry at https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/83972/), and "Wizerunki kobiet w twórczości Alice Munro" ["Images of Women in the Works of Alice Munro," as in the APD translation] (BA dissertation by Emilia Kaźmierczak, 2014, thesis supervisor—Professor Bogumiła Kaniewska, entry at https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/87070/). The last-mentioned dissertation is an exception because it was written at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology, whereas the remaining ones were submitted at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Literature, or the Faculty of English —after it became an independent university basic unit (https://apd.amu.edu.pl/catalogue/search/simple/?pattern=%22Alice+Munro%22&type=all, n.d.).

On the basis of the collected information, it can be stated that the number of theses written before and after the Canadian short-story writer received her Nobel Prize in literature in 2013 is similar. It is also worth noting that, in most cases, the subjects generally refer to Munro's short stories rather than particular titles of her works, the exception being the collections *Who Do You Think You Are* and *Lives of Girls and Women*. Three important interpretative aspects appear in the data analysed: gender roles, particularly with emphasis on femininity, Gothicism, and the combination of such themes as "pride and rebellion." These aspects are included in key words, especially the recurring words related to the first aspect, and in individual summaries; by way of illustration, the BA thesis in Polish "focuses on the presentation of the particular images of women, illustrated in the prose of Alice Munro, with a special emphasis on femininity as an overriding category in her work" (https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/87070/, n.d.), and one of the MA theses studies "the relations between women in selected short stories by Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood and Audrey Thomas" (https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/83972/, n.d.). The latter quotation brings forth the question of placing Munro's works in a comparative context and exploring them along with the works of other Canadian writers, which is also the case of both "Pride and rebellion in *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence and *Lives of Girls and Women* by Alice Munro" and "The Quest for Femininity on the Basis of *Lady Oracle* by Margaret Atwood and *Who Do You Think You Are* by Alice Munro." As regards the sphere of Gothicism, the MA project deals with

> the experimental quality of the elements of the Gothic literary tradition in Alice Munro's short stories. Its aim is to explain how Munro experiments with the traditional Gothic conventions by challenging the romantic Gothic plot and the compulsory happy ending, by subverting the Gothic archetypes and typical Gothic figures, by inverting a traditional Gothic gender roles and power relations, and by deconstructing the portrait of the Gothic mother. (https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/83920/, n.d.)

The excerpt of the summary additionally signals gender-related themes, and in this respect brings the thesis close to the predominant perspective which transpires both in titles and such key words as "Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, […] feminism,

motherhood (https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/83972/, n.d.), "feminity, women, feminine literature, [and] gender studies" (https://apd.amu.edu.pl/diplomas/87070/, n.d.).

The subject of Gothicism in Munro's oeuvre is also explored by the only diploma project on the Canadian writer found in the APD archive of the University of Silesia ("Alice Munro," searched at https://apd.us.edu.pl/catalogue/, n.d.). The MA thesis is entitled "Disturbing Realism of Southern Ontario: The Discourse of Gothic and Interpretation of Alice Munro's *Too Much Happiness* and *Friend of My Youth*" (thesis by Kamila Piontek, 2014, thesis supervisor—dr hab. Eugenia Sojka, entry at https://apd.us.edu.pl/diplomas/78093/, n.d.). In the summary of the thesis (available in Polish only), we read that the diploma project "interprets selected short stories by Alice Munro from such collections as *Too Much Happiness* and *A Friend of My Youth* by means of elements of Gothic discourse" (https://apd.us.edu.pl/diplomas/78093/, n.d.; my translation). In particular, the author addresses the following themes: "madness, dreams and secrets—also present in Munro's fiction" (https://apd.us.edu.pl/diplomas/78093/, n.d.). With respect to such a selection of themes, the thesis remains quite exceptional in the context of other diploma papers analysed so far.

Nevertheless, the exceptional quality of the thesis discussed in the previous paragraph loses its value when compared to diploma papers found in the APD archive of Nicolaus Copernicus University ("Alice Munro," searched at https://apd.umk.pl/catalogue/, n.d.). The inquiry returned four results in chronological order: the earliest one is entitled "Decoding Open Secrets: Alice Munro's Subtle Use of the Gothic in Selected Short Stories" (BA thesis by Renata Wojciechowska, 2010, thesis supervisor—dr hab. Anna Branach-Kallas, entry at https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/47227/, n.d.), and its title reads quite similar to "Disturbing Realism of Southern Ontario: The Discourse of Gothic and Interpretation of Alice Munro's *Too Much Happiness* and *Friend of My Youth*." However, the two papers use different short stories for analysis: in the case of "Decoding Open Secrets: Alice Munro's Subtle Use of the Gothic in Selected Short Stories," the analysed works come from the collection *Open Secrets* and include "Carried Away," "Open Secrets" and "Spaceships Have Landed" (https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/47227/, n.d.). In terms of the research perspective, the thesis combines "Gothic and feminist aspects" (https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/47227/, n.d.); and the feminist approach dominates in other theses previously discussed.

