

Female Body as a Source of Shared (Hi)stories: On Munro's Del and Joyce's Eveline

ABSTRACT

Every society and culture has its own social conventions that provide specific models for ways of behaving, thinking, and communicating. According to Cordelia Fine (2012), such values are shared and reflected on and by our body (through our social roles and positions, expressions, and behaviour). This paper elicits and compares shared (hi)stories told on and by the bodies of two female characters – Del Jordan in Alice Munro's short story cycle *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and Eveline Hill from James Joyce's short story "Eveline" from the collection *Dubliners* (1914). The paper approaches Del's and Eveline's body as a source for a broader semantic notion: a (re)source for (re)creating and understanding both characters' sociocultural and family surroundings that, consequently, act as a (re)source for all their silenced desires, life choices and identities. Although geographically set in different spatiotemporal contexts, the stories and their characters share other elements.

Keywords: Alice Munro, James Joyce, *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Dubliners*, body, gender, identity

Žensko telo kot vir skupnih zgodb in preteklosti: primerjava junakinj Del Alice Munro in Eveline Jamesa Joycea

IZVLEČEK

Vsaka družba in kultura ima lastne družbene dogovore, ki tvorijo specifične modele za načine vedenja, mišljenja in komuniciranja. Cordelia Fine (2012) meni, da se te vrednote zrcalijo na našem telesu in da jih le-to odseva (skozi naše družbene vloge in položaje, izražanje in vedenje). Prispevek izpostavi in primerja zgodbe in preteklosti, ki so zapisane na telesih in ki jih pripovedujejo telesa dveh ženskih likov – Del Jordan iz cikla kratkih zgodb Alice Munro z naslovom *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) in Eveline Hill iz kratke zgodbe Jamesa Joycea z naslovom »Eveline« iz zbirke *Dublinčani* (1914). V prispevku obravnavamo telesi obeh likov kot vir širšega semantičnega pomena: kot vir (ponovnega) ustvarjanja in razumevanja družbeno-kulturnega in družinskega okolja obeh likov, ki posledično delujeta kot vir njunih utišanih želja, življenjskih izbir in identitet. Čeprav sta literarni deli geografsko postavljeni v drugačna prostorska in časovna konteksta, prispevek osvetli tudi druge elemente, ki so skupni obema likoma.

Ključne besede: Alice Munro, James Joyce, *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Dublinčani*, telo, spol, identiteta



1 Introduction

Society, as a form of public community, is, according to Iryna Galutskikh, made from individual bodies that constantly meet, intervene, communicate, and act in accordance with societal traditions and expectations. Culture, on the other hand, as a system of standardised social values (Eagleton 2000), not only represents an overall process of (re)creating, questioning and (re)defining bodies' identities (Loxley 2006) but is also a synonym for civilization that embodies the idea of the Otherness (Jameson 1993), of all the individual peculiarities that contribute to an idea of culture as a universal concept. Accordingly, both society and culture represent and serve as a source for (re)creating and capturing the immanent reality that is then mirrored and written in one own's or the other's body, i.e., in the body of the narrative (con)text.

Ivan Crozier, in a volume dedicated to a cultural history of the human body in the modern age, clarifies that “even ‘traditional’ historical topics such as war, medicine, class, and education have taken a corporeal turn and emphasize the body as a mediating point between ideas and social reality: as something at once ‘real’ and imagined, objective and subjective” (2015, 1–2). Consequently, we witnessed forty years ago, when various anthropological and sociological writings began to include a range of interpretations on culture, how the human body became an important focus not only of cultural history but also of many literary theories. According to Daniel H. Garrison, “the human body is the subject of its own master narrative in every culture and many subcultures” (2015, 1); therefore, whether we discuss (hi)stories of the body in narrative or the body of (hi)story in narrative, one element remains the same: one own's or someone else's body in narrative holds the key not only to knowledge and understanding of the body as a purely biological entity but also as a source for a broader semantic notion: the body as a context-specific entity, i.e., the body as a ground for dialogues about race, gender, sexuality, inequality, etc. Alternatively, as Peter Brooks adds, “the body must be a source and a locus of meanings, and stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations” (1993, xii).

