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An Appraisal-Based Rereading of Alice Munro's "Vandals"

ABSTRACT

Alice Munro's "Vandals", a story of the sexual abuse of a little girl, was first published in 1993. While it received considerable scholarly attention in the past, with a specific focus on the female character Bea, who fails to protect the girl, interest in the story was reignited after the sexual abuse in Munro's own family was revealed in 2024, shortly after the author's death. The newly revealed biographical testimony calls for a systematic rereading of this story as potentially semi-biographical. This paper focuses on the story's three protagonists in their respective roles of abuser, victim and bystander, and analyses Munro's skilful use of evaluative language in the portrayal of these characters, employing the appraisal model by Martin and White (2005) and focusing specifically on attitude, one of the three main categories in the model, in an experimental attempt to apply this approach to a story containing polyfocalization.

Keywords: appraisal, attitude, Alice Munro, "Vandals", autobiographical elements

Ponovno branje zgodbe »Vandals« Alice Munro skozi jezik vrednotenja

IZVLEČEK

Zgodba »Vandals« avtorice Alice Munro, ki govori o spolni zlorabi deklice, je bila prvič objavljena leta 1993. Že v preteklosti je bila predmet številnih raziskav, ki so se osredotočale predvsem na lik protagonistke Bee, ki deklice ne zaščiti pred zlorabo. Zgodba je znova pritegnila pozornost kmalu po avtoričini smrti leta 2024, ko je javnost izvedela za spolno zlorabo v njeni družini. Ob razkritju spolne zlorabe se pojavlja potreba po ponovnem, bolj sistematičnem branju zgodbe, ki je potencialno delno avtobiografska. Pričujoči članek se tako osredotoča na tri protagoniste, ki v zgodbi nastopajo v vlogah nadlegovalca, žrtve in opazovalke, in s pomočjo analize jezika vrednotenja (model Martina in Whitea, 2005), pri čemer se osredotoča na odnos, eno od treh glavnih kategorij modela, razišče, kako je Alice Munro upodobila njihove značaje. Gre za poskus uporabe analize jezika vrednotenja na primeru zgodbe, ki vključuje več fokalizacij.

Ključne besede: jezik vrednotenja, odnos, Alice Munro, »Vandals«, avtobiografskost

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1 Introduction

Alice Munro's story "Vandals" was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1993; a year later, it was included in the short story collection *Open Secrets*, and went on to attract considerable scholarly attention (e.g. Dawson 2005; Ventura 2007; Bigot 2013; Bentley 2017; Szabó 2024). Lucile Bentley (2017, 47), for instance, notes that "Vandals" is one of the darkest stories in Munro's oeuvre. It can indeed be labelled as Southern Ontario Gothic,[1] together with many other of her stories (e.g. "Gravel", "Child's Play", "Open Secrets", "Dimensions") in which something horrible – domestic violence, a fatal accident, even a murder – lies hidden underneath the lives of ordinary small-town people. The source of the Gothic in "Vandals" is the sexual abuse of a preteen girl, Liza, by her neighbour, a middle-aged man called Ladner, which Bea, Ladner's partner, seems not to notice, and the abuse thus remains unacknowledged. As Corinne Bigot points out, the fact that the sexual abuse is never acknowledged in the story allows for the exploration of "the complex relationships between abuse, silence and self-deception" (2013, 114). A study of the three main characters in their respective roles of abuser, victim, and bystander provides an insight into the complex interplay between the sexual abuse that occurs, the silence that keeps it unacknowledged, and the self-deception that conditions the silence. This paper focuses on the excerpts from the story that contain language of evaluation referring to the three protagonists – Ladner, Bea and Liza – and their interaction and analyses them using appraisal theory, developed by Martin and White (2005), hence shedding light on the portrayal of the characters in an experimental attempt to apply Appraisal to a story containing polyfocalization.

2 "Vandals" and Reignited Interest in It

However, "Vandals" has recently received fresh attention among Munro scholars and fans for its potential connection to a real event in the author's life. Shortly after Munro died in 2024, her youngest daughter, Andrea Skinner, claimed in a newspaper article that her stepfather, Gerald Fremlin, Munro's second husband, had sexually assaulted her as a child (Honderich 2024). This news shocked Munro's readers worldwide, not only because of her silence about the abuse but also because of the details revealed by her daughter in the article that showed the beloved writer in a negative light. As Holly Honderich (2024) explains, Munro only learned about the abuse in 1992, in a letter that the then-adult daughter wrote to her, upon which Munro left her husband for a few months but then returned and stayed with him until his death. Rebecca Sullivan, professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies, adds that Munro "used the power of her fame to help create a positive narrative about her husband" (Sullivan 2024), even after Andrea pressed charges in 2005 and Fremlin pleaded guilty. Sullivan concludes that by choosing her role as a wife over that of a mother, Munro betrayed not only her own daughter but also "all her literary daughters" (Sullivan 2024).