The other three diploma papers found in the APD archive of Nicolaus Copernicus University in chronological order are "In Search of Magic Realism. An Analysis of the Convention in Alice Munro's 'The View from Castle Rock' and Alistair Macleod's 'Vision'" (BA dissertation by Judyta Sobieraj, 2011, thesis supervisor—dr hab. Anna Branach-Kallas, entry at https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/56363/, n.d.), "Female Silences in Selected Short Stories by Alice Munro" (BA dissertation by Anna Bilicka, 2014, thesis supervisor—dr hab. Anna Branach-Kallas, entry at https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/90054/, n.d.), and "Time, Space and Events in *Lives of Girls and Women*. An Analysis of the Short Story Cycle by Alice Munro and Its Film Adaptation" (MA thesis by Emilia Leszczyńska,

2015, thesis supervisor—Professor Mirosława Buchholtz, entry at https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/99109/, n.d.).

Each of the theses contributes its share to the presence of Munro in the system of tertiary education in Poland and each explores a different theme. The first one is yet another comparative work, and this time Munro is juxtaposed with Canadian contemporary writer Alistair MacLeod, who died in 2014 (Alistair MacLeod, n.d.) and whose works are analysed from the perspective of magic realism (https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/56363/, n.d.). Feminist aspects, also explored in other theses on Munro previously discussed—yet combined with the theme of silence—are examined in "Female Silences in Selected Short Stories by Alice Munro," and the short stories subject for analysis include "Chance" and "Silence" (https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/90054/, n.d.).

The last thesis, "Time, Space and Events in *Lives of Girls and Women*. An Analysis of the Short Story Cycle by Alice Munro and Its Film Adaptation," contains "the comparison of the way in which the setting (time and place) and the main events are depicted. The aim of the analysis is to answer the question of whether the adaptation tells the same story as the book" (https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/99109/, n.d.). The thesis is perhaps the only diploma project, at least among the analysed ones, which brings together Munro's works and their adaptations, which are also addressed in the aforementioned text by Bodal (2015, pp. 411–432). The diploma project was written under the supervision of prof. Mirosława Buchholtz (https://apd.umk.pl/diplomas/99109/, n.d.), whose contribution to Alice Munro scholarship has already included two edited volumes: the one, already touched upon, in Polish, and another, in English (co-edited with dr hab. Eugenia Sojka), entitled *Alice Munro: Reminiscence, Interpretation, Adaptation and Comparison* (2015).

To conclude, it should first be reiterated that the 2013 Nobel Prize can hardly be treated as a caesura in the history of how interest in Munro's life and works has been developing among Polish graduate and postgraduate students. In addition, I would argue that her short stories are not frequently explored in BA and MA theses, and there is no PhD dissertation on Munro in any APD archive. Furthermore, Munro's short stories have been compared to works by other Canadian writers: for example, Margaret Atwood or Mavis Gallant. As regards the mainstream perspective from which Munro's oeuvre is examined, it predominantly comprises various approaches to womanhood and femininity. Most diploma papers on Munro have been written at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (six theses) and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (four theses). The subjects selected for diploma projects seem to be related to Canadian research interests shared by most of the thesis supervisors, involved in the activity of the Polish Association for Canadian Studies or Canadian study centres in Poland (http://www.ptbk.org.pl/Home,37.html, n.d.; http://www.ptbk.org.pl/Centres,40.html, n.d.).

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The Lesson of the Mistress: From "The Office" to "To Reach Japan"

Mirosława Buchholtz

Abstract This chapter is a comparative reading of Henry James's "The Lesson of the Master" (1888) and two of Alice Munro's stories: "The Office" (1962) and "To Reach Japan" (2012). Although both authors seem to encourage biographical criticism in their stories about writers, Mirosława Buchholtz is not primarily interested in the tension between real people and fictitious characters. She focuses instead on similarities and differences between the dilemmas faced by male and female authors portrayed by James and Munro. She argues that far from being bluntly didactic, both James and Munro comment on authorship in a way that constitutes an important, though by no means straightforward, lesson for their readers. She also points to the imbalance between the honorifics "master" and "mistress" that affects the conceptualization of authorship in the selected texts.

