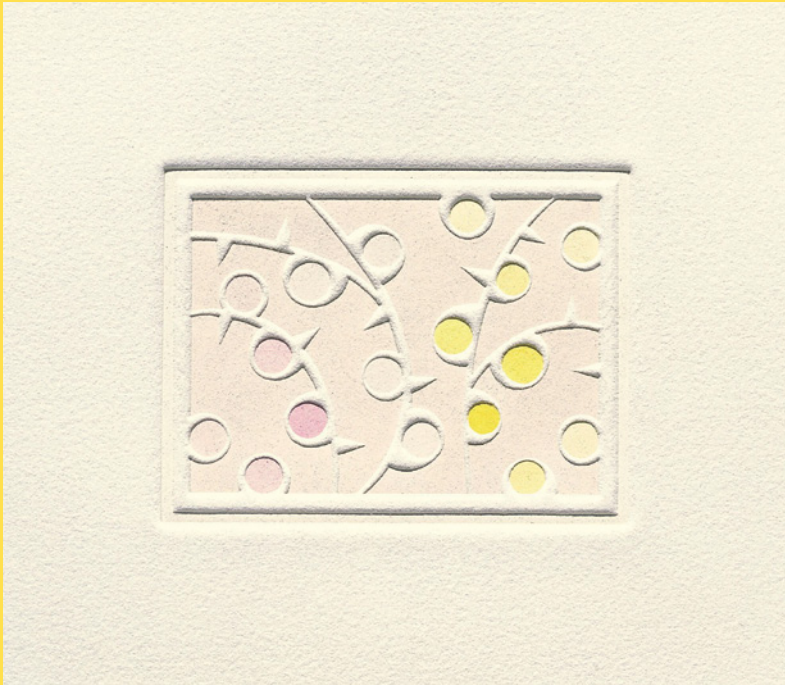


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Vol. 19, No. 1 (2022)

ALICE MUNRO: PRECISE, PARADOXICAL AND PRET-TY TRICK-Y

Guest Editors of ELOPE Vol. 19, No. 1:
Michelle GADPAILLE and Tjaša MOHAR

Journal Editors: Smiljana KOMAR and Mojca KREVEL

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Part I

Introduction

Michelle Gadpaille

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Celebrating the Precise, the Paradoxical and the “Pret-ty-Trick-y”¹ in Alice Munro’s Fiction

Preciznost, paradoksalnost in tisto »pre-cej pre-bri-sa-no«² v zgodbah Alice Munro

When in 2013, a colleague called me up exclaiming “We won! We won!” I am ashamed to admit that my response was puzzlement: WHAT had we won? And who were WE? It was the Canadian fiction writer Alice Munro who had just won the Nobel Prize for literature, and “we” indicated Canadians and the whole expatriate industry of Canadian literary scholarship. We had, indeed, scored a major coup for short fiction, its writers, and readers.

It was validating to learn later that the reaction from Munro herself had been similar. According to *The Guardian* (Higgins 2013), the author felt “kind of dazed” about the win. In contrast, the speech at the Nobel awards ceremony expressed no hesitation. Peter Englund, Secretary for the Nobel Prize Committee for literature in 2013, credited Munro with having come close “to solving the greatest mystery of them all: the human heart and its caprices” (Award Ceremony Speech). The commendatory phrase that resonated around the world was the summative “master of the contemporary short story,” but Englund steered closer to the bond between storyteller and story listener: “If you have never before fantasised about the strangers you see on a bus,” he opined, “you begin doing so after having read Alice Munro” (The Nobel Prize 2013).

In Slovenia, we, too, jumped on that Munro bus, celebrating her life, work, and achievement with two events in Maribor, including book exhibits and literary readings at the Faculty of Arts, Maribor (Gadpaille, Mohar, and Zupan 2013) and the University Library (Gadpaille and Mohar 2013). In common with other Canadianists from across Europe, we contributed to the burgeoning scholarship based on her weighty life’s oeuvre. New translations appeared, along with measured evaluation of existing ones. The translations of *Too Much Happiness* and *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* from 2011 received fresh attention from the critics and the media in 2013, and these were soon joined by new translations by the Munro scholar, Tjaša Mohar: *Dear Life* (2014), *Runaway* (2015), and *The View from Castle Rock* (2017).³ An innovative theory appeared, positing the use of transactive memory

¹ From Munro’s story “Passion” in *Runaway* (Munro 2004).

² From the Slovene translation of the story “Passion” (Slov. “Strast”) from *Ubežnica* (Munro 2015).

³ Slovene titles: *Ljubo življenje*, *Ubežnica* and *Pogled z grajske pečine*.

as the basis for Munro's mysteriously compelling narratology (Gadpaille 2016). The Central European Association for Canadian Studies produced a volume on the impact of Canadian writing in the member countries since 1990, with one part dedicated to cataloguing work on Munro and Cohen and their reception. Even during the pandemic, collaborative work continued, with an event called *Tricks and Other Ceremonies* joining students in Rijeka to those in Maribor (Gadpaille, Mohar, and Onič 2021a), and in May 2021, an online lecture in which Tjaša Mohar, Tomaž Onič and Michelle Gadpaille scooped up participants from across Europe: *Alice Munro's Fiction: Calling all Readers, Writers and Lovers* (2021b). Additionally, two articles were published in Slovene on the occasion of Munro's 90th birthday, popularizing Munro among the general public; one appeared in the newspaper *Večer* (Mohar 2021a) and the other in the literary magazine *Zvon* (Mohar 2021b).

The CEACS challenged its members to celebrate Munro's 90th birthday in whatever way seemed feasible in a year of lockdowns and distanced education. As one response, in November 2021, the conference *Alice Munro at 90* (Budapest, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary: Eötvös Loránd University) assembled an online group of Munro experts. At this conference arose the idea for this special issue on the work of Alice Munro.

Although it might seem that the topic of Munro's fiction has been exhausted, these eight articles, originating from diverse countries, testify to the continuing fascination with Munro's exploration of ordinary women's lives. Contributor Ana Penjak places Munro's work next to the high modernist short fiction of James Joyce, in which company it holds its own. In "Female Body as a Source of Shared (Hi)stories: On Munro's Del and Joyce's Eveline" Penjak finds parallels between the circumscribed lives of Joyce's Dublin women and the lives of girls and women in Huron county, Ontario, applying a feminist methodology.

Michelle Gadpaille's "'Country speech': Regional and Temporal Linguistic Layering in Alice Munro's Fiction" draws attention to the tiniest of linguistic elements – speech tags – to uncover a split in Munro's fiction between two forms of discourse: country and cosmopolitan. By foregrounding speech tags attributing certain expressions to communities removed in time and space, Munro's narrators create layers of voice that evoke distance mediated by time, education, class snobbery and city living. Meanwhile, country voices break through the dominant discourse to privilege remembered phrasings. Another contribution focusing narrowly on grammatical features of Munro's style is Katja Težak's "Adverbials of Time, Time Expressions and Tense Shifts in Alice Munro's 'Dance of the Happy Shades'". By highlighting stylistic features that mark both time and stasis, Težak demonstrates Munro's distinctive technique for adjusting readerly position vis-à-vis the narrator's timeline.

Contributor Iris Lucio-Villegas Spillard, on the other hand, exemplifies the thematic approach that has been current in Canadian literary studies since the 1980s: "Honey, Where Are the Kids?": Motifs of the Past, Water, and Photography in Munro's Stories Featuring Dead Children" brings together six stories linked by common themes of children's drowning, and shared motifs of water. Working from Munro's biography, Spillard convincingly posits an autobiographical origin for the figure of the lost child in Munro's fiction.

In contrast, Gertrud Szamosi has chosen a single collection for her thematic analysis, “The Human Geometry of Deathscapes and Homes in Alice Munro’s *The View from Castle Rock*.” Employing the theory of spatiality, Szamosi traces these thematized loci from Scotland to Ontario, to arrive at an image of the narrator as more Munro than otherwise in this collection.

Jason Blake and Simon Zupan contribute an innovative article, “Thresholds and What Seems to Be: Munro’s First Sentences,” using stylistics software and, surprisingly, word clouds, to investigate the mystery of Munro’s story openings. The authors deftly combine quirky statistics (e.g., the average length of a Munro opening sentence) and close reading to defamiliarize sentences that the avid Munro reader had skimmed over, thus sending the reader back to contemplate patterns and coincidences hitherto unperceived. Instead of covering Munro’s whole oeuvre, as Blake and Zupan did, Murat Öner has chosen to focus on a single early story in the article “Whispers and Dances: (De)Construction of Heterochronism in Alice Munro’s ‘Walker Brothers Cowboy’” but to apply an unusual interpretive approach. By employing a Foucauldian spatial concept, Öner illuminates the distinctive narrative structure of this story, allowing us to see it as composed of micro-narratives, linked rhizomatically to other stories in the collection *Dance of the Happy Shades*.

In the article titled “Destiny of a Nobel Laureate in a Small Book Market: Alice Munro in Slovene Translation”, Tjaša Mohar investigates the possible reasons for Munro’s late introduction to Slovene readers and the continued underrepresentation of her works in Slovene translation, providing an insight into the dynamics of the translation and publishing industry in Slovenia.

This is the second issue of *ELOPE* to focus on an individual Canadian author; Volume 17, *Atwood at 80*, began the trend. Such apparent editorial bias reflects more than local interest and expertise, although it does that, but also the global appeal of a young national literature that has recently come of age. Canadian literature has enticed European readers and critics by its historicized paradigms of wilderness and survival but, paradoxically, has achieved peak recognition in the works of two authors who defy such paradigms. We read the short fiction of Munro, not because it is Canadian but because it holds us disturbingly spellbound by its tricky mirroring of our most secret doubts about the brief, time-bound span of human lives. These eight contributors are all under that spell and invite future readers to join them.

The guest editors wish to thank all those who worked behind the scenes to bring this special issue to fruition, including our doughty reviewers, the Budapest organizers of *Alice Munro at 90*, and the journal editors: Smiljana Komar, Mojca Krevel and Andrej Stopar.

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Part II

Articles

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“Country Speech”: Regional and Temporal Linguistic Layering in Alice Munro’s Fiction

ABSTRACT

Foregrounded reports of remembered speech habits typify Alice Munro’s short fiction. In one story, the author refers to this, almost casually, as “country speech.” I will examine instances of generalized speech tags (such as “As they used to say”) to explore their relation to the creation of spatial and temporal depth in the fictional landscape. Distinctions are established between types of these foregrounded speech tags, and the category of “country speech” is extended to include a related concept of “country manners.” These combine to help create the subtly layered distinctions between place (city, country, small town) and time (decades and generations) that add texture to Munro’s narratives.

Keywords: Alice Munro, Canadian Literature, short fiction, stylistics

»Podeželski govor«: regionalna in časovna jezikovna večplastnost v kratki prozi Alice Munro

IZVLEČEK

V kratki prozi Alice Munro je v ospredje postavljeno poročanje o govornih navadah, ki se jih junaki zgodb spominjajo. V eni izmed zgodb avtorica to – skoraj brezbrizno – imenuje »podeželski govor«. Prispevek analizira primere generaliziranih spremnih stavkov (npr. »Kot so včasih rekli«) in razišče, kakšna je njihova vloga pri ustvarjanju prostorske in časovne globine v fiktivni pokrajini. Prispevek prav tako vpelje razlikovanje med različnimi vrstami spremnih stavkov in razširi kategorijo »podeželskega govora«, tako da le-ta vključuje soroden koncept »podeželskih manir«. Oboje skupaj ustvari tenkočutno večplastno razlikovanje med prostorom (veliko mesto, podeželje, malo mesto) in časom (desetletja in generacije), ki pripovedim Alice Munro dajejo teksturo.

Ključne besede: Alice Munro, kanadska književnost, kratka proza, stilistika

1 Introduction

“As they used to say” or “As people said” – these phrases or similar variants pass virtually unnoticed in Alice Munro’s fiction. Since Munro’s oeuvre is rooted in place (predominantly southwestern Ontario) and time (specific decades of the 20th century), it is unsurprising to find overt references to the distinctive idiom of a region or a generation, the “country speech” (Munro 1998, *Love of a Good Woman*, 47) that may need introduction, apology or even decoding for the reader.

However, these suspension phrases, or generalized speech tags, mark an overlooked feature of Munro’s fiction, whether they appear in the past or present tense. Phrases like “as they say” and “what people around here are apt to call” introduce polyphony into the narrative discourse, allowing alternative voices to break through. These voices often, but not invariably, represent what Munro herself has called “country speech.” Such moments evoke the stylistic and syntactic phrasing of another, usually unnamed, speaker, often collective, and take various forms, which will be defined, illustrated, and explicated to explore their layering effect in Munro’s narratives. I will consider the stories as a text corpus rather than interpreting them individually.

2 Narratives of Place and Time

In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Munro denied being a regional writer (Hancock 1987, 200); this demurrer must be negotiated by any critic discussing region or place in her oeuvre.¹ Nevertheless, Reingard Nischik (2007) affirms “regional attachments” as being among the three main characteristics of her writing. Maria Löschnigg also confronts the issue, maintaining that place constitutes “the major linking device” (2014, 21) in groups of Munro stories. This is especially relevant for the collections that have been read as “story cycles” (*Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) and *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971)). From the more distanced perspective of European critics such as Nischik and Löschnigg, it could be easier to interpret the narratives as providing a “map” of a particular Canadian region, southwestern Ontario bordering Lake Huron (Nischik 2007, 203). However, the two-dimensional concept of mapping needs to be corrected with the addition of the dimension of time. Munro’s narratives commonly offer the illusion of a credible voice telling an autobiographical story about something that happened not just in another place – a rural place, long left behind – but also in a distant time – a childhood similarly distant. The sense of distance is imbricated with both the spatial and temporal removal, which produces, as in stories told by migrants, a preoccupation with a personal story of origin. Löschnigg identifies this as an “almost obsessive engagement with places of origin” (2014, 46), which includes analysis of individual-community interaction and issues of otherness (2014, 47).

The nexus of time and place forms the main topic of a recent Canadian monograph, Ryan Porter’s *You Can’t Get There from Here: The Past as Present in Small-Town Ontario Fiction* (2019).

¹ Although, as Joanne McCaig points out, Munro once bowed to pressure in an interview and admitted that IF she were a regional writer, then that region aligned with the American south because of the rural setting and the Scots-Irish origin of the inhabitants (McCaig 2002, 39-40).

Dealing with Munro alongside Stephen Leacock, Robertson Davies and Jane Urquhart, Porter defines the common features of memorialized distance:

Small towns in Ontario's literature are often portrayed as repositories of time-honoured values, as natural or organic communities, as antiquated counterparts to a degraded, urban modernity, and as places infused with traditional wisdom that stretch back into the mists of time: places that harbor a qualitative difference from life in the modern city. (Porter 2019, 8)

In further analyzing Munro's work, Porter highlights the phrase "country life" in the story "Simon's Luck." To Porter, this phrase, used by the characters with ironic self-mockery, "bookends" the life stories of Rose and Simon (Porter 2019, 135). "Country life," as we will see, constitutes the acceptable, cosmopolitan version of what will be analyzed here as "country speech" and "country manners."

3 Generalized Speech Tags

The pattern of country speech can be introduced with three clear examples of generalized speech tags, the syntactical structure to which I am referring, which are indicated in bold below:

*"Wal if a feller took a notion to, **they said.*** They really said that. ("The Beggar Maid" in *Who Do You Think You Are?* 1996, 107)

"Talking back" **it was called.** ("Dear Life" 2013, 306)

Or beating the tar out of me, **as people would cheerfully say back then.** ("Dear Life" 2013, 317)

In each of these cases, the phrase produces the illusion of realistic linguistic reporting. Some people, even many people, perhaps even almost everybody said this phrase. The past tense is another commonality in these three examples; whatever the wording, this is something that people no longer say, according to the story's narrator. Past tense is expressed with the simple past, or with the modal formation "would say" to indicate habitual usage in a past time. The second example from "Dear Life" even provides the time frame: "back then." This vague indicator covers a vast potential sweep of past time. The only real time location is that the era exists in the past of the narrator, probably during their lifetime, because memory is invoked. By relying on auditory witness, the narrator cements their intradiegetic position, and implies distance in time and, less tangibly, in place.

There are three distinct ways of identifying the utterers of these tags: 1) the passive voice ("it was called"); 2) the third-person plural pronoun ("they"), and 3) the noun "people." With slight variations, these three types cover almost all examples from Munro's stories. This linguistic feature establishes the "qualitative difference" that Porter found between remembered life in small towns and adopted life in the metropolis (Porter 2019, 8). It is necessary to grasp the function of these speech tags and sample their range of usage and occurrence.

Quirk et al. set out the structure and semantic functions of these comment clauses (Quirk et al. 1985, 1114); not all of these functions are evident in this sample from Munro's work.

The following five further examples of distancing suspensions display the usual pattern: the generalized speaker, the auditory memory, and the capture of special habits of speech:

“Going to Morrisville, **they say.**” (“Before the Change” in *The Love of a Good Woman* 1998, 331)

“So-and-so digs with the wrong foot, **they would say.** She digs with the wrong foot. That was **what they would say** about Nora. (“Walker Brothers Cowboy” in *Dance of the Happy Shades* 1988, 14)

“Maiden ladies, **they were called.** Old Maids was too thin a term, it would not cover them. (“Chaddeleys and Flemings” “Connection” in *The Moons of Jupiter* 1986, 1)

“**That’s what they say here,** isn’t it? Steamed up?” (“Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux” in *The Progress of Love* 1995, 90)

“Up and down,” **they used to say** in her childhood, talking of the health of people who weren’t going to recover. “Ah. She’s up and down.” (“Dulse” in *The Moons of Jupiter* 1986, 59)

The first two examples involve specific cultural usages that might be opaque to outsiders and to younger generations. Morrisville is where people are sent for mental problems, thus the dismissive tone of “Going to Morrisville.” The phrase encapsulates a prudish attitude towards mental illness, a smug community agreement that out of sight could be out of mind. “Digging with the wrong foot” is an even more obscure reference to being a Roman Catholic. The Protestant/Catholic divide often hovers in the background of Munro’s southwestern Ontario, nowhere more obviously than in this coded slur against Nora. These two speech tags allow the narrator to create both small-town attitudes and a safe distance from them.

The third example from “Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux” clearly indicates a difference in place with the word “here” (“That’s what they say **here**” my emphasis), while the fourth one emphasizes temporal distance instead. The tag “they used to say in her childhood” is unusually forthright about the narrator’s relation to this remembered snippet of local speech. The homodiegetic narrator with a retrospective point of view underlies all five instances of distancing speech tags but is most prominent in the fourth one.

4 Speech Tag Variants

The first variant of this linguistic feature is the personalized speech tag, where an actual person is identified as the habitual speaker of the phrase, as in the three examples below:

the kind that Enid’s mother called “potato Irish.” (“The Love of a Good Woman” in *The Love of a Good Woman* 1998, 32)

She always called her cigarettes ciggie-boos. (“Family Furnishings” in *Hateship* 2002, 78)

Relations performing.

That was Flo’s word for it: perform. (“Privilege” in *Who Do You Think You Are?* 1996, 31)

Despite their identification of a speaker, these speech tags resemble the ones with a generalized speaker because they share some of the function of spatial and temporal distancing, while also contributing to characterization. These three deserve careful analysis.

the kind that Enid's mother called "potato Irish." ("The Love of a Good Woman" in *The Love of a Good Woman* 1998, 32)

"Potato Irish" belongs to a class of derogatory labels used against various waves of immigrants to Canada, in this case to southwestern Ontario. The "Potato" part of the phrase invokes the Potato Famine of 1847–52, which sparked heavy Irish emigration, much of which was to Canada. Irish Catholics entered on the bottom rung of the ethnic and socio-economic ladder. Additionally, the phrase associates the person so labelled with lowly agricultural pursuits and, invariably, rural poverty with its concomitant monotonous diet. In these stories, it probably also connotes Roman Catholicism, since this was perceived as hostile to the dominant Anglican/Presbyterian/Methodist/United Church belief systems (see the early story "Walker Brothers Cowboy"). Through this phrase, we learn something about Enid's mother, her thoughtless prejudice and snobbery, and much about the dominant attitudes of the time and place. Enid's mother could not have used the descriptor unless it also reflected a common community usage and attitude. The distancing here emerges as not just time but also attitude. Society at the time the narrator speaks has undergone an attitude adjustment, not just to the Irish Catholics, who moved up the immigrant ladder long ago, along with the Protestant Irish, but more so to prejudicial ethnic stereotypes. Even in the present tense of the story, Enid's mother is singled out for her usage, and from the point of view of the narrator, the phrase needs corrective distancing.

She always called her cigarettes ciggie-boos. ("Family Furnishings" in *Hateship* 2002, 78)

Alfrida, the "career girl" cousin from "Family Furnishings" is the user of the flip phrase *ciggie-boos*. The infantile nickname conjures a complex of attitudes on Alfrida's part to her nicotine addiction, and her use of it to construct a persona of careless, cynical sophistication. However, the young narrator has reached the point where she can deconstruct the projected persona and its linguistic script. This instance shows that a Munro reader must carefully distinguish between usages like this and places where direct speech from the past is simply reported. This word is not allowed to exist on the same plane as the other dialogue; the narrator singles it out, raises it above the flow of dialogue, distances it from the narrator's own usage and thus from our sense of normative linguistic usage in the setting. In this case, the word becomes part of Alfrida's idiolect, which in turn is part of her life-long performance. Alfrida aspires to a chic, cosmopolitan self and uses such phrases to distinguish herself from small-town speech, attitudes and socio-economic realities. Self-mockery can be afforded by those who have moved away from what Porter calls the small-town "restrictive behavioural code" (Porter 2019, 135).

Relations performing.

That was Flo's word for it: *perform*. ("Privilege" in *Who Do You Think You Are?* 1996, 31)

In the third example, the speaker is a major character in the story and the story cycle. This is Flo, the stepmother around whom many fictional episodes swirl. The normally taciturn Flo has begun to speak, and her flat locutions need special foregrounding. The narrator cannot be satisfied with the first utterance but must repeat the odd usage and attribute it to Flo specifically, as with Enid's mother in the potato Irish usage. The verb *perform* as used by Flo describes both the juvenile, incestuous sex act taking place in the school toilet and, according to Flo, all the perverse conjunctions to be found in remote country districts. The diction choice strips the sexual act of romance or pleasure and reduces it to spectacle. In the case of Shorty and Franny McGill, the brother and sister "performing" for money in the schoolyard, it has become literally a spectacle, one at which the narrator herself was present. In Flo's mouth, *perform* becomes more than a euphemism current within a community that cannot say *have sex*, or *copulate* or their coarser four-letter relatives, but a dismissal of the ontological presence of the act. As performance, the act signifies the gender performance that marks the normative heterosexuality of the community but calls into question the very existence of the reality that is being performed. This goes beyond mere country speech to indicate a broader set of country attitudes, ones inimical to the rose-tinted "country life" of "Simon's Luck." Rose, the narrator, notes the odd usage, attaching it particularly to Flo and not to the wider community. A word like this allows Flo to discuss the unmentionable with her stepdaughter, while capturing the negation associated with the absence of sex as a social experience in that small town.

Elsewhere, Flo is reported using non-standard grammar in other ways – an incorrect past participle, for instance:

... another man who hanged himself using a chain, the kind of chain you hook on a tractor with, so it was a wonder his head was not torn off.

Tore off, **Flo said**. ("The Beggar Maid" in *Who Do You Think You Are?* 1996, 208)

As in the case of *perform*, the narrator deliberately allows the echo; the verb first appears in standard form, then is repeated to capture the flavour of Flo's discourse, since these are her oral stories that the narrator is reporting. This clarification creates immediacy and evokes the force and authenticity of Flo's storytelling by allowing her dialect to surface briefly within the flow of standard English. The pattern is not derogatory to the character; instead, it does justice to Flo by permitting her voice to emerge from the substrate of the past and the country.

This variant of the Munroian speech tag personalizes the usage, while still separating it from the narrator. The attributed locution becomes part of characterization, in some cases of a distinctive idiolect (as with Flo and Alfrida). In each of the three examples, the narrator foregrounds the usage with the distancing speech tag, allowing the reader the impression of a parallel linguistic universe running behind the narrator's own plausible voice. This makes the narrator into a type of interpreter, a translator of lived idiolect into the voice of the story. These speech tags, therefore, create the effect of layered voices almost of heteroglossia, where the idiolectal country speech functions as a substrate to the narrator's safely cosmopolitanized discourse. Munro's technique differentiates her practice from that of the local colour story of the American short-fiction writer Kate Chopin, for instance. Were an entire Munro story to

have been narrated by Flo, it would shift decisively towards local colour. Instead, this usage of well-placed speech tags assists in constructing the multiply textured voice of the Munro stories, what Löschnigg calls “counter-realistic deep mapping” (2014, 21).

5 Regional Dialect and Accent

Having established Munro’s distinctive use of speech tags in creating temporal and spatial distance between the narrator and remembered experience, we can now enlarge the view of “country speech” to include the plainest level at which she represents regional accent and/or dialect. As established, there is no place in her fiction where there is anything like the extended evocation of regional language varieties that characterized the regional writers of the early 20th century, no extended passages of country characters speaking in country dialect. The most direct representation of the phenomenon is the occasional reference to non-standard pronouns and verb forms. In the story “The Eye,” for instance, there is talk of teaching Sadie the hired girl not to say “youse” (*Dear Life* 2013, 260), and in “A Queer Streak” the narrator suddenly notices how her family speaks: “Weren’t they saying ‘youse’ on purpose, to sound funny?” (“A Queer Streak” in *The Progress of Love* 1995, 283). In another story, the second-person pronoun emerges as “yez”:

“In the town I come from,” Rose said, exaggerating, “**everybody says yez**. What’ll yez have? How’re yez doin.”

“Yez?”

“Youse. It’s the plural of you.”

(“Mischief” in *Who Do You Think You Are?* 1996, 126)

Another pronoun appears in non-standard form in the speech of the narrator’s father. This is a reflexive pronoun:

Till **my father would say** with embarrassment, and oblique reproach, “He seems to get on all right by hisself.”

If his relatives had not been present, he would more likely have said “himself.” (“Family Furnishings” in *Hateship* 2002, 80)

This example offers an explanation for the non-standard usage: it is conditional on the presence of family. The father reverts to a usage from his childhood, one that mimics a usage common among his family and community. For him, this represents a word from the past but for the relatives, *hisself* is a commonplace even in current discourse. Presumably, the father’s usage is partly diplomatic, as he avoids making a distinction between his way of speaking and theirs. It is an expression of solidarity, not just with language, but with values, too. Löschnigg discusses this pronoun variant at length, interpreting it to indicate the father’s fear of being considered arrogant (2014, 44). This identifies the situation as revealing one of the “merciless codes” that must be observed in the rural community (Löschnigg 2014, 44). The existence of such codes, of self-censorship or even silence, marks the difference between country speech and its opposite.