That "Vandals" was published a year after Munro had learned about her daughter's abuse seems significant. Munro often wrote about her own life in her stories. The second part of her collection *The View from Castle Rock*, titled "Home", for instance, contains several

[1] The term refers to aspects of the Gothic in the writings of contemporary Ontario authors such as Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Marian Engel and others.

stories "from Munro's own childhood, teenage years and adult life" (Mohar 2019, 141). She also addressed difficult situations from her life in her writing. For instance, Iris Lucio-Villegas Spillard (2022, 37) notes that the loss of her baby daughter Catherine, who died shortly after birth, haunted Munro for years, and later materialized in her short story "My Mother's Dream". The abuse of Munro's youngest daughter, Andrea, seems to be another real-life situation that the author turned "into art", as Rachel Aviv (2024) puts it. Some related aspects of "Vandals" have revealed a semi-autobiographical dimension to the story that was not obvious before Andrea's public revelation in 2024. Just as in the case of Munro and Fremlin, in the story, Ladner is Bea's second husband, whom she meets when she is in her forties; and Liza, the girl whom Ladner molests, is approximately the age of Munro's daughter at the time of the alleged abuse. According to Aviv (2024), Munro may even have used several details from Andrea's letter in her story, such as the swimming scene, which is possibly based on an anecdote described in Andrea's letter. There are, of course, aspects of the story that are not autobiographical. For instance, Liza has a younger brother, Kenny, who is potentially another victim of sexual abuse, and Ladner – unlike Fremlin – is a taxidermist by profession, catching wild animals, skinning and mounting them for sale to museums or exhibiting them in his private collection on his estate, a kind of nature reserve. It is not clear from the story whether Bea is aware of the sexual abuse; if she is, she turns a blind eye to it. Liza seems to believe that Bea failed to protect her from Ladner, and years later takes revenge on both of them. While Bea and Ladner are at a hospital, waiting for the latter's surgery, they ask Liza to drive to their place to check if the water has been turned off, for it is winter and the pipes could burst. Liza drives to the house with her husband, Warren, to check the pipes, but then trashes the place completely, and Warren helps her make it look like the work of vandals.

The story has a third-person narrator but does not follow a single narrative path. The narratorial voice is focalized through different characters; as Bigot (2013, 124) points out, Bea is the focalizer in the first[2] section, Warren, Liza's husband, in sections two and four, and Liza in section three, while Ladner's perspective is never represented. However, the focalization slides in and out of focus, making it at times difficult to decide whether one of the characters is actually the focalizer or if it is the narrator's point of view. According to Bigot, the shifting of viewpoints in the story prevents "the reader from gaining too much information about the past" (2013, 124) as well as from identifying with any of the characters; we learn about Liza's emotions, for instance, mostly from Warren's perspective. The story's confusing chronology also adds to its complexity. The story begins with the letter Bea starts writing to Liza after Ladner's death, then moves back to the time when Bea and Ladner met. In section two, the now adult Liza and her husband drive to Ladner's place and trash it – for seemingly no obvious reason. Section three then shifts back to Liza's childhood. Here, the sexual abuse is gradually disclosed from young Liza's confused perspective, marked also by the use of the second person pronoun "you" (e.g. "when you cross into Ladner's territory, it's like coming into a world of different and distinct countries" (Munro 2007, 244)), which reminds Bigot of the "dissociative strategies to which victims of sexual abuse usually resort" (2013, 118). Section four then briefly returns to Liza and Warner right after they have vandalized Ladner's place.

[2] Bigot's article claims that Bea is the focalizer in the second section; we believe this is a mistake, and the first section is meant.

That the story is intentionally ambiguous and confusing for the reader was confirmed by Munro herself in an interview in which she commented on her short story collection *Open Secrets*, in which "Vandals" appeared: "I wanted to challenge what people want to know. Or expect to know. Or anticipate knowing" (Munro 1995). Carrie Dawson adds that "Vandals" challenges "what people want to know about pedophilia" (2005, 71). The story's sensitive topic of sexual abuse and the newly revealed claim of autobiographical relevance call for a systematic rereading, and thus this paper is an attempt at this through appraisal analysis.

3 Appraisal

Located within systemic functional linguistics, which focuses on the use of language to make meanings in social contexts (Halliday and Mathiessen 2004), appraisal is language of evaluation. It is one of three resources (alongside involvement and negotiation) for construing interpersonal meaning at the discourse-semantic level (Martin and White 2005, 34). It is divided into the domains of attitude, graduation, and engagement. Attitude is a resource for expressing feelings (AFFECT; e.g. *happy*), assessing human behaviour and character (JUDGEMENT; e.g. a ***strange*** *man*), and assessing things (APPRECIATION; e.g. *an* ***interesting*** *book*). Graduation is a resource for up/down scaling and softening/sharpening attitudes (e.g. ***very*** *beautiful*), while engagement is a resource for positioning and (dis)aligning the writer/speaker with the text and other voices (e.g. ***Of course*** *she is beautiful*) (Martin and White 2005, 35–37). Attitude, which is the main focus of our study, can be positive (e.g. *beautiful*) or negative (e.g. *ugly*); it can be expressed explicitly via attitudinal lexis, i.e. words that entail evaluation directly (e.g. *corrupt*), or implicitly via, for example, ideational meanings (Martin and White 2005, 62–65). In *He is a caring son*, attitudinal lexical word *caring* conveys positive judgement directly, whereas in *He often visits his sick mother*, positive judgement can be implied based on the ideational meaning.