Although Alice Munro can hardly be described as a didactic writer, the words "lesson," "learn," and "teach" appear both in her fiction and in its critical analyses. The reason seems obvious. Many of Munro's most memorable characters are young people, girls in particular, who go to school. Apart from formal education, which is anyway only a fraction of their learning process, they are confronted with life itself, and it is mostly life that teaches and shapes them with ruthless efficacy. Several essays preceding this one offer many examples of Munrovian characters who learn various lessons, and for whom the scene of instruction is also often the scene of public derision. Jędrzej Burszta, Emilia Leszczyńska, and Paula Suchorska, who write about Del Jordan (among other characters), study in detail the many "harsh lessons" that Del needs to learn before she becomes, more or less, her own woman. Magdalena Ładuniuk, who focuses on the story "Amundsen," disentangles the paradox of a young teacher who "instead of educating others, […] takes a vital life lesson. She learns important things about herself, about relationships with other people, and also about her sexuality."

It seems that in Munro's narratives learning never reaches its aim completely, and her later stories featuring older people also abound in characters that experience

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moments of epiphany, which often occur after many years of partial knowledge or complete ignorance ("Powers" in *Runaway* is an excellent example). Tomasz Sikora takes a general view of the epistemological dilemmas of Munro's characters and brings the reader into play as well. Referring to "The Progress of Love," he argues that "[o]ne more lesson can be learned from Euphemia's epiphany: every *fabula* or narrative has its loops, puzzles and aporias that simply cannot be resolved within the limits of that very same story." This observation, apart from its role in Sikora's meticulously constructed argument, also explains the reworking of certain earlier motifs and reformulating of previous questions in Munro's later stories. The author's task of illuminating dark corners is endless, and the tracing of life's (and love's) progress becomes an end in itself. "Progress" emerges as a crucial concept in Munro's fiction, as it is also, but in an entirely different (positivist) sense, in all educational endeavors.

This essay is an attempt to look closer at the "lesson" that is "taught" in selected stories by Alice Munro. Despite the alleged (and deceptive) "simplicity" of Munro's diction, I do not expect a clear-cut message, and for this reason I turn for guidance to another, earlier master of ambiguity, Henry James. In 1888, at the age of forty-five, James published the famous novella "The Lesson of the Master." Although it is a lengthy piece and the states of the characters' minds seem to change often and dramatically, the gist of the story is easily told: there are two writers, an aspiring young one and a celebrated old one, and a young woman who admires both. They are Paul Overt, Henry St. George, and Marian Fancourt, respectively. Their names seem significant, too. The young author feels both attracted to and repelled by the more experienced one. He is enamoured of the young lady, but not to the extent that would incapacitate him to break up with her. The picture is thus composed of a small but dynamic cast of characters, including also St. George's ailing wife, Marian's father (a former colonial officer), and the first-person narrator. Despite his occasional doubt and distrust, Paul Overt obeys the lesson he is taught by the master, who may well be a happy husband and father, but nevertheless announces to his young disciple that "[o]ne has no business to have any children […]. I mean, of course, if one wants to do anything good" (Chapter III). St. George, who has not accomplished much lately, blames his diminishing creative power on his family. He thus outlines that intangible, and unattained, achievement to Paul Overt in Chapter V:

> The sense of having done the best—the sense which is the real life of the artist and the absence of which is his death, of having drawn from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature had hidden in it, of having played it as it should be played. He either does that or he doesn't—and if he doesn't he isn't worth speaking of. (James, 1915)

In addition to this high-flown (but hazy) description of success, Henry St. George also has practical advice for the aspiring author. He claims that he should give up his love for Miss Fancourt. Paul follows his master's advice, but when he returns to London two years later, St. George, now a widower, is getting married to Marion. The younger man is outraged, but "[t]he elder man beautifully smile[s]" (Chapter VI) and finds a way of proving that it was all for the best for the younger artist. St.