In an attempt to clarify the above, the aim of this paper is to seek a new comprehension, interpretation and understanding of sociocultural (hi)stories, silenced meanings and shared experiences embodied by two female characters – Del Jordan from Alice Munro's short story cycle *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), and Eveline Hill in James Joyce's short story “Eveline” from the collection *Dubliners* (1914). In other words, by reconstructing their realities–defined primarily by the dominant sociocultural context, family surrounding and marriage as a woman's obligation, here addressed as “pockets of conventionality”, the paper compares and highlights the possibility of reading their bodies in two different modes: 1) the body seen beyond the perception of being a mere flesh and blood object but rather as a means of communication in relation to *stereotypical costumes*, to use Fine's term, and rooted and perpetuated within a male-dominated tradition; and 2) the body as a narrative (re)source for attaining and retrieving characters' memories (past and present) that, accordingly, (re)construct their desires and aspirations–their identities.

The choice and the connection of narrative texts is based on several elements detected in both works of fiction. Firstly, both texts share the same generic formation–*Lives of Girls and Women*

is a short story cycle, while “Eveline” is a short story within *Dubliners* (the collection of short stories) – that enabled their authors “the freedom to challenge, whether intentionally or not, the totalising impression of the traditional novel of social and psychological realism” (Lynch 2001, 93).¹ Secondly, the structure of each text follows and narrates a life story where a female character, both of whom are equally surrounded by harsh geographical settings (Ontario in Canada and Dublin in Northern Ireland) and marginalized culture, embodies and shares communal sources of restricted life paths and future life choices.

2 On the Crossroads of “Odd Little Pockets of Conventionality”²

2.1 Pocket of Conventionality No. 1: Sociocultural Context

Although recent decades have seen an outpouring of cross-disciplinary debates on and approaches to the *permanent negotiation*, to use Stephen Greenblatt’s term, between the man-woman dichotomy, gendered bodies and identities all viewed within a living culture/society, the issues remain intriguing and challenging even today. In seeking to understand two literary characters’ realities and, consequently, life choices – Del’s and Eveline’s – the sociocultural macrostructure, which has been imprinted in the stories of both characters’ outer and inner worlds and bodies, must be reconstructed.

Lives of Girls and Women is a short story cycle in which Munro gives “the reader a sense of being admitted into the experience of an imaginative child and yet manages to convey the insight of an adult” (Martin 1989, 59). Through eight interlinked short stories, Munro depicts the growth and development of her main character, Del Jordan, from a schoolgirl to an adult woman with the artistic calling to write. With her “touch of the triumphant slyness of Shakespearean comedy” (Bloom 2009, 2), Munro sets her characters in the small Canadian town of Jubilee, Ontario, where, by the means of irony, she realistically depicts the daily lives and routines of not just girls and women but all townspeople.

“In the beginning”, says Del, “the very beginning of everything”, they [her family] lived in “the barest, darkest, tallest of all old frame houses [...] at the end of a very long lane” of the Flats Road in the middle of the field; the house had wire fences and sagging windowpanes of wire on either side. The house was so poor and ugly that Del has never seen anything like it in any newspaper ever; a “simple and familiar yet with something terrible about it, enclosing evil, like a house when a murder has been committed” (Munro 1971, 93–94). The Flats Road was not officially part of Jubilee, but they were not a part of the country either. More precisely, Jubilee was set in Wawanash County and “spread almost equidistantly on either

¹ The short story as the youngest genre occupies a central place within Canadian literature. While William New (1986) sees the reason for the popularity of short story in Canada in its status as a marginalised genre, Gerald Lynch suggests that the short story enabled Canadian writers to portray “a new kind of unity in disunity and a more accurate representation of modern sensibility” (2001, 93). This is something we find in Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women*.

² *Lives of Girls and Women*, 175. In this paper the concept of conventionality, as “the quality of being traditional and ordinary” (*Cambridge Dictionary*), i.e., a way of behaving that is considered correct or acceptable, is addressed through three key contexts – society/culture, family, and marriage – that together contribute to the overall understanding of both female characters and similarities between two literary texts.

side of the main street. Its shape [...] was seen to be more or less that of a bat, one wing lifted slightly, bearing the water tower, unlighted, indistinct, on its tip” (Munro 1971, 86).

This balance between the town (benefits) and the country (limitations) as an opposition between high and low, cultural (civilized) and natural is something Munro skilfully uses throughout the stories, not just with the aim of underlining the town’s differences but more to add a contextual tone for all her characters. As Marilyn Simonds writes, place in Munro’s stories plays a crucial role; there is always more than one place in the story and it always shifts; it is like a “chimera: deceptive, implausible, sometimes one thing, sometimes another, made up of scales, woolly skin, a lion’s roar, and a feral laugh that, once heard, haunts forever” (Simonds 2012, 26). In addition, we read that Jubilee was a rather rusty town; there was only one grocery store, which was

“so narrow from front to back it looked like a cardboard box stood on end, haphazardly plastered with metal and painted signs advertising flour, tea, rolled oats, soft drinks, cigarettes. [...] Houses [...] were set further apart and looked in general more neglected, poor, and eccentric than town houses would ever be; half a wall would be painted and the job abandoned, the ladder left up; scars of a porch torn away were left uncovered, and a front door without steps, three feet off the ground; windows could be spread with yellowed newspapers in place of blinds” (Munro 1971, 7).