Appraisal has been researched in various texts, such as, for example, media texts and news, emails, academic papers, advertisements, book reviews, and legal documents, to systematically explore the interpersonal meaning, i.e. how language is used to express and negotiate emotions, judgement, and opinions, and to manage interpersonal positioning in a text. In previous research, Križan, for instance, explored judgement in 200 British advertisements and compared the occurrence and use of attitude in English and Slovene football match reports (Križan 2016a; 2016b; 2024). Additionally, Križan and Majcenovič Kline (2021) focused on appraisal to analyse communication between nurses and patients, while Križan and Barbič (2025) compared the results of an AI-conducted appraisal analysis of a general-interest newspaper article with those of human researchers, hence providing insights into the advantages and disadvantages of AI in this context.

Appraisal theory has also been used as a linguistic framework in the analysis of literature. Macken-Horarik (2003), for example, explored how affect and judgement are used to trigger empathy and discernment in ideal readers in the narrative *CLICK.* Alsina, Espunya and Wirf Naro (2017) applied appraisal theory to analyse the point of view in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and its translations. By applying the sub-system of affect to 10,000 words in the

Twilight series, Ataei's (2019) study showed the prevalence of negative and indirect emotional language as a significant feature of a vampire-themed suspense romance. Furthermore, Hadidi and Mohammadbagheri-Parvin (2015) examined attitude in the discourse of the main protagonists in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* to show how it can be used for exploring characterization in a literary work.

4 Methodology

The corpus for the analysis conducted in this study comprises excerpts from Munro's story "Vandals" that refer to Bea, Ladner or Liza as the main characters, and where there is interaction among them. The excerpts were selected based on the criterion of whether they contained language of evaluation that referred to any of the three characters. The total number of words in the selected excerpts is 3,657. The analysis focused on attitude, one of the main categories in the appraisal model by Martin and White (2005). In each sentence of the selected excerpts all attitudes – both explicit (realized by attitudinal lexis) and implicit (triggered by the co(n) text, e.g. figurative language, ideational meaning, other linguistic elements in the proposition) – were identified using the UAM software programme (UAMCorpusTool) for the linguistic annotation of text corpora (O'Donnell 2009). The identification of implicit attitude in a narrative like "Vandals" is important since the intertwining of explicit and implicit attitudes provides a better insight into the characters.

Each attitude was categorized as either affect, judgement, or appreciation, which are the main attitudinal categories. Additionally, each attitude was categorized in terms of its positive or negative status, and target (of judgement and appreciation)/emoter (of affect) of attitude. When necessary, double-coding[3] was taken into consideration to restrict the subjectivity as much as possible. This is even more significant in the analysis of such a complex narrative as "Vandals". For example, in "When Ladner grabbed Liza and squashed himself against her, she had a sense of **danger** deep inside him" (Munro 2007, 244), the lexical word "danger" inscribes negative emotion (affect) felt by Liza. Additionally, Ladner is explicitly negatively judged as a dangerous man, which is already signalled lexically via "grabbed" and "squashed". Moreover, in "He was quite **ordinary** again, a **serious** workman" (Munro 2007, 242), Ladner is explicitly positively judged via "ordinary" and "serious", however, the preceding text and the repeated modality "could" conveying Ladner's ability to "switch from one person to another" (Munro 2007, 242) in the following text also imply negative judgement targeting Ladner. When Liza is described as unique in "She looked **unique,** and she was" (Munro 2007, 236), it is not clear if her behaviour (judgement) or appearance (appreciation) is evaluated, thus both attitudes were taken into consideration.

The main interest in the study was the expression of attitude targeting Bea, Ladner, and Liza. Since all attitudes in the excerpts were identified and categorized, and with that all

[3] According to Martin and White (2005, 60–61), double coding means that one lexical word can encode two or more attitudinal categories in borderline cases. Moreover, Thompson (2014) observes that evaluation in discourse is often not single-layered. Similarly, Križan (2016a; 2016b) illustrates the formation of chains of attitudes (various categories and/or explicit and implicit attitudinal realization) around some lexical words and/or in the whole proposition owing to the co(n)text in advertisements.

targets, a target that is neither Bea nor Ladner or Liza also occurred, which we labelled "other" (e.g. Liza's brother, Ladner's estate). Although the main protagonists were the focus of the analysis, in some instances, "other" played a contextual role in the identification of an implicit attitude. For example, in the context of the story, "family" in "Liza thought, Like a family" (Munro 2007, 240) was identified as a target of implicit positive appreciation, indicating Liza's longing for family, i.e. family being important to her.

Furthermore, regarding the coding decision, when Liza and Kenny (who is always identified as "other") are referred to via the plural pronoun "they" (e.g. "They **knew** much more" (Munro 2007, 240)), and evaluated with the same attitude (judgement, in this case), they were counted as two targets/emoters, and the attitude was counted twice. Additionally, based on the use of the plural pronoun "we" in "how we **despise** her" (Munro 2007, 241), Liza, Kenny and Ladner were counted as three emoters, together with three instances of affect conveyed via the single word "despise". After coding all attitudes in the selected excerpts, the results for the targets, Bea, Ladner, Liza, and "other" were calculated with regard to their frequency of occurrence with the UAM CorpusTool. The results for Bea, Ladner, and Liza (the main protagonists), as targets/emoters, are shown in the tables below, followed by an interpretation of selected examples for all three categories (judgement, affect, and appreciation).