George claims to have taken the burden of family life off Overt's shoulders to make him free and capable of great literary feats on his own. The final sentences of the novella offer an ambiguous comment from the first-person narrator:

> When the new book [by Overt] came out in the autumn Mr. and Mrs. St. George found it really magnificent. The former still has published nothing but Paul doesn't even yet feel safe. I may say for him, however, that if this event were to occur he would really be the very first to appreciate it: which is perhaps a proof that the Master was essentially right and that Nature had dedicated him to intellectual, not to personal passion. (James, 1915)

By the end of the narrative, Overt seems to have gained a little reassurance, but it is nowhere near complete certainty. His new book seems to be a success, but the reader (and Overt) has no other proof for that than the opinion of Mr. and Mrs. St. George, who have reasons to deceive him once again. The Master is right, but only "perhaps." Cynthia Ozick recalls in a review how "in earlier days I felt I had been betrayed by Henry James. I was like the youthful writer in 'The Lesson of the Master' who believed in the Master's call to live immaculately, unspoiled by what we mean when we say 'life'—relationship, family mess, distraction, exhaustion, anxiety, above all disappointment" (1982). Henry James had clearly done with his life what Henry St. George preached in his fiction. James's message throughout the novella is, however, far from straightforward and every reader is free to feel reassured or betrayed as s/he pleases. Henry James decided for himself, but while playing with the idea in his novella, he considered the dark aspects of both options, instead of offering a straightforward manifesto. In the 1900s when James was indeed becoming "the master," his (most likely) *porte-parole*, Lambert Strether, the protagonist of *The Ambassadors* (1903) would give to his young friend "little Bilham," by no means his disciple, the following unasked-for advice which is the exact opposite of the "lesson of the master" fifteen years before: "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what have you had?" (James, 1909, Vol. I, Book Fifth, Chap. II).

As has been mentioned before, the characters in James's novella have significant names. Paul is too overt, too honest, to be able to probe other people's secrets, and perhaps too open to other people's suggestions. Quite significantly, it is the older man, the manipulator, who receives the author's given name, Henry, along with the family name suggestive of one of the most celebrated Christian saints, the killer of the dragon. The aura of sainthood combined with justified brutality suits him perfectly. Marian Fancourt's family name combines fancy, fanaticism and the courtly tradition. The competition is, as usual in James's fiction, between life and art, with love as a catalyst and marriage as a visible sign of the choices that have been made. Significantly also, as in Hawthorne's masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*, the real conflict develops between two men, and the woman is just a pretext, a random embodiment of male desire.

Karen Scherzinger calls "The Lesson of the Master" a "tantalizingly equivocal story," and adds to the current repertoire of critical concepts—which includes "the operations and effects of ambiguity" and the "doctrine of renunciation"—one more

idea, namely, "the notion of aesthetic value." Scherzinger shows how the aspiration to perfect form is always threatened by its other, the artistic failure, which is in itself a recurrent theme in James's life and fiction alike. "Given the persistent subversion of the term 'master' in "The Lesson of the Master," it is supremely ironic that the term should have been applied by the author's admirers so innocently to James himself" (Scherzinger, 1999). That would happen later, though, "at the start of the twentieth century" (Gorra, 2012, p. 82). Although wary of equating Henry St. George and Henry James, Scherzinger points to the complaints about the unattainable triumph that the two voice in a very similar manner. She argues that "the piercing shafts of satire and irony aimed at the interrelated problems of aesthetic success, failure and mastery," which she detects in the novella, "also find their mark in the reader intrigued by James's own position on these matters" (1999). "The Lesson of the Master" has indeed often been read in the context of James's biography, "as a tale about his own sense of dedication" (Gorra, 2012, p. 82) and one of the tales "about the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a literary career" (p. 285).

Two of Alice Munro's stories of female artists written and published fifty years apart also invite a comparison with her own life and effort to be(come) an author. "The Office" appeared in the September 1962 issue of the "Montrealer" and then as part of Munro's first volume, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, in 1968. "To Reach Japan" appeared in Munro's latest (and possibly last) volume, *Dear Life*, in 2012. "The Office" is a first-person narrative of a married woman who tries to become a writer. Unlike James, who foregrounded a love triangle (two writers and their fan), while in fact tracing the conflict between two men, Munro chooses as her cast two married couples and foregrounds the conflict between one person from each couple: a young woman who wants to rent an office and an elderly man who rents out offices. There is no love lost between them from the very beginning, and it seems that the two couples are not particularly happy either. Hardly any conclusions can be drawn, however, because the first-person narrator offers only facts about her own marriage and nothing but speculations about the life of her landlord and his wife. The circumstances of the woman's decision are presented laconically in the very first sentence of the story:

> The solution to my life occurred to me one evening while I was ironing a shirt. It was simple but audacious. I went into the living room where my husband was watching television and I said, "I think I ought to have an office". (Munro, 2000, p. 59)