Differences are not always syntactical or lexical: sometimes “country speech” emerges in pronunciation. For example, “White Dump,” a story set in the Ottawa Valley (one of the few Canadian locations west of the Maritimes with a distinctive local accent), singles out some local usages as marked: “**they talked as they did, saying**, “We-ez goen to towen,” and “bowt” (“White Dump” in *The Progress of Love* 1995, 389). In this case, it is primarily the accent that is non-standard.

6 Country Discourse

As previously hinted, the matrix of country speech in Munro’s fiction is **country discourse**, a phenomenon sometimes evoked directly in her stories but just as often reflected through its antithesis, the urban, educated discourse of people who have left the small town or rural district for wider horizons. Many critics have noted and commented on this, for example Nischik, as she discusses the family “stuck in conventional thought patterns” in the early story “Boys and Girls” (Nischik 2007, 210). Marlene Goldman (1990) also touches on the familial discourse that conspires to delimit girls’ opportunities. Löschnigg identifies silence as the defining element of this discourse: “Codes of silence, and absences of signifying meaning, also play an important role in Munro’s depiction of difference against the backdrop of closely knit small-town communities” (Löschnigg 2014, 28). Munro’s narrators call attention to discourse in the form of marking difference; only where discourse differs is there a need for comment. As the narrator says about their visitor, Mr. Florence, in “The Progress of Love,” “he [an outsider] wasn’t used to our way of talking” (*The Progress of Love* 1995, 16). If the generalized speech tags first discussed could appear inconsequential or contingent, then their placement within this wider framework cements their importance as boundary markers in the mapping of “here” and “there” both temporally and spatially in Munro’s oeuvre. As Raymond Williams reminded us, “‘country’ and ‘city’ are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities” (Williams 1973, 1). Moreover, it is in language and discourse that such polarities are created and negotiated. Country speech only becomes manifest when a gap has been opened between it and its opposite: the cosmopolitan world of Standard Canadian English and normative readerly expectation.

“Country speech” (“Love of a Good Woman” 1998) and country discourse in Munro’s work have a behavioural equivalent in the phrase “country manners” (“The Progress of Love” in *The Progress of Love* 1995, 1; “Hateship, Friendship” in *Hateship* 2002, 6), and even in “family ways”: “My father returned to family ways” (“Images” in *Dance of the Happy Shades* 1988, 34). These concepts all coalesce around that gap between the narrative present and the memorialized past. Once beyond individual speakers and generalized speech tags, we can anatomize the phenomenon in a more holistic way.

The distinctive elements of country discourse break down into three categories: verbal reticence; predictability (restricted and familiar usage); and proverbial wisdom to clinch arguments and represent ethical positions. We will take these in order.

Verbal reticence: This feature of Munro’s stories can be difficult to pin down, requiring as it does the observation of what is not said rather than of what is. It receives considerable attention

in Löschnigg's discussion of "firmly established codes of silence and secrecy" (2014, 46). An extreme example emerges in the farm sisters from the two-part story "Chaddeleys and Flemings." The sisters – Susan, Clara, Lizzie, Maggie, Annie and Jennet (who died) – center the second part, titled "The Stone in the Field." "Work would be what filled their lives," opines the narrator, "not conversation" ("The Stone in the Field" in *The Moons of Jupiter* 1986, 26). Since this category of discourse involves an absence, it is worth quoting an entire paragraph:

What was to be said? The aunts, like those who engage in a chat with royalty, would venture no remarks of their own, but could answer questions. They offered no refreshments. It was clear that only a great effort of will kept them all from running away and hiding, like Aunt Susan, who never did reappear while we were there. What was felt in that room was the pain of human contact. I was hypnotized by it. The fascinating pain; the humiliating necessity. ("The Stone in the Field" in *The Moons of Jupiter* 1986, 27)

Although this taciturn, reclusive behaviour is acknowledged as extreme even for this community (and likely to have been pathologized in a contemporary setting), the story depicts it as part of a spectrum of silence and silencing, on which the narrator positions herself at the end of the twin stories. A life of verbal absence and avoidance leaves few records, not even the lost grave stone of the story's second section. Munro's narrators sometimes take up the challenge of voicing this community silence, often gendered, and of documenting what strangled substrate survives time and distance to document traces of this more genuine version of country life.

Predictability: this category of country discourse refers primarily to lexis, although sometimes to syntax or even tone. Using the words and expressions that everyone knows marks one as an insider to the small community. Using fancy words makes one alien. The predictability of utterance is evident, for example, when the father in "Voices" engages in code-switching because "he understood that the thing to do was never to say anything special" ("Voices" in *Dear Life* 2013, 290). The restriction to the predictable can result in discourse that is opaque to outsiders. Here is the farm girl, Helen, from "Floating Bridge":

"You picked a hot enough day to be out in," she said. It was the sort of thing she might have heard people say to start a conversation. She spoke in a hard, flat tone of antagonism and distrust, but even that, Jinny knew by now, should not be taken personally. It was just the way some people sounded – particularly country people – in this part of the world. ("Floating Bridge" in *Hateship* 2002, 54)

Moreover, in the story "Fits," we hear that in the country, "much of conversation is repetition" (*The Progress of Love* 1995, 140), which is later elaborated into the observation that "At that time he [the newcomer] had a very faulty comprehension of Gilmore vocabulary" ("Fits" 1995, 141).

A prescribed repetition and familiarity go together with a straitened vocabulary. This does not mean merely exclusion of the complicated and the Latinate. In the story "Wood," for instance, even the commonplace word "forest" sounds strange to the rural protagonist; the simple six-

letter word was unthinkable until after his dangerous experience in the wood. The ordeal has altered that common assemblage of trees into “forest”: “*Forest*. That’s the word. Not a strange word at all but one he has possibly never used” (“Wood” in *Too Much Happiness* 2009, 245).

In the story “Jesse and Meribeth” the unspeakable word is “menstrual,” as distinct from local usage, which would refer instead to “monthlies” or even “the curse” (“Jesse and Meribeth” in *The Progress of Love* 1995, 223). Similar prudish diction crops up in “Accident” where the sister-in-law cannot say “penis” but has to use the euphemism “pecker.” “She had never heard the word *penis*, tried it but couldn’t get used to it. *Pecker*, she said. *Whipped out his pecker*, she said” (“Accident” in *The Moons of Jupiter* 1986, 95). These examples of restricted vocabulary are associated with the prudishness that accompanied church-going people in a small, vigilant community that self-censored its conversation. As the narrator says in “Royal Beatings,” “we were all most prudish people” (“Royal Beatings”, in *Who Do You Think You Are?* 1996, 5). The words for sexuality and reproduction have a parallel lexicon in country discourse; country speakers may know the official equivalent but would not use it publicly. This is not mere prudishness but a strategy for policing gender boundaries and disallowing certain attitudes deemed citified.

Proverbial wisdom: the third category within country discourse comprises sayings and proverbs. These sometimes occur in the mouths of Munro’s characters as strategies for shutting down argument, for having the last word. They suggest what Porter calls “reverence for the past” in his study of small-town Ontario fiction (2019, 8). “How I Met My Husband” offers a clear example, easily overlooked in our appreciation for the “digressive unfolding of the narrative” (Gadpaille 1989, 60):

“Have a house without a pie, be shamed until you die,” my mother used to say ...
 (“How I Met My Husband” in *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You* 1990, 46)

The finality of the pronouncement has the presumed effect of shutting down argument. It replaces discussion with an inarguable proposition. Munro’s narrators absorb the habit of quotation as a means of interpreting everyday experience, but these younger women often access other forms of verbal wisdom, poetry in particular.

7 Contrasting Discourse Systems

In later stories, Munro sometimes offers clarifying summations of the difference between two kinds of conversational discourse: country speech and its cosmopolitan opposite. The story “Passion” devotes a whole paragraph to Grace’s careful observations about conversation. A smart but inexperienced country girl, Grace notes the distinction between conversational habits at the Travers’ house and those in her own small-town community:

People [at the Travers’] told amusing stories, in which the joke was often on themselves (... Where she came from, most of the lively conversation took the form of dirty jokes, which of course her aunt and uncle did not go in for. On the rare occasions when they had company, there was praise of and apology for the food, discussion of the weather, and a fervent wish for the meal to be finished as soon as possible). (“Passion” in *Runaway* 2005, 168)

This passage offers a clear distinction between a domestic milieu where verbal exchange is brief and restricted in subject, and another family milieu where conversation functions to express individuality and reveal wit and intellect. The difference lies partly in the city/country divide, partly in the level of education and class expectations. Young Grace, from a tradesman's family, finds the discourse difference at the Travers' a challenge at first, but discovers that she can learn the rules of this game with ease.

Note that there is a terminological asymmetry here: what to call this "game" of cosmopolitan family discourse. Naming country discourse has been easy, largely because Munro herself provided the phrasings "country speech" ("The Love of a Good Woman" 1998, 47) and "country manners," and addressed the phenomenon directly, as in this early story: "'Well,' This is a habit of country people, old people, to say 'Well,' meaning, 'is that so?' with a little extra politeness and concern" ("Walker Brothers Cowboy" in *Dance of the Happy Shades* 1988, 12). This brief passage unites temporal and spatial distance around one simple speech habit – not diction, but pragmatic usage; the pattern of country speech is evident. More difficult, however, has been naming the opposite type of discourse that throws country speech into relief. Occasionally, the citified form of discourse is mocked in Munro's stories, as in the phrase "country life" from the story "Simon's Luck" (*Who Do You Think You Are?* 1996). In context, this summarizes all the things that city people think life in the country will be like; it has a glossy, comfortable connotation that ignores the rugged reality of dirt roads and outdoor toilets.

One convenient way of capturing the antithesis of country discourse appears in a surprising phenomenon: the compound or hyphenated words that Munro places strategically to signal values and attitudes. There exists a set of similar phrases that disparage anything not springing from country discourse. These include the use of "hotshot" in "Family Furnishings" to disparage the reading of classic novels (*Hateship* 2002, 89), and the closely related "High-Hat" in "Powers": "He somehow thinks it's too High-Hat" (*Runaway* 2005, 282). "Airy-fairy" conjures up the same level of contempt in the story "Soon": "He might use the word airy-fairy" (*Runaway* 2005, 115), and in "The Bear Came over the Mountain" (*Hateship* 2002, 277). A similar usage is the adjective "fangle-dangle" in "Postcard," where one family betrays their outsider status by their choice of garment for a child's christening: "one of them long fangle-dangle christening robes" ("Postcard" in *Dance of the Happy Shades* 1988, 131).

This list comprises the negative judgments of the 'country people' in the stories. The compounds drip with contempt and assign triviality to anything not comprehended within the allowed subjects of country discourse. Munro's country is not isolated from the modern world; things intrude – classical music and literature, even paintings. Löschnigg offers an extended reading of the Chagall painting *I and the Village* that is rejected by the country family in "Soon" (Löschnigg 2014, 41–44). This is an instance where country discourse receives extended consideration in relation to one story, which is not my aim here, since the stories are treated as a text corpus. Across her oeuvre, Munro's protagonists usually negotiate the switch between discourse types, often uncomfortably and with keen awareness of the "monstrous snobbery" that the switch can entail ("The Peace of Utrecht" in *Dance of the Happy Shades* 1988, 192).

8 Conclusion

Despite the terminological asymmetry, the binary between country speech and its foil emerges clearly when one considers Alice Munro's fiction as a whole. Its existence and foregrounded nature are inarguable, given the author's acute self-awareness in the matter.

"Country speech" ("The Love of a Good Woman" 1998, 47), though never the dominant narratorial language, yet shadows the stories, running parallel as a linguistic substrate that surfaces strategically to create temporal and spatial difference and to contribute to the sense of depth and multivocality in Munro's fiction. Thus, even stories with single, homodiegetic narrative focalisation nevertheless radiate a sense of multiplicity in a voice that Nischik has called "Joycean" (Nischik 2007, 208).

I acknowledge the distortion that is the inevitable result of treating Munro's oeuvre as a corpus of linguistic usages, rather than focusing on one story, one collection, or a set of related stories for a more nuanced analysis. However, the findings in this stylistic treatment of country speech deserve to be extended in future to explore their implications for individual stories. Moreover, the identification of this category, with the concomitant dialectal and pronunciation instances in some stories, has implications for future translation of Munro's fiction. An awareness of the phenomenon of country speech could aid translators in capturing consistent target language equivalents. Overall, the identification of this pattern of speech tags leads to cognizance of the phenomenon of country speech, to the broader concept of country discourse and to its opposite. This alerts us to a conflict energizing these fictions of distanced reminiscence, one operating even in negation and absence. As the narrator says in the remarkable story "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage": "She [Joanna] didn't have country manners – in fact, she had no manners at all" (*Hateship* 2002, 6).

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“Honey, Where Are the Kids?”: Motifs of the Past, Water, and Photography in Munro’s Stories Featuring Dead Children

ABSTRACT

As indicated by many critics, the death of children features prominently in Alice Munro’s short fiction. This paper approaches the theme in six of her short stories from the standpoint of her personal experience to establish shared elements that combine to build the narratives, reverberating in her writing. These elements are the past, water, and photography. The argument and literary exploration are grounded on previous literature on the author, short story theory, and photography theory, and ultimately pursue a double objective, i.e., to develop an interpretation of the figure of the lost child in Munro’s work, while providing supporting evidence for the autobiographical nature of her literature.

Keywords: Alice Munro, death of children, autobiography, the past, water, photography

»Kje so otroci?«: Motivi preteklosti, vode in fotografije v zgodbah Alice Munro, v katerih nastopajo liki mrtvih otrok

IZVLEČEK

Številni kritiki ugotavljajo, da smrt otrok zavzema pomembno mesto v kratki prozi Alice Munro. Pričujoči prispevek obravnava to temo v avtoričinih šestih kratkih zgodbah z vidika njene osebne izkušnje, z namenom določiti skupne elemente, ki se povezujejo v pripovedi, ki odmevajo v avtoričinih delih. Ti elementi so preteklost, voda in fotografija. Naši argumenti in raziskovanje se naslanjajo na predhodno literaturo o avtorici, teorijo kratke zgodbe in teorijo fotografije ter sledijo dvema ciljema, tj. razviti interpretacijo podobe izgubljenega otoka v delih A. Munro in dodatno potrditi avtobiografsko razsežnost njenih del.

Gljučne besede: Alice Munro, smrt otrok, avtobiografija, preteklost, voda, fotografija

1 Introduction

If death has always been an essential subject in literature (Dasenbrock 2021), the figure of ultimate absence, the lost child, is also recurrent in culture and throughout time as a universal haunting presence that we inevitably carry within us as trauma. The loss of innocence, of the past, and of the essence of our undisturbed identity metamorphoses into images and narratives in the form of the death of children (Froud 2017a). In literature, the memory and truth of childhood sink into the forgetfulness and nontruth of adulthood, the presence and life of the child entering the realms of absence of pure knowledge and death (Derrida 1998). In short fiction in particular, the epistemological traits and spatial constraints of the genre link this loss to the immaterial reality of the author's inner world, an enlightened place of insight into truth, a place transformed into "human experience distilled in black ink on paper" (Thomas 1999, viii), which signifies and emotionally isolates the event outside the temporal and social context of long fiction to provide a fragmented and possibly more real portrayal of the human condition and our encounter with the sacred (Brown 1997; Iftekharuddin, Rohrberger, and Lee 1997; May 1994; Trussler 1996). Storytelling intertwines cultural conceptions of death with the author's remembrance and psychology to combine seemingly incongruous elements into an "existential temporal horizon" (Trussler 1996, 563) where the safety of everyday life is disrupted, and the starkness of reality revealed (May 1994).

This connects short fiction narratives with the inner world and personal experience of writers, and, in this sense, no Munro reader can fail to notice how prominently the death of children features in her work. Although critics have analysed this theme in some of her stories (Bigot 2017; Heble 1994; Morgenstern 2018; Omhovére 2018; Sutherland 2018; Warwick 2018), and much research has been conducted to establish patterns of motifs in her work (Carscallen 1993; DeFalco 2018; Howells 1998, 2009; Martin 1987; Thacker 1998, 1999), my intentions are to approach the death of children in Munro's literature from the standpoint of her biography and discern recurrent elements that combine in the narrative to provide variations, and to ultimately support the much discussed autobiographical aspect of her writing (Howells 1998; Howells 2016; Palusci 2017; Redekop 1992; Ross 2020; Thacker 1988). In this regard, the Maitland River of Munro's childhood and youth is an endless source of life and inspiration that endows her narrative with mystery and adventure – as admitted by the author herself (quoted in Thacker 2018) – but remains a double-edged sword that feeds but drowns the surrounding fields and towns. It "conveys a prehistoric sense of flood and the possibility of either genesis or fearful sinking death" (Rasporich 1990, 133), and it is thus unsurprising that water and in particular drowning appear so often in her fiction (de Papp Carrington 1997). In a similar line, the author's idiosyncratic narrative has been compared with the photographic image because of its dichotomic and paradoxical nature (York 1988), which establishes "the pure relation of that which is to that which no longer is", freezing a moment of life while becoming "the effigy of death" (Barthes quoted in Rancière 2011, 39). On a different level, like visual art, in Munro's fiction, the objectively and accurately portrayed reality is broken by an outbreak of emotion (Howells 1998); it has the capacity to "immerse us in sensation" (Thomas 1999, iix), construing "delicate moment[s] of exposure" (York 1988, 21) which share the sensorial qualities of photography, and which try to provide order or explain a paradoxical and unruly reality difficult to comprehend. Munro's

finesse lies in the fact that, in stories about childhood, she achieves this photographic-like portrayal of the ambiguities of existence with the retrospection and hindsight of adulthood – jumping backwards and forwards in time to create her subjective understanding of the picture – while still managing to leave intact the baffling components perceived by the child.

The following sections explore six of Munro's stories, which, I argue, stem from personal experience, to find patterns of coherence, outlining stylistic and thematic components – autobiography, the death of children, water, and photography – integrated in the writing to construct a sense of *déjà vu* for the reader (Bigot 2017). In this respect, Sheila Munro's memoirs *Lives of Mothers & Daughters: Growing Up with Alice Munro* (2001) and Robert Thacker's biography, *Alice Munro: Writing Her Lives* (2005), anchor the biographical component of my argument.¹ Nevertheless, despite foundations in previous literature on Munro, short fiction and photography theory, this exploration remains personal and subjective and aims to advance my own interpretation of child death in the author's work.

2 Elements in Munro's Stories Featuring a Child's Death

To start at the beginning is to confront the last of Munro's work, "Finale", the quartet of stories in *Dear Life* that concludes the author's literary career and which she introduced in semiautobiographical terms as "the first and last – and the closest – things" (2013, 255) to be said about her life. Yet the events and themes of these four childhood pieces echo her previous work (Bigot 2017; Lucio-Villegas 2021; Ross 2020) which, in many instances, reads as their initial revisitation in fiction. As insightfully pointed out by Corinne Bigot in her 2017 essay "Ghost Texts in Alice Munro's Stories", in "Night", the second story in "Finale", the adult narrator remembers her childhood self being persecuted at night by the thought that she would strangle her sister, and this acknowledged reminiscence, the scenario of a child killing a child, haunts Munro's fiction from the beginning to become a theme she approaches from various perspectives, employing different narrative devices in stories which could be loosely described as potential fratricides and sororicides: "The Time of Death" in *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), "Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux" in *The Progress of Love* (1986), "Child's Play" in *Too Much Happiness* (2009), and "Gravel" in *Dear Life* (2012).² In parallel, water as a medium of death also appears from the start of Munro's work. In "The Time of Death", from *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Patricia, the precocious nine-year-old protagonist, accidentally kills her mentally disabled brother Benny with boiling water while cleaning unsupervised, although readers are given no details of the accident itself. She is unable to understand the seriousness of her action and remains unaware of the guilt that may assail her, blocking her grief – "with her it was as if nothing had happened" (2011, 97) – until Benny's mythical innocence comes to haunt her in the figure of Brandon, the wandering scissors-grinder who fascinated the little boy, unlocking her emotions into a screaming fit (Carscallen 1993; Ventura 2015). Furthermore, Patricia's suspended emotional tension proceeds alongside an unseasonal lack of snow, as readers are reminded throughout the narrative, and Brandon's release of Patricia's grief in turn finally precipitates the snowfall in the final paragraph (Smythe 1992): "The snow

¹ Sheila Munro was born in 1953 and is the eldest daughter of Jim and Alice Munro (S. Munro 2001).

² Later editions have been used to write this paper.

came, falling slowly, evenly, between the highway and the houses and the pine trees, falling in big flakes at first and then in smaller and smaller flakes that did not melt on the hard furrows, the rock of the earth” (A. Munro 2011, 99), in a description evoking the stillness of a photograph and condensing Munro’s entire story behind it (York 1988).

This inferred process, a photograph as an “inexhaustible invitation³ to deduction, speculation, and fantasy” (Sontag 2019, 24) prompts the storyline of “Epilogue: The Photographer”, in *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), a story which, according to Munro’s biographer Robert Thacker, “encapsulated not only her own life’s detail – seen and imagined – but also the very sensibility that had made her the writer she had become” (2005, 213). In the story, a photograph of Marion Sheriff, a young girl who drowned herself by walking into the Wawanash River in Jubilee, fascinates Del, the teenage narrator, into trying to piece together in her mind a novel about the girl’s family. What is known of the unhappy events surrounding Marion’s family – “Well, there is a family that has had its share of Tragedy!” (A. Munro 2015, 307) – is insufficiently dramatic for Del, who fashions its members and the reasons for the girl’s suicide into a more Gothic and satisfying version of reality (Carscallen 1993). Thus, she creates a character, *The Photographer*, who, like Del, manipulates through his art the world around him, distorting his subjects into their “unusual, even frightening” potential future selves, so that “[p]eople saw that in his pictures they had aged twenty or thirty years”. In consonance with the romantic notions of a teenage girl, Caroline – Marion in Del’s novel – falls in love with the photographer and carries his child until “[o]ne day (when she could already feel her womb swollen *like a hard yellow gourd in her belly*), she found the car overturned beside a bridge, overturned in a ditch beside a dry creek. It was empty. He was gone. That night she walked into the Wawanash River” (A. Munro 2015, 311). The photographer is an agent of death (Barthes 1993; Smythe 1992), both through his escape – note the dry creek – which triggers the girl’s demise, and by the very nature of his art, “transmuting, in an instant, present into past, life into death”, “enlarging the familiar iconography of mystery, mortality, transience” (Sontag 2019, 76, 72). In this regard, it seems apt that Marion’s photograph enchants Del because it conceals the mystery of her death (York 1988); it provides a clean slate on which to create her own fictionalised version of the past, something Munro also does in her work, although with the hindsight and distorted memory of adulthood (Palusci 2017; Redekop 1992; Regan 1991; Thacker 1988).

As indicated by many critics (Carscallen 1993; Froud 2017b; Heble 1994; Martin 1987), this distorted memory is acknowledged in the linked reminiscences of “Miles City, Montana”, in *The Progress of Love*, which is based on the near drowning of Munro’s four-year-old daughter Jenny in 1961 (S. Munro 2001; Thacker 2005). In the story, the adult narrator remembers in the first line how “[m]y father came across the field carrying the body of the boy who had drowned”, although “I don’t think I really saw all this” (A. Munro 2007, 84). At the boy’s funeral, the narrator recalls how, as a child, she “felt a furious and sickening disgust” at the sight of her parents that “could not be understood or expressed” (A. Munro 2007, 86). It is a photograph that elicits this memory and the main recollection of the story, the near drowning of her daughter in a swimming pool twenty years later: “Andrew took a picture of me standing

³ “Invitations” in the original in plural.

beside the car. I was wearing white pants, a black turtleneck, and sunglasses. I lounged against the car door, canting my hips to make myself look slim” (A. Munro 2007, 87). The main story describes the family’s car trip to visit the children’s grandparents. They stop in Miles City, where the children take a dip in the local pool, although it is closed for lunch and the parents are not allowed in. The mother wanders off looking for something to drink when she has a premonition, “*Where are the children?*” (A. Munro 2007, 103), and through a hole in the fence sees her eldest daughter, Cynthia, “standing about waist-deep in the water, fluttering her hands on the surface and discreetly watching something at the end of the pool, which I could not see. I thought by her pose, her discretion, the look on her face, that she must be watching some byplay between the lifeguard and her boyfriend. I couldn’t see Meg” (A. Munro 2007, 100), the younger daughter. The mother calls out and Meg is saved by her father from the “treacherous clear blue water” (A. Munro 2007, 102), even though as admitted by the narrator again, there is a certain degree of invention in her recollection of the event. “Miles City, Montana” narrates the experiences of “the loss and near loss of a child” (Froud 2017b, 130) by drowning, both acts of remembrance triggered in the story by a family photograph. In turn, this sparks the protagonist’s “mental pictures of the present and the past” (Sontag 2019, 25), a fictionalised version of a true event in Munro’s family history, adapted to explain the dual and contradictory nature of water, sex and life, a child’s realisation and comprehension that living and procreation entail guilt and death (Carscallen 1993; Froud 2017b; Heble 1994, 2009; Ross 1992). It dawns on this narrator that her disgust at her parents is justified because they implicitly “gave consent to the death of children and to my death not by anything they said or thought but by the very fact that they had made children – they had made me. They had made me, and for that reason my death” (A. Munro 2007, 103).

This bifocal perspective of adult and child narrators (Burszta 2016; Guignery 2015; Hoy 1980) becomes more complex in “My Mother’s Dream”, in *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998), which is based on a recurrent and haunting dream Munro had after the death of her second daughter Catherine, fourteen hours after her birth (S. Munro 2001; Thacker 2005). Munro’s daughter Sheila explains how “[t]here are no photographs of my mother when she was pregnant with Catherine, and the death was something she rarely mentioned” (2001, 43), although Alice Munro pours this memory into a narrative that unites the voices of mother and daughter (Sutherland 2018) and fictionalises its conclusion to a happy ending. Told from the adult viewpoint of the surviving baby, who implicitly and complicitly shares her mother’s recollection of the unfolding events, the story starts with the mother’s dream: “During the night – or during the time she had been asleep – there had been a heavy fall of snow”, but things soon start to go amiss since “[s]now had settled overnight on the luxury of summer. [...] Also, everybody had gone away – though she couldn’t think who ‘everybody’ was” (A. Munro 1999, 293). The dream drifts into a nightmare when the mother recalls who this “everybody” is and “remembered that she had left a baby out there somewhere, before the snow had fallen. Quite a while before the snow had fallen. This memory, this certainty, came over her with horror. It was as if she was awakening from a dream”. The guilt and grief that ensue follow a recognition that the infant “would be dead, shrivelled and brown, its head like a nut, and on its tiny shut-up face there would be an expression not of distress but of bereavement”, an extension of the mother’s feelings rather than “any accusation of her” (A. Munro 1999, 294), and that “[t]here would

never be any room in her for anything else. No room for anything but the realization of what she had done". The dream's ending, like the ending of the story that unfolds once the mother wakes up, is full of relief: "What a reprieve, then, to find her baby lying in its crib. [...] Red hair like her own, on her perfectly safe and unmistakable baby. The joy to find herself forgiven" (A. Munro 1999, 295). One cannot but wonder at the implications of "My Mother's Dream" in terms of Munro's biography and interpret the story as an exercise of reconciliation with the death of her child where the conceptual nature of water, in this case snow, is exploited as a "symbol of the feminine and the unconscious" (Rasporich 1990, 134), an element intrinsic to female fertility, which carries life and death. In fact, in the narrative perspective, the voice of the child merges with the mother's memories to omnisciently develop the story, unifying the two, as they were during pregnancy, in one consciousness and body to find reconciliation (Sutherland 2018).