5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Evaluation of Bea

The analysis has shown that the prevailing attitude targeting Bea is judgement (47.5%), as seen in Table 1. As an emoter, Bea also frequently expresses emotion (38.6%), while the least expressed attitude is appreciation (13.9%). Although negative attitudes prevail (53.5%), Bea is also frequently positively evaluated (46.5%). A high prevalence of explicit attitudes (explicit: 73.3% vs implicit: 26.7%) indicates that Bea is primarily evaluated directly via attitudinal lexis. A selection of examples for all three categories is presented and interpreted below.

Table 1. Bea as a target/emoter of attitude.

ATTITUDE-TYPE	**N**	**%**
affect	39	38.6
judgement	48	47.5
appreciation	14	13.9
TOTAL	101	100.0
explicit	74	73.3
implicit	27	26.7
TOTAL	101	100.0
positive	47	46.5
negative	54	53.5
TOTAL	**101**	**100.0**

5.1.1 Judgement

The story begins with the older Bea musing about her past after Ladner's death, then jumps back to the time shortly before she first meets him. Here, we are given an insight into Bea's character through several examples of explicit and implicit negative judgement from her own perspective, as she is the focalizer in this section. We learn, for instance, that "love affairs were the main content of her life, and she knew that she was **not being honest**[4] when she belittled them" (Munro 2007, 222); as well as that "[s]he did think, she did admit, that she was **vain**" (Munro 2007, 222). Bea first meets Ladner through her current boyfriend, Peter Parr, a school headmaster. He takes her with him when he pays a visit to Ladner to ask him for permission to bring groups of high school students to his estate. Bea finds Ladner irresistibly attractive and decides to visit him on her own a few days later under the pretence of having lost her way. Her real intentions are revealed in further examples of implicit negative judgment targeting her, from her own perspective: "She had to feel sorry for herself, in her silk underwear. She pitied herself for being a victim of such wants" (Munro 2007, 226). Ladner, however, ignores Bea's intentions and gives her a full tour of the estate, something she is neither prepared nor equipped for. She is thinking that this "might be a joke on her, a punishment for being, after all, such a tiresome **vamp** and **fraud**" (Munro 2007, 228), expressing explicit (negative) judgement of her own tendency towards insincerity and indulgence in the seduction of men.

Bea explains the sudden change in her life – the abandoning of her boyfriend and moving in with Ladner – in a letter to her friends, saying that she is one of those women who "might be always on the lookout for an insanity that could contain them. For what was living with a man if it wasn't living inside his insanity?" (Munro 2007, 225). The implicit negative judgment contained in her words sheds light on her predilection for the rude and arrogant Ladner over her kind former boyfriend, whose insanity she found "not big enough" (Munro 2007, 225). Bea and Ladner's relationship is by no means an uncomplicated one. The implicit negative judgment targeting her and expressed from her perspective in "She learned, she changed" (Munro 2007, 230) reveals that she needed to adapt to Ladner; "It seemed that she had to be cured of all her **froth and vanity** and all her old notions of love" (Munro 2007, 230). The latter sentence contains explicit negative judgement from her own perspective, but it is implied (by "it seemed") that Ladner is the one who finds these faults with her and wants her "cured" of them.

Several examples of judgment targeting Bea appear in the third section, in which young Liza is the focalizer. When Liza is first introduced to Bea, Bea says something to please Liza's younger brother, but Liza knows that "[s]he's **lying**, […] **Lying** for Kenny's sake" (Munro 2007, 238), which is an example of explicit negative judgement targeting Bea; it is Liza's assumption about Bea's morality. At a later point, when Bea and Liza become friends, a swimming scene takes place that is supposedly based on a real event in Munro's life. Liza sees Ladner imitate Bea behind her back as she is standing in the pond, splashing around in the cold water and producing funny noises. Liza believes that Ladner's prancing is saying "See how **vain** she is […] See what a **fake**. **Pretending** not to be afraid of the deep water,

[4] Language that conveys attitudes explicitly is in bold.

pretending to be happy, **pretending** not to know how we despise her" (Munro 2007, 241). This passage contains an explicit negative judgement of Bea, which Liza attributes to Ladner, intensified via the repetition of "pretending", which echoes Bea's own negative judgement of herself as a vain person and a fraud from section one. What is also worth noticing here is the use of the plural pronoun "we", in "how we despise her" ("despise" belonging to the category of affect), which indicates that Liza attributes this to at least another person – to herself, to Kenny, or both? It is difficult to say, as the story does not make it clear.