While Munro has been complimented for her vivid and lifelike style of describing ordinary people and their settings in her fiction (Powell, 2008), Georgeann Murphy suggests that all her elements represent a reflection of the raw elements that were closely linked to Munro’s life (Murphy 2009). As Joann McCaig argues, “Munro’s regionalism could well be linked to her own sense of marginalization arising from an (imagined or actual) inferior class position” (2002, 41). By noting in detail the outer world reality, i.e., Ontario’s nature and the town’s rural, marginalized surroundings, Munro illustrates this balance between cultural/rural through Del’s daily life routines. For instance, since Del’s mother could not tolerate living in the countryside, she rented a house in town where she and Del would live for the summer just to enjoy the town spirit and commotion. Del’s father, in contrast, would come only for supper and an overnight stay. Living in town, Del could enjoy social life, a fresh and modern touch of living which was pictured through her mother’s daily activities: from visiting the local store to selling encyclopaedias and occasionally giving parties for the town ladies. Although the images of Jubilee’s slow decline mirror modest disasters and vanished civilized images, Del loves living in the house in town. Even though the house they occupied was rather old, with the wooden parts, with its sloping front veranda painted in grey, Del simply enjoyed the whole concept of the “order, the wholeness, the intricate arrangement” (Munro 1971, 88) that living in town offered. There is another element that adds to the whole dated spirit of this small-town setting.

The issue of attending church also forms part of the social ritual that defined and guided the daily life of all townspeople. Even more, if you wanted to be a respected member of society, going to church was obligatory. Belonging to a church did not play an important role in Del’s family; nevertheless, they belonged to one of the churches. Ironically, Del will say that her being baptized is only due to her mother’s “surprising weakness or generosity” that “mellowed

and confused her” (Munro 1971, 118), probably because of the childbirth hormones. The rare times that they attended church masses reminded Del of a scene of attending some special occasion. On these rare occasions, her father, who would wear an unaccustomed suit, “would put his elbows on his knee, rest his forehead on his hand, close his eyes, with an air of courtesy and forbearance”, while her mother “never closed her eyes a minute and barely inclined her head. She would sit looking all around, cautious but unabashed [...] sceptically chewing her lipstick [...]” (Munro 1971, 120).

In sum, the “nimble malice that danced under their courtesies to the rest of the world” (Munro 1971, 49) captures the overall tone of the short story cycle; the cycle layers the atmosphere of these townspeople, who were full of signs of stupidity and dullness that hid any future life possibilities or desires. As if all the “old cracked sidewalks underfoot, all the tree branches, broken off in winter storms” contributed and resembled distances between people whose “dull, simple, amazing, and unfathomable” lives looked more like “deep caves paved with the kitchen linoleum” (Munro 1971, 309), not what one would expect and imagine townspeople’s life to be like. To be more accurate, the behaviour and beliefs of the townspeople in Jubilee can be summarised in three key covert features:

- 1) Respect men’s work beyond anything: the Jubilee townspeople absolutely believed in the imperative of respecting men’s work in contrast to women’s work. The distinction between these two, in the sense of the former’s importance, was drawn by the finest line that was to be respected by every individual, in particular girls and women.
- 2) Do not turn down offered things: the Jubilee townspeople’s motto was not to turn down things such as marriage, positions, opportunities, and money, that are offered; instead, these should be accepted because rejecting them would only make people laugh, and “the worst thing that could happen in life was to have people laughing at you” (Munro 1971, 48).
- 3) Ambition is dangerous: in Jubilee, it was considered that an individual was not supposed to stand out from the crowd because of his or her achievements. Ambition as a personal virtue that has a certain goal as its final achievement was something that the townspeople not only stayed away from but “were alarmed by”, because being ambitious for them meant only one thing: “to court failure and to risk making a fool of oneself” (Munro 1971, 47).