Disturbingly, in "Child's Play", from *Too Much Happiness*, preteens Marlene and Charlene drown Verna, a Down syndrome girl, at a summer camp; the shadow of Verna's murder haunts the two adult females in different ways and unites them in their individual search for reconciliation with their deed. Much has been written about the story highlighting Verna's disability and/or analysing Marlene's – the protagonist and narrator's – unfelt guilt (Darroch 2018; Duncan 2011; Sutherland 2018; Warwick 2018), yet the plot line leading to the latter's confession, the raw and graphic description of Verna's killing, is condensed in images that plague her to disclosure, "uncovering a hidden truth, conserving a vanishing past" (Sontag 2019, 59) that she is unable to fend off, as she points out at the beginning of the story (A. Munro 2010, 188–89):

For a long while the past drops away from you easily and it would seem automatically, properly. Its scenes don't vanish so much as become irrelevant. And then there's a switchback, what's been all over and done with sprouting up fresh, wanting attention, even wanting you to do something about it, though it's plain there is not on this earth a thing to be done.

In this sense, Munro's "paradoxical combination of power and powerlessness, secrecy and exposure experienced by female narrators" (Howells 1998, 142) remains a contradictory pursuit to control the uncontrollable past, which, like photography, employs retrospection and voyeurism in its exposition (de Papp Carrington 1989). Indeed, the feelings that ultimately trigger the murder are underpinned by the power Marlene confers on Verna, partly due to a lack of understanding of her syndrome and behaviour, since

only adults would be so stupid as to believe she had no power. A power, moreover, that was specifically directed at me. I was the one she had her eye on. Or so I believed. As if we had an understanding between us that could not be described and was not to be disposed of. Something that clings, in the way of love, though on my side it felt absolutely like hate (A. Munro 2010, 200).

Hence, Marlene goes on to dedicate part of her academic career to the justification of this hate and publishes a book, *Idiots and Idols*, which describes how different cultures assign to "mentally or physically unique" people "a good deal that is remarkable, even awesome [...]".

And what was interesting was to discover a certain amount of veneration as well as persecution, and the ascribing [...] of quite a range of abilities, seen as sacred, magical, dangerous, or valuable” (A. Munro 2010, 210). For she ultimately needs to explain to herself the emotions that drove Verna’s drowning and murder, the jubilation felt at winning a child’s in-existent battle: “Charlene and I kept our eyes on each other, rather than looking down at what our hands were doing. I don’t think we felt wicked, triumphing in our wickedness. More as if we were doing just what was – amazingly – demanded of us, as if this was the absolute high point, the culmination, in our lives, of our being ourselves” (A. Munro 2010, 222).

As pointed out by Susan Warwick (2018), this story expands on “The Time of Death” and shifts the viewpoint from the third person to the first, focusing on the psychology and guilt of the killer rather than on the questionable responsibility of the child. In between these two stances, “Gravel” – included in *Dear Life*, Munro’s last collection of short stories – operates again in the ambiguous territory of memory and culpability, although, in this case, the narrator cannot be held ethically accountable for the murder of his/her sister. In the story, the protagonist inhabits a kind of “no man’s land”, obsessed with the ascertainment of his/her involvement in the self-inflicted death of the older sibling, Caro. In accordance with this state of mind, the narrator remains throughout the narrative unnamed, ungendered, of unspecified age, as he/she unfolds a confusing and vacillating account of the events surrounding Caro’s death, a life he/she “can barely remember” (A. Munro 2013, 91), for the reality of the moment itself escapes him/her. The events approaching the scene are clear enough: two children playing outside their trailer by a gravel pit, their dog Blitzee for company, while their mother and newly acquired stepfather have sex inside; then, Caro giving instructions, “I was to go back to the trailer and tell Neal and our mother something. That the dog had fallen into the water. The dog had fallen into the water and Caro was afraid she’d be drowned” (A. Munro 2013, 102), although the rest is unclear:

In my mind I can see her picking up Blitzee and tossing her, though Blitzee was trying to hang on to her coat. Then backing up, Caro backing up to take a run at the water. Running, jumping, all of a sudden hurling herself at the water. But I can’t recall the sound of the splashes as they, one after the other, hit the water. Not a little splash or a big one. Perhaps I had turned towards the trailer by then – I must have done (A. Munro 2013, 102).

The following events are also sketchy and full of uncertainty in the memory of a child who is too young to go to school, and who grows up afflicted by his/her guilt and responsibility in Caro’s haunting death, although his/her subconscious provides a different version, one in which blame and attribution do not exist:

When I dream of this, I am always running. And in my dreams I am running not towards the trailer but back towards the gravel pit. I can see Blitzee floundering around and Caro swimming towards her, swimming strongly, on the way to rescue her. I see her light-brown checked coat and her plaid scarf and her proud successful face and reddish hair darkened at the end of its curls by the water. All I have to do is watch and be happy – nothing required of me, after all (A. Munro 2013, 102–3).

The scene itself is elusive, a secret photograph hidden by the *lethe* of childhood, which contains a “delicate balance of concealment and revelation”, where the drowning yet again “suggests immolation in the ugly feelings of the past” (York 2018, 211) and continues to torment. For acceptance of oblivion is unacceptable, and the one image that would appease is unreachable: “But, in my mind, Caro keeps running at the water and throwing herself in, as if in triumph, and I’m still caught, waiting for her to explain to me, waiting for the splash” (A. Munro 2013, 109).

3 Discussion and Conclusions

As argued, the stories analysed in this paper surface from Munro’s personal experience. “The Time of Death”, “Child’s Play” and “Gravel” can be linked to Munro’s semiautobiographical story “Night” in so far as they articulate and explore the potential scenario that oppresses its child protagonist, i.e., the capacity to kill another child, from different angles and judgements. However, while the narrator’s mind in “Night” is consoled by her father, who explains that “[p]eople have those kinds of thoughts sometimes” (A. Munro 2013, 283) without necessarily acting upon them, in the previous stories there is a lack of adult presence which borders on negligence. In “The Time of Death”, nine-year-old Patricia is expected to look after three younger siblings alone for “[t]hree-quarters of an hour at least” (2011, 89); she tries to impose cleanliness and “exercise a sense of responsibility in a household where this is conspicuously lacking” (Martin 1987, 32), with tragic consequences. In the first few lines of “Child’s Play”, Marlene assumes her parents talked about Verna’s drowning, which was deemed an accident: “I suppose there was talk in our house, afterwards. How sad, how awful. (My mother.) There should have been supervision. Where were the counsellors? (My father.)” (2010, 188); however, we later learn that there was some supervision, but that the murder happened quickly, in the confusion and excitement of a camp’s last day, and therefore passed unobserved. In “Gravel”, the children are told to play outside while their mother and her lover have sex, although both adults are fully aware of the dangers of the gravel pit “filled to the brim with snow and rain” and “twenty feet deep” (2013, 100). There is an implicit accusation of neglect in the circumstances of the deaths – which might otherwise have been avoided – yet the negligence provides the stories with a further component in the *tableau* of death, reworking “the frame of our perception and the dynamism of our affects” (Ranci re 2009, 82), so that readers may also become obsessed with its understanding and conception, rereading its description and surrounding details to fully comprehend the props involved. It is ironic that the death scene in “The Time of Death” is omitted from the narration – Benny’s fatal scalding with boiling water is an ellipsis too horrendous to visualise – while in “Child’s Play” it is starkly and graphically described as a conscious act which, like Verna’s drowning head, rises up, gasping for air, a truth refusing to be left behind (Ventura 2015; Sutherland 2018). In “Gravel”, “the emblematic ghost story that is both haunted by a dead/undead child and haunted by several ghost texts” (Bigot 2017, 145), the death scene remains elusive, the one piece of the puzzle that is missing and would put the narrator’s mind at rest. In all cases, the image of death lies at the core of the story, the frozen moment in time stating our innocence, vulnerability, and destruction, filling in “blanks in our mental picture of the present and the past” (Sontag 2019, 25), glued together by the symbolism of water and approached from shifting perspectives.

It is perhaps not surprising that while “Finale”, the author’s final four stories including “Night”, was introduced as a “separate unit, one that is autobiographical in feeling, though not, sometimes, entirely so in fact” (A. Munro 2013, 255), *Lives of Girls and Women*, published forty-one years previously, initially contained an authorial disclaimer – not incorporated in recent editions – which described the narrative as “autobiographical in form but not in fact” (Thacker 2005, 211). The final piece in the collection, “Epilogue: The Photographer”, conceived originally as a novel titled *Real Life*, transforms the collection into “a portrait of an artist as a young woman” (Thacker 2005, 216) and draws from Munro’s childhood and youth, and her own adolescent attempt to novelise a Gothic version of her Ontario hometown, Wingham. The writer’s fictional references to photography go hand in hand with a writing mode that builds on the recollection of a decisive image, a scene where something happened to determine the narrator’s life forever. In these stories the crucial event is closely connected with the figure of the lost child, which haunts Munro’s biography and fiction: “Something happened here. In your life there are a few places, or maybe only the one place, where something happened, and then there are all the other places” (A. Munro 2013, 162).

Curiously, a draft version of “Miles City, Montana” included a stillborn baby, Elizabeth, buried in a shoebox, and another baby Elizabeth, who lived less than twenty-four hours and was buried in the same way, forms one of the main axes of an unpublished story, “Shoebox Babies”, on which the author worked in the 1970s (Thacker 2005, 126). Both Sheila Munro and Robert Thacker mention the death of Munro’s daughter Catherine and its impact on the author. Catherine was buried in a small box in an unmarked grave. Her death haunted Munro so that “[f]or years afterwards she had dreams about a lost baby, dreams about leaving a baby girl out in the rain and forgetting about her” (S. Munro 2001, 43), which would finally materialise in “My Mother’s Dream”. The author also placed a belated marker on the baby’s grave in 1990 to recognise her existence (Thacker 2005, 126). Catherine’s kidney-related medical condition was the cause of her death, although her physical appearance made the Munros think she had Down syndrome, and they discussed the possibility of finding an institution for her so Alice Munro could continue her writing career (S. Munro 2001, 43).

Although we cannot fully ascertain to what degree all this weighed on Munro’s mind, there is a veiled tone of parental guilt and justification in the writing of these stories, a combination of uncontrollable elements and circumstances amalgamated to provide meaning (Lin 2020), with Munro’s psychology, as a mother and woman, underpinning and furnishing her writing so that the figure of the lost child becomes a central theme in her fiction. The “afterwardness”, “beforeness”, and intertextuality which group these stories together sometimes function on a fictional level, and in other instances work on the metafictional plane. The recollective and changing perspective of the adult narrators – not included in “The Time of Death” – reverberates from Munro’s biography (Sutherland 2018), blending the imagination and memory of the author into the narrative, embedding a set of recurring components – her past, the iconography of water, and photography – to shape her depiction of children’s deaths.

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Destiny of a Nobel Laureate in a Small Book Market: Alice Munro in Slovene Translation

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the representation of Alice Munro's writing in Slovenia, focusing on the issues of its late introduction to Slovene readers, and the low level of interest by Slovene publishers in her works even now that she is a Nobel laureate. To address these issues, two important features of her writing – that she is exclusively a short-story writer and that her stories deal mostly with women's themes – will be analysed against the background of the tradition of the short story genre and women's literature in Slovenia. Additionally, the specifics of the Slovene book market and publishing industry will be examined as another potential reason for the underrepresentation of Munro's works in Slovenia.

Keywords: Alice Munro, Slovene translation, publishing, Nobel laureate, book market

Usoda nobelovke na majhnem knjižnem trgu: Alice Munro v slovenskem prevodu

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek proučuje zastopanost literarnih del Alice Munro v Sloveniji. Posebej se osredotoča na vprašanji, zakaj je bila avtorica tako pozno predstavljena slovenskim bralcem in zakaj je tudi zdaj, ko je nobelovka, zgolj malo zanimanja za njena dela med slovenskimi založniki. V iskanju odgovorov na vprašanji bomo analizirali dve pomembni značilnosti njene pisave – in sicer da je avtorica izključno kratkih zgodb in da se v svojih zgodbah večinoma ukvarja z ženskimi temami – v sklopu tradicije kratke zgodbe in ženske književnosti v Sloveniji. Poleg tega bomo raziskali še posebnosti slovenskega knjižnega trga in založništva kot dodatni razlog za slabo zastopanost avtoričinih del v slovenskem prevodu.

Ključne besede: Alice Munro, slovenski prevod, založništvo, nobelovka, knjižni trg

1 Introduction

Alice Munro's first short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), won Canada's most prestigious literary prize, the Governor General's Award, and marked the beginning of her successful literary career. Publications of her stories in *The New Yorker* magazine soon brought Munro recognition and popularity among American readers. Of fourteen short story collections (and a few compilations) that Munro published in her long writing career, several received prestigious literary awards. In 2009, Munro won the Man Booker International Prize (now the International Booker Prize), which consolidated her international fame. Her first, very modest introduction to Slovene readers happened in 2003, when the Slovene translation of the story "The Office" was published in a literary magazine. It took seven more years for the first Munro collection to appear in Slovene translation. In 2010, two collections were published in Slovene: *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* and *Too Much Happiness*. Following Munro's award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013, three more translations of her short story collections followed: *Dear Life* in 2014, *Runaway* in 2015, and *The View from Castle Rock* in 2017. Although all Slovene translations received favourable reviews, interest in further translation of her works has waned since 2017. The questions that arise here are why Munro was introduced to Slovene readers so late, and why – after a short period of increased interest in her works following her winning of the Nobel Prize – Slovene publishers are no longer interested in publishing her works.

Munro's late arrival to Slovenia is not an isolated case in this part of Europe. The results of a project launched by the Central European Association for Canadian Studies (CEACS) show a similar situation in other Central European countries participating in the project, those being Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovakia. Among these countries, Serbia was the first to translate a short story collection by Munro; this was *Runaway*, which was translated into Serbian in 2006. The Hungarian translation of the same collection followed in 2007, while Munro first appeared in Croatian and Czech in 2011, and in Slovak only in 2014. A comparison with European countries that have a larger readership¹ suggests that Munro's late introduction to these Central European countries is connected with these countries' small book markets. However, the situation is more complex than that, for despite Munro's late arrival to Hungary, Serbia and the Czech Republic, she is now quite well represented in these languages (eleven collections have been translated into Hungarian and eight into Serbian and into Czech), while in Croatia, as in Slovenia, five Munro collections have been translated thus far, and in Slovakia only four.² Since the sizes of the book markets in these last three countries are comparable, the reasons for the low level of interest in Munro's works among the publishers might be connected with these countries' translation and publishing policies. This paper will focus on the case of Slovenia only and will investigate the dynamics of the Slovene publishing industry (section 4) as one possible reason for the modest interest in Munro's works among Slovene publishers. Additionally, it will analyse two other potential

¹ Munro first appeared in Spanish in 1971, in French in 1979, in German in 1981, and in Italian in 1989. Almost all her short story collections are now available in these languages.

² Data on translations of Munro collections into these Central European languages has been obtained from the Translation Research Project Database of the CEACS (<http://www.cecanstud.cz/index.php/en/translation-research-project-database>).

reasons for Munro's late arrival to Slovenia and the underrepresentation of her works in the Slovene book market: the author's predilection for women's themes (section 2) and the fact that she is exclusively a short-story writer (section 3).

2 Munro as a Representative of Women's Literature

Alice Munro declared in 1972 that she was "generally sympathetic to the Women's Liberation Movement" (Nischik 2007, 207); however, she was never actively engaged in feminist activism and always tended to avoid "public causes, controversies and arguments" (Sheldrick Ross 1992, 84). Nevertheless, Munro's writing clearly testifies to her gender awareness and offers a female perspective on life, which, as Nischik (2007, 207) observes, has made Munro popular among feminist readers and critics. Munro's second short story collection, *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) even became "a 1970s feminist *cri de coeur*" (Thacker 2011, 11) because it addressed several feminist themes. However, Munro has not been popular only among declared feminists but among women in general, for her writing "has the potential of speaking to many kinds of women" (Redekop 1992, xii). Critics have identified multiple women's themes in Munro's writing, such as problematic communication between the sexes, and the nature of romantic love (Gadpaille 1988), mother figures within the patriarchal society (Redekop 1992), women's bodies, and women's romantic fantasies (Howells 1998), restrictive patterns of socialization for girls, and gendered issues regarding professions (Nischik 2007). Additionally, Munro's narrative technique has been identified as forming a feminist meta-narrative that displays the woman's way of thinking (Elliott 1996), and as a "subversive tool for exposing and undermining rigid patriarchal structures" (Löschnigg 2016, 62).

Munro explored the restrictive patterns of socialization of girls particularly in her early stories, such as "Boys and Girls" and "Red Dress" (*Dance of the Happy Shades*), and stories published in the collections *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* She returned to this theme in stories published in later collections, such as "Meneseteung" (*Friend of My Youth*), "Lying Under the Apple Tree" (*The View from Castle Rock*), and "Haven" (*Dear Life*). Romantic relationships represent a common theme in Munro's stories throughout her career. In some of these stories, women's romantic fantasies are – at least partly – fulfilled ("How I Met My Husband"), in others the fairy-tale plot is reversed ("The Beggar Maid", "Passion") or spoiled by fate ("Simon's Luck", "Tricks"). Several stories feature wives and mothers from the period of the 1950s to the 1970s, women who feel trapped in the limited roles society ascribes to them. They are unhappy in their marriages ("Miles City, Montana") and sometimes commit adultery ("Oranges and Apples", "To Reach Japan"), or divorce their husbands and go with another man ("The Children Stay", "Gravel"). A few stories set in the 1950s to 1970s period problematize gender issues related to professions, for instance those that feature a woman trying to follow a profession of which her family or the society disapproves ("The Office", "Haven"), or a woman who is required to quit her job once she marries ("Friend of My Youth", "Chaddeleys and Flemings").

Munro's writing clearly reflects what the place of women was in the patriarchal Western society of the second half of the 20th century (particularly stories set in the 50s, 60s and 70s) and thus strongly resonates with issues that the second feminist movement addressed. In the communist

and socialist countries of the East, women's position in society was different from that of women in the West, and there was no feminist movement like that in the West. Women in the East thus could not easily identify with Munro's heroines, since they did not share their experiences. To be able to consider Munro's portrayal of women within the Western society as one reason that her works were not introduced to Slovene readers earlier, we need to consider the tradition of women's literature in Slovenia in the second half of the 20th century.

Silvija Borovnik argues that one cannot analyse Slovene women's literature from the period after World War II until 1990³ without considering the position of women in society in this period (1995, 12), particularly within the framework of communist ideology as the official ideology in Slovenia and Yugoslavia at the time (1995, 21). As Vlasta Jalušič (1998, 118) observes, in socialist countries that emerged after World War II, a women's movement outside the Communist Party was not allowed; women's associations could be established only within the existing Communist Party, where they propagated the image "of the female worker as a liberated woman" (1998, 118). Milica Antić Gaber (2004, 80) reports that women's endeavours within the Communist Party in Slovenia were quite successful because the efforts for improving the position of women in society were viewed as part of a larger struggle for improving the position of people in society in general. However, as Antić Gaber (2004, 82) further points out, this kind of 'state feminism' ended in the second half of the 1980s, when the liberalisation of social relations enabled the emergence of various civil groups, including those representing women's cause. Jalušič (1998, 61) reports that after the fall of socialism, there was a tendency in all Eastern European countries to reject feminism, for it was seen as only another form of unification. However, as Jalušič (1998, 82–83) further explains, in all Eastern European countries that became democracies, gender discrimination was constitutionally prohibited and was therefore no longer considered an issue that needed to be addressed.

The absence of a proper feminist movement in Slovenia under the socialist regime explains the lack of interest in women's literature in Slovenia in this period, for, as Borovnik (1995, 9–10) points out, women writers were much fewer than male writers, and little was known about their writing until recently. It was only after 1980 that the number of female novelists increased significantly, and at that point they distanced themselves from fixed literary patterns to include new, previously taboo topics, such as the notion of the female, women's behaviour patterns, and stereotyped images of women in the media (Borovnik 2012, 47). However, Slovene literary criticism still focused primarily on male authors, even after the further increase in the number of female writers at the turn to the 21st century (Borovnik 2012, 73). Katja Mihurko Poniž explains that feminist literary criticism in Slovenia emerged with a two-decade delay in comparison to the West (2005, 89); however, nowadays it represents a legitimate part of literary criticism (2013, 210) and testifies to a growing interest in research on women authors (2013, 212).

Literature by Slovene women authors was thus underrepresented in Slovenia during the socialist regime. What was the situation with Slovene translations of literary works by prominent foreign female writers? Data obtained from COBISS (the central on-line

³ Slovenia gained independence in June 1991 and at that time entered a transition period from socialism to a market economy, which lasted till 1999.

catalogue of Slovene libraries) shows that translations of literary works dealing explicitly with feminist concerns were also scarce in the period between World War II and 1990. Simone de Beauvoir's gender study *The Second Sex* (*Le deuxième sexe*) was first translated into Slovene only in 1999, half a century after it was written (and was republished in Slovene in 2013 and 2014). However, two translations of de Beauvoir's works did appear earlier: her novel *Les mandarins* was translated in 1971 and her autobiography *La force de l'âge* in 1986. Hélène Cixous's feminist essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" ("Le rire de la meduse"), originally published in 1975, was translated into Slovene only in 2005. Virginia Woolf's works were somewhat better represented in Slovene translation in the socialist period. *Mrs. Dalloway* from 1925 was translated into Slovene in 1965 (and republished in 1987). This novel was also included in the "Sto romanov"⁴ collection, which consisted of the best one hundred novels of world literature. Woolf's *Orlando* was translated into Slovene in 1974 (republished in 2004), *The Waves* in 1986, and *To the Lighthouse* in 1988. However, Woolf's most feminist text, *A Room of One's Own*, appeared in Slovene only in 1998. More novels by Woolf have recently become available in Slovene, such as *Jacob's Room*, *Between the Acts* (both were translated in 2013), and *The Years* (translated in 2014). Doris Lessing, another famous British feminist author, received her first Slovene translation in 1980 (*Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, originally published in 1971), followed by the 1987 translation of *The Grass is Singing* (originally published in 1950). After 1990, more works by Lessing became available in Slovene. The feminist manifesto by the American writer Marilyn French, *The Women's Room*, written in 1977, was translated into Slovene only three years after its publication; however, this remains the only translation of this author's work, apart from an essay on Shakespeare. The American poet and writer Sylvia Plath has been well represented in Slovene translation since 1990; however, none of her works was available in Slovene during the socialist period. Similarly, the American poet Adrienne Rich was first translated into Slovene only in 1996, while the works of the British author Angela Carter were not available in Slovene until 2013, when *Nights at the Circus* was translated. Interestingly, several works by the American author Erica Jong were translated into Slovene almost immediately after their publication: her controversial feminist novel *Fear of Flying* appeared in Slovene in 1978, followed by translations of *How to Save Your Own Life* in 1980, *Fanny, Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* in 1984, *Parachutes & Kisses* in 1987, *Serenissima – a Novel of Venice* in 1989, and *Any Woman's Blues* in 1993. Margaret Atwood is the Canadian writer most translated into Slovene; however, only *Lady Oracle* (translated in 1987) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (translated in 1990) were available in Slovene during the socialist period. Several more novels by Atwood were translated in the first two decades of the 21st century: *Surfacing* in 2003 (written in 1972), and more recent novels, such as *Oryx and Crake* in 2004, *The Penelopiad* in 2005, *The Blind Assassin* in 2010, *The Year of the Flood* in 2012, and *The Testaments* in 2019. Alice Munro received her first book length translation only in 2010, more than four decades into her writing career; as for other salient Canadian representatives of women's literature, such as Margaret Laurence and Mavis Gallant, they are still waiting for their début in Slovene.

⁴ The works within the collection were published in the period 1964–1977. Besides Woolf's novel, there were only seven works by other female authors included in the collection, including Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*.

As shown by this analysis of the data on Slovene translations obtained from COBISS, foreign works by women writers were underrepresented in Slovenia during the socialist period, particularly before 1980, and those that were translated into Slovene mostly arrived with a major delay. However, there are exceptions, such as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* and Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*, which were translated into Slovene almost immediately after their original publication. The data (although limited to a selection of women authors) additionally shows that since 1990, literature by prominent women authors is better represented in Slovene translation, which is in line with the finding about Slovene literature by women authors being much better represented in the post-socialist period than before. These findings speak in favour of the hypothesis that one of the reasons that Munro was overlooked by Slovene publishers for so long was her status as a woman author writing about women's issues. It is interesting, however, that some women authors (such as Erica Jong) received almost immediate attention from Slovene publishers, while others, like Munro, were side-lined. The question of the selection of authors and texts that are translated into Slovene will be dealt with in section 4, which will focus on the dynamics of the Slovene publishing industry. In the following section, I will investigate Munro's place in the Slovene literary space against the background of the popularity of the short story genre in Slovenia.

3 Munro as Exclusively a Short Story Writer

That Munro is exclusively a short-story writer has possibly contributed to her late introduction to Slovene readers, as has been observed by Jason Blake (2012, 182), who also points to the fact that short stories do not sell as well as novels do. Besides the general lesser popularity of short stories among readers in comparison to novels, we also need to consider that the short story genre has a much shorter tradition in Slovenia in comparison to Canada. Its early beginnings in Canada date back to the first sketches and stories written by Thomas McCulloch and Thomas Chandler Haliburton in the 1820s and 1830s (Weaver 1997, 1058). As Michelle Gadpaille (1988, 3) explains, Canadian short fiction writers started producing short stories proper in the late 19th century and found a market for them in American magazines; however, they did not follow the American short story tradition but developed "in two other directions: the naturalistic animal story and the local-colour story" (Gadpaille 1988, 4). The first short story anthology appeared in Canada in 1928 (Gadpaille 1988, 18). The author who stands out during the period of the consolidation of the Canadian short story is Morley Callaghan, who began to publish his stories in the European literary magazine *This Quarter*, thus marking the beginning of a period "when the short story became simultaneously serious and profitable" (Gadpaille 1988, 25). After World War II, two literary magazines that later combined into the *Northern Review* played a major role in the development of the Canadian short story (Weaver 1997, 1059). In the 1950s, the Canadian radio CBC became another important medium, besides literary magazines, "for popularizing the developing Canadian short story" (Gadpaille 1988, 34). Robert Weaver claims that in the 1960s, the short story became "one of the most interesting and varied literary genres" (1997, 1960) in Canada. This was also the period when Alice Munro's first book-length publication appeared. According to Geoff Hancock (1997, 1061–62), the short story flourished in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, also owing to creative-writing workshops, university programmes, and literary competitions. As Nischik (2007, 1)

points out, the number of short story anthologies published per year proves that the short story genre remains lively and productive in Canada.