Having witnessed Ladner's prancing in the pond, Liza believes that Bea will decide to leave because of the insult. But Bea stays, and Liza observes that Bea "had forgiven Ladner, after all, or made a bargain not to remember" (Munro 2007, 246), thus implicitly negatively judging Bea for not acting against Ladner's insulting behaviour. That Liza believes Bea could protect her (and possibly Kenny) from Ladner is seen in "Bea **could** spread safety, if she wanted to. Surely she **could**. All that is needed is for her to turn herself into a different sort of woman, **a hard-and-fast**, **draw-the-line sort**, **clean-sweeping**, **energetic**, and **intolerant**" (Munro 2007, 246). She sees in Bea "[t]he woman who **could** rescue them – who **could** make them all, keep them all good" (Munro 2007, 246). The above examples of explicit judgement targeting Bea, expressed from Liza's perspective, refer to the kind of woman Liza believes Bea would need to be to put a stop to Ladner's indecent behaviour – but she fails to be. Although the repetition of "could" seems to emphasize Liza's hope for Bea's capacity and potential for a change, hence explicitly and positively judging her, Bea's change is conditioned by her lack of desire or her inability to do so, which transforms explicit positive judgement into negative implicit judgement. The difference in behaviour is intensified via the list of explicit positive attributes, which Bea obviously lacks. Liza's firm belief in Bea's ability to change is expressed via "surely". However, the sentence "What Bea has been sent to do, she doesn't see" (Munro 2007, 246) implies negative judgement of Bea from Liza's perspective, although it is not clear whether Liza thinks that Bea refuses to see or is unable to see what she should do.

After Ladner's death, many years later, Bea enters, as we learn from the narratorial voice, "a period of musing and drinking" (Munro 2007, 221), which implies negative judgement, targeting Bea's problematic behaviour based on some inner struggle. This period of Bea's life "looked to everybody else like a **slow decline** but to her seemed, after all, sadly pleasurable, like a **convalescence**" (Munro 2007, 221), hence explicitly judging Bea negatively (slow decline), from the point of view of other people, and positively (convalescence), from her own point of view. What Bea possibly muses over – we are able to fill this narrative gap only after having read the whole story – is her turbulent past with Ladner. This is when she writes a letter to Liza (that she never sends) under the pretence of thanking her for checking on the house when she and Ladner were at the hospital; however, she soon starts evoking the times when Liza and Kenny were children, which indicates that it is this problematic period of the past on which her mind dwells.

5.1.2 Affect

Bea's emotions are also frequently expressed in the story. In the section where Bea is the focalizer, we learn implicitly of the importance she ascribes to romance: "But still she felt

the first signal of a love affair like the warmth of the sun on her skin, like music through a doorway, or the moment, as she had often said, when the black-and-white television commercial bursts into color" (Munro 2007, 222). We also learn that "[s]he **liked** tributes and attention" (Munro 2007, 222), which adds to her idea of herself as vain. Bea's emotional state when she first visits Ladner on her own is described as a combination of "**[l]ust** and **terror**" (Munro 2007, 226), revealing that Ladner's intimidating behaviour makes him all the more irresistible in her eyes. When Ladner barely greets her upon her arrival at the estate, as he is absorbed in his work, his cold reception only increases Bea's desire for him, for she feels that "there was nothing like this – nothing like watching a man work at some hard job, when he is forgetful of you and works well, in a way that is tidy and rhythmical, nothing like it to heat the blood" (Munro 2007, 222).

5.1.3 Appreciation

Appreciation is the least represented category in Bea's evaluation. The following example is from section three, where Liza is the focalizer: "[S]he loved the **dampness** that was often to be seen in Bea's eyes, the **tremor and teasing and playful pleading** in Bea's voice, its **huskiness and artificiality**" (Munro 2007, 240). The dampness in Bea's eyes and the tremor in her voice testify to Liza seeing Bea as emotional, even sentimental. However, the teasing, playful pleading and artificiality that Liza ascribes to Bea's voice convey explicit negative appreciation, implying that Liza sees Bea as prone to dishonesty and gamesmanship.

5.2 Evaluation of Ladner

Table 2 shows that Ladner is evaluated mostly in terms of judgement (63.2%); the ratio of his expression of feelings (affect) is 27.6%, while the least expressed attitude is appreciation (9.2%). Negative attitudinal status (75.0%) greatly prevails over positive (25.0%), while the prevailing realization of attitude is explicit (59.2% vs implicit 40.5%). The most salient examples of judgement and affect that add to Ladner's character portrayal are presented in the section below. Appreciation does not play a significant role in his character portrayal and is therefore not presented here.

Table 2. Ladner as a target/emoter of attitude.

ATTITUDE-TYPE	**N**	**%**
affect	21	27.6
judgement	48	63.2
appreciation	7	9.2
TOTAL	**76**	**100.0**
explicit	45	59.2
implicit	31	40.5
TOTAL	**76**	**100.0**
positive	19	25.0
negative	57	75.0
TOTAL	**76**	**100.0**