The combination of highly descriptive imagery of the overall atmosphere, together with social rituals, values, and beliefs, appointed gender roles and positions, duties and expectations, all shape, foster and reveal Del’s awareness of what society expects of her. Eventually we read that all this rootedness in the small town, its culture and ordinary people’s rituals will prevent Del from thinking beyond social expectations, as if it, in a way, paralyzed her body and mind from moving forward.

Just as Munro captures and conveys the spirit of the time and the marks of social injustice stored in and by Del’s body, in understanding Eveline Hill’s embodiment of her social surrounding, one also needs to know the conditions and the atmosphere of the time and societal values Eveline lived in. Similar to Munro, “Joyce”, explains Don Gifford, “depended heavily on the people, events, and environment in his own life for models of the characters

and events of his fictions” (1982, 4) which, as we see in *Dubliners*, mirror a range of issues: from public-private life issues to cultural-political confusions (Leonard in Attridge 2004). “Eveline”, the shortest of all the stories in James Joyce’s collection *Dubliners*, masterfully depicts precisely this range: all “fifteen slices of Dublin life” (Rice 1998, 43) in the period 1900 to 1910.

The first element that is shared by both texts is the weary and, to a certain extent, decaying atmosphere. Just like in *Jubilee*, life conditions in Dublin, at the beginning of the 20th century, were influenced by restricted socioeconomic possibilities. In other words, chronic unemployment, scarce job opportunities, great poverty, political tension and emigration to America were the *Dubliners*’ everyday reality. With practically non-existent hygiene and sanitation, serious housing problems, and increasing class and social segregation (McManus 2003), life in Dublin was unimaginably hard and depressing. Finding a job and a decent salary with which one could sustain one’s family was like searching for a needle in a haystack. In other words, Dublin at the turn of the last century resembled an image of “[the last] judgement” (Bloom 1999, 9–10) or, as the first few opening lines in “Eveline” reveal: “She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtain and in her nostrils was an odour of dusty cretonne. She was tired” (Joyce 2008, 25). Eveline’s weariness, emotional emptiness and overall tiredness can also be traced to a decline in the birth rate (McCarthy 1998; Gifford 1982; Walzl 1982), which influenced the overall decline of the Irish population. The lifelessness of the human relationships and their spirits, which we notice also in the *Jubilee* townspeople (apart from Del’s mother), also pictured itself in the decline of the marriage rate and, unfortunately, in a rise in the number of spinsters and bachelors (Walzl 1982). In such “sterile and unproductive lives” (Walzl 1982, 32), many people succumbed to alcoholism as the only way out. For middle-class women, the horizons were even more limited: they could marry, enter a convent or work for a living. Although society did not look upon working women as a public shame, their job possibilities were limited; therefore, many townswomen stayed within the household. If a woman had any education, she could work as a schoolteacher or a governess, or even a typist if she had attended a vocational school; if she had no education, she could look for a job as a shop clerk (Gifford 1982). Eveline, who had no education, “had to work hard, both in the house and at business” (Joyce 2008, 26). She worked in the Stores, where Miss Gavan treated her with no respect or understanding; Miss Gavan constantly complained about Eveline’s work: “Miss Hill”, Miss Gavan would say, “don’t you see these ladies are waiting? Look lively, Miss Hill, please” (Joyce 2008, 26). For Eveline, these words acted as a daily reminder about her life conditions; these words were a reminder of how desperately she wanted to leave, to start a new life in a distant, unknown country where “people would treat her with respect” (Joyce 2008, 26), instead of living a “life of commonplace sacrifices” (Joyce 2008, 28) like her mother. Public life made it no easier for Eveline to do the hard work that she had to do “to keep the house together and to see that the two young children who had been left in her charge went to school regularly and obtained their meals regularly. It was hard work – a hard life” (Joyce 2008, 26). With alcoholism being not only a general social/public problem but also her father’s problem (thus private), Eveline had to tolerate people talking behind her back and her father’s constant verbal violence and humiliation – for a wage of seven shillings in total.

In sum, these constraints, here seen as conventionalities, together with other silenced yet embodied traditional expectations that arise from family and marriage conventionality, narrow, limit and, eventually, adjudicate both Del's and Eveline's life choices since, as Crozier explains, "bodies do not make sense in the abstract. They are deeply imbedded in culture and cannot be prized out like oyster from a shell for inspection before devouring" (Crozier 2015, 22).