While short fiction has a long tradition in Slovenia as well, going back to the 19th century, with writers such as Janko Kersnik, Ivan Tavčar and Ivan Cankar, (Štuhec 2001, 75), the rise of the short story as a form happened in the 1980s (Bošnjak 2005, 204; Žbogar 2005, 17). According to Tomo Virk (1998, 291) the intensive development of the short story in Slovenia in the 1980s was influenced by postmodernist short fiction and the American meta-fictionists. However, Virk (2004) points to the problem of the definition of the short story within Slovene literary theory, for there existed several names for short fiction written by older generations of Slovene authors. According to Alenka Žbogar (2005, 18), the term *kratka zgodba* (short story) became increasingly used in Slovene literary theory in the 1990s, while in the 1980s the term *zgodba* (story) was more often used. Žbogar (2009) also notes that there was a considerable increase in the production of short stories in Slovenia between 1980 and 2000 and that they became market oriented. The increased interest in the short story was also accompanied by the publication of several short story anthologies after 1990. Andrej Koritnik (1997/1998, 167) argues that the first anthology of short stories titled *Čas kratke zgodbe*, published in 1998, represented an important milestone for Slovene literary theory, which previously had no clear idea of the short story form. The short story is nowadays widespread in Slovenia, a fact confirmed by the number of short-story contests organized, the one with the longest tradition being the annual contest of the Third Programme (ARS) of the National Radio, which has been taking place for 30 years. Short story contests are also organized by the literary journals *Sodobnost* (in the past together with the Slovene Writers' Association) and *AirBeletrina*, among others. Many Slovene writers nowadays lend their pens to the short story; however, in comparison to the genre's long tradition in Canada and its stage of maturity and perfection, the short story is still a young genre in Slovenia. Andrej Blatnik (2010, 21), the Slovene author of several short stories and a manual on how to write a short story (*Pisanje kratke zgodbe*), argues that the short story's tendency to experiment with narrative techniques is one reason that this genre is less popular with readers than the novel. In a small book market like Slovenia, the fact that short story collections sell less, along with the plethora of domestic short story writers, undoubtedly contributes to publishers having less interest in producing translations of short story collections. Additionally, Blatnik's remark about experimenting with narrative techniques undoubtedly holds true for Munro's short stories, which are characterized – particularly those written in the late period – by cryptic openings and narrative gaps (Gadpaille and Mohar 2014), multi-layered structures (Löschnigg 2014, 25), and “suggestive, deliberately fragmentary representations and open endings” (Nischik 2007, 206), all of which make them complex reading and therefore less suitable for a large readership.

4 The Slovene Translation and Publishing Industry

Jason Blake has argued that the Slovene translation industry seems chaotic in terms of the choice of authors and works that are translated, for this choice is often “an eclectic mix of personal initiative, market concerns and pure chance” (2012, 177). There seems to be no national strategy about which foreign authors get translated into Slovene; therefore,

the choice of authors and works depends on the individual publishing house. Blake also observes that until recently, only “a handful of leading authors from a given country” (2012, 187) were translated into Slovene, and claims that Munro’s work was long overshadowed by other, more famous Canadian authors, such as Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje. A survey on the popularity of Alice Munro in Slovenia, conducted within the Canada Consumed project that was launched by the CEACS, has shown that Atwood is still more widely recognizable in Slovenia than Munro, even after the latter won the Nobel Prize (see Mohar and Gadpaille 2019), which seems logical – one reason for this being that Atwood has worked hard on building an international profile, the other that she has been available in Slovene translation for more than twenty years longer than Munro.

That the Nobel Prize is no guarantee of an author’s popularity with the Slovene readership has previously been shown by several researchers who have dealt with the reception of Nobel laureates and other widely popular authors in Slovenia. Tomaž Onič (2007) and Urša Gavez (2016), for instance, report that the works of the Nobel Prize winning British playwright Harold Pinter were mostly translated into Slovene before he won the prize (which happened in 2005), and despite his unique and engaging style (see Onič 2016), there have been few re-translations of his works since. Polona Ramšak (2021) finds that this might be characteristic particularly of contemporary Nobel Prize winners, because older generations of laureates still present strong competition for contemporary authors. Simon Zupan (2020), for example, points to Hemingway’s continuous popularity in Slovenia and to the fact that library loans of his works available in Slovene have increased by 20% in the last two decades. On the other hand, as Ramšak (2021, 109–10) notices, there are also cases when an author who has not won an important literary award nevertheless becomes very popular in Slovenia, such as the case of Karl May (see Trupej 2020), or that of Edgar Allan Poe, who, according to Zupan (2015, 121), was very popular in Slovenia in the period between the two wars despite his low popularity in the USA.

A survey conducted for my PhD thesis in 2016, within which I contacted several Slovene publishers, including those who published one or more translations of Munro, offers insight into how publishers choose foreign authors and works to be translated into Slovene. The survey included the following publishers: Mladinska knjiga, Celjska Mohorjeva družba, Beletrina, Sanje, Miš and Litera. All publishing houses included in the interviews reported that they followed a yearly plan in their choice of works to be published; however, the smaller publishing houses felt more freedom to adjust their plan to current market conditions. The then editor-in-chief of the leading Slovene publishing house Mladinska knjiga, Andrej Ilc (2016), explained that literary agents and book fairs played a key role in their choice of literary works to be translated; however, they also considered which works were being translated into other languages. The oldest Slovene publishing house, Celjska Mohorjeva družba (Petrovčič Jerina 2016), provided a similar answer to the question of how they chose foreign works to be translated; additionally, they also emphasized the importance of literary awards and of the need for the chosen work to be compatible with the publishing house’s general concept. While Mladinska knjiga found literary awards less important in their choice of titles to be translated, since they strived towards a balanced representation of literatures and genres (Ilc 2016), both publishing houses mentioned that translators sometimes played a

critical role in the choice of literary works, as did subsidies (Ilc 2016; Petrovčič Jerina 2016). Beletrina's then editor Anja Kovač (2016) explained that translations represented one half of all books they published per year and that literary awards as well as longlists and shortlists for literary awards played an important role in their choice of authors and works to be translated, as did subsidies, on which the publishing house depended considerably. The Sanje publishing house reported that it was mostly the editors who decided which books to translate; however, sometimes a translator's enthusiasm for a certain work as well as literary awards played a decisive role (Koprivec 2016). Representatives of the Miš publishing house explained that they often translated authors who were not yet internationally famous, and that literary awards and subsidies were not a decisive factor (Miš Svoljšak 2016). The editor-in-chief of Litera, Orlando Uršič (2016), explained that their publishing house focused on translations of foreign literature written mostly by European authors – preferably living – and those dealing with problems affecting contemporary society, and that it was usually the translators and sometimes also the editor who proposed a literary work for translation.

The three publishing houses that published translations of Munro's work were additionally asked to explain their decision to publish this author. Litera's 2010 translation of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* was the first book-length Slovene translation of Munro (by Katja Šaponjič), which was followed by Miš's translation of *Too Much Happiness* (by Jana Ambrožič), appearing in the same year. That the first two translations were published in the same year is merely a coincidence, as is the fact that they appeared only a year after Munro won the Man Booker International Prize. In the case of Litera's translation, it was the then editor Petra Vidali (2016) who selected the book because of its high quality. In the case of Miš's translation, it was also the editor, Irena Miš Svoljšak, who selected the title. She was introduced to Munro's works during her travels in the USA and Canada, and when contacted by a book agency in 2009, she opted for this title based on the book's favourable reviews (Miš Svoljšak 2016). The following (and so far last) three Slovene translations of Munro were all published by Celjska Mohorjeva družba, whose decision to translate the collections was influenced by Munro's winning the Nobel Prize in 2013, as well as my proposal as the translator, for I already had a longstanding cooperation with this publishing house and was working on my PhD thesis on Munro at the time she received the award. I also proposed the titles to be translated: *Dear Life* as the most recent collection seemed a logical choice (the translation appeared in 2014), while *Runaway*, which was translated a year later, and *The View from Castle Rock* (translated in 2017) were suggested by my PhD mentor Michelle Gadpaille. For the purpose of this paper, I have contacted the three publishing houses again to discover how well their translations of Munro's collections have been selling and whether they would be willing to publish another volume by Munro. All three publishing houses, Celjska Mohorjeva družba (Ozvatič 2022), Miš (Miš Svoljšak 2022) and Litera (Uršič 2022) replied that they had signed a five-year contract for the publishing rights, and while Miš and Litera managed to sell all the copies of their volumes, Celjska Mohorjeva still has several copies of all three titles; among these, *Ljubo življenje* (*Dear Life*) has sold the most copies and *Pogled z grajske pečine* (*The View from Castle Rock*) the fewest. The Miš publishing house (Miš Svoljšak 2022) would not consider publishing another title by Munro, because they are a small publishing house and do not focus primarily on books for adults. Neither is Litera (Uršič 2022) considering publishing another volume by Munro; they have limited their publication of translations, because translations

have flooded the Slovene book market, and readers are now increasingly looking for original works. Celjska Mohorjeva, on the other hand, is willing to consider publishing another title by Munro after they manage to sell all the copies of the translated collections, for they believe it is important that Munro's works be available to Slovene readers (Ozvatič 2022). Like Litera, Celjska Mohorjeva (Ozvatič 2022) also claims that sales of translations of literary works are declining, because people prefer to borrow books from libraries than buy them. If a publisher is unable to sell all the copies within the five-year contract, the contract needs to be renewed and additional payments made to be able to continue selling the book (Ozvatič 2022). This explains the low print run of Munro's books – all translations of Munro's works were printed in 500 copies each, which seems to be sufficient for the book market in a nation of two million like Slovenia. However, the low print run consequently makes the books more expensive and thus less accessible to readers.

The deterioration in the situation on the Slovene book market concerning translations of literary works, as has been observed by Celjska Mohorjeva and Litera, partly explains the lack of interest in publishing additional Munro collections in Slovene. The COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened the already fragile situation on the Slovene book market, as Blaž Mazi (2020) observes in the article titled “Knjige so poražene. Zmagale so uteži za domači fitnes” (English: “Books are defeated. Weights for home fitness have won”), referring to Miha Kovač's statement that during the first wave of the pandemic, sales of books decreased by 90%, which caused a collapse in the Slovene publishing business. The closure of bookshops during the pandemic, and the absence of live book fairs and book launches have negatively impacted Slovene publishers, for, as Ozvatič (2022) explains, books sell the most at book launches, particularly original literary works which are promoted by the authors themselves. Mazi (2020) also points to the fact that the current crisis in the Slovene publishing business is connected to a reading crisis that predated the pandemic: according to a recent survey, the number of non-readers in Slovenia has lately increased to reach a similar level to that of forty years ago. The current situation in Slovenia is not an isolated case; similar trends have been observed in other countries. However, small book markets like Slovenia are undoubtedly more vulnerable in case of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The prospects of getting more Slovene translations of Munro are thus not promising at the moment, since, as we have seen, the decision to publish an author is not entirely in the hands of the publishing houses, for they are dependent on the situation of the book market, over which they have little control.

5 Conclusion

There is no single reason why Munro was not introduced to Slovene readers earlier and why there is but little interest for her works among Slovene publishers, even now that she is a Nobel Prize winning author. The fact that she is exclusively a short-story writer partly accounts for this, since the short story genre has a short tradition in Slovenia compared to Canada, and since short stories are generally less popular with readers than novels. Munro's writing about women's lives as seen from the feminine – occasionally also feminist – perspective is another reason for her late arrival in Slovenia: a large percentage of current Slovene (female) readers grew up under the socialist regime, which propagated gender

equality; thus, they could not easily identify with the restricted social roles of Munro's heroines from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. It is therefore unsurprising that the five Munro collections available in Slovene are from the author's later period, in which she moved away from the early female/feminist themes towards more contemporary settings and more universal human issues. As is often the case with foreign authors translated into Slovene, the first two Slovene translations of Munro were the result of an editor's personal initiative. Munro's winning the Nobel Prize resulted in an additional three Slovene translations of her works. With five translated volumes out of fourteen, Munro has embraced the destiny of other (contemporary) Nobel laureates in Slovenia, who are represented in the Slovene language only by a boutique selection of their works.

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Whispers and Dances: (De)Construction of Heterochronism in Alice Munro's "Walker Brothers Cowboy"

ABSTRACT

Alice Munro stitches a patchwork of short stories in her 1968 short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*. The collection is constructed as a rhizomatic multiplicity wherein stories relate to each other in a rhizomatic pattern, as off-shoots of the same organic body. Each story in *Dance of the Happy Shades* is also internally constructed in the same way as a multiplicity, where micro-narratives are assembled as pieces of a patchwork to form a whole. This paper, however, explores only the opening story "Walker Brothers Cowboy" through a geocritical and geophilosophical lens and shows how Munro builds it through the same pattern. The story comprises multiple micro-narratives of different lengths and forms, each of which functions as part of this organic growth. The essay also shows how the juxtaposition of such micro-narratives, and of smoothing and striating images, creates a heterochronian heterotopia at the climax of the story.

Keywords: Alice Munro, "Walker Brothers Cowboy", heterotopia, heterochronia, geocriticism, geophilosophy, rhizomes, smoothing

Šepetanja in plesi: (de)konstrukcija heterokronizma v zgodbi »Walker Brothers Cowboy« Alice Munro

IZVLEČEK

Zbirka Alice Munro z naslovom *Dance of the Happy Shades* iz leta 1968 predstavlja krpanko kratkih zgodb. Zbirka je izgrajena kot rizomatska množičnost, kjer se zgodbe navezujejo druga na drugo v rizomatskem vzorcu kot poganjki iz istega telesa. Vsaka izmed zgodb v zbirki je notranje izgrajena na enak način, saj so mikropripovedi združene v celoto kot delčki krpanke. Pričujoči prispevek skozi geokritiko in geofilozofijo analizira zgolj prvo zgodbo, »Walker Brothers Cowboy«, in pokaže, da jo je Munro izgradila po istem vzorcu množičnosti. Zgodba vsebuje več mikropripovedi različnih dolžin in oblik, med katerimi vsaka deluje kot del organizma. Prispevek tudi prikaže, da na vrhuncu zgodbe jukstapozicija mikropripovedi ter gladkih in gubastih podob tvori heterokronično heterotopijo.

Gljučne besede: Alice Munro, »Walker Brothers Cowboy«, heterotopija, heterokronija, geokritika, geofilozofija, rizom, glajenje

“If the art of speaking is itself an art of operating and an art of thinking, practice and theory can be present in it.”

Michel de Certeau
The Practice of Everyday Life

1 Introduction

Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades* (2000), first published in 1968, is a collection of short stories anchored in a small-town Ontario environment and peopled by “young, female protagonists confronting expectations as firmly rooted as the rural landscape in which they live” (Liebson 2019). The stories are marked by a retrospective narrative mode where, as Robert Thacker remarks, “past and present comingle,” and narrators are “allowed their articulate moments” (2016, 23). Liebson, however, recognizes an important convention in the structure of the stories in *Dance of the Happy Shades*: “an essential co-dependency” (Liebson 2019), which is indicative of what this essay claims: a rhizomatic structure. The stories in the collection are also assembled in a patchwork model, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (2005), and mutually connected through a rhizomatic system. Moreover, each story comprises a rhizomatically structured patchwork model, internally, too. The essay will primarily focus on “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” the opening story in *Dance of the Happy Shades* and explore the story through a geocritical and geophilosophical lens, which could initiate further spatial studies on Munro's writing. “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” as a rhizomatic multiplicity, comprises multiple micro-narratives of different lengths and forms, which appear as heterogeneous off-shoots of this rhizomatic multiplicity. The juxtaposition of these micro-narratives, and of smoothing and striating images, constructs a heterochronian heterotopia, a Foucauldian spatial concept, at the climax of the story in the presence of Ben, Nora, and the young girl. The heterochronian heterotopia creates an illusory space where these characters temporarily experience an alternative dimension and return to reality after this climactic event. Yet, the experience for the young girl, the unnamed narrator of the story, was enduring and maturing. To better understand her experience, the essay will first delve into the concepts of heterotopia and heterochronia.

2 Realized Utopias of Alternative Dimensions

The metaphor of heterotopia was proposed by Michel Foucault in his renowned 1967 lecture “Of Other Spaces” where he initially states that we humans do not dwell in a void but in heterogeneous spaces – streets, trains, cafés, cinemas, beaches, or houses, bedrooms, and beds – which we define through “a set of relations that delineate emplacements that cannot be equated or in any way superimposed” (2008, 16). Foucault later expresses his main interest, not in these emplacements, but in other sites where we “suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored, or reflected by [these spaces, and these] nevertheless contradict all the other emplacements” (2008, 17). Foucault identifies these other emplacements as utopias, “emplacements with no real place,” and heterotopias (2008, 17). Foucault categorizes heterotopias as “a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be

found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable” (2008, 17).

Foucault classifies heterotopias into two major categories: heterotopias of crisis, and heterotopias of deviation. Heterotopias of crisis, Foucault suggests, “are privileged, or sacred, or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.” (2008, 18). Foucault offers boarding schools and hotels as examples of such heterotopias (2008, 18). For the second category, heterotopias of deviation, he points to rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and retirement homes, where individuals manifest deviant behaviour in relation to the general norms (2008, 18).

Foucault postulates that heterotopias can juxtapose several spaces within a simple space. For such incompatible juxtapositions, he propounds theatre stages and cinemas. He suggests that “the theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage a whole series of places that are alien to one another,” and that “the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space” (2008, 19).

Foucault also introduces the term “heterochronia,” as a subcategory and suggests that heterotopias may be connected to “slices of time” (2008, 20). Heterochronia is manifest in the temporal accumulation within a heterotopia, the best examples of such heterotopias being museums and libraries. In such heterotopias, time continuously accumulates to create a heterochronia (Foucault 2008, 20). Foucault considers this idea one of the paradoxes of modern times:

By contrast, the idea of accumulating everything, the idea of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time, and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move – well, all this belongs to our modernity (Foucault 2008, 20).

Foucault then identifies two more heterotopias: heterotopias of festivity, for instance, “fairgrounds,” where time is treated “in its most futile, most transitory, most precarious aspect, and this in the festive mode,” and heterotopias of vacation where one is paradoxically offered temporary abolishment of time to regain time in return in “three short weeks of primitive and eternal nudity” (2008, 20). Foucault also suggests that heterotopias have a function, for instance, “to create a space of illusion that exposes all real space, all the emplacements in the interior of which human life is enclosed and partitioned, as even more illusory” (2008, 21). Foucault finishes his lecture with the most interesting heterotopian example: the ship. “The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage replaces adventure, and the police the pirates,” suggests Foucault (2008, 22). The concept of the ship, in the context of this essay, corresponds to Ben’s car in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” which leads him to adventures of ‘a vagabond cowboy,’ an ironic name for Ben as he hardly leaves his home, does not dance, and buys liquorice instead of ice cream in the end.

3 A Journey in Narrativity

“Walker Brothers Cowboy” begins with an invitation: “Want to go down and see if the Lake’s still there?” (Munro 2000, 1). The first invitation takes the narrator and the reader to the shore of Lake Huron where one of the first micro-narratives in the story is told by Ben Jordan, the narrator’s father, a vagabond cowboy – at least in spirit. The second invitation is to the whole family for “a drive in the country” (Munro 2000, 6). These invitations, while captivating the narrator’s sense of adventure and curiosity, initiate a journey in narrativity for the reader. Sturgess defines narrativity as “the enabling force of narrative, a force that is present at every point in the narrative, and thus [it] always operates syntagmatically” (1989, 763). Sturgess further states that “juxtaposed events” create “one powerful sense” and the text will always carry “a sense of the mediating or juxtaposing power of narrativity” (1989, 765). “Walker Brothers Cowboy” also has metafictional qualities, as the story is told through a specific story construction technique.¹ Metafiction creates fiction while making a statement about the way it is created (Waugh 2001, 6). Regarding the self-exploratory quality of metafictional writing, Waugh also says that metafiction “draw[s] on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, but often recasting it in the terms of contemporary philosophical, linguistic or literary theory” (2001, 3), and adds that metafiction offers “extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems” (2001, 9). In the light of the narrativity logic, as observed by Sturgess, and the metafictional writing mode, as suggested by Waugh, this essay claims that Munro presents a rhizomatic² pattern comprising a collection of spatiotemporally divergent micro-narratives in “Walker Brothers Cowboy”; the juxtaposition of these micro-narratives, which function as off-shoots of the rhizomatic growth in the frame narrative, and the juxtaposed images within the micro-narratives, help in the construction of heterochronian heterotopia in the story.

4 The Narrativizing Voice

“Walker Brothers Cowboy” is narrated in the confiding voice³ of an adult woman who reminisces about a memorable episode from her childhood, like an intimate diary entry. “My father does not say anything to me about not mentioning things at home, but I know, just from the thoughtfulness, the pause when he passes the liquorice, that there are things not to be mentioned,” says the perceptive narrator in the end (Munro 2000, 18). The story revisits and, more importantly, retells the events leading up to a spatiotemporal experience, in the historical present tense, except for a few places in the story where Munro uses past simple tense. One of these occurs in the story as an off-shoot of the episode with her father during their walk by Lake Huron.⁴ Another one comes in a similar fashion, as a micro-

¹ Munro’s short story “The Office” in the same collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, comments on the issues of story writing as an art form.

² I borrowed the term from Deleuze and Guattari (2005).

³ Duncan highlights the confiding voice in Munro’s short stories “The Peace of Utrecht” from *Dance of the Happy Shades* and “Material” in *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You* (2011, 19–30). Munro also uses the expression “confiding voice” in her story “Thanks for the Ride” from *Dance of the Happy Shades* (2000, 51), which naturally creates a rhizomatic connection with “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” “The Peace of Utrecht,” and “Material.”

⁴ “That is the part of the town we used to know when we lived at Dungannon and came here three or four times a

narrative within a micro-narrative, during the ‘Do you remember’ episode.⁵ Another finds voice in the ‘Nora’ micro-narrative as a rhizomatic off-shoot,⁶ which I entitle the ‘wrong foot’ micro-narrative in the context of this essay.⁷ These instances all appear as off-shoots of micro-narrative episodes to express anchorage to a stagnant experience in the past.

In the traditional sense, however, the use of the historical present suggests that the author or the narrator experiences an event anew while narrating it and that the event is vividly rooted in the narrator’s mind (Park et al., 2011, 1171–76). It should also be taken into consideration that the construction of heterochronism, as this essay claims, requires “[a] narrativizing of practices [as] a textual ‘way of operating’ having its own procedures and tactics,” drawing upon de Certeau’s ideas about storytelling (1988, 78). The use of the historical present tense gives a unifying voice to the rhizomatic multiplicity in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” and a smoothing quality to the polychrony and polytypy of the story. In short, the use of multiple micro-narratives narrated in the historical present tense in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” exemplifies what de Certeau calls “a discourse composed of stories” (1988, 78).

5 Patchwork Model: A Discourse Composed of Stories

Insofar as “Walker Brothers Cowboy” is about metafictional storytelling, it also focusses on the storyteller (presumably a version of Munro herself)⁸ who experiences a transgressive journey of awakening, epiphany, smoothing and, more importantly, ‘becoming.’ The narrator follows her father’s footsteps in the ‘barding’ tradition and gains originality as Munro gives her the role of storyteller. She becomes a “rhapsode” who stitches micro-narratives together into a whole like a patchwork, which is a rhizomatic strategy. Robert Tally states that *rhapsode* is “a term used in its technical or etymological sense of a ‘weaver,’ as one who thus weaves disparate parts into a whole” (2013, 48). A rhapsode becomes “a surveyor of spaces” and “sews these spaces into a new unity,” adds Tally (2013, 48). In support of this, Nunes demonstrates a ‘patchwork piecing’ pattern in Munro’s writing strategy and suggests that “[Munro’s] writing calls attention to itself not to underscore disruption or narrative excess, but to note the narrative strategies – the conditions and contingencies – that allow the pieces to come together” (1997).

As a patchwork unity, “Walker Brothers Cowboy” also corresponds to the smooth space concept proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. They state that a patchwork model created by the continuous addition of fabric of varied sizes and types exhibits smooth space characteristics (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 476–77). This explains the story’s expansive quality as well. In clarifying how patchwork spaces are created, Deleuze and Guattari evoke “an amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways”

summer, to the Lake” (Munro 2000, 2).

⁵ “[...] before my brother was born, when she would give me a little tea and a lot of milk in a cup like hers and we would sit out on the step facing the pump, the lilac tree, the fox pens beyond” (Munro 2000, 5).

⁶ “I think of what my grandmother and my Aunt Tena, over in Dungannon, used to always say to indicate that somebody was a Catholic. *So-and-so digs with the wrong foot*, they would say. *She digs with the wrong foot*. That was what they would say about Nora” (Munro 2000, 14; italics in the original).

⁷ “Dig with the left foot” is used as a derogatory term indicative of one’s Catholic origins (Dalzell and Victor 2015, 237).

⁸ The story draws on some elements of Munro’s upbringing (Tausky 1986).

(2005, 476). Munro creates an expanding, smoothing and rhizomatic movement in the story, in both form and content. This practice results in polychrony, “the combination of different temporalities,” and polytopy, “the composition of different spatialities” (Westphal 2011, 43), which then leads to the construction of heterochronian heterotopia through juxtaposition.

Waugh suggests that authors who engage in metafiction respond to “the pluralistic, hyperactive multiplicity of styles that constitute the surfaces of present-day culture” with the use of aleatory writing. What authors offer in metafictional writing, Waugh adds, is “an anarchic individualism, a randomness designed to represent an avoidance of social control by stressing the impossibility of easily categorizing it or assimilating the reader to familiar structures of communication” (2001, 12–13). For present purposes, I prefer to call such aleatory writing ‘rhizomatic.’ Rhizomatic growths seem random, decentralized, and heterogeneous, while avoiding a fixed order, like trees. Deleuze and Guattari call rhizomatic growths “adventitious” because of their natural randomness (2005, 15). Thacker recognizes “an organic feel” in Munro’s stories with their “stops and starts, bends and turns” (2011, 501). Munro indeed creates *Dance of the Happy Shades* as a rhizomatic organism where the stories are all interconnected through a rhizomatic logic.⁹ Therefore, the geocritical analysis of “Walker Brothers Cowboy” could encourage further studies on *Dance of the Happy Shades* as well as Munro’s other works. The rhizomatic expansion in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” is much like the movement of the ice Ben describes in the ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative. Ben imitates the creeping ice from the north with his hands, and says: “Well, the old ice cap had a lot more power behind it” (Munro 2000, 2), which may indicate his powerlessness in the face of hardship and struggle, alongside the ineffectiveness of his smoothing desire. “And the ice went back, shrank back towards the North Pole where it came from, and left its fingers of ice in the deep places it had gouged, and ice turned to lakes and there they were today,” concludes Ben (Munro 2000, 2). The force of the ice caps is inevitable, forceful, and transgressive, but then creates the smoothest space.¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari classify “ice deserts” and “sand deserts” as smooth spaces where “the polyvocality of directions” becomes an indispensable quality (2005, 382).