5.2.1 Judgement

Ladner is predominantly judged from Bea's or Liza's perspective. Bea first learns about Ladner from Peter Parr, who greatly praises him, but later discovers that many things she has been told about him are untrue. For instance, in the first section, in which Bea is the focalizer, we learn that she finds Ladner "**not at all a pacifist**" (Munro 2007, 223), thus judging him explicitly negatively. The negative judgement is further implied via ideational meaning in "he supported the Vietnam War and believed that nuclear weapons were a deterrent" (Munro 2007, 223). Upon first meeting him, Bea notes that he does not need a dog because "[h]e was his own **fierce dog**" (Munro 2007, 224); here, negative judgement is expressed through a metaphor and implies Ladner's rude behaviour towards strangers. Negative judgement of Ladner as a rude, unkind man is also implied via his direct speech when he turns down Peter Parr's request to allow high school students to visit his estate: "I don't give a fuck about your teenagers. […] Sometimes I let people go through but they are the people I decide on" (Munro 2007, 224). Bea later writes in a letter to a friend that "she would hate to think she had gone after Ladner because he was **rude** and **testy** and **slightly savage**" (Munro 2007, 225), but rather because with him, "she would be able to live surrounded by **implacability**, by ready doses of **indifference**" (Munro 2007, 225), expressing further negative judgment targeting Ladner. Bea also admits in the letter that Ladner sometimes ignores her when she comes to his bed, which makes her feel as if she has come "against blocks of solid darkness" (Munro 2007, 230), which contains an implicit negative judgement of Ladner's unpredictability in their relationship. However, there are also a few examples of positive judgement targeting Ladner that are provided from Bea's perspective. For instance, when she watches Ladner as he is working on the road culvert, she is thinking that "[t]here was no waste about Ladner, no extra size or unnecessary energy and certainly no elaborate conversation" (Munro 2007, 226), hence implying positive judgement targeting Ladner's high work efficiency. And when after the tour of the estate, Ladner offers her tea, she observes that he is somewhat nervous and unsure of himself, "**not so strange** a man after all, **nothing so very mysterious** about him, maybe **nothing even so very interesting**" (Munro 2007, 229), explicitly judging him rather positively.

From Liza's perspective, judgement targeting Ladner is predominantly negative. In section three, where young Liza is the focalizer, we learn that the first time Liza and her brother Kenny sneak onto Ladner's property and he catches them, coming from behind a tree, he seems to Liza "like a **murderer** on television, with a little axe, from behind a tree" (Munro 2007, 239), which is explicit negative judgement. Moreover, a combination of explicit negative judgement via "danger" and implicit judgement via "grabbed", "squashed", and "his eyes shone out of ambush, hard and round as the animals' glass eyes" (Munro 2007, 244–45) in the scene of Ladner's sexual assault on Liza, which is presented from Liza's perspective, indicates the kind of danger that he represents for her, comparing him to a wild animal, a predator about to catch his prey. In this section, we also learn that the children's father warns them about Ladner when they tell him they are spending time with him: "But you better not cross him or he'll skin you alive" (Munro 2007, 239). This allusion to Ladner's skinning of animals also implies danger and thus contains negative judgement coming from the father but through Liza's focalization.

The scene at the pond, when Ladner tries to assault Liza after Bea disappears, contains a combination of implicit judgement targeting Ladner's sexually abusive behaviour towards Liza, of explicit positive judgement via "ordinary" and "serious", and of explicit negative judgement emphasizing his ability to change from an abuser to an ordinary man, and the ease with which he does that:

> He made a pretend grab at her, to get her between the legs. At the same time he made a pious, shocked face, as if the person in his head was having a fit at what his hand might do. […] He was quite **ordinary** again, a **serious** workman, slightly fed up with all their foolishness. Ladner **could** do that. He **could** switch from one person to another and make it your fault if you remembered. (Munro 2007, 242)

Since Liza is the focalizer in this scene, the repetition of the modal "can" in the past ("could") implies that Liza has witnessed his abrupt change before, thus providing evidence that Ladner's behaviour is repetitive, pointing to his duplicitous nature.

5.2.2 Affect

Ladner occurs much less frequently as an emoter than as a target of judgement. The most significant example of affect that adds to his character portrayal is contained in the following sentence from section one, where Bea is the focalizer: "And when he got used to her, or **felt safe** from her, his feelings took a turn for the better" (Munro 2007, 230), with "her" referring to Bea. This suggests that Bea believes that the reason for Ladner's initial rudeness or indifference towards her is his insecurity, and that when he becomes sure of her devotion to him, he becomes somewhat kinder.

5.3 Evaluation of Liza

Table 3 shows that in Liza's evaluation, the most frequently expressed attitude is judgement (47.1%), closely followed by affect (41.4%), while appreciation is the least expressed attitude (11.4%), as is the case with the other two characters. Regarding attitudinal status, negative (50%) and positive (50%) status are evenly balanced. The explicit attitude (74.3%) greatly dominates the implicit attitude (25.7%). The most significant examples of judgement, affect, and appreciation targeting Liza are presented in the section below.

Table 3. Liza as a target/emoter of attitude.

ATTITUDE-TYPE	**N**	**%**
affect	29	41.4
judgement	33	47.1
appreciation	8	11.4
TOTAL	**70**	**100.0**
explicit	52	74.3
implicit	18	25.7
TOTAL	**70**	**100.0**
positive	35	50.0
negative	35	50.0
TOTAL	**70**	**100.0**

5.3.1 Judgement

Most of the early examples of judgement targeting Liza are found in section two, where Warren is the focalizer, and refer to Liza in her early twenties. We learn from Warren's perspective, for instance, that Liza is a Christian and that she follows a strict daily and weekly routine, which implies positive judgement: "She did the laundry every Wednesday night and counted the strokes when she brushed her teeth and got up early in the morning to do knee bends and read Bible verses" (Munro 2007, 232). However, this may also imply obsessive behaviour, hence negative judgement, which was also considered in the analysis. Additionally, Liza is explicitly evaluated as "always very **conscientious** about changing the exclamation 'Jesus' to 'Jeepers' and 'Hell' to 'help',[5] as they were supposed to do in the Fellowship" (Munro 2007, 233), which emphasizes her religious zeal but could also point to an obsessive-compulsive disorder. Warren also notices a kind of duality in Liza's behaviour when he first sees her at a Fellowship dance. He is amazed by "the **crazy, slithery spirit** that possessed her" (Munro 2007, 235) on the dancefloor, which is an explicit negative judgement. But he also feels proud of her and wants to tell everybody "That's what she's got in her" (Munro 2007, 235), which contains implicit positive judgement. We also learn from Warren's perspective that Liza later admits to him that she was "**wild** before becoming a Christian" (Munro 2007, 236), even as a child, which is an example of her explicit negative judgement of herself. While "wild" could mean many things, in Liza's case, it needs to be understood in a sexual context.

