

The Scream in Alice Munro's "The Time of Death"

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As several critics have pointed out, paradox is central to Alice Munro's fiction, and "The Time of Death" is no exception as signaled by its very title and its incipit. Indeed, despite its bold-faced and unflinching title, the "time of death" is precisely what the text will carefully avoid depicting, although it informs the whole story. The very first word of the short story, "Afterwards", suggests an event significant enough to be a watershed while it remains in the prehistory of the text, placing the reader in the uncomfortable position where he feels he ought to know something about which he has not yet read. The time of death is somehow taken for granted, at once natural, decisive and unaccountable. The text deals with the "before" and the "after," but through several ellipses the time of Benny's death as well as his funeral are left untold, haunting the typographic breaks on the page. This narrative silence is in stark contrast with Patricia's scream, a belated reaction to her little brother's death for which she is, however unwittingly, responsible. However this scream, towards which the whole short story seems to move as tension unrelentingly builds up is – by its very textual nature and its evolution from an articulated expression of hatred to pure sounds,¹ to a purely visual deformation of the face – a *silent* scream, a scream we read about but can only hear in the private recesses of our minds. This, I feel, is very close to the experience one has in looking at Edvard Munch's famous 1893 painting, *The Scream*, which likewise creates a visual, and therefore silent,

¹ This is emphasized by the repetition of the word *scream* four times within the space of six lines.

auditory impression in a moment suspended in time. In both Munch's painting and Munro's story, the silent explosion echoes long after the viewer of the painting has gone and the reader closed the book, its paradoxical nature making it all the more potent and suggesting unbearable horror and pain, the cause of which remains unrepresentable. What "The Time of Death" and *The Scream* give us are the effects on people of what escapes definition or description, and how this in turn affects their and our vision of the world around. The paradoxical nature of the short story therefore appears as partaking of its very essence as it makes us experience the epistemological dead-end death confronts us with.

Although it does not show the time of death, Munro's short story presents us with the times of death, each person involved reacting in their own way and differently in time. None of these reactions however seems to be appropriate. It is somehow Patricia's scream which appears adequate in its very inadequacy as it disrupts the appearances which everybody, Patricia included, has tried to keep up; it reveals an animality in man which civilization desperately tries to elide. As in Munch's painting, the world's solid reality seems to melt away, distorted by the deafening silent sound waves. Even though the short story ends on the snowflakes that do not melt on "the rock of the earth" and seem to cover up and silence the scream, Munro's narrative technique does not allow such fake firmness as it deprives the reader of any solid ground on which to base an interpretation, creating a similar experience to that of Munch's painting.

1. The times of death

Placed straightaway in the aftermath of Benny's death, the reader is first presented with Leona's reaction, her overpowering presence somehow already erasing the boy whose existence is only implied in the mention of "the mother, Leona Parry," the absence of the possessive adjective "his" redoubling as it were that effacement. Leona, the figure of the bereaved mother, indeed occupies center-stage as all the women circle around her and she uncomprehendingly goes over the moments that just preceded Benny's death, trying to exculpate herself from responsibility: "I wasn't hardly out of the house, I wasn't out of the house twenty minutes-" (89). The double negation foreshadows Allie McGee's aside, calling into question the truth of the statement. The latter's remembering of the time

just before the accident again focuses on Leona, who invades both Allie's domestic space and the space of the narrative. When mourning the loss of her child, Leona seems to value his effacement mostly, as if the child were already an absence even before his death: "He was so good, too, you never would of known you had him in the house. I always said, that's the best one I ever had" (92). Her hysterical reaction to Benny's death, screaming that she does not want to set eyes on her daughter Patricia, held responsible for the little boy's death, thus appears somewhat overdone, almost theatrical. This is corroborated by her later instant reconciliation with Patricia when the young girl is offered an opportunity to sing in a concert. Leona is shown to project onto her daughter the singing career she might herself have hoped for², and what she says about her actually reflects on herself: "[...] it just comes natural to her to perform" (90). The paradoxical wording that qualifies the idea of authenticity is confirmed in the next few lines where Leona prides herself on Patricia's "natural blond hair", the genuineness being guaranteed by a long lineage of natural blondes in the family and by the pleonastic use of adjectives: "that *real natural* blonde is a lot scarcer than natural curly" (90) (*my emphasis*), while the artificiality of the whole process is emphasized by the tedious routine performed every night to make Patricia's hair curly. Therefore Leona's attempt at restoring her self-image as a good mother intuitively attuned to her children cannot but raise the reader's suspicions:

And I went out the door and down the steps and down to the end of the garden and just as I took the hook off the gate something stopped me, I thought, *something's wrong!* [...] and Allie says, Leona, what's the matter with you, you look so white, she says—
Allie McGee heard this too and said nothing, because it was not a time for any sort of accuracy. (90-91)

² Although Patricia's name appears no less than five times in the space of a single paragraph, making her as obtrusive a presence as her mother, it is most of the time caught up in structures that turn her into a passive object in the hands of her mother: "Patricia *was supposed to* have the outfit for that night", "Patricia *was introduced* as the Little Sweetheart of Maitland Valley" (89), "Leona *had started her singing* in public when she was three-years old" (90). She is besides netted in her mother's discourse, with no voice of her own at this stage in the narrative.

Allie McGee's unvoiced inconspicuous comment³ is scathing and destroys whatever credibility might have been granted to Leona's self-reported premonition. Allie's reserve is instantly filled in by Leona's frantic cries. From the start, the grieving mother's reactions –the hysterical screams, the rambling talk, the self-justification, the isolation in her bedroom for weeks or the trite comfort of "You gotta go on" (98) – are stamped with inauthenticity.

So is the consolation brought by the mourning women of the village who gather around Leona after the news of Benny's death. Forming a protective circle around the mother and insulating her from Patricia, their silhouettes are vaguely disquieting and almost witch-like:

And the women in the kitchen would crowd around the couch, their big bodies indistinct in the half-light, their faces looming pale and heavy, hung with the *ritual masks* of mourning and compassion. Now lay down, they *would* say, in the stately tones of *ritual* soothing. Lay down, Leona, she ain't here, it's all right. (91 – *my emphasis*)

The repetition of the word *ritual*, associated with *masks*, and the iterative *would*, empty these conventional expressions of mourning of any meaning or true compassion. The words of religious solace uttered by the two Salvation Army women are likewise stilted, mechanical and insensitive to Leona's grief: "In the garden of heaven the children bloom like flowers. God needed another flower and he took your child. Sister, you should thank him and be glad" (91). Out of touch with the actual suffering of the mother, the religious cliché is all the more cruelly ironical as it clashes with the sterility of Leona's garden:

I stood there and I looked back at the garden and all I could see was the cornstalks standing and the cabbages there frozen, we never got them in this year [...] and the yards all empty, it was cold I guess and no kids playin' out- (90)

As the official language of religious authority, it silences the women placed in the position of children meant to believe what they are told, even against their better judgment: "The other women listened uneasily while these spoke; their faces at such words took on a look of embarrassed

³ Though the last sentence starts with narration, the second part seems to translate Allie's thought process in what comes close to Free Indirect Thought.

childish solemnity”⁴ (91). The support brought by the female community thus appears contrived, artificial, an impression also prompted by the narrator’s use of parallel structures for the opening lines of two successive paragraphs: “And the women in the kitchen would crowd [...]” followed by “And the girl from the Salvation army would say [...]” (91), the very repetitive structures adding to the use of *and* and *would* to make the actions appear automatic. Furthermore, the recurrence of the verb *say*, four times in the span of a few lines across these same two paragraphs, becomes self-destructive, increasingly suggesting that nothing of importance is actually uttered and no authentic message conveyed. Finally, in such a context, the reader is likely to intuit that, although the women weep with Leona, their compassion is tainted with contempt and petty jealousy, a point confirmed at the end of the story; indeed, a few weeks later, all traces of sympathy are gone, leaving only spite: “That is a prize kid of Leona’s, the neighbors said to each other as they went home. That *singer*, they said, because now things were back to normal and they disliked Leona as much as before” (99).

As for Allie McGee who first appears as the helpful and efficient neighbor, offering the shelter of her house to Leona and to the three children whom she gets ready for the funeral, her generosity also appears fake, as her disparaging comments to the store-man about the children’s uncleanliness or Patricia’s insensate reaction reveal. Thus, what could be thought of as the only appropriate reaction turns out to be mere hypocrisy.

Faced with the inauthenticity of female solidarity, the men’s reaction is one of escapism. Excluded from the domestic sphere and the mourning rituals, the father, together with the other men of the community, is made to feel inadequate. He therefore rejects those ritualistic expressions of grief and finds refuge in drink. The men’s absence from the mourning scene, a result of both exclusion and escapism, is matched by the peripheral space the text devotes to them.