2.2 Pocket of Conventionality No. 2: Family Context

Together with social context, family context is an additional key component that relates these two female characters to each other. Family as an institution represents for Del and Eveline a setting to which they not only belong, but from which they learn and within which they embody gender differences.³ In other words, Del's and Eveline's family context is a patriarchal one, i.e., a hierarchically organised family order with the father figure at its top. As Kate Millet writes in her book *Sexual Politics* (1977), the family acts as a source for patriarchal ideas that connect an individual with his or her society and, accordingly, influence all the individual's spheres where politics does not.

Although Jubilee's social surroundings imposed the father figure as normative, Del's family surroundings were more reminiscent of a mother figure role.⁴ Del's father was quite different from Del's mother: in his attitude, he was diplomatic, easy-going and popular in the Flats Road. Even more, "everybody liked him. He liked the Flats Road, although he himself hardly drank, did not behave loosely with women, or use bad language, although he believed in work and worked hard all the time" (Munro 1971, 11). Her mother, Addie Morrison, or Ada (as she was called), was sharp, smart, determined, and selective; she did not like the Flats Road and its townspeople, nor did they like her. Although she was raised in the country in a traditional family and in poor living conditions, where her father banned her from going to high school with the excuse that she had to "stay home and keep house until she got married" (Munro 1971, 97), she managed to cast aside all the country customs in exchange for town/urban culture. Ada's upbringing was why she never wanted to live in the Flats Road; the town subconsciously reminded her of the life conditions she ran away from. These life conditions were defined by "the hard-set traditions, proud poverty, and monotony of farm life" (Munro 1971, 11); in such conditions, women were seen as inferior to men. Ada's fresh, contemporary spirit, a type of a feminist quest (Rasporich 1990), could be seen in every decision she made. For instance, in those days, it was uncommon for a woman to drive a car by herself, to work, or to have any kind of ambition. Ada did all this: she drove a car when going shopping in town, she carried a jack and a shovel in the trunk in case she got stuck somewhere in the mud, and she even "honked her horn despairingly at blind country corners" (Munro 1971, 81).

In addition, the altering of female dress codes and the introduction of topics such as education, marriage, birth control and women's rights into public space align Ada with emerging

³ Jędrzej Burszta argues that for Munro's characters, childhood is a crucial phase because everything that surrounds the child "becomes the basic experience of identity-formation" (2016, 24).

⁴ According to Magdalene Redekop (2014), this element comes from Munro's personal life, for, as she claims, Munro was obsessed with the mother-daughter relationship and thus mirrored it in her characters.

changes for women's position in society. After World War I, women eventually entered the public sphere for work and achieved some economic independence: these changes played an important role in how women were perceived in society. The character of Ada incorporates these changes. First, there is the selling of encyclopaedias – Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace called this activity “going on the road” (Munro 1971, 80) – which left little time for ironing and other traditional household tasks and thus represented Ada's neglect of social expectations: she worked outside the house, which allowed her to achieve (economic) independence from her husband. Second, she rejected the traditional, rather rural manner of dressing: she dressed thoughtfully, wore a hat and “a red dress, semitransparent, covered with little black and blue pansies, like embroidery” (Munro 1971, 91). Last, although she had no formal education, she was very literate; she wrote letters – although under the pseudonym Princess Ida, the name of a character in Tennyson whom she truly admired – to the local newspaper the *Herald-Advance* on very delicate, in those days even unacceptable, issues, such as the need for better education, women's rights, and birth control for girls and women. Additionally, she tried to oppose compulsory religious education in the school. This description of Ada may be linked to Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity, where gender identity is not perceived as the prime and fixed bodily determiner but rather a ritualized and acted gender performance depending on the social institutions and demands of the natural world (Butler 1993).

Del admired and inherited her mother's rebellious spirit, her new attitudes, and her desire to live in accordance with her own wishes, disregarding societal expectations. She felt proud of her mother and enjoyed the commotion her mother created, but not at all times. For instance, when Ada came to her school to represent the encyclopaedia company, Del felt ashamed: she could “not bear anything about her – the tone of her voice, the reckless, hurrying way she moved, her lively absurd gestures, [...] and most of all her innocence, her way of not knowing when people were laughing, of thinking she could get away with this” (Munro 1971, 101–2). Munro uses these dramatic methods of opposing entities, such as traditional-modern, natural-cultural, rural-urban, and ironic-serious to reveal the ambiguities of life (Hoy 1980) and to create an interplay that will eventually lead the reader to something larger: a surprising twist-at-the-end incorporated in Del's body and her final decision. All the emancipated decisions and behaviours of Del's mother represented the means of Del's development, on the one hand; on the other hand, Del was still subconsciously bothered by them. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explain that every new generation simply accepts the already rooted and defined sociocultural behaviours (Berger and Luckmann 1992) that, as Simone de Beauvoir claims, will remain the same as long as individuals are raised and brought up by their mothers and grandmothers who themselves were raised and brought up in restricted, patriarchal and traditional societies (Beauvoir 2011). Or as Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis adds, “Del Jordan's life is quintessentially female, composed of experiences and perceptions directly related to her role as a girl and as a woman” (Sternberg Perrakis 1982, 61).