The idea "sounded fantastic, even to me" (p. 59), she admits, because she has a house, which is "pleasant and roomy and has a view of the sea; it provides appropriate places for eating and sleeping, and having baths and conversations with one's friends. Also I have a garden; there is no lack of space" (p. 59). The woman expresses not so much a wish to have a place where she can write as an externally imposed obligation: "I ought to have an office." She does not seem to believe that it is her desire or even that she has the right to such a desire. In fact, the assumed business-like attitude allows her to ignore the question of desire altogether. The demand for an office, and not just a room, is a symbolic act; it amounts to

requesting acknowledgement for her creative work. The husband's response is not exactly encouraging, but not dismissing either. The woman's ambition is not an issue worth pondering. Money is. "Go ahead," her husband says, "if you can find one cheap enough" (p. 61). The underlying message behind the husband's consent is that work done in such an office is not likely to bring any profit and the cost of such a hobby should be kept at the minimum.

The prospective landlord is absent during the woman's first visit. She meets his wife instead, who is from the very beginning defined by her attribute, a vacuum cleaner. The narrator describes her in detail, drawing conclusions about her marital life; Mrs. Malley has "the swaying passivity, the air of exhaustion and muted apprehension, that speaks of a life spent in close attention on a man who is by turns vigorous, crotchety and dependent" (p. 62). The landlord's wife can make no decisions, and her only promise to the narrator is that she will speak with her husband. Even though the man is absent during the first visit, the narrator senses his ghostly presence in a room which is "a combination living room and office":

> The first things I noticed were models of ships—galleons, clippers, Queen Marys—sitting on the tables, the window sills, the television. Where there were no ships there were potted plants and a clutter of what are sometimes called "masculine" ornaments—china deer heads, bronze horses, huge ash trays of heavy, veined, shiny material. On the walls were framed photographs and what might have been diplomas. One photo showed a poodle and a bulldog, dressed in masculine and feminine clothing, and assuming with dismal embarrassment a pose of affection. Written across it was "Old Friends." But the room was really dominated by a portrait, with its own light and a gilded frame; it was of a good-looking, fair-haired man in middle age, sitting behind a desk, wearing a business suit and looking preeminently prosperous, rosy and agreeable. Here again, it is probably hindsight on my part that points out that in the portrait there is evident also some uneasiness, some lack of faith the man has in this role, a tendency he has to spread himself too bountifully and insistently, which for all anyone knows may lead to disaster. (pp. 62–63)

The objects in Mr. Malley's room reflect his taste and testify to his belief in what it means to be a man. The issue of gender relations surfaces only indirectly in the image a poodle and a bulldog. Their staged anthropomorphisation is meant as a joke, but it unintentionally subverts the very idea of dividing animals (and people who are vestigially—par excellence—represented by human clothes) along gender lines in that it exposes the equality of the two dogs and the arbitrariness of their imposed roles.

The renting agreement is reached when the narrator meets Mr. Malley "in the flesh" (p. 63). A comparison between the man and his portrait is unavoidable on that occasion:

> Ten years, maybe fifteen, had greatly softened, spread and defeated the man in the picture. His hips and thighs had now a startling accumulation of fat, causing him to move with a sigh, a cushiony settling of flesh, a ponderous matriarchal discomfort. His hair and eyes had faded, his features blurred, and the affable, predatory expression had collapsed into one of troubling humility and chronic mistrust. I did not look at him. I had not planned, in taking an office, to take on the responsibility of knowing any more human beings. (pp. 63–64)

The most noticeable change in Mr. Malley's appearance amounts to his becoming more and more like a woman. At the same time, the narrator, who shares these observations with the reader, claims that she has disposed of some typically female qualities (for example, she is not inquisitive or gossipy). Like a man who does important work, she wants to have an office and like a man, she expects that the transaction will be impersonal. Even though the office is comfortable, the landlord is a nuisance from the very beginning. He keeps calling on her and insists on helping her to make the room cosy. He brings her little gifts: a plant, a flowery teapot, a decorative wastebasket, or a foam rubber cushion for her chair. Unable to object at first, even when she masters the art of refusal, she still repeatedly feels outwitted by Mr. Malley, who, in addition to decorating her space, takes up her time turning her into a captive audience for his stories. She attempts to ignore the intruder and keeps the door locked when he knocks. In retaliation, Mr. Malley spies on her, repeatedly orders her to see him in his office, and raises more and more absurd allegations. Eventually, he accuses her of throwing wild parties and having intoxicated visitors who scribble obscenities on the washroom walls.