Only the children, in their innocence, speak out what the other characters do not allow themselves to voice, and confront their elder sister with the horror of Benny’s death and her responsibility: “Is he going to die?” (95) George says, “He cried awful, Irene said, her face in the pillow.” (96) It should be noted that the children’s dialogue (95-96) is presented in indented lines which suffice as markers of direct speech and

⁴ As for Leona, she somehow reverts to an infant state, rocking herself back and forth.

of change of speaker. Because all the previous direct speech verbal exchanges between adults until this point in the text have been integrated within the narrative discourse, neither inverted commas nor paragraphing working as demarcation between quoted discourse and reporting discourse, the children's dialogue is endowed with a special status. The visual difference, because it corresponds to a return to more conventional speech presentation, seems to make the dialogue appear far more real, retrospectively confirming that no authentic communication has taken place between the protagonists until that stage in the short story. The dialogue concludes on a paragraph where direct speech is again narrative-integrated as it introduces Allie McGee back into the conversation: "He did so die, he did so! Patricia did not answer. *It's her fault*, George sobbed, and Mrs McGee said, Oh, no, oh, no!" (96): the children's sincere and immediate reaction is a foil to Ali McGee's disingenuously orthodox protestation, but they cannot get the full meaning and implication of their words.

Patricia, on the other hand, is old enough to understand, but her attitude is one of denial. She cannot face Benny's death, and even less so her own instrumentality in that death. Her reaction is thus first to refuse to consider the very possibility of his dying and to play down the suffering he must have endured, taking refuge in outrageous fantasy which she needs to assert very authoritatively: "[...] I never in my life heard of anybody that died of a burnt skin. Your whole skin could be burnt off it wouldn't matter you could just grow another. Irene stop crying or I'll hit you" (96). When Benny's death has become a fact, she behaves as though nothing had happened. Her complete indifference, the fact that she does not manifest any kind of grief and keeps paying attention to her own appearance (her shoes, her hair) and reading magazines, or continues her public singing, turn her into a kind of monster. Her complete insensitivity creates an uncanny atmosphere as she seems to live in a parallel world, cut off from reality. Time is suspended, like the snow which, throughout the short story, is about to fall but does not. The scream that suddenly breaks out thus almost comes as a relief, easing the tension that has been building up as Patricia, it seems, suddenly gets the full implications of Benny's death and of her own guilt. Although both Patricia's reactions – her denial that makes her keep up appearances as well as her insane scream – first appear as utterly unacceptable responses, their very inadequacy makes them perfectly adequate in response to a situation so horrible and monstrous that it precludes any idea of normality. There can be no rational and

adequate response to the death of a child, and this is what Patricia's extreme reactions show as they shatter the world of appearances set up by the little community.

2. Shattered appearances

Patricia's scream indeed disrupts the "return to normal" which the short story stages. The delayed shock of recognition breaks up the surface of everyday routine as the apparition of the old scissors-man, whom Benny used to run to – his name being one of the few words the cognitively-impaired child could pronounce –, has a *punctum* effect on Patricia. The *punctum* is defined by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* as: "[...] this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me." Karen Smythe, taking up Barthes' analysis, writes:

In Munro's stories, then, the *studium* is that which produces the 'reality effect,' while the *punctum* produces the surprise, the shock of revelation. The *punctum* is therefore that which is unnamable, since, Barthes writes, 'what I can name cannot really prick me'. [Smythe: 1991 495]

She further links this to Walter Benjamin's analysis which associates the *punctum* with Freud's exploration of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and his discovery of the protective shield: "Benjamin suggests that 'shocks' are unconscious impulses which break through the protection of consciousness" [Smythe: 1991 495]. Patricia's scream indeed breaks through the protective screen she has been painstakingly building, imitating and carrying to the extreme the system of values the whole community sets up as a defense against its instinctive nature and animality.

Patricia's scream is indeed one of anger and hate: "I hate that old scissors-man! I hate him! She screamed" (98). In the chapter he dedicates to the analysis of anger in *La Chair envisagée*, Denis Vasse points out that a fit of anger is usually a reaction to something that destabilizes the ego ideal, that is, the narcissistic image one has of oneself, the model one tries to conform to:

Elle apparaît souvent et avec une violence inouïe dans les moments de fausse sérénité qui précèdent la déconstruction de l'image de nous-mêmes centrée sur nous-mêmes au lieu d'être ouverte à l'altérité qui nous constitue comme sujet.