At times, Del wanted her mother to be ordinary, just like the mothers of all the other girls in Jubilee – i.e., she wanted her mother to be invisible, silent, modest, unambitious, an obedient wife without desire – so that she would not have to hate her and so that people would stop giving her “sly and gloating and pitying looks” (Munro 1971, 101). Since Ada was defined by her failure to realise her desire for better living conditions, it is easy to understand why

she feared her children would become mediocre, “infected with the dreaded, proud, scared perversity of [Del’s] father’s family” (Munro 1971, 303). Within the family context, Del also shared her mother’s appetite for knowledge: “She loved the volumes of the encyclopaedia, their weight [...] a superb unreality” (Munro 1971, 82–83). She enjoyed reading books where “the heroine’s generous proportions were tenderly, erotically described, and was worried by books where desirable women were always slim” (Munro 1971, 232) but preferred reading about history; she could list in order all the United States’ presidents’ names. Although she heard people say reading was a “habit to be abandoned when the seriousness and satisfactions of adult life took over” (Munro 1971, 149), she always sensed that the only thing she would be good at in life was writing. It is here that we learn of Del’s goal of becoming a writer. This is also a reflection from Munro’s life; throughout her domestic life as a young wife and mother, she continued to write (Thacker 2011). In her teenage years she had already written a few poems and bits of a novel, and she “locked them away where nobody could find them and where they would be safe in case of fire [...] under her mattress [...] folded inside a large flat copy of *Wuthering Heights* (Munro 1971, 78). Del was well aware that knowledge, in those days in Jubilee, was seen as “a chilly commodity that most people, grown up, can agree to do without” but would not deny that it was seen as “a fine thing for children” (Munro 1971, 82). For Del and her mother, knowledge was anything but chilly; it was warm and lovely. Although Del had high marks at school and wished “not just to win the scholarship and get into university” (Munro 1971, 261) but to be the best, once she grew older, she started to “hide her brains” (Munro 1971, 85), to expose less of her knowledge or, as her mother would say, she became shy, and shyness was one of “the luxuries she could never afford” (Munro 1971, 84) if she wanted to achieve better life possibilities and rise from a mediocre, patriarchal rural society.

In contrast to Del’s family surroundings, little is known of Eveline’s family. We know that she grew up in a large Irish family: there was the mother, who was dead at the time of the story, the father, two brothers named Harry and Ernest (Ernest also died before the story starts), and two young children. Harry was in the church-decorating business. The names of the two younger children, whom Eveline looked after, are not given. Eveline’s father, as a male figure in a traditionally organised society, whom we would expect to work and financially provide for his family, was an alcoholic whom Eveline, at the age of nineteen, sustained and served. These reversed family roles, in which the daughter took care of her father, were due to two factors: a promise she gave at her mother’s deathbed to “keep the home together as long as she could” (Joyce 2008, 28), and a memory of her father as he once was. “The human capacity to remember words and things, information and actions, and then to recall these for contemplation or for adjustment, is”, as Barbara Craig defines, “understood universally to be our memory” (Craig 2002, 278). We subconsciously suppress some memories, while others are “recalled unselfconsciously, perhaps by sights or in settings” (Craig 2002, 278). What triggered Eveline’s brighter memory of her father was probably the innate fear of the unknown: fear of embarking with her fiancée, Frank, whom she did not know so well, on a boat that would take her to a new country about which she knew nothing. As if somehow that fear of the unknown made her violent father seem less frightening, as if she found an excuse for all the palpitations and trembling his mere image evoked in her body, as if the memories in which “her father was not so bad” (Joyce 2008, 25) represented a shelter, a home in which,

despite his progressively violent behaviour, she felt safe. Craig explains that “most often it is through conscious effort that we summon ideas and words, and with them the disturbing emotions that can accompany memories” (Craig 2002, 278). He behaved less violently, Eveline would think to herself, while her mother was still alive; her mother had acted as a front-line defender for her children. Now that she was dead, reality completely contradicted the memories. With her mother and Ernest dead, Eveline was left without protection. She “sometimes felt herself in danger of her father’s violence [...] he had never gone for her, like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl; but latterly he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother’s sake” (Joyce 2008, 26). He started with verbal violations as well. First, he would accuse her of squandering money and of not having a head of her own to think with, after which he would ask her to make dinner as if nothing had happened. In fear of more insults and possible physical assault, Eveline would “rush out as quickly as she could and do her marketing, holding her black leather purse tightly in her hand as she elbowed her way through the crowds and returning home late under her load of provisions” (Joyce 2008, 26).