“Walker Brothers Cowboy” is indeed a smooth story in geophilosophical terms, with its polychronic and polytopic micro-narratives creating narrative polyvocality. The narrator devises various micro-narratives of different lengths and forms. For instance, ‘The nineteenth-thirties’ is the shortest micro-narrative in the story; another short one is the ‘on my way to see you’ micro-narrative,¹¹ and some are impromptu, or “adventitious” as termed by Deleuze and Guattari (2005, 15). ‘Spying kids’ exemplifies such an adventitious micro-narrative: “The children are far away, following dry creek beds or looking for blackberries, *or else they are hidden in the house, spying at us through cracks in the blinds*” (Munro 2000, 9; emphasis

⁹ Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* can be taken as an example of rhizomatic writing, since each story in *Winesburg, Ohio* is presented as having the potential to bloom into another one – and does so. Caryl Phillips also uses this technique in his writing. For more about Phillips’s use of this *modus operandi*, see Öner (2016).

¹⁰ The words ‘smooth’ and ‘smoothing’ in the article are borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (2005).

¹¹ This story reveals that Ben and Nora were in an intimate relationship in the past. The narrator’s awareness is also noteworthy here. “My father shakes his head. ‘I can’t think of her any way but when she was going to school, so shy I used to pick her up on the road – I’d be on my way to see you – and she would not say one word, not even to agree it was a nice day’” (Munro, 2000, 13).

added). The ‘spying kids’ micro-narrative is also a rhizomatic reference to neighbours drawing curtains so as not to see the eyesore of a house owned by Mrs. Fullerton in “The Shining Houses” in the *Dance of the Happy Shades* collection.¹²

6 Juxtaposition of Micro-Narratives

Howells states that “Walker Brothers Cowboy” touches upon “microhistories” within “national history” (2004, 6). Bonta and Protevi write, “Smooth space does not have a long-term memory with all that entails, so only microhistories are possible, and microsociologies” (Bonta and Protevi 2006, 145). In this essay, I prefer to use the term ‘micro-narratives’ instead of microhistories, as each microhistory already comes with its own narrative.

“The tiny share we have of time appalls me,” comments the narrator regarding the creation of the Great Lakes (Munro 2000, 3). Ben’s ‘scientific’ story takes her back to a time when dinosaurs roamed the Earth. Although it looks aleatory, the ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative gives the frame story an immense backward expansion in space and time. “All where Lake Huron is now,” the narrator quotes her father, Ben, “used to be flat land, a wide flat plain. Then came the ice, creeping down from the North, pushing deep into the low places” (Munro 2000, 3). This backward expansion is reflected in the forward trajectory of the story: a smoothing transgression toward the construction of the heterochronism at the climax of the story.¹³ This movement also resembles Ben’s aleatory choice to go “out of [his] territory” to visit Nora (Munro 2000, 10). Ben is compelled into this choice after he experiences a humiliating affair as a salesman. “Just don’t tell your mother that [...]. She isn’t liable to see the joke,” says Ben before he naturally follows “a line of flight”¹⁴ and changes his regular course. Ben is “plugged by machines of enslavement and order” and “unplugged by forces of desire and smoothing” (Bonta and Protevi 2006, 106). Speaking of such (in)voluntary transgressive movements, Bertrand Westphal comments: “In the absence of a common rhythm, transgression is inevitable” (2011, 43), and further comments: “Transgression is somehow the result of an oscillation, little attributable to a singular, individual responsibility but more like continental drift, the shock of geological plates” (2011, 46). Being unable to achieve a common rhythm with his wife, Ben holds his desire for smoothing and follows a line of flight. By this movement, more importantly, Ben leaves the imprints of his smoothing desire on his daughter just as Nora leaves “an unintelligible mark in the dust” on Ben’s car (Munro 2000, 17). The undeniable presence of this experience can be traced, as we see in “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” in the life of the storytelling rhapsode she later ‘becomes,’ and in the story (or stories) she (Munro) ‘whispers.’ With its assemblage of rhizomatic stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* indicates that Munro is indeed a rhapsode who not only tells stories but also comments on the way she composes stories like a bard.

¹² Ben’s foxes are also rhizomatically matched with Mr. Fullerton’s plans of “putting chinchillas in the backyard” in “The Shining Houses” (Munro 2000, 20).

¹³ Dutoit classifies Munro’s stories into groups: “the geologically-based” ones (outside and childhood stories), and “the nongeologically-based” ones (inside stories and adulthood stories). Dutoit also believes that Munro connects “Canadian place in the Anthropocene (the era of the human in geological time) with literary space-time in imagination (the epoch of the trace)” (2014, 77–78).

¹⁴ Another geophilosophical term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Bonta and Protevi see lines of flight as “vectors of freedom” (2006, 107).

At the end of “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” the narrator gains a new experience, and this creates what de Certeau calls a “curved’ movement” “like the knight in chess” for the narrator to cross “the immense chessboard of literature” (1988, 81). This enables the narrator to go beyond the fixity of stagnancy and find fluidity of smoothing in the end. It is not a coincidence that Munro opens *Dance of the Happy Shades* with “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” an organic story of fluidity, and weaves similar rhizomatic stories with a postmodern playfulness into the collection.

With reference to contradictive and paradoxical postmodern spaces in literature, McHale writes: “Space here is less constructed than *deconstructed* by the text, or constructed and deconstructed at the same time. Postmodernist fiction¹⁵ draws upon a number of strategies for constructing/deconstructing space, among them *juxtaposition*, *interpolation*, *superimposition*, and *misattribution*” (2004, 45; italics in the original). Unlike the “noncontiguous and unrelated” spaces projected by real-world atlases or encyclopaedias, McHale observes, postmodern spaces in literature create zones when juxtaposed, for instance, Foucauldian heterotopias¹⁶ (2004, 45–46).

The juxtaposition of micro-narratives brings to the surface an alternative zone in “Walker Brothers Cowboy.” For instance, the ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative can be juxtaposed with all other micro-narratives in the story. This micro-narrative holds the key to unlocking the other stories, since it proves that any transgressive movement has the potential to construct a smooth space, e.g., Lake Huron. The ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative also foreshadows the unavoidable change the narrator will be experiencing, and it reveals how insignificantly microscopic our lifespan is compared to cosmic history, which initially frightens the narrator (Munro 2000, 3), and how important it is for one to realize this and embrace the destined change. After the narrator’s epiphanic experience in the heterochronism of the heterotopia, as narrated in the ‘Nora’ micro-narrative, she realizes that some things in life are almost magical: “[...] like a landscape that has an enchantment on it, making it kindly, ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine” (Munro 2000, 18). Here, her emotions conflict with her father’s moody, embittered feelings. Similarly, the ‘wrong foot’ micro-narrative is in sharp contrast with, for instance, the image of “the picture of Mary” in the ‘Nora’ micro-narrative (Munro 2000, 18). The narrator comments on this contrast with what she witnesses: “She digs with the wrong foot, I think, and the words seem sad to me as never before, dark, perverse” (Munro 2000, 17). The narrator’s awareness of this stark contrast is reflected in her words: “dark” and “perverse” (Munro 2000, 17). The narrator sees Nora as a woman filled with a positive vibe and life energy, unlike her own mother back home.

Juxtaposing the smooth ‘Lake Huron’ micro-narrative and the micro-narratives dealing with the mother’s fixity also reveals the main conflict in the story. As we read, we become witnesses

¹⁵ I am referring to postmodernity here with caution and not suggesting that Alice Munro is a postmodernist author and her work postmodernist. However, Munro, recognized by critics as a quintessential realist, is also known to use postmodern modes and methods in the construction of her stories. For instance, Nunes recognizes ‘patchwork piecing’ as a narrative technique in Munro’s stories (1997). This essay also demonstrates the playfulness of her techniques.

¹⁶ For juxtaposing cinematic narrative space, see Zhao and Öner (2018).

to the mother's painfully uncomfortable stagnant attitude and the entrapment in which Ben finds himself. The narrator's mother keeps returning to the past by simply imitating "most leisurely days" (Munro 2000, 5). She does not compromise her suffering and even finds Ben's smoothing attempts pitiful: "A pedlar's song, and that is what he is, a pedlar knocking at backwoods kitchens" (Munro 2000, 4). All she can offer her children is to recycle clothes out of "an old suit and an old plaid wool dress of hers [which] she has to cut and match very cleverly" (Munro 2000, 1). She also (un)willingly wants to keep her children in this stagnancy: "Children are still playing. I don't know them either because my mother keeps my brother and me in our yard [...]" (Munro 2000, 1). The narrator knows that her mother's journeys do not offer vagabond adventures like her father's. In the 'Simon's Grocery' micro-narrative, she feels pinned and trapped, like a gazed-upon object of mockery: "Even the dirty words chalked on the sidewalk are laughing at us" (Munro 2000, 5). She becomes a character in her mother's narrative, not a rhapsode who creates her own stories. She confirms this in these words: "With me her creation, wretched curls and flaunting hair bow, scrubbed knees and white socks – all I do not want to be. I loathe even my name when she says it in public, in a voice so high, proud, and ringing, deliberately different from the voice of any other mother on the street" (Munro 2000, 5). Even in her smoothest moments, as she offers her children ice-cream, the mother attempts to co-opt her children into her own entrapment. In the 'Do you remember' micro-narrative, for instance, she tries to hold her daughter spatiotemporally entrapped in a place, Dungannon, and at the time of "[their] earliest, most leisurely days before [her] brother was born [...]," while the narrator, tired of her mother's such attempts, pretends she remembers little (Munro 2000, 5).

The narrator's father, Ben, also seems entrapped in her mother's wish for stagnancy. Although he tells stories, sings songs, and attempts to smooth the stasis, he "seem[s] to be fresh out of songs" on the way back home (Munro 2000, 17). After experiencing the smoothness of Nora's presence in her house, a heterochronian heterotopia, which is juxtaposed to his own house, he feels downcast as they approach Tuppertown, and the narrator senses the sharp shift in her father's mood: "I feel my father's life flowing back from our car in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange," and the sky turns "overcast" (Munro 2000, 18). This paragraph shows that the narrator has become more perceptive and understanding of her father's struggle. For Ben, his wife's attitude toward their life is a striating force to be tackled.

Deleuze and Guattari contrast smooth spaces, or the smooth products of smooth spaces, with striated spaces. Striated spaces¹⁷ are produced by the stratification of state apparatus and control mechanisms (2005, 385–86). Of striation, Bonta and Protevi write: "Striation imparts the 'truth' that 'place' is an immobile point and that immobility (dwelling) is always better than 'aimless' voyaging, wandering, itinerancy, and of course nomadism, which at best are temporary vacations, but, if insisted upon, pose grave threats to striated space" (2006, 154). Predictably, the narrator's mother appears as a striating force, a state apparatus, a person who finds Ben's smoothing struggles pathetic.

¹⁷ "[Striation], a geological phenomenon first detected by Louis Agassiz in 1840, was primordially the scratching of the earth's surface by continental glaciers" (Bonta and Protevi 2006, 151).

While “nature” is established by smoothing elements, “human systems” are recognized as striating forces (Bonta and Protevi 2006, 151). Smooth spaces are peopled by nomads, or more specifically, “war machines” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 351–423). “Smooth space operates in the landscape, in mathematics, in music, in thought, in politics, in religion, and so forth,” state Bonta and Protevi (2006, 144). Deleuze and Guattari recognize “becoming” in its smoothing attributes (2005, 488), while Bonta and Protevi state that “intensive becomings” take place only in smooth spaces (2006, 144). Additionally, Bonta and Protevi classify destructive forces like fire, natural spaces such as steppes, seas, deserts, polar ice, air and landscapes, and activities such as dance parties and children’s games, as smooth spaces, and elements of smooth space (2006, 144–45).

There is a general sense of stagnancy in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” as history presents its share of striation. “The nineteen-thirties,” says the narrator pointing to the Great Depression as the major striating force and associating the decade with particular imagery: the “father’s hat,” “bright flared tie,” “an Essex, and long past its prime,” and desolation (Munro 2000, 8). “Nice boy, there’s a boy, nice old boy,” says her father to the only animals, dogs, in this desolation. Ben is portrayed as a man who attempts to smooth any striation he faces: He also needs to know how to calm the “desperate foxes with tongs around their necks,” and he uses “[o]ne gentling voice for the dogs and another, rousing, cheerful, for calling at doors” (Munro 2000, 8). Nevertheless, a prevalent cyclical pattern appears in the lives of the narrator’s parents. Ben seems to have the desire to go beyond the striations of his wife’s stagnant attitude for “some fresh air and a drive in the country” (Munro 2000, 5), and he is also willing to go “out of [his] territory” (Munro 2000, 10) to create an alternative smooth story. Yet, his invitations to singing, banter and wandering, to include his wife in his adventures, both physical and emotional, seem to fail. He only gets unwilling laughter or scorn: “Not a very funny song, in my mother’s opinion” (Munro 2000, 3). Yet, unlike his daughter, he is still trapped by striations of stagnancy. Ben does not get up to dance with Nora and will probably never visit her again. However, Ben and Nora (in)voluntarily pass the heterochronian experience on to the narrator, the rhapsode, who grows up to continue creating smooth stories of unbound, adventurous, moving vagabonds and nomads in search of smoothing, hence the title “Walker Brothers Cowboy.” After all, she has a soul “wary of being trapped into sympathy or any unwanted emotion” (Munro 2000, 6).

7 A ‘Whispering’ Illusion

The frame narrative in “Walkers Brothers Cowboy” climaxes at Nora’s house, where some of the micro-narratives find an alternative story, a climactic juxtaposition takes place, and micro-narratives, songs, contrasting images, smoothing, and striating forces converge to construct an enticingly heterochronian heterotopia. The spatial practice Munro adopts in the story leads to this construction. The narrator experiences an epiphanic transgression in a newly constructed heterotopia. At Nora’s house Ben fails to dance with her, which would be the ultimate act of smoothing in the story; the denouement then takes place in the car, a mobile heterotopia,¹⁸ where the narrator senses a “flowing” change in her father (Munro 2000, 18).

¹⁸ This mobile heterotopia can also be called ‘the heterotopia of vagrancy’ as Ben and his children find some comfort and temporary smoothing in their car, travelling and venturing.

The ‘Nora’ micro-narrative opens with an intriguingly polysensorial introduction. The narrator describes the paradoxically dilapidated state of this ‘illusory’ heterotopian setting using visual cues: “[...] pricks of sunlight penetrate and float on her face” (Munro 2000, 11) and “[...] every bit of her skin you can see is covered with little dark freckles¹⁹ like measles” (Munro 2000, 12); auditory cues: “[...] Momma. Hear his voice” (Munro 2000, 11) and “[...] cheerfully and aggressively” (Munro 2000, 11); olfactory cues: “[...] there is a faint sour smell” (Munro 2000, 11) and “[...] sending a smell of cologne far and wide [...]” (Munro 2000, 12); tactile cues: “It’s cool in the house” (Munro 2000, 11) and “She pulls us forward, makes each of us touch the old lady’s dry, cool hand [...]” (Munro 2000, 12); and finally gustatory cues: “You go and pump me some good cold water [...]” (Munro 2000, 12). Munro constructs this narrative heterotopia using a sensorially holistic approach, “polysensoriality” in geocritical terms (Westphal 2011). Westphal explains that “sensoriality allows the individual to conform to the world. It contributes to the structuring and definition of space” (2011, 133). By using this approach, Munro creates juxtaposed polysensorial images. Nora’s dress, for instance, is lined with “green poppies,” “flowered more lavishly than anything [the narrator’s] mother owns”, and Nora wears “Cuban heels”²⁰ (Munro 2000, 12), in contrast to the dress and shoes of the narrator’s mother: “She wears a good dress, navy blue with little flowers, sheer, worn over a navy-blue slip [and] a summer hat of white straw [and] white shoes [...]” (Munro 2000, 4). Ben’s songs, which are among the story’s most important auditory cues, are juxtaposed with a song from Ben and Nora’s mutual history in the insinuated ‘on my way to see you’ micro-narrative: “*Whispering while you cuddle near me, Whispering so no one can hear me*” (Munro 2000, 16; italics in the original). Nora also shows them “the snapshots” of her sisters, Isabel and Muriel (Munro 2000, 13). This can be contrasted with the mental image the narrator builds thinking of her Protestant grandmother and Aunt Tena, open anti-Catholics, with their ‘wrong foot’ micro-narrative.

With a tactile, or more specifically kinaesthetic image, “Dance with me, Ben” (Munro 2000, 16), the story reaches its pivotal moment, which functions as a point of no return. The invitation would have led to a polysensorially physical build-up,²¹ yet it is unaccomplished. This rejection indicates that Ben is aware of the illusory, temporary, and liminal nature of this heterotopia. This spatiotemporal experience simply ‘whispers’ a past long lost and yet revisited momentarily and painfully. Ben simply enjoys the temporary loss of identity determinants.

¹⁹ With this visual image, we can again see Munro’s playful anchorage to her other stories in the collection “Images”: “Out in the daylight, and not dressed in white, she turned out to be freckled all over, everywhere you could see, as if she was sprinkled with oatmeal, and she had a crown of frizzy, glinting, naturally brass-coloured hair” (Munro 2000, 31), and “Thanks for the Ride:” “She had her long pale hair tied at the back of her neck; her skin was dustily freckled, but not tanned; even her eyes were light-coloured” (Munro 2000, 49). This shows the rhizomatic strategy in the creation of her stories.

²⁰ With this expression, Munro again connects “Walker Brothers Cowboy” to another story, “Sunday Afternoon” in *Dance of the Happy Shades*, in a rhizomatic pattern: “She had to wear stockings too, and white Cuban-heeled shoes that clomped on the stones of the patio – making, in contrast to the sandals and pumps, a heavy, purposeful, plebeian [sic] sound” (Munro 2000, 164).

²¹ The narrator’s polysensorial description of this intimate experience is as follows: “Round and round the linoleum, me proud, intent, Nora laughing and moving with great buoyancy, wrapping me in her strange gaiety, her smell of whisky, cologne, and sweat. Under the arms her dress is damp, and little drops form along her upper lip, hang in the soft black hairs at the corners of her mouth. She whirls me around in front of my father – causing me to stumble, for I am by no means so swift a pupil as she pretends – and lets me go, breathless” (Munro 2000, 16).

In recognition of the potential of the smoothing forces of such heterotopian spaces, Westphal writes: “Heterotopia is another name for the sphere of intimacy that resists codification and that each individual tries to expand at leisure” (2011, 64). In this heterochronian heterotopia of illusion,²² Ben could have expanded by grasping the chance to dance with Nora and smooth the striations his wife creates in real time. Foucault suggests that heterotopias tend to generate “a space of illusion” that reveals the roles of real emplacements where one’s life is controlled, or they create an alternative “perfect” or “meticulous” space contrasting the tough, chaotic, real space in which we live (2008, 21). Here, Westphal’s comments on Foucault’s heterotopias are noteworthy:

The Foucauldian heterotopia is the space imbued by literature in its capacity as a “laboratory of the possible,” the investigator of the integral space that sometimes occurs in the field of reality and sometimes outside of it. Heterotopia enables individuals to juxtapose in the same site several spaces that had previously been incompatible (Westphal 2011, 63).

In this alternative heterotopian space of heterochronia, we have a glimpse of ‘the possible’ universe. It is illusory, temporary, and liminal. Yet, it is revealing, enduring, and maturing for the narrator, the future storyteller, the rhapsode-to-be. It is not surprising that Munro initiates her writing journey with this very story, “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” the smooth story of transgression.

8 Conclusion

Thacker asserts that Alice Munro is “an organic writer” (2016, 11) and “an artist who, in her secret world has articulated in her stories the very feelings of being alive, and of being human” (2016, 268), which explains why her stories carry a unique smoothness. This essay addresses this naturalness and smoothness in the story “Walker Brothers Cowboy” through a geocritical and geophilosophical lens. The essay concludes that this organic feel and smoothness comes from Munro’s use of rhizomatic logic. Rhizomes do not function on a fixed order like tree structures but exhibit a natural randomness. I have established that the story contains multiple micro-narratives as off-shoots of this rhizomatic growth and that these are adventitious, random, and decentralized. These micro-narratives achieve an enticing spatiotemporal effect in the story. For instance, the smooth ‘Huron Lake’ micro-narrative brings an immense expansion to the story since this micro-narrative is also a metaphor for the emergence of a story-weaving rhapsode. This emergence is innately forceful, adventitious, inevitable, and transgressive, just as the ice caps, which naturally created the smoothest space, Lake Huron, were millions of years ago. When multiple micro-narratives in the story are juxtaposed, an alternative zone emerges in the story’s pivotal moment where reality is suspended and neutralized. The experience is climactic for Ben and Nora. For the narrator, however, it paved the path to becoming a story-weaving rhapsode and to telling the story of the vagabond cowboy, her father, Ben.

²² Foucault also suggests an alternative name: ‘heterotopia of compensation’ (2008, 21).

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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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The Human Geometry of Deathscapes and Homes in Alice Munro's *The View from Castle Rock*

ABSTRACT

In her semi-autobiographical collection, *The View from Castle Rock* (2006), Alice Munro claims to portray the history of her ancestors by traveling through time and space and putting her fictional self at the centre of the narrative. This paper explores a set of complex relationships between space, place, and identity formation with the help of various spatial trajectories. At the thematic and structural centre of the narrative there are two recurring spatial trajectories that most commonly manifest themselves in the form of deathscapes and homes. This paper will map the different deathscapes and homes in relation to their physical locations in Scotland, the United States, and Canada, in the timeframe of the past 400 years, but more importantly in the context of their fictional meaning and the formative role they play in the protagonist's self-quest.

Keywords: *The View from Castle Rock*, literary cartography, spatial trajectories, death, home, Alice Munro

Človeška geometrija pokrajin smrti in domov v zbirki *Pogled z grajske pečine* Alice Munro

IZVLEČEK

Alice Munro trdi, da v svoji delno avtobiografski zbirki *Pogled z grajske pečine* iz leta 2006 slika zgodovino svojih prednikov, s tem ko potuje skozi čas in prostor in svoj fiktivni jaz postavi v središče pripovedi. Pričujoči članek raziskuje kompleksne odnose med prostorom, kraji in oblikovanjem identitete s pomočjo različnih potovanj skozi prostor. V tematskem in strukturnem središču pripovedi sta dve ponavljajoči se potovanji skozi prostor, ki se najpogosteje kažejo v obliki pokrajin smrti in domov. Prispevek bo identificiral različne pokrajine smrti in domove glede na njihovo fizično lokacijo na Škotskem, v ZDA in Kanadi v obdobju zadnjih štiristo let, predvsem pa v kontekstu njihovega fiktivnega pomena in formativne vloge, ki jo odigrajo na poti iskanja identitete posameznih junakov.

Gljučne besede: *Pogled z grajske pečine*, literarna kartografija, potovanje skozi prostor, smrt, dom, Alice Munro

1 Introduction

To explore the wide array of complex relationships between space, place, and identity formation, in the 1980s a novel field of study emerged, which came to be known as “new cultural geography”. The proliferation of recent ideas and texts resulted in a “spatial turn” that led to several new discoveries across the fields of humanities and social sciences.¹ In his book *Spatiality*, Robert Tally applies the concept of space to the field of literature and identifies the term “literary cartography” by comparing the act of writing to “a form of mapmaking” and the role of the writer to that of a cartographer (2013, 45). Maps represent geographical spaces, areas, and lands by exhibiting their physical features; similarly, literary texts can also map and make places and spaces visible. Bushell highlights the inevitably “subjective direction” of the process resulting from the “intersection between literature and geography/cartography (2020, 34), and emphasizes that “literary spatiality” can also be seen as a form of “‘human geometry’ that connects humans to each other and to their environment” (2020, 24). Although it is often possible to identify textual places on a geographical map, literary representations of space or place are not primarily topographical in nature, but more importantly, they foreground the vastly complex nature of human experience. This paper explores the different spatial locations and their role and meaning by following the narrator’s literary journey into her ancestral past. *The View from Castle Rock* (2006) reconstructs the writer’s family history with the help of public records, letters, diaries, and other family documents, and offers the perspective of Alice Munro’s fictionalized self.²

2 Mapping Munro

As an iconic figure in Canadian literature, Alice Munro has also exerted a worldwide influence on short story writing that was acknowledged in her award of the Nobel Prize in 2013. The “master of the contemporary short story” was born as a Laidlaw, and on her father’s side, the family originates from Scotland. *The View from Castle Rock* is divided into two major parts, “No advantages” and “Home,” both of which place on the map a range of spatial locations. The title in “No advantages,” by quoting the Statistical Account of Scotland written in 1799, provides a matter-of-fact description of the Ettrick parish where the Laidlaws originate. The Ettrick Valley lies 50 miles south of Edinburgh and 30 miles north of the English border, and “[T]his parish possesses no advantages. Upon the hills the soil is in many places mossy and fit for nothing [...]. Barley oats and potatoes are the only crops raised. [...] There are ten proprietors of land in this parish: none of them resides in it” (Munro 2007, 3). In stark contrast with the barren location, the place is described as fertile land for stories. The reader learns about the home of Michael Scott or Scotus, a twelfth- and thirteenth-century philosopher and alleged sorcerer, who also features in Dante’s *Inferno*. This is where William Wallace, widely known as Braveheart, once hid, and Merlin was hunted down by the local shepherds (Munro 2007, 5). Not only is the place rich in ghost stories and fairy tales, but it also boasts notable literary connections. A canonical figure of Scottish literature,

¹ Don Mitchell’s critical volume, *Cultural Geography* (2020), provides a concise overview of the new field of study.

² In the Foreword to *The View from Castle Rock*, Alice Munro self-consciously identifies the main motif of her book by claiming, “I was ... exploring a life, my own life [...] I put myself in the center and wrote about that self, as searchingly as I could” (Munro 2007, x).

James Hogg,³ became widely known as the “Ettrick Shepherd,” a nickname under which some of his works were published; Hogg was a cousin to James Laidlaw.⁴ The writer’s father, Robert Hogg (1729–1820), was a tenant farmer, while his mother, Margaret (1730–1813), was known for collecting Scottish ballads. Hogg was a friend to many of the great writers of his day, including Sir Walter Scott (Munro 2007, 6). The “narrator-protagonist”⁵ highlights that for several generations her ancestors were shepherds, yet in every family, somebody was known for writing letters, diaries, even articles for the famous *Blackwood’s Magazine* (Munro 2007, 24). She emphasizes that Scotland was the country where the Scottish Calvinist John Knox⁶ decided that every child should learn to read and write so that everybody could read the Bible, and as a result, they became “the best-educated peasantry in Europe” (Munro 2007, 18). In the beginning of her book, Munro puts her ancestors on the literary map, people who, despite originating from a geographically remote and deprived location, possessed an abundance of creative inspiration.