La colère annonce, en le dénonçant comme excessif ou insupportable, le signifiant qui décale l'image spéculaire et la fait choir, le signifiant du manque en tant que, dans l'économie du même, il est signifiant de l'ouverture et de l'Autre. [Vasse 78]

En nous faisant sortir de nos gonds, l'affect de la colère protège ou restaure un sentiment de plénitude ou de justice de nous-mêmes attaché à un objet que nous ne voulons pas perdre ou à une situation, un manque que nous ne voulons pas voir ou savoir. [Vasse 81]

The scissors-man, an avatar of the Grim Reaper, appears as *punctum* in the blind spot of Patricia's self, that part of the self and of reality she has steadfastly tried to ignore. The presence of the scissors-man suddenly brings to the fore the moments of communion Patricia used to share with Benny, moments of simple sincerity, unmediated by language, which contrast with her usual escape into the world of magazines that provide her with a model. His shabby appearance – “he wore the same stained brown overcoat, with the hem hanging ragged, and the same crownless felt hat” (98) – is also a reminder of the putrescent corporeal nature Patricia is desperately trying to fight. He thus shatters the perfect self she has been creating: the gifted girl with blonde curly hair, always clean and well-mannered. Patricia does not make any distinction between the ego ideal and her real self:

She did things the way a grown-up does; she did not pretend things. She did not play at being a singer, though she was going to be a singer when she grew up, maybe on the movies or maybe on the radio. She liked to look at movie magazines and magazines with pictures of clothes and rooms in them; she liked to look in the windows of some of the houses uptown.⁵ (92)

It cannot be forgotten that Benny dies from scalding precisely because of Patricia's obsession with cleanliness, her desire for a house as perfect as those she sees in glossy magazines or as Allie McGee's own house:

I'm going to clean this place up, she said. It never gets cleaned up like other places. The first thing I'm going to do I'm going to scrub the floor and you kids have to help me—
She put the pail on the stove.
That water is hot to start with, Irene said.
It's not hot enough. It's got to be good and boiling hot. I seen Mrs McGee scrub *her* floor. (94)

⁵ One may note here that the use of repetitions ironically saps any idea of progression and thus of growing up.

Allie McGee as the embodiment of the veneer of civilization is here designated as indirectly responsible as well for Benny's death, and with her, it is the whole society with its prescriptive norms and attachment to appearances which, we contend, is indicted. Indeed, from the start, Leona's slovenly appearance is insisted upon: her coming to Allie's place in her nightdress, her clumsy handling of Allie's sewing machine, her unkempt house and children. First anchored in Allie's perception, these judgments betray the attitudes of the women of the community at large: "Leona [...] threw her head down and then back (showing, as some of them noticed with a feeling of shame, the dirty lines on her neck)" (92). It is this sense of shame which is infused in Patricia as her reactions show when she washes her feet at the shoe shop for fear of the adults' comments—which indeed they do not fail to make about the younger children-- or again when she insists on good manners while the children are staying at the McGees's. Patricia's absence of reaction at Benny's death could actually be interpreted as a corrective to her mother's lack of restraint, another instance of the latter's indecorous attitude. There is indeed a form of indecency in exhibiting what ought to remain private, whether it be your daughter's singing, your body or your suffering, and this early description of Leona symbolizes her general attitude: "Her kimona fallen open revealed her lean chest, her wilted breasts with their large blue veins sloping into the grey-pink nightgown." (90)

The flesh here appears as faded, an intimation of death, crudely revealing man's carnal nature. It is this carnal dimension which society tries to keep at bay by erasing any reminder of its lower nature. Thus Patricia tries to discreetly dispose of George's urine as Allie McGee's sophisticated mauve and yellow guestroom does not allow room for a "stinking old pot" under the bed (95). Once again, the children's spontaneous and unaffected reactions reveal the artificiality of society and its unhealthy relationship to the body and to waste, although – significantly – education prevents any direct wording. Allie McGee's house appears as the epitome of such artificiality: "it was covered on the outside with imitation brick and inside it had an imitation fireplace" (95). The balanced repetition of the word *imitation* points to the fake harmony that is sought after and proves as inauthentic as Leona's outbursts, or rather makes the latter appear more sincere. Patricia finds herself caught between the standards of good society which require the erasure and disposal of anything considered dirty and too corporeal, and the reality of her life at

home where bodies and refuse are not hidden.⁶ Her monstrous denial of Benny's death therefore exposes the denial at work in the whole of society which keeps upholding the lie of its ideal image while refusing to acknowledge the body.