The accusation is quite obviously a cruel joke on the woman's writing ambition—literature and obscenities on the washroom walls are mentioned in one breath. Mr. Malley threatens the narrator with obscenity laws, which, as he argues, apply to both kinds of "artistic" activity (p. 72). The landlord's suspicion of the woman's nefarious behavior is as absurd to her as her idea of having an office is to him. Unable to stand the annoyance any more, the woman moves out even though she paid for several months ahead. Thus she admits that she has no right to her own office, and on the level of symbolic meaning, she cannot hope that her writing might be acknowledged as serious work. Mrs. Malley reappears in time to help the narrator carry bags and to clean up. The concluding paragraph testifies to the narrator's defeat:

> I have not yet found another office. I think that I will try again some day, but not yet. I have to wait at least until that picture fades that I see so clearly in my mind, though I never saw it in reality—Mr. Malley with his rags and brushes and a pail of soapy water, scrubbing in his clumsy way, his deliberately clumsy way, at the toilet walls, stooping with difficulty, breathing sorrowfully, arranging in his mind the bizarre but somehow never quite satisfactory narrative of yet another betrayal of trust. While I arrange words and think it is my right to be rid of him. (pp. 73–74)

It is impossible for the aging effeminate man and the young progressive woman to meet halfway on the shared ground of femininity because psychologically and socially they progress in opposite directions, constructing their identities in spite of the inner confusion each of them apparently experiences. Despite his matriarchal appearance, the man fashions himself as a warden of social roles and especially of his own role as owner and master, whereas the woman—despite her newly developed business-like attitude—has no real means of opposing him. She has to give way and can only (belatedly) take revenge on him in her published account. Even though the story is fictional, the array of problems it addresses is very real and, as Munro's biographer argues, based on the author's real experience (Thacker, 2011, pp. 172–174). It is not clear to what extent Mrs. Malley, the disheartened housewife, mirrors the self-image of the narrator, and if Mr. Malley might perhaps

be an analogy to the narrator's husband. Malley is in fact the only name that appears in the whole story and its central significance is hence a challenge to the reader. According to *The Internet Surname Database*, Malley "derives from the pre-10th century Gaelic surname O'Maille, meaning the male descendant of the prince, although who the prince was is not proven." What is more, many members of the family "were renowned for their prowess at sea which is encapsulated in their motto, 'Terra marique potens' meaning 'Powerful by land and sea'" (Malley). Both Mr. Malley and his own "office" illustrate the main elements of this tradition: the insistence on male identity, seafaring, and power. Other interpretations of the name's meaning are also possible, though, including in particular the Latin "malus" or "male," which opens the story to interpretations in the light of ethical concerns.

In a comparable narrative published fifty years later, Munro still seems to look back to the 1950s and 60s (Piechucka, 2015, p. 343) and the time when the protagonist, a female author, was still young and unknown. The very title of the story—"To Reach Japan" (2012)—points, however, to a different conceptualization of space in relation to writing career from the one represented in "The Office." The nameless narrator of the earlier story attempts to find the space where she could work, while struggling also on the level of symbolic meanings for social recognition of her work. She remains literally nameless, which reflects her status (and her chances) in the literary marketplace. The protagonist of "To Reach Japan" has a name, though it is only the given name, Greta. She is not the narrator of her story, however, which in a way testifies to her lack of control over both her story and her life. Like the nameless narrator in "The Office," she has a good-natured, matter-of-factly husband, who is presented in greater detail than his predecessor. He has a name (Peter) and the family history of fleeing from the communist Czechoslovakia in his mother's arms. Practical, unintrusive, and reticent, Peter has a hands-off, tolerant attitude to people, including his wife, whose writing he accepts apparently without viewing it as a profession. The opening paragraph of the story shows that the habit of fleeing characterizes both Greta and Peter:

> Once Peter had brought Greta's suitcase on board the train he seemed eager to get himself out of the way. But not to leave. He explained to her that he was just uneasy that the train would start to move. Out on the platform looking up at their window, he stood waving. Smiling, waving. His smile for Katy, was wide open, sunny, without a doubt in the world, as if he believed that she would continue to be a marvel to him, and he to her, forever. The smile for his wife seemed hopeful and trusting, with some sort of determination about it. (Munro, 2012, p. 3)

Peter is eager to do his duty and "get himself out of the way," whereas Greta seeks some unattainable fulfillment, almost like Paul Overt under Henry St. George's guidance in James's novella. The difference between Greta and Paul is that she has no master (or mistress) who would tell her what to do. Feminist ideas were already welling up in intellectual circles, but Munro's Greta has the precarious in-between position, being in fact more of a housewife than an intellectual. She is a subject of feminists' concern rather than a feminist herself. This observation seems to surface also in Alicja Piechucka's reading of Greta's adventures (and those of several other women in *Dear Life*) alongside Betty Friedan's 1963 study *The Feminine Mystique*.