For a long time, space in literary fiction was considered to have no function other than “to supply a general background against which the action takes place, something to be taken for granted rather than requiring attention” (Buchholz and Jahn 2005, 551). The French cultural theorist Michel de Certeau observes in *The Practice of Everyday Life* that the role of stories is similar to that of public transport. He gives the example of modern Athens where “the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorei*. To go to work or come home, one takes a ‘metaphor’—a bus or a train” (de Certeau 1984, 115). Similarly, stories also function as vehicles by traversing and organizing places, selecting and linking them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them, they function as “spatial trajectories” (de Certeau 1984, 115). Human geography defines the concept of space as abstract and universal, in contrast to place as concrete and individual. According to Tuan, the difference between “space” and “place” can best be described through the extent to which human beings have given meaning to a specific area (1977, 6). It is important to note that, despite their different connotations, “space and place are dialectically structured in human environmental experience, since our understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from their spatial context” (Seamon and Sowers 2008, 44). The following analysis explores the different meanings and the connected and interrelated nature of the various spaces and places that feature in *The View from Castle Rock*. At the thematic and structural centre of the narrative there are two recurring spatial trajectories that most commonly manifest themselves in the form of graves and homes. This paper maps these multiple deathscapes and homes in relation to their physical and temporal location, and more importantly in the context of their fictional meaning and the formative part they play in the central character’s journey of self-quest.

³ Scottish poet and novelist, 1770–1835.

⁴ Adrien Hunter (2010) argues that James Hogg’s best-known work, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), most likely inspired Munro’s short story “Wilderness Station”.

⁵ I have borrowed the term from Martin Löschnigg, who also refers to the first-person narrator in *The View from Castle Rock* as “Munro’s fictional alter ego” (2009, 223).

⁶ John Knox (1514–1572), leader of the Scottish Reformation, who set the severe moral tone of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and shaped the democratic form of government it adopted.

3 Deathscapes

Deathscape is a notional landscape of death or the cultural practices that surround it,⁷ and as such, deathscapes are spaces connected to death, dying, mourning and remembrance. Human beings need “*lieux de mémoires*, symbolic spaces of remembrance [...] with their own spatio-temporal rules: time stands still and remembrance becomes eternal” (Klooster and Heirman 2013, 4). In Munro’s book, deathscapes are burial places occurring in the form of cemeteries, graves, or gravestones. They represent and preserve the past in a physical form, but in a symbolic sense, they also become spiritual milestones that mark the writer’s journey of self-quest as she is following in the footsteps of her predecessors. In spatial terms, *The View from Castle Rock* begins in an Etrick graveyard in Scotland, and it ends in a Canadian cemetery in Blyth, Ontario. The events of the book extend over 400 years, since the narrative begins in seventeenth-century Scotland and ends in the present.

The zero milestone of the story lies in the graveyard of the Etrick parish church in Scotland, where William Laidlaw, the great-great-great-grandfather of Munro was born at the end of the seventeenth century. The epitaph of the Laidlaw’s ancestor was composed by his grandson, James Hogg the writer: “Here lyeth W. L., the far-famed Will o’ Phaup, who for feats of frolic, agility and strength, had no equal in his day [...]” (Munro 2007, 7). The reader also learns that Will established a legendary reputation in the community as a fast runner, and a bootlegger by smuggling French brandy (Munro 2007, 10). As the sight of tombstones and epigraphs fuels the narrator’s imagination, it recalls the opening scene of Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, where the central character of the novel, Pip, visits the grave of his parents, whom he never met, and in his childish fantasy he imagines them with the help of the inscription on their gravestone. Similarly, in the writerly imagination, the character of Will grows into a mythical hero possessing larger-than-life qualities. The narrator draws a parallel between the antithetical nature of her ancestor’s character—a near pagan, a merry man, a brandy drinker, a man who listened to fairies and to the strict principles of the Calvinist faith—and the inherent contradictions of lives past and present (Munro 2007, 17).

In the course of the collection, graves and gravestones become emotional “gravity centers” (Piatti 2009, 181) that mark the stations on a journey that the narrator undertakes to connect with her family. The arrival in the Etrick village turns out to be a disappointing experience, as the “conspicuous, out of place, and cold” (Munro 2007, 6) setting compares so unfavourably to the dearly familiar landscapes of Canada:

I was struck with a feeling familiar, I suppose to many people whose long history goes back to a country far away from the place where they grew up. I was a naïve North American, in spite of my stored knowledge. Past and present lumped together here made a reality that was commonplace and yet disturbing beyond anything I had imagined. (Munro 2007, 7)

By staging herself as a naïve outsider—whose ancestors left the “Old World” in the hope of finding a better one—the narrator foreshadows the intensity of an emotionally disturbing

⁷ I have taken the definition of the *WordSense Online Dictionary* <https://www.wordsense.eu/deathscapel/>.

journey that, in the larger context of Munro's fiction, often "reveals a concern with the implications of space for identity formation" (McGill 2002, 10).

Graves and cemeteries are, on the one hand, real places, but they are also spaces of reflection that through the narrator's memory, outline broader spatiotemporal attachments between geographically and chronologically distant notions. Thus, the title chapter of the book connects the family history of past and present by recounting the story of the voyage and the emigration of Will's grandson, James Laidlaw, who makes the move to the new world at the unusual age of 60, following the loss of his wife at the birth of their sixth child. The tragic death of the wife marks a new beginning for the family, and it is a well-recorded event that on June 4th 1818, the Laidlaws, the father, James, his children Andrew, Walter and Mary, Andrew's son and wife, board a ship that takes them to Nova Scotia.⁸ The voyage was said to have been inspired by "the view from Castle Rock". According to the family anecdote, James and his son Andrew climb Castle Rock, the hill where Edinburgh Castle was built, and by pointing to the estuary, the father makes the boy believe that in the distance he can see America, the country that will one day become their home. The symbolic meaning of the scene on the one hand highlights the limited nature of our vision and the way distance distorts our perspective and understanding of the world. On the other hand, when our vision is blurred, we tend to fill in the invisible or missing content with the help of our imagination. Tina Trigg compares the illuminating nature of distance to the act of storytelling by observing that spatial and temporal remoteness and displacement fuel the mind's eye and offer new perspectives and meanings (2017, 123). In *The View from Castle Rock*, the writerly imagination becomes an essential structural device that mingles autobiographical and fictional elements as it moves between real and fictional locations. The first part of the book starts in the Scottish graveyard, and it ends 3357 miles from Ettrick parish, in the Canadian graveyard of Boston Church, Esquesing, in Halton County, Ontario, where the first Laidlaws and their descendants are buried (Munro 2007, 84–87). The temporal and spatial structure of the narrative maps essential connections between past and present, the old and the new worlds, and their influence on the narrator's family.

Deathscapes have the function of the *memento mori*, to remind us of mortality, and in Munro's book the concluding chapter, "What Do You Want to Know For?", expands the topic of quest to a more universal theme about the ultimate meaning of life and death at a time when the narrator faces the possibility of her own death. The chapter moves along two parallel plotlines: one follows the search for an ancient crypt that she once accidentally noticed during a yearly cross-country journey, while the other follows the medical search for a lump in the narrator's breast. Side by side with the sighting of the crypt, the doctor also sights the narrator's lump, and as with the many detours that pave the way to the crypt, the medical saga also entails several unproductive and postponed examinations. The crypt is set in the middle of a small country cemetery, and it looks "[l]ike a big woolly animal-

⁸ Val Ross claims: "The 12 stories in *Castle Rock* are as close as Munro has come to turning her family's life into stories. She uses author James Hogg's late-18th-century account of her folk, the Laidlaws, of the Ettrick Valley, south of Edinburgh. She quotes a Laidlaw diary describing the crossing to Canada in 1818, and selections from her father's novel *The Macgregors*." 2006. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/eating-and-talking-at-alices-restaurant/article12674739/>.

like some giant wombat, lolling around in a prehistoric landscape” (Munro 2007, 316). As the narrator and her geographer husband follow the guidance of a geological map, the deathscape journey leads them to a prehistoric past, where “[t]he landscape is a record of ancient events” (Munro 2007, 318). As the narrator moves beyond the surface and digs deeper into the past, her efforts symbolize a profound desire to connect with the eternal, enduringly timeless natural formations of the primeval land. Her admiration for the “chocolate burgundy color kame moraines that show where a heap of dead ice sat, cut off from the rest of the moving glacier, earth-stuff pouring through all its holes and crevices” evokes a deeper form of awe for the “wild”, “bumpy” and “unpredictable” surface that has “a look of chance and secrets” (Munro 2007, 321). Paradoxically, it is this geologically distant landscape that helps to resolve some of the family secrets when the traveller eventually discovers the crypt, but more importantly, she attains a deeper form of unity when she finds a living witness to her family. The scene when she acknowledges that “I am happy to find somebody who can see me still as part of my family” (Munro 2007, 332), once again foregrounds the symbolic sense of seeing that testifies to and confirms the narrator’s sense of belonging and her rightful membership in the family. In addition to spiritual transformation, this life-affirming journey also delivers physical healing, since the narrator’s breast lump turns out to be benign. In reference to the title-question of the chapter, “What Do You Want to Know For?” Morra notes: “The fact that Munro locates her queries and observations about glacial geography extends the nature and implication of the question” and “situates human curiosity within larger existential questions about why knowing is important and what ends it will serve” (2017, 265).

Deathscapes also form the narrative frame of the collection. As with the opening scene of the book in the Ettrick graveyard, the last story recounts the narrator’s search for the grave of the immigrant great-great-grandfather, who was known to have died in the United States in a place called Joliet, outside Chicago. Even though this search fails to bring the expected results, it provides an insightful paradox on the motifs of the narrator:

We are beguiled. It happens mostly in our old age, when our personal futures close down and we cannot imagine – sometimes cannot believe in – the future of our children’s children. We can’t resist this rifling around in the past, sifting the untrustworthy evidence, linking stray names and questionable dates and anecdotes together, hanging onto threads, insisting on being joined to dead people and therefore to life. (Munro 2007, 347)

The words “beguiled,” and “stray,” and the notion of “closing down,” allude to the inevitable losses and the general sense of decay and futility that accompany old age, yet the narrator also recalls that as human beings, we yearn to belong and “hang onto threads” that connect us to our past. In relation to the circular structure of the narrative, Miller concludes that graves and cemeteries meld to create a “rare and fascinating work, in which the past makes sense of the present and the present makes sense of the past” (2007, 21). In *The View from Castle Rock*, deathscapes on the one hand, serve as epistemological devices in the narrative, but more importantly, they also establish spatio-temporal connections between past and present and feature as emotional gravity centres along the narrator’s quest for her ancestral past.

4 Homes

In the most general sense of the word, a home is a place where one lives and most commonly refers to one's birthplace or homeland. In addition to identifying home as a place, Mallett emphasizes that home is "a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings [...] where particular activities and relationships are lived" (2004, 63). Besides being real places, homes are also imaginary spaces that provide essential experience for the development of identities, selves, and relationships. In the literary use of the word, home is variously described "as conflated with or related to house, family, haven, self, gender, and journeying" (Mallett 2004, 62). *The View from Castle Rock* reveals several meanings of home in relation to the physical location of the family house, the formative experience of home as a haven for gender, family relations and marriage, and home becomes a place of origin as well as a point of destination (Mallett 2004, 63).

For most people home is primarily linked to family, and it symbolizes the "birth family dwelling" (Mallett 2004, 73); as such, it also signifies family relationships (2004, 74). In the narrator's case the family house was situated on a nine-acre farm and was "an ordinary farmhouse" (Munro 2007, 182) with "an unusual location" (2007, 147):

To the east was the town, the church towers and the tower of the Town Hall visible when the leaves were off the trees, and on the mile or so of road between us and the main street there was a gradual thickening of houses, a turning of dirt paths into sidewalks, an appearance of a lone streetlight, so that you might say we were at the town's farthest edges, though beyond its legal municipal boundaries. [...] It was very seldom that you could see a stretch of country so empty, so seductive to the imagination, in our thickly populated farmland. (2007, 147)

The curious location occupies a liminal space that stretches beyond the town limits to the countryside of dirt paths yet is also within visible distance from the administrative and religious municipal centres. The description of the landscape foregrounds the seductive spiritual power the vast emptiness holds on the imagination, and in essence it may also symbolize a unique bond between the narrator's self-perception and the curious topography of her family-homeland.

The family home is a "place of intimacy" where human emotions are expressed (Bachelard 1969, 7); thus, the narrative shift from external to internal places also marks a subjective turn in the narrator's perspective when she recounts memories of her past life. Home is a place inhabited by the family and evokes mostly painful memories and many struggles at home and in the world outside. We learn that as a girl the narrator "was easily embarrassed [...] and could never stand up for anybody who was being humiliated" (Munro 2007, 184), including herself. Humiliation and shame are images that recur in the context of her most intimate relationships with friends and family. The protagonist describes shame as a perpetual feeling when "being beaten and of crying from the beating" (Munro 2007, 195), or as she projects her self-accusation onto her mother's allegedly "shameful behavior" because she was so much at ease with customers when selling them silver fox fur. As the narrator learns to identify herself with her family, she concludes that they "were decent people" (Munro 2007, 195),

and she blames herself for having a “self-important disputatious part that had to be beaten out of [her]” (194). By the time the narrator is eleven or twelve, the idealized father-figure has battered her three or four times (Munro 2007, 194), yet for the protagonist he remained “a man of honor and competence and humor, and he was the parent [she] sorely wanted to please” (2007, 195). The naïve child-like narrative voice that recounts the chapter “Fathers” reveals home to be a storehouse of repressed traumas that lay out a map of the narrator’s painful feelings, humiliation, and shame.

From a child’s perspective, an ideal home is a happy place with good family relationships and untroubled marriages. The chapter on “Home” is set at the time when the protagonist is nineteen years old and planning to get married. As she looks back on her life and tries to find out why she never had any boyfriends before, she reaches the conclusion that to become a desirable woman, she needs to get “away from home” (Munro 2007, 258). The young woman awaiting the great event of her life is anxious to find a suitable role-model as a wife, so she evaluates the various marriages she has witnessed at home, between her parents, grandparents and her aunt and uncle. She finds that her parents’ marriage was dramatically transformed when the mother developed Parkinson’s disease because of which she “began to seem more like his mother than his wife” and the former mother transfigured into an elderly relative who needed care and looking after (Munro 2007, 274). The grandparents’ marriage was similarly dysfunctional, because Grandmother Selina had not married the man she was in love with, and the “two of them were said to be as unlike as if they came from opposite sides of the moon” (Munro 2007, 275). While gathering these painstaking observations, the protagonist recalls the sharp emotional contrast she experienced in the vicinity of Uncle Cyril and Aunt Charlie:

the sense of obligation that grew monstrously around my father and my mother, and the stale air of irritability, of settled unease, that surrounded my grandparents—were absent from that one marriage, and that this was seen as something to comment on, like a perfect day in an uncertain season. (Munro 2007, 278)

The narrator also observes that the most striking aspect of the marriage that felt like “a perfect day” was that they “called each other by their first names, no Mother and Dad”, and the fact that they did not have any children “set them apart and linked them together not by function, but as their constant selves” (Munro 2007, 277). The narrator’s quest for love and companionship ends on the trope of a house in which marriage is compared to “a lighted and agreeable room you went into, where you were safe” (Munro 2007, 281).

The second major structural unit in *The View from Castle Rock* titled “Home” houses a subchapter with the same title that foregrounds the notion of a “a home within a home.” The protagonist returns to the family home after the death of her mother at the time when the father has remarried and lives in the old house with his new wife, Irlma. On this occasion homecoming takes the form of an exceedingly long and trying journey, including three separate bus rides. As the trip advances, roads and buses alike become smaller and less pleasant, reaching a culmination on an “old school bus with very uncomfortable seats which cannot be adjusted” (Munro 2007, 286). As the bus journey gets increasingly cumbersome, the narrator develops a growing sense of unease and anxiety that comes to a head when she

reaches her destination and enters the once familiar home. The description of the house exhibits numerous changes: the furniture is new, and so are the carpets and windows, the linoleum has been redone, and the old ceiling has been covered up and hidden. With the alteration of the original architectural design, the stylish old place has developed an ordinary look: “So it seems that this peculiar house—the kitchen part of it built in the eighteen-sixties—can be dissolved, in a way, lost, inside an ordinary comfortable house of the present time” (Munro 2007, 289). The loss and dissolution of the original design mark the new house-scape where the reminders of the long-dead mother “are not so easy to locate” (Munro 2007, 290). The new family member, Irlma, makes a final assault with a blunt remark claiming that the father “wished that she’d always been his wife, and not my mother” (Munro 2007, 300). In effect, the stepmother’s sharp pronouncement wipes out the family’s past and the narrator’s existence, and evokes a long line of painful memories and old feelings of guilt and regret in the character as she struggles to come to terms with her position as the eternal outsider:

Time and place can close in on me, it can easily seem as if I have never got away, that I have stayed here my whole life. As if my life as an adult was some kind of dream that never took hold of me. I see myself [...] like one of those misfits, captives – nearly useless, celibate, rusting – who should have left but didn’t, couldn’t, and are now unfit for any place. (Munro 2007, 312)

The protagonist’s desperate attempts to remain in control and her growing awareness of not belonging to the family culminate in the scene when the father is taken to hospital with a serious heart attack. Having to face the possible death of her remaining parent, the narrator realizes that this is not an ordinary visit, as “[t]he buses that run from place to place no longer seem so surely to connect with me” (Munro 2007, 311). Thus, the long and tedious journey reaches its destination when the middle-aged protagonist comprehends that her former home has become a place, a house that “does not mean as much to me as it once did” (Munro 2007, 290). This ultimate recognition helps the narrator to relinquish her dream for an ideal home and longing for acceptance. The visit turns into an epiphanic “journey of self-realization” that highlights “the traveler’s perceptions and the emotional impact of the journey on the self” (Botta 2018, 172). When the protagonist finally understands that “it was myself that I loved here—some self that I have finished with, and none too soon” (Munro 2007, 290), the long and painful passage ends on a hopeful note of acceptance.

5 Conclusion

Through its layering of stories, *The View from Castle Rock* maps a journey that explores forms of connectedness between place and self. Home, as a place of origin and return, structures the narrative between the ancestral birthplace of the family in Scotland and the narrator’s family home in Canada. The collection in many ways reads like a Bildungsroman recounting the protagonist’s journey of self-development from her early teens to middle age and reveals her many struggles to find her place in the female line of the family among Grandmother Selina, Aunt Charlie, and the ambivalent mother figure. In family histories homes and graves are both real and symbolic spaces, which connect times and places of the past to the present, and both represent the multi-layered richness of spatial images; this action is similar to the living

universe of fiction, where “space is marked by a myriad of associations and meanings in the past, present, and future” (Verraest and Keunen 2013, 35).

In the epilogue, titled “Messenger,” the disparate family burial places and homes are joined in the cemetery of Blyth, in Ontario, where the narrator visits the graves of the rest of her family. In the graveyard the storyteller recalls a vivid memory of a house that she once visited and where she saw

a big mother-of-pearl seashell that I recognized as a messenger from near and far, because I could hold it to my ear—when nobody was there to stop me—and discover the tremendous pounding of my own blood, and of the sea. (Munro 2007, 349)

Timelessness and the wonderful feminine symbols of mother and sea confirm the narrator’s powerful sense of belonging and connectedness. The “Messenger” also announces Munro’s artistic credo, and the ultimate role of the storyteller as a messenger between past and present times: a messenger who “has recorded all the names and stories of the different family members across the generations and joined them to the living people” (2007, 348).

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Adverbials of Time, Time Expressions and Tense Shifts in Alice Munro's "Dance of the Happy Shades"

ABSTRACT

Alice Munro, the first female Canadian to have been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, is a literary challenge and delight for the reader also with regards to the usage of references to time and their linguistic construction. Her literary work comprises short stories and one novel, which can more accurately be described as a short story cycle. She takes interest in everyday, small-town life and the human relationships in it, all described in concise, down-to-earth language. The settings in most of her stories are limited communities in a typically Canadian context. This paper deals with her short story "Dance of the Happy Shades" from the collection of the same name (1968), and focuses on a stylistic analysis of time expressions, tense shifts and adverbials of time. Munro has been praised for constructing moods of familiarity, home and small-town safety. The paper attempts to show that she achieves this not solely through the plot and themes, but also with the meticulous care with which she uses time expressions, time adverbials and tense shifts.

Keywords: Alice Munro, "Dance of the Happy Shades", stylistics, adverbials of time, time expressions, tense shifts

Časovni prislovi, izražanje časa in menjavanje slovničnih časov v zgodbi Alice Munro "Dance of the Happy Shades"

IZVLEČEK

Pisanje Alice Munro, prve Kanadčanke, ki je prejela Nobelovo nagrado za književnost, predstavlja literarni izziv in užitek za bralca tudi v smislu rabe časovnih referenc in njihovih jezikovnih konstrukcij. Literarni opus Alice Munro sestavljajo kratke zgodbe in roman oz. cikel kratkih zgodb. Avtorica se v njih osredotoča na vsakdanje življenje v majhnem mestu in tamkajšnje človeške odnose, vse to pa opisuje v prizemljenem, na videz jedrnatem jeziku. Večina njenih zgodb se odvija v majhnih, tipično kanadskih skupnostih. Pričujoči prispevek obravnava kratko zgodbo »Dance of the Happy Shades« iz zbirke z istim naslovom (1968) in v njej slogovno analizira časovne prislove, izražanje časa in menjavanje slovničnih časov. Alice Munro slovi po tem, da zna ustvariti občutek domačnosti in varnosti, ki sta značilni za majhno skupnost. Prispevek pokaže, da tega ne doseže zgolj skozi dogodke in teme, ampak tudi z načinom izražanja časa in uporabe časovnih prislovov ter menjavanjem slovničnih časov.

Ključne besede: Alice Munro, »Dance of the Happy Shades«, stilistika, časovni prislovi, izražanje časa, menjave slovničnih časov



1 Introduction

A fascination with time, the various ways of expressing it as well as consciously elaborating on this fascination are frequently present in literary texts. Authors often refer to its unavoidable passing, like Andrew Marvell in his poem “To His Coy Mistress”: “But at my back I always hear/Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near” (Marvell 1681), or wittily express alienation, like Tennessee Williams in Tom’s utterance from the final scene of *The Glass Menagerie*: “I didn’t go to the moon, I went much further – for time is the longest distance between places” (Williams 1999, 1379). The dangers of interfering with time, even in a supernatural way, are reflected in the words of Albus Dumbledore, the famous headmaster of Hogwarts from the *Harry Potter* series: “Mysterious thing, Time. Powerful, and when meddled with, dangerous” (Cuarón 2004). Time is a complex structure to present and use creatively in narration and thus requires considerable mastery of language and storytelling, yet in Munro’s writing it seems natural and seamless in the way it supports the flow of events and helps to lead the reader’s attention to certain moments in the stories’ present. Her narration keeps the reader in coherence with the timeline, while subtly manipulating time. She has a way of presenting time with linguistic means and creating a gateway for the reader into the story, making them feel as if the events are happening as the reader proceeds through the narrative. She achieves that by shifting tenses from past to present, creating the distinct step into the *now* of the story. She also links Simple Past and Present Perfect in a strategic way that corresponds to the classic grammatical use of perfect tenses, yet applied in her manner to weave a particular atmospheric effect of generational cosiness. In “Dance of the Happy Shades”, she describes how mothers and daughters take part in the same rituals in the same places and situations. The ritual of going to the same hairdresser, the same piano teacher or the same dentist for generations automatically spells the familiarity that is the focus of this paper, since it conceives a time frame without specifically mentioning dates or using explicit linguistic categories expressing time. These are only some of the most salient stylistic devices Munro uses when exploring time and which will be analysed in this paper on the example of the story “Dance of the Happy Shades”. Munro also orchestrates a whole lifetime passing and changing in the brief duration of the story, while still according it greater significance than just the sum of passing minutes, as observed by Inas Hassan: “Each of Munro’s stories is an attempt to survey the lives of girls and women in particular in an expanded way, presenting a whole life, not just the epiphany of the moment which is the key characteristic of the short story” (2020, 1216).

This paper addresses the fictional creation of a sense of time, primarily with the use of time adverbials and other expressions of time in the selected story from her first collection. The choice of text was based on its conformist narrative usage of time in Munro’s early writing, which indicates her fascination with simple, everyday occurrences, rituals and social gatherings from an early stage in her publishing, and which seems to have remained in Munro’s writing throughout her career. In compliance with this stylistic principle, “simple, everyday” time is ingrained in her early writing and thus in this story.

2 “Dance of the Happy Shades” and Munro’s Writing Style

“Dance of the Happy Shades” was published in Munro’s first short story collection of the same name by Ryerson Press in 1968 (Shearer 2015, 195) and won the 1968 Governor

General's Award for English Fiction. The story revolves around an annual recital organised by a seemingly naive piano teacher whose passage through life is represented through the changes occurring from year to year at the recital. Her shrinking housing, downsized from the previous location, the health deterioration of her sister and the snacks that remain unfashionably the same illustrate the subtle way in which Munro spins time into her narrative web to make the reader subconsciously aware of it. A significant juxtaposition in the story is created in the scene of the performing children when a special-needs pupil delivers the best performance of all the participating children.¹ To Miss Marsalles, such unexpected talent is the simple reward of a lifetime of service to art and not a discordant terminal marker in the temporal flow of her life. As Munro's narrator constructs it, however, the unusual event punctuates fictive temporal flow, casting a retrospective glance back over the decades of change that have been mediated by adverbials and verb tenses.

Dance of the Happy Shades (the collection and its title story) forms part of the greater Canadian opus of short stories that spans centuries. As Michelle Gadpaille (1989, 11–12) states in her overview of the Canadian short story, it goes back to Thomas McCulloch and Thomas Chandler Haliburton in the 19th century, then over the comic touch of Stephen Leacock and all the way to turn-of-the-century writers like Isabella Valancy Crawford and Susie Frances Harrison, and then to 20th-century masters like Mavis Gallant, Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro.

Both Canadian geography and colonial culture have been evoked to explain the nation's rich and prolific production in short fiction; theories by authors like W. H. New (1986, 8) suggest that the popularity of the short story in Canada results from a marginalized colonial culture and a marginalised genre. It is, however, clear that this genre has long moved to the central place in Canadian literature and has acquired a status that many contemporary writers have consolidated. One of the most visible authors, apart from Munro, is Margaret Atwood, who became "a voice of Canada" with "her ability to serve up quips, her outright humour, and her genius at interweaving the past and the present, even as she explores modern Canadian myths" (Onič et al. 2020, 38). The genre itself seems to have been influenced by the way foreign observers see the world through their culture. Gerald Lynch (2001) points out that short fiction enables Canadian writers to work with subversive irony in a form that is not the dominant genre in the overwhelming culture to the south or in the colonial homeland of Great Britain. In "Dance of the Happy Shades" the short story demonstrates its capacity to express both the rootedness in community, their culture and their rituals flowing through time and a broader Canadian cultural framework.