The above discussion shows how by reading and understanding Del’s and Eveline’s gender roles and positions within the family, we accept their body as a means of communication, a source of information, a source of silenced truths and unspoken expectations; a source of “multiple worlds hidden inside conventional maps of place” (Howells 1998, 38). In other words, Del’s and Eveline’s family conventionality mirrored their reality. Even more, the men-women/father-daughter dichotomy seen in their daily dialogues and silenced expectations stands as another example of a daily social context surrounding both Del and Eveline. These points confirm, first, that the body becomes a subject of social narrative, and second, that through a body, as its means of communication, public space becomes interwoven with private space.

2.3 Pocket of Conventionality No. 3: Marriage as/or Desire

The marriage issue was another socio-familial element that influenced both Del’s and Eveline’s life choices and desires. Although Del admired her mother’s courage, her spirit of a wild woman who does what she desires no matter the gossip of the town ladies, she on the other hand, “felt the weight of her mother’s eccentricities, of something absurd and embarrassing about her” (Munro 1971, 80). Del was aware of the dangers that might come if she followed in her mother’s steps; she could not escape that she was very like her mother no matter how much she tried to conceal it, yet she still tried. Even more, Del was aware of her female body and what it represented in society; she knew how her body constrained her, but at the same time she was well aware of her body as her only means of self-expression. Two images from Del’s life stand out as having significantly contributed to Del’s decision on the marriage issue. The first occurred while she read an article in a magazine where she came across a frantically upsetting part in which differences between boys and girls were pictured, although the image was of the boys and girls sitting on a bench while looking at the full moon. At that time, the boy thought about “the universe, its immensity and mystery” (Munro 1971, 228), and the girl thought about washing her hair. At that moment Del realised that she would never fit into the stereotypical vision of women as superficial in contrast to men. Although she did

not want to be like her mother and her “virginal brusqueness” (Munro 1971, 228), she still wanted men to love her for who she was and not simply for how she looked. In other words, she suddenly felt “trapped, stranded; it seemed there had to be a choice where there couldn’t be a choice” (Munro 1971, 228). The part in the article stating that “for a woman, everything is personal; no idea is of any interest to her by itself” (Munro 1971, 228) additionally upset Del, because the passage reminded her of what she did not want to become.

Thanks to her best friend, Naomi, Del would realise that marriage, although a type of woman’s silenced social obligation, was something that the girls of her age looked forward to. In the third year of high school, Naomi switched to commercial school and suddenly started talking only about domestic work (such as cooking and washing the laundry). Although Del found her change in behaviour boring and rather lacking an intellectual and moral sense of life, Naomi’s new self was simply a ritual passage from the life of a girl to the life of a woman; Naomi simply became part of a circle in Jubilee that included all the married women’s daily activities, such as going to stores and putting things away to be paid for at the end of the month. Del thought she would never fall into that trap until one day she fell in love with Garnet French. With Garnet, Del had her first sexual experience, which led her to exchange her church for the Baptist one, and to study less. Until one day, when her mother posed her several questions: “Do you intend to live in Jubilee all your life? Do you want to be the wife of a lumberyard worker? Do you want to join the Baptist Ladies Aid?” (Munro 1971, 278). She also gave her advice: “I hope you will use your brains – use your brains. Use your brains. Don’t be distracted. Once you make that mistake, of being – distracted, over a man, your life will never be your own. You will get the burden, a woman always does” (Munro 1971, 222).

Like Eveline, Del suddenly realised that marriage and marital obligations were not something she would sacrifice her life for; she was unwilling to carry that burden for the rest of her life. As Walter Martin (1989) claims, it is through Del’s attitude toward sex and love that we witness her mental and emotional development and maturation. She summoned the courage to get away from Garnet and never looked back. For a second, she felt free, but since she missed the opportunity to gain the scholarship, which would make her leaving justified and meaningful, in reality she “was not free” (Munro 1971, 304).