Piechucka exposes Greta's behavior as typical of female victims of conservative patriarchal ideology in both the United States and Canada. For example, like the housewives studied by Friedan, Greta seeks satisfaction in silly erotic adventures (Piechucka, 2015, p. 348). On the train to Toronto, she leaves her young daughter unattended to have sex with a man she has just met. She is drifting, dissatisfied, and unable to stand on her own, like so many other housewives whose ambition is not channeled.

She defines her artistic pursuit as a reaction against Peter's practical attitude. He "learned Business Practice […] when Greta was learning *Paradise Lost*. She avoided anything useful like the plague. It seemed he did the opposite. But she clothed her avoidance in contempt, which he never would have thought of doing" (Munro, 2012, pp. 4–5). Whereas she seems critical of culture products—books or television shows—he accepts them as they are, evidently assuming that the strict principles of perfection do not apply to works of fiction:

> He had patience with such things. The people who put them together were probably doing the best they could. Greta used to argue, rashly asking whether he would say the same thing about a bridge. The people who did it did their best but their best was not good enough so it fell down. Instead of arguing, he just laughed. (p. 5)

The narrator supplements this account with a diagnosis of social habits that Greta would give to people much later, using concepts that were not in common usage at that time, even though problems did exist:

> It would become hard to explain, later on in her life, just what was okay in that time and what was not. You might say, well, feminism was not. But then you would have to explain that feminism was not even a word people used. Then you would get all tied up saying that having any serious idea, let alone ambition, or maybe even reading a real book, could be seen as suspect, having something to do with your child's getting pneumonia, and a political remark at an office party might have cost your husband his promotion. It would not have mattered which political party either. It was a woman's shooting off her mouth that did it. (p. 6)

Greta's rebellious attitude seems to be her only genuine *magnum opus*, whereas her actual artistic achievements are modest in comparison. They include two poems that appeared in *The Echo Answers*, a magazine published irregularly in Toronto. An invitation from the editor of the magazine to a party he is planning to attend in Vancouver may also count as a moderate social-literary success. The number of her published poems is not impressive (but then was that not the case of Emily Dickinson, too?), the magazine's name hardly connotes work of genius, its irregular publication suggests an amateur endeavor, and an invitation to someone else's party is hardly a great honor. Having an office is not an issue to Greta, she can do without it, but the problem she encounters seems still more disheartening than an unsympathetic landlord. It is the community of literati that she now has to face and suffer. "The party was at the house of a writer whose name had been familiar to her, it seemed, for her whole life" (p. 7). The famous name is never revealed, and the host

hardly registers her presence. The narrator describes in detail, however, the logistic effort (i.e. the pain) of going to that party; it took place

> in the late afternoon, when Peter was still at work, so she hired a sitter and set off on the North Vancouver bus across the Lions Gate Bridge and through Stanley Park. Then she had to wait in front of the Hudson's Bay, for a long ride out to the university campus, which was where the writer lived. Let off at the bus's last turning, she found the street and walked along, peering at house numbers. She was wearing high heels, which slowed her down considerably. Also her most sophisticated black dress, zipped up at the back and skimming the waist and always a little too tight. It made her look somewhat ridiculous, she thought, as she stumbled slightly along the curving streets with no sidewalks, the only person about in the waning afternoon. Modern houses, picture windows, as in any up-and-coming suburb, not at all the kind of neighborhood she had expected. She was beginning to wonder if she had gotten the street wrong, and was not unhappy to think that. She could go back to the bus stop where there was a bench. She could slip off her shoes and settle down for the long solitary ride home. (pp. 7–8)

Once Greta overcomes all the technical obstacles, she begins to struggle against the sense of her own inadequacy. She does not feel welcome once she enters the house after much hesitation:

> Nobody looked at her with any recognition or pleasure, and why should they? People's eyes slid round her and then they went on with their conversations. They laughed. Everybody but Greta was equipped with friends, jokes, half-secrets, everybody appeared to have found somebody to welcome them. (pp. 8–9)

When all attempts to start a conversation fail, she gets drunk out of despair and sheer boredom. She cannot help comparing this strange party with the meetings of engineers which she attended with Peter before. She not only notices the difference, but also explains why the literati behave the way they do.