Munro, as one of the most salient writers of the Canadian short story, displays these roots in culture, particularly in the culture and thoughts of ordinary people. "Labelled a 'post-modernist' author, or a writer of 'magic realism', Alice Munro has been praised for her vivid and lifelike descriptions of ordinary people and settings in her fiction" (Powell 2008, 12), and as Bosman (2013, 121) further suggests, her work has been described as revolutionizing the architecture of short stories, especially in its tendency to move forward and backward in time. Munro

¹ For a discussion of this story's treatment of Down Syndrome and dementia, see Marlene Goldman. 2016. "Re-imagining Dementia in the Fourth Age: The Ironic Fictions of Alice Munro," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 39 (2): 285–302.

has been the recipient of many literary prizes such as the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature, the 2009 Man Booker International Prize for her lifetime body of work, three Canada's Governor General's Awards for fiction, the Writers' Trust of Canada's 1996 Marian Engel Award, and the 2004 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize for *Runaway*. As highlighted in this paper, her writing style is recognised as presenting an illusion of the comfortable and familiar.

Throughout Munro's stories, intangible impulses between the protagonist and some other element – other characters, the past, a code of morality or behaviour – shift between the rational and the irrational, between the familiar comfortable world and uncertainty and illusion – to create a tension which gives Munro's writing its haunting and disturbing quality (Pfaus 1984, 23).

Munro has herself pointed to the fact that she enjoys meddling with time in her narration, allowing time and its expressions in her stories a way to create her own unmistakable style:

In commenting on her writing technique, Munro explains that she never adopts a chronological or linear development. Munro's stories are not meant to be read in the traditional way from beginning to end. Though traditional short stories are conventionally characterized by unity of time and place, the contrary is found in Munro's collections. (Hassan 2020, 1216)

The connection of the familiar and the comfortable with time in Munro's writing is evident from the observations of both literary critics and readers. Considering her passion for manipulating time, it makes sense to consider time in literature as a concept. In his overview paper on concepts of time and literary criticism, Carsten Elbro (1986, 99–100) categorizes views on time into three general views: the idealist, the realist and the relational one. In this paper, time in Munro's writing is viewed as relational: "time is a result of the interaction between man and his surroundings" (Elbro 1986, 100), and it will be demonstrated that the repeated actions and observations of the characters create the steady flow of time in the story.

3 Representation of Time in "Dance of the Happy Shades"

Munro's characters in "Dance of the Happy Shades" are ordinary people, who perceive time by observing the ordinary moments around them. They live from annual recital to annual recital of the local piano teacher, where they get to see time pass in minuscule changes to the environment and the people they see each year. The rootedness in the culture and repetition of ordinary events create a sense of familiarity and an impression of being stuck in a moment in time. Munro's use of time expressions, adverbs of time and tense shifts co-create her signature feel of familiarity in the constant and repetitive rhythm of life perceived by simple people in Canadian towns and suburbs, as well as by the reader. The stylistic analysis will first focus on analysis of the adverbs of time.

3.1 Adverbs of Time

General definitions of adverbs usually determine them as words which further describe or define other words such as verbs, adjectives and other adverbs (Richards, Platt, and Platt

1992, 2) or define circumstances of things happening, such as time, place, manner and frequency, as well as sentence adverbs (Eastwood 1999, 270–1). This chapter primarily focuses on adverbs of time and frequency and closely examines their function and impact. Looking at the theory of time adverb classification will help to illustrate which categories are used in Munro’s story and in what way.

Adverbs of time and frequency express when and how often something happens, or when it is happening, for example, *often, now, never, daily, or occasionally*. (Swan 2005, xix). *Now*, which has a specific role in this story, is a general adverb of time. According to Quirk et al. (1985, 542–43), adverbs of frequency describe a span of time; in other words, they respond to *wh*-questions like *how many times, how often*, etc. The classification of adverbs of frequency is sub-divided into definite and indefinite frequency. The former group contains adjuncts which name explicitly the times by which the frequency is measured, while the latter contains adjuncts which do not name explicitly the time by which frequency is measured. Definite frequency can be sub-divided into period frequency (*hourly, daily, nightly, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually*, etc.), occasion frequency (*once, twice, thrice*), usual occurrences (*usually, commonly, customarily, normally*, etc.), continuous universal frequency (*always, constantly, continuously*, etc.), high frequency (*frequently, often, regularly, repeatedly*), low frequency (*infrequently, irregularly, occasionally*, etc.) or adverbs that denote rare occurrences (*seldom, rarely, scarcely*) (Quirk et al. 1985).

Martin and White (2005, 54) also point out an interesting connection between adverbs of frequency and modality. They explain that modality is subdivided into modalization and modulation, and modalization is further divided into probability and usuality, which is further connected to judgements of normality. The following quote illustrates the connection of usuality and judgements of normality:

Similarly, modalities of usuality can be related to judgements of normality: He’s naughty. He’s often naughty. It’s usual for him to be naughty. It’s normal for him to be naughty. It’s normal, average, fashionable, peculiar, odd, etc. [judgement: normality]. (Martin and White 2005, 54)

This finding illustrates how adverbs of frequency can aid the feelings of what we deem normal, abnormal, usual and familiar; how these can influence the mood of a story will be illustrated further, since “Dance of the Happy Shades” depends for its effect on the illusion of predictable normality interrupted by the uncannily abnormal.

Adverbs of time fulfil these functions in Munro’s story, i.e., they create the feel of time frequency, time passage, general time location and feelings of normality, as in the case of *now*. In the story, we can observe adverbs of period frequency (*yearly* and *year after year*, an idiom serving as an adverb of period frequency), occasional frequency (*once*), unusual occurrences (*unusually*) and continuous universal frequency (*always, forever*). Of Quirk’s seven categories of adverbs of frequency, Munro uses four, which is a relatively high number of categories. They create an interplay in presentation of the repetitiveness that creates a cosy, familiar feeling with adverbs of higher frequency as in this passage:

It was the same room, exactly the same room, in which they had performed themselves; a room whose dim impersonal style (the flossy bunch of peonies and spirea dropping petals on the piano was Miss Marsalles' own touch and not entirely happy) was at the same time uncomfortable and reassuring. Here they found themselves *year after year* ... (Munro 1989, 154; my emphasis)

This passage illustrates how the sameness and repetitiveness in the surroundings play on the reader's temporal sense to create an atmosphere of the familiar and cosy. Each generation grows up in the same environment and has the same mundane experiences from a slightly different angle, as a child or, in turn, as a parent. Those are repetitive cycles with which almost every reader can identify and experience as familiar and cosy. The familiarity effect that I am suggesting has much in common with the theory of transactive memory as posited by Michelle Gadpaille: "By deploying rhetorically loaded words such as *afterwards* or *whatever*, Munro's narrator coopts us into sharing a space that includes a memory or experience that we do not literally possess" (Gadpaille 2016, 6). The adverbials highlighted in "Dance of the Happy Shades" perform a similar co-optation function by ascribing shared *time* as well as space. The following excerpt offers another example of continuous universal frequency:

After the piano-playing came a little ceremony which *always* caused some embarrassment. (Munro 1989, 154; my emphasis)

Here we see the same effect at play: the ceremony of Miss Marsalles giving out gift-wrapped books to the children who have performed, an awkward ceremony held after each piano recital, and which causes the same emotions for several generations, and that too is something every reader can recognise as familiar.

Some adverbs point out the rare occasions when something unusual occurs and do that as a contrastive emphasis of the repetitiveness itself:

Miss Marsalles' idealistic view of children, her tender- or simple-mindedness in that regard, made her almost useless as a teacher; she was unable to criticize except in the most delicate and apologetic way and her praises were unforgivably dishonest; it took an *unusually* conscientious pupil to come through with anything like a creditable performance. (Munro 1989, 153; my emphasis)

The time adverb *unusually* is the direct opposite of Quirk's usual occurrences category, which contains *usually* as a time frequency indicator of how often something happens; the contrasting case of the time adverbial *unusually* in the passage above indicates the rarity of an occurrence. Miss Marsalles is so predictable and repetitive in her instruction and feedback to her students, that it would merit an unusual child, thus an unusual occurrence in time to change anything. The exception to the rule highlights the familiar ritual the piano teacher goes through with all the generations she teaches, and knowing what feedback may come from a teacher creates a lulling familiarity, whereas a completely different one would destroy the cosy atmosphere and show how unusual change would be in the time suspension of Miss Marsalles and her life.

Another adverb of time that has significance in Munro's story is *now*. It notably occurs in the first two paragraphs:

Poor Carrie is having her tonsils out. In the end all she can say is: Oh, but won't all that be too much trouble, *now*? *Now* being weighted with several troublesome meanings; you may take your choice. (Munro 1998, 152; my emphasis)

In this instance, the adverb is used in the context of a banal everyday occurrence of a standard, minor surgical procedure and evokes the question of convenience in the adverb *now*, followed by an unmistakable meta-comment on the meaning of time in the adverbial use, inviting the reader to create their own interpretation. Here Munro exhibits one of her marriages between familiar and odd, mundane and weird, which mark her writing style. Even though having one's tonsils removed would not have been unusual at that time, the fact that it is highlighted as inconvenient in the story underlines the cosy, routine unfolding of life in the story. For such a mundane occurrence to be a disturbance now or at any given time, the temporal progression must be uneventful overall. The adverb *now* also continues to haunt the story's opening paragraph:

Now that Miss Marsalles has moved from the brick and frame bungalow on Bank Street, where the last three parties have been rather squashed, to an even smaller place – if she has described it correctly – on Bala Street. (Bala Street, where is that?) Or: *now* that Miss Marsalles' older sister is in bed, following a stroke; *now* that Miss Marsalles herself – as my mother says, we must face these things – is simply getting too old. (Munro 1998, 152; my emphasis)

The extension to the phrase *now that* indicates the well-developed construction of time passing through change. *Now that* indicates that it was not like this before.² Two more examples of this juxtaposition of *then* and *now* and the temporal shift appear in this passage:

Piano lessons are not so important *now* as they *once* were; everybody knows that. (Munro 1998, 153; my emphasis)

In these two passages, the author ventures into a stylistic antithesis of *then* and *now* that points out minuscule changes we might notice only in a cosy, familiar environment where everything is so well-known that only there do they become salient. Antithesis, etymologically suggesting opposition, “a stylistic pair figure in the text used for expressive-visual, humorous, ironic, evaluative and other purposes” (Ruzibaeva 2019, 149), illustrates how a stylistic feature serves both ironic and evaluative purposes; Munro has foregrounded a mundane shift in local habits conjuring temporal depth into the cosy, small-town narrative mood. The following example adds another layer of awareness of the present:

The door is standing open. Miss Marsalles is wedged between the door, the coatrack and the stairs; there is barely room to get past her into the living room, and it would

² The phrase *now that* also has a causal meaning as stated in the *Cambridge Online Dictionary* (n.d.): “now (that) conjunction US /'naʊ (ðət)/ You use now that to give an explanation of a new situation: *Now that I live only a few blocks from work, I walk to work and enjoy it.*”

be impossible, the way things are *now*, for anyone to get from the living room upstairs. (Munro 1998, 155; my emphasis)

The antithesis here shows the difference between how Miss Marsalles used to live and the current living conditions, but it also indicates that now, in the present, the spatial arrangement has social significance, as the phrasing issues an invitation to visualize the cramped space. The combination of the adverb with mundane life shifts, such as moving house, getting older or getting ill creates an unmistakable Munroian atmosphere, where the reader joins the narrator in their position on the story's timeline.

In Munro's usage, those small rituals build a constant rhythm to evoke a feeling of "I know this, this is familiar" and add to the mosaic of her style. The juxtaposition of constancy and flux comes to a ruthless halt in the closing paragraph of the story, where attendance at Miss Marsalles' parties must now cease "quite certainly forever" (Munro 1998, 160), where *forever* becomes the cruellest adverb. In general, the adverbs used in the story display the interplay of ritual and disturbance of ritual to create the atmosphere characteristic of Munro's writing. The next literary device Munro uses to show repetition and familiarity involves a selection of phrases expressing time. These are analysed in the following section.

3.2 Repetitiveness and Familiarity

Repetitiveness is a common phenomenon in spoken and written discourse, while repetition schemes are particularly frequent elements in literary texts. In the latter, recurring patterns can be observed on the micro- as well as the macro-structural level of the discourse. In the latter, these patterns emerge in the plot features, while at the level of text, the patterns of repetition are a significant stylistic feature as noted by many stylisticians (Leech and Short 2007, 63–64, 164; Simpson 2004, 50; Burke 2014, 25). It has been frequently researched in concrete literary discourse, where it materializes in a variety of functions, such as contributing to the creation of gothic effects, projecting trapped emotion, creating menacing atmosphere, enhancing violence, or preserving rhetorical effects in translation, etc. (Zupan 2006; Kusovac and Pralas 2016; Onič and Prajnč Kacijan 2019; Mohar, Orthaber, and Onič 2020; Plemenitaš 2020; Gadpaille and Zupan 2020, 18). Several of these studies also find that the effects of repetitive stylistic patterns are often affected by the translation process and the perception and interpretative potential of the target text is different, mostly narrower, than that of the original.

In "Dance of the Happy Shades", there are a micro level and a macro level of repetition that coexist and produce a synergy to highlight the life routine, creating the impression of familiarity and peace. The micro level comprises repetition in words and phrases, and the macro level creates repetition on the level of plot and semantic word usage. These levels of repetition evoke the constant passage of years in the lives and events in the story. The first stylistic feature involving repetition at the micro level is anadiplosis and can be observed in a passage already analysed for its adverbials:

Oh, but won't all that be too much trouble, *now*? *Now* being weighted with several troublesome meanings; you may take your choice. (Munro 1998, 152; my emphasis)

It is interesting that in this passage we find the anadiplosis specifically with the time adverb *now*. That indicates repetition not just on a micro level, but also a connection to the macro level of repetition, both creating the mood of the familiar as they place us in the *now* of the story. The next feature creating repetition on the micro level is the use of anaphora:

Now that Miss Marsalles has moved from the brick and frame bungalow on Bank Street, where the last three parties have been rather squashed, to an even smaller place – if she has described it correctly – on Bala Street. (Bala Street, where is that?) Or: *now* that Miss Marsalles’ older sister is in bed, following a stroke; *now* that Miss Marsalles herself – as my mother says, we must face these things – is simply getting too old. (Munro 1998, 152; my emphasis)

But on the whole the affair in those days *had* solidity, *it had* tradition, in its own serenely out-of-date way *it had* style. (Munro 1998, 153; my emphasis)

An anaphora with variation, is reinforced by parallelism in these two passages:

And she asks how her June party could ever be too much trouble, *at any time, in any place?* (Munro 1998, 152; my emphasis)

But then *driving* home, *driving* out of the hot red-brick streets and out of the city and leaving Miss Marsalles and her *no longer* possible parties behind, ... (Munro 1998, 160; my emphasis)

The anaphora examples are intricately used with time expressions and words such as *now*, *at any time*, and *no longer*, showing the same effect of interweaving the micro and macro levels of repetition. The next element on the micro level are two examples of epiphora or epistrophe:

It was *the same room*, exactly *the same room*, in which they had performed themselves; a room whose dim impersonal style (the flossy bunch of peonies and spirea dropping petals on the piano was Miss Marsalles’ own touch and not entirely happy) was at the same time uncomfortable and reassuring. (Munro 1998, 152; my emphasis)

And all that this girl does – but this is something you would not think could ever be done – is to play it so that this can be *felt*, all this can be *felt*, even in Miss Marsalles’ living-room on Bala Street on a preposterous afternoon. (Munro 1998, 159; my emphasis)

Both instances of epiphora reinforce the rhythmic repetition, creating an even pace of words and a sense of familiarity that momentarily fends off the intrusion of the “preposterous” event of musical prodigy. Another micro level repetition is the following epizeuxis:

The mothers sit, caught with a look of protest on their faces, a more profound anxiety than before, as if reminded of something that *they had forgotten they had forgotten*; the white-haired girl sits ungracefully at the piano with her head hanging down, and the music is carried through the open door and the windows to the cindery summer street. (Munro 1998, 159; my emphasis)

These micro level repetitions help create the intimate style, and as seen above, some also correlate directly to the macro level in the types of words repeated. The next few instances will illustrate the macro level of repetition in the story.

The piano recital party happens around the same time every year; every year the children learning piano are the same and different; they are taken to the recital by their mothers, who used to take piano lessons with the same teacher, in the same rooms, receiving the same gifts as their children, and this happens for many successive years. It is so repetitive that it seems to have become timeless; there is no mention of when and where it started, and there is no knowing when it will stop, apart from the inevitable death of the now elderly piano teacher, but there is no mention of that possibility in the story; it all continues from year to year, morphing into a passage from youth, to middle age, to old age.

The time expression “Here they found themselves *year after year*” (Munro 1998, 154; my emphasis) describes repetition and constant actions taken at the same time. This creates a feeling of safety within a small community, apparent in the following narrator’s comment: “but who were drawn together by a rather implausible allegiance – not so much to Miss Marsalles as to the ceremonies of their childhood” (Munro 1998, 154), which presents a link to the past. The same rituals have been occurring since their childhood, in the same house, in the same community, in the same time frames; the mood of familiarity is constantly re-constructed, as every community of people has rituals that connect and changeless buildings that engulf.

An occurrence that stands out, yet creates an atmosphere of intimacy is the narrator’s apparently offhand remark: “*Last year* a child had a nosebleed” (Munro 1998, 152; my emphasis). The sheer banality of the occurrence and the subsequent mild outrage immediately draw attention to the interwoven, rhythmical, usually undisturbed time frames of the events which can be “disrupted” by a simple nosebleed. The prosaic uneventfulness of those parties means that a nosebleed is a mildly shocking event. This scene depicts an almost generalized image of ordinary suburban existence.³

As shown in this section, time expressions combine with certain rhetorical figures to co-create the signature Munro feel of familiarity and of a routine that somehow includes the reader. In “Dance of the Happy Shades”, we find the repetitive rhythm at both the micro level of language use and the macro level of the yearly recital, with the same mothers bringing their children, their children reliving the same recitals and receiving the same gifts. Although human beings do find solace in a certain amount of repetition, the insistent patterning in this story stifles us into the recognition that time can cycle or stand still for only so long and that the era of the recitals is over.

3.3 Grammatical Tense Shifts

Tense usage is a universally important and semantically powerful feature in the English language, and according to Fludernik, particularly so in literary narration:

³ In contrast to Munro’s usual small-town setting, “Dance of the Happy Shades” unfolds in Toronto, with the mention of its fashionable neighbourhood (Rosedale) and of other recognizable streets, to which the recital moves as Miss Marsalles’ budget shrinks and her housing choices become restricted.

Tense in narrative and non-narrative texts performs a variety of functions, not all of which are properly temporal or aspectual. In particular, tense relates to the passing of time (duration), sequentiality, chronology and the expression of subjectivity (frequently linked with aspect). In addition, tense is here argued to fulfil textual functions of foregrounding and backgrounding over and above plot-related foregrounding. (Fludernik 2003, 117)

Accordingly, tenses in narration do not just function for moving from one moment to the next but can also be used for foregrounding. That is a linguistic strategy for calling attention to specific linguistic and thematic features, and in “Dance of the Happy Shades” Munro does that with tense use. She draws attention to the present moment in the story by going from past tense narration to the present, pulling the reader into the story to share the atmosphere of familiarity and cosiness, as seen in this passage:

But after the house in Rosedale was gone, after it had given way to the bungalow on Bank Street, these conversations about Miss Marsalles’ means did not take place; this aspect of Miss Marsalles’ life had passed into that region of painful subjects which it is crude and unmannerly to discuss.

“I will die if it rains,” my mother says. “I will die of depression at this affair if it rains.” But the day of the party it does not rain and in fact the weather is very hot. It is a hot gritty summer day as we drive down into the city and get lost, looking for Bala Street. (Munro 1998, 155)

In this passage, Munro moves from describing the recital in previous years, to anticipating the upcoming recital, switching the narration from a variety of past tenses to present tense. This specific device is known as a verb-tense shift, which is defined by Moxley as follows:

A verb-tense shift occurs when a writer changes tense within a single piece of writing. Tense is the term for what time frame verbs refer to. Standard American English has a number of tenses, each of which is a variation on past, present, or future. Any switching of tense within a sentence, paragraph, or longer piece of writing is a verb tense shift. (Moxley, n.d.)

By using this verb-tense shift, Munro creates an intimate shared past, a world where the reader is almost fully present. By establishing increments of mundane events playing out right in front of us in the present, she implicates the reader in the story; with the shift to the present, the narrator creates an illusion of *now* and invites readers to share it. A similar point is made by Hassan, who claims that Munro’s texts “frequently contain instances of anachrony that signal some relationship between the past and the present” (2020, 1216):

Munro utilizes various devices in order to create the feeling of life which is extended through time. One of such devices, which are frequently employed by Munro in her narrative universe, is the use of time shifts in favor of linear chronological order of events. In such a way, the author often either jumps backwards to fill in a past event or leaps forward surprising her reader with the changes caused by time. (Hassan 2020, 1216)

The “I will die if it rains” passage above illustrates Hassan’s point that tense shifts serve to create a window for narrating the past within the story and at the same time highlight that jump to the present, the *now* of the upcoming party. This device pulls us further into the familiar rhythm and pace of suburban life. We tell stories while we live in the present, and this shift imposes bifocal vision on the reader, where a borrowed past morphs into a shared present.

Munro’s use of the perfect tenses complies with their traditional grammatical use; however, it is the meticulous planning of their placement in the context of the seemingly conventional and expected discourse that foregrounds them and thus makes them stylistically interesting. This stylistic use corresponds to elements at the level of plot, since the talk among and about the multiple generations of mothers who used to attend Miss Marsalles’ classes as their children do now highlights the time difference that divides the events in the story. The characters’ own story discourse thus creates the linkage between past and present:

Every June reveals some new and surely significant dropping-out. Mary Lambert’s girl no longer takes; neither does Joan Crimble’s. What does this mean? think my mother and Marg French, women who *have moved* to the suburbs and are plagued sometimes by a feeling that they *have fallen behind*, that their instincts for doing the right thing *have become confused*. (Munro 1998, 153)

In this passage, Present Perfect expresses a stage that is apparently far from perfect. These mothers worry about their social and moral positioning, expressed in two cases by verbs of motion (*move, fall*). In the final case there is the more anxiety-inducing verb *become*. The resulting moral confusion, already fed by the deteriorating condition of the Marsalles household, will be exacerbated by the artistry of the marginalised child.

4 Conclusion

In creating generational cosiness in her stories, Munro relies on a style that has become recognizable for its unique ability to convince the reader that they share common memories with the narrator (Gadpaille 2016, 3-6). Both readers and critics often see this in her plot development and the choice of her geographical setting (Martin 1987, 56), but here it is argued that this is also created through time expressions, tense shifts and time adverbials.

The analysis has shown that the strategic stylistic deployment of these features can create a mood of familiarity between the reader and events in a text. This early story indicates that Munro had successfully achieved this even in her first collection. The adverbials point to foregrounding of everyday occurrences and how they depict routine, constant and familiar time intervals, while tense shifts allow us to zoom in to the mundane events on repeated occasions.

We have also shown Munro successfully creating patterns of repetition throughout the story on a linguistic micro level and a semantic and plot-related macro level. She combines these to show the constant pace of repetitive cycles and to evoke a mood of familiarity, what I have chosen to call generational cosiness. The rhythmical repetition that characterizes music and

dance extends from the story's title through its adverbial fabric. It would not be Alice Munro, however, if she did not betray this cosiness with the eruption of the abnormal, the unexpected gift of the music offered by the special-needs pupil. For Miss Marsalles, this prodigy fits seamlessly into her time-resistant world view, merely the fulfilment of the prophecy for which every music teacher waits. For the uneasy mothers at the recital, however, this performance sets a marker in time – constructing a *now* in which they no longer wish to participate.

The paper illustrates how time and the representation of time are utilised in creating atmosphere and mood in “Dance of the Happy Shades”, which is rarer than creating mood through, for example, imagery or adjectives. It also adds to the body of research exploring time as co-inclusive of the reader.

The connections drawn here between stylistic devices of time expression and familiarity could spark further inquiry into Munro's narratology in her other writing. It might help to frame questions about the formation of style and its narrative function in mediating narrator/reader positionality through expressions of time.

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Thresholds and What Seems to Be: Munro's First Sentences

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of Alice Munro's first sentences from her 149 stories published in her 14 collections. Despite the epithet "Munroesque," there is a remarkable variety to the typical Munro story and Munro's style. Many of her stories begin with short, mundanely declarative sentences of a few words; many other first sentences stretch over several lines; many foreground time or, more accurately, time past. The variety of these first sentences might lead the cataloguer to despair or to proclaim fatuously that *the Munroesque quality of her fiction lies in how different it all is* Though generalizations are dangerous, there is one constant: for all their stylistic diversity, Munro's first sentences tend to establish a tension between what is realistic and tangible and the seeming, what lies beneath or hidden.

Ključne besede: Alice Munro, stylistics, first sentences, short story

Med vidnim in navideznim: uvodne povedi v prozi Alice Munro

IZVLEČEK

V prispevku so obravnavane uvodne povedi iz 149 kratkih zgodb Alice Munro, objavljenih v 14 zbirkah. Čeprav se je za njen slog uveljavila oznaka »monrojevski«, so si zgodbe med seboj po svojih slogovnih značilnostih zelo različne. Uvodne povedi so tako pogosto kratke in preproste, po drugi strani pa lahko obsegajo tudi več vrstic. V njih je pogosto poudarjen čas, še posebej pretekli časi. Pravzaprav se izkaže, da se povedi med seboj tako razlikujejo, da nas lahko vsak poskus njihovega razvrščanja pripelje na robu obupa, ali pa preprosto do ugotovitve, da je *bistvo monrojevskih značilnosti njene proze v njeni različnosti* ... Čeprav so posplošitve vedno tvegane, je jasno eno: uvodne povedi Munrojeve kljub njihovi slogovni raznovrstnosti zaznamuje razhajanje med realnim in oprijemljivim na eni strani in med dozdevnim, nevidnim in prikritim na drugi.