Marriage for Irish women at the beginning of the 20th century, just as in Jubilee, represented a type of silenced obligation that women had to fulfil. For Eveline, marriage represented the idea of freedom, happiness, love, and an escape from poor, miserable and restricted living conditions; she was tempted yet frightened at the same time. “Frank [whose name has significance] would save her”, Eveline thought to herself, “He would give her life, perhaps love, too. [...] He would save her” (Joyce 2008, 28). At first, Frank charmed her with his manners, with his stories from his journeys as a sailor; he took her to see *Bohemian Girl*, a ballad opera by the Irish composer Michael William Balfe on the fortunes of a girl abducted by gypsies and taken to Bohemia. The way he behaved, according to scholars Katherine Mullin and Laura Barberán Reinares, might indicate his hidden intentions. White slavery and sex trafficking from Europe to Argentina increased between the 1860s and 1930s (Mullin 2002; Barberán Reinares 2011; Barberán Reinares 2013). When contemplating marriage and emigration, questions like “Why?” and “Was that wise?” struck Eveline with a “sudden

impulse of terror” (Joyce 2008, 28). A mixture of feelings tormented her: the desire to live but not like her mother, the empathy she felt for her father, a promise she gave to her mother, as well as the idea of “what would people say if they knew she had run away with a fellow”. All this influenced Eveline’s final decision-making, while she was standing among the swaying crowd in the station at the North Wall. She was troubled on the inside and the outside: the “distress awoke a nausea in her body [...] she felt her cheek pale [as if] all the seas of the world tumbled about her heart” (Joyce 2008, 28); in a word, she was paralyzed. “No! No! No! It was impossible. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish!” (Joyce 2008, 29), as she decided to stay. She “set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (Joyce 2008, 29). At this moment, Eveline relinquished her desire to confront all social norms and expectations; she rejected the idea of having the right to happiness; she accepted her mother’s position of being subordinate in the social and familial hierarchy, of her body being an object.

As in Eveline’s case, the patriarchal system and restricted social and familial conditions narrowed and limited Del’s life decisions and future possibilities. Del constantly struggled to answer the question “*What was normal life?*” for girls and women in Jubilee: Was it the life that resembled her mother’s brave yet unacceptable social stance? Or was it simply the life of “the girls in the creamery office, [...] showers, linen and pots and pans and silverware, that complicated feminine order? [...] by undertaking and getting used to them both a girl was putting herself on the road to marriage. There was no other way. And I was not going to be able to do it. No. Better Charlotte Brontë” (Munro 1971, 245) – silent and reserved yet consistent in her own beliefs. We know that Del had a hidden copy of Emily Brontë’s novel *Wuthering Heights*, which she admired, so choosing a Brontë’s destiny was much better than fulfilling social expectations to get married. Ultimately, we see that Del was left with only her artistic aspiration to write the memories she stored through her body. She decided to write a collection of memories and records of all the people living in Jubilee, “a list of all the stores and businesses [...] a list of family names, names on the tombstones [...] a list of the titles of movies that played at the Lyceum Theatre [...] names on the cenotaph [...] names of the streets and the pattern they lay in [...] every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together – radiant, everlasting” (Munro 1971, 319) past and future embodied identities yet to come.

3 Conclusion

This analysis of two female characters highlights and illustrates how by analysing the body as a means of communication in a narrative text, we read the body as a source of understanding characters’ sociocultural and family (hi)stories/contexts which prove similar in the two literary works, no matter their different spatiotemporal contexts. The paper has also raised the issue of memories and collections of experiences (individual or collective) as another set of embodied elements that contributed to creating Del’s and Eveline’s identities. Unfortunately, the analysis has also shown that the female body, which was objectified through three conventionalities (society, family, and marriage), became their final arbiter in realising their needs, dreams, and desires. However, the thought that “there is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. Yes. However, it is up to us to make it come” (Munro 1971, 222) sheds light

on a change that Del and Eveline initiated by their desire to counter social expectations, by believing they had the right to a better life, for it takes desire to make the first step in initiating change, so that future generations might reap the fruits of their struggle.

The paper witnesses not only how multi-layered and intense Munro's and Joyce's stories are, but also that the reading of female body plays an important role in mapping, presenting, and defining self-society relations that, together with other elements, connect Munro's and Joyce's texts. It also adds to new interpretations of and approaches to the roles and meanings of the female body in both Alice Munro's short story cycle *Lives of Girls and Women* and James Joyce's short story "Eveline". Such an interpretation opens the doors for future studies into the representation of the female body in literature in general.

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