Judgement targeting Liza as a child appears mostly in section three, of which she is the focalizer, and is predominantly linked to her relationship with Ladner. We learn that Ladner teaches the young Liza and Kenny about nature: "Soon they **knew** much more. At least Liza did. She **knew** birds, trees, mushrooms, fossils, the solar system. She **knew** where certain rocks came from and that the swelling on a goldenrod stem contains a little white worm that can live nowhere else in the world", but she also "knew not to talk so much about all she knew" (Munro 2007, 240). The use and repetition of "knew" indicates Liza's wide knowledge about nature and her fast-learning ability, which is a positive judgement; however, in the last sentence, "knew" refers to what is going on between Ladner and her and indicates that Liza is aware that it is problematic for her to possess such "knowledge".

After the scene of Ladner's sexual assault on Liza in section three, which is told, as Bigot (2017, 19) explains, indirectly, from the point of view of Liza who "tries to dissociate herself from the rape" (Bigot 2017, 19), Ladner tells Liza and Kenny (who seems to be merely an observer, although this is not entirely clear from the story) that "they were **bad**" (Munro 2007, 245), after which follows a repetition of the adjective in italics: "***bad-bad-bad***" (Munro 2007, 245), which sounds like an echo in Liza's mind. With the explicit negative judgement of Liza or possibly of both children, Ladner manipulates them into believing that they are the ones who are doing something wrong, which Bigot (2017, 120) refers to as committing moral violence against the children. On another occasion, Ladner calls Liza and Kenny "**dirty-minded juveniles**" (Munro 2007, 242), again explicitly judging them negatively, which is a trick to which he resorts to prevent Bea's suspicion when Kenny, in his innocence, tells Bea that the initials P.D.P. on a trunk mean "pull-down-pants" (Munro 2007, 242).

[5] These are examples of what Michelle Gadpaille (2022) calls "country speech" in Alice Munro's writing.

Because of Ladner's dual role in Liza's life – as a teacher and caretaker on the one side, and as an abuser on the other – and because of his cunning way of making Liza feel like an accomplice in the wicked things he does to her, Liza, as a child, has a confused image of him:

> Liza herself **couldn't** have described to anybody what he was like. In the secret life she had with him, what was terrible was always funny, badness was mixed up with silliness, you always had to join in with dopey faces and voices and pretending he was a cartoon monster. You **couldn't** get out of it, or even want to, any more than you could stop an invasion of pins and needles. (Munro 2007, 243)

The passage above provides explicit judgement referring to Liza's inability to fully comprehend her relationship with Ladner, for while she enjoys the funny things they do together, there are other things that she finds terrible. Her situation feels like a blind alley, with no way out.

5.3.2 Affect

In the evaluation of Liza, affect is almost as highly represented as judgement. Examples of affect appear mostly in section three, where Liza is the focalizer, and refer to her feelings towards Bea and Ladner. When Bea moves in with Ladner, it seems to Liza that they – she and Kenny included – have become "[l]ike a family" (Munro 2007, 240), which highlights her need for a family, being motherless, and with her father not adequately taking care of his children. There are several examples where Liza's love for Bea is explicitly expressed, for instance, referring to Bea's skin, "it was in fact this collection of flaws, this shadowy damage, that Liza especially **loved**" (Munro 2007, 240). But Liza's love for Bea is not "easy or restful – her love was one of expectation, but she did not know what it was that she expected" (Munro 2007, 240–41). What she expected, without being fully aware of it, was for Bea to assume a motherly role and protect her.

Her feelings towards Ladner are even more complex. She feels danger in the sexual assault scene, an intense negative emotion: "When Ladner grabbed Liza and squashed himself against her, she had a sense of **danger** deep inside him" (Munro 2007, 244). However, in the scene in the pond, where Ladner is making fun of Bea, she has mixed feelings: "Part of her **wanted** to make Ladner stop, to stop at once, before the damage was done, and part of her **longed for** that very damage, the damage Ladner could do, the ripping open, the final delight of it" (Munro 2007, 241). But afterwards, she is "full of **guilt** and **foreboding**" (Munro 2007, 242); she is afraid that Bea would leave after the incident and that it would partly be her fault.

When, many years later, Liza vandalizes Ladner and Bea's house, which is described in section two, where Warren is the focalizer, he asks her what they did to her "that made you so **mad**" (Munro 2007, 237), but does not get a straight answer. Liza replies half-jokingly, referring to Bea: "I already told you what she did to me. She sent me to college", which implies that the anger that has accumulated in Liza and manifested as extreme vandalism has more to do with what Bea failed to do.