Keywords: Alice Munro, stilistika, uvodne povedi, kratka zgodba

1 Introduction

On the cover of *The Beggar Maid* (published as *Who Do You Think You Are?* in Canada), A. S. Byatt pronounces Alice Munro “the greatest living short story writer.” Critic James Wood places her beside Jane Austen as one of the “greatest realists” (2008, 247). Harold Bloom, never one to praise lightly, admits that “ordinary unhappiness, which in others is not colorful to us, is an achievement for most of her women and many of her men,” but mitigates this by saying she “lacks the fine madness of great literary art” (2009, 1–2). Tamas Dobozy, another fine short story writer from Canada, reveres Munro precisely for her lack of madness, for her ability “to make the quotidian so readable” and her fearlessness in narrating the everyday “plainly in all its plainness, and then somehow in that process, arriving at the sublime” (qtd. in Grubisic, 2022). Scholarly works, too, have scrutinized Munro from many an angle and not found her wanting. *The Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro*, in addition to being an academic work, is as much as celebration of the “excellence of her writings” (Staines 2016, 3), and the authors consider Munro an “unobtrusive and undogmatic” feminist (Löschnigg 2016, 60), a realist capable of making even a “menu list” “dramatic” (Glover 2016, 53), one who makes small town and rural place “a chimera: deceptive, implausible, sometimes one thing, sometimes another” (Simonds 2016, 26). There have also been many thematic and stylistic analyses. Nevertheless, one of the aspects that has received little attention is how Munro begins her stories, which is why we examine how her very opening lines usher the reader into her world of small towns and people with ordinary lives and ordinary problems.

This article has three subsections: in the first, previous research on first lines in fiction is presented; in the second, main part, the methodology behind the study and the analysis of first lines in Munro’s stories is presented; and the article closes with the conclusions.

2 Opening Lines in Fiction

In her essay “The Fisherwoman’s Daughter,” Ursula Le Guin refers to opening sentences in fiction as “doors to worlds” (1988). Quoting the first line of Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*, Le Guin explains how Woolf’s novel, although focused on the central character Jacob Flanders, opens elsewhere, with a description of his mother sitting on the sand by the sea, writing. The significance of first lines has also been acknowledged by Stephen King. In an interview given a telling title, “Why Stephen King Spends ‘Months and Even Years’ Writing Opening Sentences,” King uses the same conceptual metaphor as Le Guin, noting that his first sentences “were a doorway I went through,” which is why the opening paragraphs of his stories sometimes take “weeks and months and even years” of wording and rewording until he is pleased with them (2013). Similarly, William Gibson speaks of the opening line as something that “must be done, or at least approximately done, else nothing will follow” (2014). Opening lines are equally, if not more, fascinating to readers of fiction.¹ Even a simple search on Google with phrases such as “first sentence in fiction” results in dozens of websites ranking the “top best opening lines in literature” or promising “killer opening lines” to budding authors.

¹ In this regard, openings to short stories are no different from novel openings, even if “the short story is essentially ‘end-oriented,’ inasmuch as one begins a short story in the expectation of soon reaching its conclusion” (Lodge 2011, 225).

In contrast, first lines have received limited scholarly attention. Literary theorists (e.g., Culler 2000; Eagleton 2008; Barry 2017) typically mention them in passing, which is to some extent understandable, given the focus of literary theory on the macrostructural aspects of literature. Not surprisingly, story openings feature more prominently in narratological studies. Gerald Prince (1982), for example, highlighted the avoidance of presuppositions in the opening sections of fairy tales, which he explains with their primary intended audience (1982, 44). Mieke Bal (2017) analysed the opening lines of several canonical literary works, underscoring the role of changing perspectives in the opening of Balzac's *Père Goriot* (35) or the shifting between different levels of first-person narration in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (39–41). Seymour Chatman, both a literary scholar and film critic, illustrated the many similarities between the literary and cinematic narrator with the opening sequence of Alfred Hitchcock's movie *Rear Window* (1990, 45). As it turns out, narratological tools are particularly useful for examining the functional aspects of narratives, including their opening, such as point of view, temporality, sequential ordering, or levels of narration.

The linguistic, microstructural characteristics of fiction, on the other hand, are the subject of stylistic research, some of which has also focused on first lines. A prime example is *Style in Fiction* by Leech and Short (2007), comprising analyses of opening lines from several works of fiction. One case in point is their analysis of D. H. Lawrence's short story "Odour of Chrysanthemums" (Leech and Short 2007, 37), which opens with a sentence describing the sounds accompanying the arrival of a locomotive: "The small locomotive engine, Number A, came clanking, stumbling down from Selston with seven full wagons" (qtd. in Leech and Short 2007, 37). As Leech and Short show, the sentence imitates the motion of the locomotive, creating an onomatopoeic effect, which is the result of a combination of rhythm, the dragging effect of consonant clusters, and the actual qualities of the consonants themselves. In addition, the authors consider the syntactic characteristics of the sentence and use the combination on the microstructural level to explain the effect on the macrostructural level (Leech and Short 2007, 37). Similar stylistic analyses can be found in other studies on stylistics (e.g., Simpson 2004; Toolan 2013).

3 Opening Lines in Munro's Short Stories

Alice Munro's first sentences do not obviously rank among literature's greatest hits or greatest hooks. There is no Orwellian, "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen"; There is no grand Tolstoyesque "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," nor is there Camus's notoriously cold "Mother died today"; and, of course, in Munro nobody turns into a giant bug like poor Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. In contrast, five out of the 149 stories looked at for this paper begin with static verbs like "sitting" or "waiting" – sometimes both, as in "Amundsen": "On the bench outside the station I sat and waited" (2012, 31). One 1982 story, "Accident," begins with "loitering...": "Frances is loitering by a second-floor window of the high school in Hanratty, on an afternoon in early December" (2006a, 84); a few begin with train or plane travel – that is, waiting but moving at the same time. For example, "Rich as Stink" begins: "While the plane was pulling up to the gate on a summer evening in 1974, Karin reached down and

got some things out of her backpack” (1998, 215); “The Jack Randa Hotel” starts: “On the runway, in Honolulu, the plane loses speed, loses heart, falters and veers onto the grass, and bumps to a stop” (1994, 124); and “Train,” from *Dear Life*, starts: “This is a slow train anyway, and it has slowed some more for the curve” (2012, 175). Although we expect short stories to be plot-driven, and quick out of the blocks, Munro often starts obliquely, sluggishly, almost like a “slow train.”

To continue with this catalogue of what Munro does not do, she does not anticipate in the style of O. Henry’s “The Ransom of Red Chief” (“It looked like a good thing: but wait till I tell you.”); nor does she promise the world like Ford Madox Ford in the *The Good Soldier*: “This is the saddest story I have ever heard.” Indeed, when we teach Munro’s work, students comment that she is not overtly literary because her vocabulary is not lexically complex. She is not one for verbal pyrotechnics. Many a Munro sentence “looks casual,” with “the flavour of an aside” but with a style and “rhetoric [that] is deliberate” (New 2016, 127). The most strikingly literary sounding start is from 1990’s “Goodness and Mercy”: “Bugs said so long to the disappearing land, a dark-blue finger of Labrador” (New 2016, 131). Note that the zest of the metaphor “dark-blue finger” is offset by the quotidian “said so long.” “Bugs said so long...” pushes us towards country-speak, and “a dark-blue finger” points us in other, loftier lexical directions. If, as the formalists argued, literary language deviates from ordinary language, or makes us see the world in a new way, Munro is decisively non-literary.

Alice Munro “writes,” says author Francine Prose, “with the simplicity and beauty of a Shaker box. Everything about her style is meant to attract *no* notice, to make you *not* pay attention” (2006, 25). One wonders whether Munro missed her true calling as a confidence woman, a scammer, or at least a superb pickpocket, since she is a master of understated distraction. Munro herself described her theory of writing in a 1978 interview with Don Harron: “What I have as an ideal, I think, is something so clear, as if you’re looking through perfectly clean water, so that the words don’t get between the reader and what’s happening. [...] If anything seems to be decoration, I will take it out” (CBC 2022).

This paper arises from a survey of the first sentences in each of Alice Munro’s original short story collections, not including stories that appeared in magazines but never in a collection.² We have included at least one sentence from each of Munro’s fourteen books: *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), *Who Do You Think You Are? / The Beggar Maid* (1978), *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), *The Progress of Love* (1986), *Friend of My Youth* (1990), *Open Secrets* (1994), *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998), *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001), *Runaway* (2004), *The View from Castle Rock* (2006), *Too Much Happiness* (2009), and *Dear Life* (2012). The background to this paper is double:

² Early stories and even later *New Yorker* stories that Munro did not republish, such as the fine “Axis,” are not included. Also, the first sentences selected were those from the book edition, which occasionally differ slightly from the magazine version. For example, the magazine version of “Free Radicals” (2008) begins “At first, people kept phoning, to make sure that Nita was not too depressed, not too lonely, not eating too little or drinking too much.” The more understated lead-off in *Too Much Happiness*: “At first people *were* phoning to make sure that Nita was not too depressed, not too lonely, not eating too little or drinking too much” (our emphasis; 2009, 95). On the types of changes Munro made to her stories between magazine and book publication, see New (2016).

1. There is a contemporary tendency to avoid looking at language and style (in favour of, say, themes or context or, perhaps, word policing). If one asks students to examine a sentence closely in stylistic terms, they are far less comfortable than when discoursing on abstractions or themes.³ In our experience, one reason for this lack is that in-depth stylistic analyses require proficiency in both literary and linguistic concepts and terminology, which may be a challenge for less advanced students.
2. Second, is there a Munro style? If so, can we see it from the outset of a Munro story? We read about Munro’s “characteristic style” (*Publisher’s Weekly*) and her “characteristic sentences” (Mars-Jones) (qtd. in Thacker 2011, 447, 420), and we can presumably tell Munro from Cormac McCarthy at a glance, but could we *explain* that difference with anything other than clichés about, “simplicity”⁴ and “voice” and “understatement”?

Novelist and critic David Lodge argues that the first lines of a story or novel are “a threshold, separating the real world we inhabit from the world the [author] has imagined” (2011, 4). Narratologist Mieke Bal states that the first sentence of a literary work is a “commentary on the narrative about to unfold” (2009, 174) – it tells us what to expect, how the tale will be told (first person, third, second). If the speakers says, “I’m gonna tell ya a story...” or “Once upon a time...” or “This actually happened...,” expectations differ radically. A question that lurks in the background of our approach is: What is a sentence? Linguists say, it’s the “largest unit of grammar [...] over which a rule of grammar can operate” (Matthews 1997, 337); philosophers say, “the smallest entity whose production constitutes a message, such as an assertion, a command, or a question” (Blackburn 2016, 439). For the sake of simplicity, we merely stopped at the first period. Therefore, the first “sentence” of Munro’s 1978 story “Royal Beatings” is the nominal phrase “Royal Beating.” (The second: “That was Flo’s promise.” (*BM*, -112013b, 3).) These are fragments that deliver a message of some sort – even without a verb, you know the message: a threat of being physically punished.

4 Methodology and Results

The methodology is somewhat informed by stylistics – that is, the concrete application of linguistic analysis to a literary text. For the purposes of the present study, a small corpus was built, featuring 149 first sentences from Alice Munro’s published collections (including the “Foreword” and the “Epilogue” from *The View from Castle Rock* – 147 stories). All sentences were copied to Word and Excel files for qualitative and quantitative analysis, and a corpus file was created for concordancing and text analysis with the corpus analysis toolkit AntConc. In stories that open with a motto, both the motto and the initial sentence were included in the corpus. In total, the corpus thus comprises 2872 tokens, comprising 1059 different words. The average number of words in each sentence is 18.38; the median 16 (i.e., half the sentences are longer, half are shorter); the mode is 16, meaning that 17 of Munro’s first sentences have 16 words. The sentences were also manually analysed from

³ To quote Terry Eagleton, “close analysis of language, responsiveness to literary form, a sense of moral seriousness” are less foregrounded in literary studies – “people could be very smart about the context of a poem, but had no idea about how to talk about it as a poem” (*Oxonian*).

⁴ On simplicity, see James Wood (2008, 182–84), who observes that even “ornate writers” such as Cormac McCarthy are masters of simplicity.

a qualitative standpoint. This part of the study addressed questions such as the following: Which tenses does Munro use? What kind of and how many adjectives, nouns or verbs does she use? Is the prevalent narration mode first or third person? What are the main syntactic patterns? What punctuation is used? In the end, the results were assessed and an attempt was made to interpret the findings.

5 Results

In terms of length, the shortest sentence is from “Family Furnishings”: “Alfrida.” (*HFCLM*, 2001b, 68). One word. Alfrida is the cousin of the narrator’s father from Toronto and initially fascinates the narrator, a young girl from rural Ontario, with her seeming city-girl sophistication, only for the narrator to realize that her idealization of Alfrida is unjustified. The proper name thus serves as a pivot and the central point around which the story evolves, in the sense that “Alfrida” is a potential alternative title of the story. At the other end of the spectrum in the corpus is the longest sentence (66 words) from “Epilogue: The Photographer,” from *Lives of Girls and Women*:

“This town is rife with suicides,” was one of the things my mother would say, and for a long time I carried this mysterious, dogmatic statement around with me, believing it to be true – that is, believing that Jubilee had many more suicides than other places, just as Porterfield had fights and drunks, that its suicides distinguished the town like the cupola on the Town Hall. (2001a, 265)

Evidently, this type of opening has a different effect on the reader. The first impression is that of flowing prose, befitting a budding young artist. Direct speech at the beginning of the sentence is a signal that the story opens *in medias res*, with the reader confronting a narratee face-to-face even before they meet the narrator. However, it then turns out that inverted commas do not mean that the reader has found herself or himself in the middle of a conversation between two or more speakers; instead, the past tense in the accompanying introductory clause of the first person narrator signals that the clause in inverted commas comprising a simple sentence is singled out retrospectively by the narrator, who uses the generic statement made by her mother as a starting point for her own consideration of her mother’s observation that Jubilee had the worst reputation for suicides. The introductory clause features two coordinate sentences, with two more participial clauses in parallel (believing it / believing that), following which the narrator reflects on her own position towards her mother’s claim. The sentence characterized by some syntactic parallelism thus also includes a large amount of information to process in one stroke. In addition, the subject being addressed is grim: suicide statistics. At the same time, the narrator is seemingly not upset by the subject, given that the number of suicides is compared to the numbers of fights and drunks, while also being used in the simile of the cupola. From a lexical standpoint, the sentence is a mix of simple, monosyllabic words (“town,” “say,” etc.) and more sophisticated words of Latin origin (“dogmatic”), suggesting a person who can communicate clearly but also in a high register. In contrast with “Alfrida” in the previous example, this sentence does not yet clearly indicate which way the story might turn: Is it about the narrator’s mother? About suicide statistics? About a particular suicide? The options are many.

The two sentences considered above lead to two observations about openings that are at polar opposites in terms of the number of words. However, the corpus features several other notable characteristics, one of them being punctuation. The following is a breakdown of punctuation in the corpus:

- Three semi-colons.
- One set of parentheses: “Liza, my dear, I have never written you yet to thank you for going out to our house (poor old Dismal, I guess it really deserves the name now) in the teeth or anyway the aftermath of the storm last February and for letting me know what you found there” (“Vandals,” OS, 1994, 197).
- Ten dashes. These usually indicate a specification to help the reader join a relational reference: “Violet’s mother – Aunt Ivie –” (“A Queer Streak,” PL, 1986, 180) or “Sometimes I dream about my grandmother and her sister, my Aunt Charlie – who was of course not my aunt but my great-aunt” (“The Ticket,” VCR, 2006b, 183); once indicating a date range, and two veering off in another direction, before the story has even begun.
- Four question marks. For example, “‘Is that your brother out there?’ Davidson said” (“Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux,” PL, 1986, 53), or the famous opening of “Walker Brothers Cowboy”: “After supper my father says, ‘Want to go down and see if the Lake’s still there?’” (DHS, 2013a, 1).
- Two comma splices. Munro was famous for fusing two full sentences or independent clauses with a comma: “I had a name for this unruly device of hers – I started calling it ‘The Munro Splice’ to myself,” said Daniel Menaker, one of Munro’s editors at *The New Yorker* (qtd. in Thacker 2011, 398).

As can be seen, a full-stop or period is by far the most frequent punctuation, showing the prevalence of indicative mood. On the other hand, not a single exclamation mark is used, which confirms Munro’s avoidance of affective language.

To determine its lexical characteristics, the corpus was analysed using online Wordcloud or “tag cloud” applications. The results showed that the following were the most frequently used words: mother, house, town, father, years. Mother: 14; House: 14 (interestingly, Munro uses “house,” not “home”); Town: 13; Father: 12; Years: 9 (“years old” and “years ago”). These results will surprise few readers of Munro, yet there is comfort in having numerical proof of what we have intuited. The analysis has also shown that simple stylistic or quantitative tools fulfil the gambler’s desire to have their gut instinct proven correct. Here are the wordclouds for the most frequent ten and twenty words (Figures 1 and 2):



FIGURE 1. The most frequent ten words.



FIGURE 2. The most frequent twenty words.

Regarding the use of verbs, the most frequent ones are “be” and “have,” mostly because they are typically used as auxiliary verbs. Among other verbs, “say” accounts for 13 appearances, followed by “call” with nine appearances and seven of “come.” Other verbs have lower frequencies.

It is also interesting to observe the use of pronouns. Not surprisingly, given the prevalence of first-person narration, the top ranking one is “I” with 50 appearances, followed by “my” with 34 appearances throughout lead-off stories in the collections. The two exceptions are *Who do You Think You Are?* and *Runaway*, which are narrated in third person and do not even have the characters use first person pronouns. On the other hand, the largely autobiographical *The View from Castle Rock* accounts for eight out of 34 appearances of “my,” while “I” is used as many times in *Something I’ve been Meaning to Tell You*. The pronoun “she” is used more frequently than “he,” with 20 vs. 12 appearances, respectively.

Another interesting group of words consists of expressions for time, which are also frequent, suggesting that the narrator and characters pay attention to temporal deictics. “When” thus appears 14 times, and the adverb “ago” appears five times.

When it comes to analysing literature through linguistic means or numbers, there is a tension between the aesthetic or the linguistic (Leech 2007, 12), between subjective impressionism and objective quantification. Regardless of which end of the spectrum is at the forefront at a particular moment, the study has a clear focus: Munro’s quiet brilliance.

Many of Munro’s stories begin with a short, declarative sentence of a few words (such as in “Boys and Girls”: “My father was a fox farmer.” *DHS*, 2013a, 111); many other first sentences stretch over several lines; many foreground time or, more accurately, time past (with a specific reference to, say, 1979 or 1965; or general markers of time past “used to” or changing names: “Maybe you better stop calling me that,” Queenie said, when she met me at Union Station (“Queenie,” 2001b, *HFCLM*, 16); others start with gasps and spurts, with dashes interrupting flow, and two include rhymes or near rhymes – “Simon’s Luck”: “Rose gets lonely in new places; she wishes she had invitations” (2013b, *BM*, 156) hovers somewhere between a bawdy rhyme and an advertising jingle or a country speech saying.

The variety of these first sentences might lead the catalogueur to despair or to absurdly claim that *the Munroesque quality of her fiction lies in how different it all is. . .* Although generalizations are dangerous, there is one constant: for all their stylistic diversity, Munro’s first sentences establish a tension between what is realistic and tangible and what is seeming, what lies beneath or hidden.

Robert Fulford has commented on Munro's knack for pulling off the "marvelously duplicitous and contradictory act" (qtd. in Thacker 2011, 233). Put more simply, Douglas Glover applauds the "but-construction" – "a sentence (or paragraph) that turns on the word 'but' or some cognate, or an implied but, antithesis, irony, or contrasting parallel" (Glover 2012, 32). One sees this construction in "A Trip to the Coast": "The place called Black Horse is marked on the map but there is nothing there except a store and three houses and an old cemetery and a livery shed which belonged to a church that burned down" (2013a, *DHS*, 172). Similarly, "Walking on Water" begins: "This was a part of town where a lot of old people still lived, though many had moved to high-rises across the park" (2014, *SIBM*, 78).

For the balance of this paper, we will zero in on a few opening sentences and cleanse ourselves of bare numbers in hopes of understanding how a Munro sentence works – how a sentence comes to *mean* or *affect* us is, of course, not an accident of language.

Another note drawn from David Lodge (of campus novel fame): He compares the beginning of a novel to the human embryo becoming a person. In terms of genesis: when did the author get the idea for this story? When did she first make a mental sketch? "For the reader, however, the [text] always begins with that opening sentence" (2011, 4). Lodge's cogitations are incomplete because the title leads the reader into the first line. For example, the first sentence of a 1978 story reads: "Rose fell in love with Clifford at a party which Clifford and Jocelyn gave and Patrick and Rose attended" (*BM*, 2013b, 101). The story title is "Mischiefs," which colours our reading. We would be starting a different story, so to speak, if the title were "Party" or "Rose and Clifford" because those titles would stoke alternative expectations in the reader. We might be on the lookout for hints of bacchanalia, or assume we were entering the romance genre.

Another aspect of Munro's first sentences is this: We do not approach her work naively if we are at all familiar with her stories. We come to expect extraordinary events told with a certain coolness of delivery – no exclamation marks. Most obviously, if Munro starts a story "March 13, 1927" (as she does in "Powers," *R*, 2004, 193), we expect her to shift to a later date – as she does: "summer day in the early seventies" ("Powers," *R*, 2004, 222) – or even to the present. We can see how the present and the past interact. As is well attested, she is a master of time shifts. Coral Ann Howells, examining "Royal Beatings," notes how Munro controls how "past leaps into the present," while being attuned to how a "double vision" of a place such as the fictional Hanratty can occur, thanks to "shifts of emphasis within personal and communal memory over time" (Howells, 51). To move from academic to author plaudits, novelist and short story writer Lauren Groff (2011) proclaims that "Alice Munro does time and structure better than anyone".

In a close reading of "The Peace of Utrecht," Isla Duncan praises Munro's "temporal and spatial shifts" and her ability to ensure that the "tensual and aspectual nuances in the opening paragraphs are a foretaste of the subsequent temporal shifts that distinguish this narrative" (2011, 21). In other words, Munro can set structural foundations from the outset through grammatical and tense means. Munro's "dexterous" "shifts between narrative past and present" (Duncan 2011, 108) are evident from the outset of "Friend of My Youth": "I used to dream about my mother, and though the details in the dream varied, the surprise in it was always the same" (1990, *FMY*, 7). A few details we may note: there is a first-person narrator, and

Munro breaks the “tell a dream, lose a reader”⁵ rule of thumb, by beginning, it seems, with a pat Freudian reference; then there is the tension created by “though...,” which is similar to the “but-construction” Douglas Glover praises, above. A further tension exists, however – namely, the tension between “surprise” and “always the same.” Though dream logic runs by its own rules (unhindered by such constraints as space and time), here Munro seems to be undoing dream logic itself. “The details...” are quickly done away with, and the sentence – the opening sentence of a story – finishes with “always the same.”

If one looks at all of Munro’s first sentences, laid out neatly in the order in which they appeared, one seeks patterns and therefore finds patterns in addition to the lexical and thematic characteristics evident in the wordclouds above. In both “Home” and “Dimensions,” a character travels on “three buses”: “I come home as I have done several times in the past year, travelling on three buses” (*VCR*, 2006b, 204); “Doree had to take three buses – one to Kincardine, where she waited for the one to London, where she waited again for the city bus out to the facility” (*TMH*, 2009, 8). This is at best a curiosity, or perhaps an echo of Munro’s own past travels. But two is at best coincidence, not a pattern. Elsewhere one becomes tempted to find meaning where none might exist. For example, it seems Munro has a propensity to use the letter combination F-L-O in her first sentences. Nine stories include the words “Flo” or “flowered” or “Florida” or “Flood” or “floor.” Other readers would no doubt find similarly whimsical patterns. This is an example of a would-be theory born of discovery desire and crystallized by confirmation bias – not of the intra-story “perfectly symmetrical alliterative pattern” that Héliane Ventura wonderfully examines in the penultimate paragraph of *The View from Castle Rock*, where words “resonate against each other and prolong each other’s effect: ‘drainboards ... dried’, ‘light ... lamps’, ‘cream cans’, ‘warmed in winter’, ‘bodies and breath’” (2016, 159).

It should also be acknowledged that the stories looked at here were written over half a century. This leads to another temptation, namely, seeking out development. As Robert McGill notes, there is a “critical inclination to identify an arc of artistic development in Munro’s career [that] is further evident in attempts to ascribe phases to it” (2016, 139). When it comes to style, we are all wonderfully adept at discerning progression or decay as long as we already know when something was published. This is the literary critic’s version of the sloppy historian’s presentism problem. Looking at the admittedly limited corpus of Munro’s first sentences, we can agree with McGill in confirming “the view that Munro’s career has been marked more by continuity and recursion than by transformation” (McGill 2016, 137).

However, there is one pattern that occurs in Munro’s last published stories. The final four pieces that Munro published in *Dear Life* are preceded by a commentary by Munro: “The final four works in this book are not quite stories. They form a separate unit, one that is autobiographical in feeling, though not, sometimes, entirely so in fact. I believe they are the first and last – and the closest – things I have to say about my own life” (2012, 256). Munro is dancing the line between pure invention and providing a kernel of truth. In terms of beginnings, the starts of the final four stories look like self-parody. Munro, the master of narrative time, chronology, and time-shifts, begins the same way, four times in a row:

⁵ “Tell a dream, lose a reader, the master said,” writes Richard Ford in *The Lay of the Land* (2006, 74), referring to Henry James. In *Inside Story*, Martin Amis quotes the same advice, but adds that nobody has ever been able to “track down” this “dictum usually attributed to Henry James” (2020, 42).

“When I was five years old my parents all of a sudden produced a baby boy, which my mother said was what I had always wanted.” (“The Eye,” 257)

“When I was young, there seemed to be never a childbirth, or a burst appendix, or any other drastic physical event that did not occur simultaneously with a snowstorm.” (“Night,” 271)

“When my mother was growing up, she and her whole family would go to dances.” (“Voices,” 286)

“I lived when I was young at the end of a long road, or a road that seemed long to me.” (“Dear Life,” 299)

6 Conclusion

The present paper aimed to provide an overview of and to clarify the opening lines of Munro’s short fiction. The examples above not only corroborated Bloom’s observation that the art of Munro’s stories is “to tell themselves” (2009, 2) but also confirmed that the opening lines are an important part of the “telling,” from setting the scene and the tone of the story, summarizing, characterizing the narrator and narratees or simply intriguing the reader. The study also underscored some of the linguistic and stylistic tools that comprise the microstructural fabric of Munro’s fiction, from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. Understandably, no literary work can be reduced to tables and figures, Munro’s being no exception. Conversely, given that her writing is essentially an epitome of humanist virtues and values, and given that, in addition, the present volume is a birthday celebration in her honour, it is not inappropriate to conclude the present article with the last words Munro wrote for publication. These refer to her *not* going home for the funeral of her mother: “We say of some things that they can’t be forgiven, or that we will never forgive ourselves. But we do – we do it all the time” (2012, 320). What a fantastic conclusion for a writer emerging from a very moral world – she does not say “we should” or “we must” just that we do – for better or for worse. How can one crunch numbers on that sort of sentence?

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