> She thought that when she went with Peter to an engineers' party, the atmosphere was pleasant though the talk was boring. That was because everybody had their importance fixed and settled at least for the time being. Here nobody was safe. Judgment might be passed behind backs, even on the known and published. (p. 10)

She is rescued eventually and brought home by a friendly newspaper columnist, Harris Bennett from Toronto, who turns out to be the host's son-in-law. Estranged from his mentally disabled wife, he is apparently ready for an affair with Greta, which probably begins to develop when the train reaches its destination at the end of the story.

The exact time when the story takes place is never mentioned by the narrator, but Alicja Piechucka may well be right when she argues that "To Reach Japan" is set at the turn of the 1950s and 60s. It is worth pondering why half a century after the publication of "The Office" Munro would still choose to rework and reconsider that early time in her female protagonist's life, the time when she is still young and at the outset of her writing career. One may argue that Greta's story is universal and might still happen today, that in fact little has changed since the mid-twentieth century, or since James's time for that matter, and with the exception of a handful of authors whose names have been familiar forever, all the others, men and women alike, still need to prove themselves ceaselessly. Being a writer means in any

century experiencing a chronic sense of insecurity. This is the message of "The Lesson of the Master," "The Office," and "To Reach Japan" alike.

Whereas Henry James's protagonists refer to sacrifice and renouncement that high art requires, however, Alice Munro—though just as concerned about success, failure, and mastery as James was—focuses instead on the meagerness of achievement in comparison with the effort. James hints at it too, but a female writer even today would not make a claim to literary mastery for herself or for her protagonists. This is the difference between male and female authorship that has persisted for centuries. It is no wonder then that especially in popular criticism, Munro's modesty has been mistaken for amateur provincialism. Munro shows that sacrifice is inescapable in any life, and especially in the lives of artists. She considers also the effect of the artistic freedom of parents on their progeny, just as James did in *What Maisie Knew* or "The Pupil." The final sentences of "To Reach Japan" focus on the little girl, Greta's daughter, who is an involuntary witness of her mother's sexual and artistic adventures: "She was trying to hang on to Katy but at this moment the child pulled away and got her hand free. She didn't try to escape. She just stood waiting for whatever had to come next" (p. 30). The little girl, one might argue, mimics both her father's dogged persistence and her mother's childlike passivity.

In Munro's stories, James's intelligent Marian Fancourt seems to become a writer herself. In "The Office" she assumes a business-like attitude to life and writing, whereas in "To Reach Japan" she gives free rein to her emotions. Whether head- or heart-driven, however, in contrast to James's artists, Munro's protagonists do not fashion themselves as high priestesses of art. Having or renouncing family life is never an issue to them. And yet, they too find it necessary to stake out their own territory within family and society.

There is no straightforward lesson to be found in Munro's stories, but conclusions concerning the condition of female authorship, or agency in general, may still be drawn. First of all, even though in Munro's fiction a woman is a central character and no longer a mere catalyst in male conflicts, she is not the one who teaches a lesson. Instead, she is the one who receives it. Like Paul Overt in "The Lesson of the Master," she may feel cheated by self-appointed masters, such as Mr. Malley or the nameless editor from Toronto. Second, the woman finds no female masters or at least other sympathetic female figures who—however mistaken they might be—would be willing to guide her steps. She is left to her own devices entirely. Third, she can hardly make any claim to artistic mastery (due to the "Who do you think you are?" upbringing). Her efforts seem inadequate and out of any proportion to the pain inflicted on herself and her family. She is doomed to permanent amateurship. Fourth, she is never in control either of her art or her life. Fifth, her obvious disadvantage derives from the inescapable lack of symmetry between the concept of "master" and "mistress." While both have been used with reference to the activity of teaching, they are not exactly equivalents of each other. What is more, the binary opposite to the "master" is first and foremost a "slave," whereas

"mistress" comes in a binary opposition with a man who has an extramarital sexual relationship. In other words, the mistress is the master's slave. The master may have become a ghostly presence since James's time, but that has not changed much in the woman's status in the literary marketplace.

These are some of the notes taken from "the lesson" of Alice Munro, a lesson that readers, especially female readers, can hardly afford to skip.

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