5.3.3 Appreciation

Appreciation targeting Liza is represented to a minor degree and is not key to her character portrayal. However, there is one example of appreciation in section two, from the point of

view of Warren, that sheds some light on her character: she is described as having a "high, rounded forehead and deep-set brown eyes" and an "expression that was both **childish** and **fierce**. She looked **unique**, and she was" (Munro 2007, 235–36). The contrast that Warren notices in Liza's expression, which is at the same time innocent as a child's, and intense and unyielding, is what makes her unique to him, while suggesting that a conflict is going on within her because of the traumatic childhood experience.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Judgement is the prevalent attitude targeting all three characters, closely followed by affect in Liza's and Bea's cases, while in Ladner's case judgement prevails over affect to a greater extent, which is not surprising, since Ladner is never the focalizer and his inner life is not revealed. Appreciation is the least represented category in the selected excerpts, thus playing a less significant role in the portrayal of the characters. Explicit attitudes prevail in the evaluation of all three characters, with slightly over 70% in Bea's and Liza's cases, while the percentage is somewhat lower in Ladner's case (59.2%), indicating that his characterization is mostly assumed. In Ladner's evaluation, negative attitudes greatly prevail over positive ones (75% vs 25%), which comes as no surprise, considering that he is the abuser. He is evaluated negatively by both female characters as well as through the rare occurrences of his direct speech. Ladner represents danger in Liza's childhood perception, resembling a predator whose prey she has become. Liza also finds him duplicitous and confusing, for he can easily change from the man who teaches her and Kenny about nature to an abuser. Upon first meeting Ladner, Bea also compares him to an animal, a fierce dog, ascribing him negative attributes such as savage, rude and insane; however, these are the very characteristics that she finds attractive in him. The few examples of positive judgement of Ladner are also provided from Bea's perspective and refer particularly to his work efficiency.

One would perhaps expect that Liza, as the victim, would be predominantly positively evaluated, but the ratio is 50% positive vs 50% negative. It needs to be taken into consideration, however, that Liza, as a child, is attributed negative characteristics (bad, dirty-minded) by Ladner, her abuser, who uses this as a manipulative tool to keep her and Kenny quiet about the abuse. Liza's husband, Waren, who as a focalizer provides most of the judgement and appreciation targeting the adult Liza, notices the duality in her appearance (childlike and fierce) and behaviour (a good Christian who is sometimes possessed by a crazy spirit). He is also the one who witnesses the letting loose of the anger, caused by the trauma, that has lain dormant in Liza and its transformation into vandalism, wondering what has made her so angry.

The analysis also shows that Bea, who only plays the role of a bystander, is more often the target/emoter of evaluation (29.1%) than Ladner, the perpetrator (22.4%), or Liza, the victim (20.6%).[6] This confirms that the story revolves significantly more around Bea than it does around the sexual abuse itself. Several scholars have identified the story's central question to be "whether or not Bea knew about the abuse" (Bigot 2017, 114). There is evidently an effort in the story to provide a detailed characterization of Bea before the reader even learns about the abuse. The story dwells on the outlining of Bea's romantic disposition,

[6] In 27.9% of cases there is another target or emoter.

her need for men's attention, her attraction to the arrogant and surly Ladner, and her inability to resist him despite his indifference and his mocking of her. In portraying Bea as a victim of her desire for Ladner, who mistreats her, her weakness and her inability to protect herself are emphasized, possibly serving as an excuse for her inability to protect young Liza. Liza, from her child's perspective, understands that Bea might not be strong enough to protect her from Ladner, which is why she experiences, as Bigot suggests, a conflicting "need to protect Bea and be protected by her" (2017, 117). The story thus reads much like an apology for Bea's self-deception and inaction. Andrea Szabó argues that the reason why Bea resorts to intentional blindness is "because knowing the truth would reveal slices of injustice and horror" in her life "that would threaten the image" (2024, 45) of her own self. That Bea likely chooses to turn a blind eye to the abuse is hinted at by Munro's statement that her stories in *Open Secrets* record "how women adapt to protect men" (1995). Bea is indeed a woman who adapts to protect Ladner by refusing "to admit – to others and, perhaps, even to herself – that Ladner was a pedophile" (Dawson 2005, 70). To admit this would result in the collapse of the world she has built for herself, and of which Ladner is the centre. Another valuable finding of the analysis of Munro's skilful and nuanced use of evaluative language in character portrayal through appraisal is that Bea, a woman who adapts to protect her man, a paedophile, is severely judged in the story, and also by herself, as seen in the parts where she is the focalizer.

This article is an attempt at applying Martin and White's appraisal analysis model to analyse evaluative language in character portrayal in a literary work. While, according to Mary Conway, this is a "a valuable method of evaluating characters and actions in the context of the narrative" (2019, 20), since it is transparent and constrains subjectivity, it does have shortcomings when used with literary texts. For instance, and as acknowledged by Conway (2019, 9), it does not take into consideration the multiple perspectives that appear in narratives. In a story such as "Vandals", where the narrative is deliberately confusing, using several viewpoints and switching between them, this has been revealed to be a major challenge. A potential extension of this study could thus usefully involve subdivision of the story by focalizer and a more targeted application of appraisal theory.

Data Availability Statement

All relevant information is contained within the article; no additional data are available.

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