However, thus denied, the animal body comes back with a vengeance in Patricia's scream which turns the blonde-haired soft-spoken girl into a wild animal with a voracious mouth:

She screamed, standing stock-still in the yard with her face looking so wizened and white. [...] Her eyes were screwed up tight and her mouth wide open; her tiny pointed teeth were almost transparent, and faintly rotten at the edges; they made her look like a ferret, a wretched little animal insane with rage or fear. (99)

Patricia seems to lose her humanity. The mask of civilized attitude falls down with her distorted face which may recall Munch's barely human character whose face is reduced to its orifices – the eyes, the nostrils and the mouth – and whose whole body seems to be dissolving. Whereas the body was denied by language, it here seems to become one with it in this unarticulated form of language.

The clear-cut, neat appearances which Patricia was attempting to keep, symbolized in her painstakingly cutting the white edges around the paper clothes her little brother and sister were cutting out so that they may "stay on" (92), have melted away precisely with the arrival of the scissors-man. The game, consisting in cutting out a model family, as well as clothes for them from a catalogue, reveals the fantasy at work in society, a fantasy which covers up anything that may recall the corporeal nature of humanity. The schizophrenic dichotomy between body and language ultimately brings Patricia, and with her the whole of society, to the verge of insanity as all borders and limits eventually dissolve. Benny's scalded skin may stand for this utmost loss of protective barriers between self and world which cannot but lead to death.

⁶ Even Benny, her retarded brother with limited access to language, somehow reveals this animality since one of the two words he can pronounce is "bow-wow" in imitation of the dog's bark. The description given when he is scalded to death, brings to the fore this animality: "[...] Benny was making a noise not like crying, but more a noise like they had heard a dog making after its hind parts were run over, but worse and louder—" (92). Patricia feels slightly ashamed and unsuccessfully tries to teach some words to her brother, trying to bridge the gap between language and body. Benny's death may therefore be interpreted as a form of symbolical murder from society at large, an ultimate denial of the body to keep up the lie of perfect appearances.

Thus Patricia's insane, and therefore completely inappropriate scream, can be seen as doubly appropriate: it first shows how the death of a child remains far beyond the pale of human understanding and it reveals the impossible lie society forces upon its members in upholding an ideal image which cancels the reality of the body. The fact that it echoes Benny's awful animal cries precisely at the time of death confirms this adequate inadequacy. The mirror is shattered when reality can no longer be escaped. Yet, the scream which distorts Patricia's face, as in Munch's painting, also twists and deforms the world around, forbidding the grasping of any definite shape. The short story likewise does not allow any firm hold, and interpretation sways, wavers and vacillates when faced with the short story's unresolved tensions.

3. The whirling world of the short story

As pointed out in the introduction, the paradoxical nature of the silent scream, central to the short story's interpretation, suggests an unresolved tension between voice and sight which translates in the ungraspable shifts in point of view and voice to be found in the short story. Indeed, the opening pages of the short story seem to posit Allie McGee as a reliable focalizer whose sensible practical point of view accessed through Free Indirect Thought is a corrective to Leona's small arrangements with the truth in her discourse. Allie's silent voice is superimposed on Leona's vocal story which it consistently debunks. The two voices run parallel, Allie's story providing a negative evaluation of Leona, an evaluation which we tend to take at face-value. The contest between the silent and the vocal voices of the two women is consistently emphasized, with no ambiguity as to who gets the upper-hand:

Allie McGee did not say, and Leona caught her breath and plunged on: Twenty minutes. (90)

Allie Mc Gee heard this too and said nothing, because it was not a time for any sort of accuracy. Leona's voice had gone higher and higher as she talked and any time now she might break off and begin to scream: Don't let that kid come near me, don't let me see her, just don't let her come near me. (91)

The contest is all the more insidiously biased as, although Allie McGee's thoughts appear in parentheses, seemingly secondary to Leona's voice, the latter is embedded in Allie's point of view: the long stretch in parentheses

(89-90) is indeed mostly made up of Leona's rambling talk (while at Allie McGee's house at the time of Benny's death) as remembered by Allie, this remembered monologue filtered through an ironical perspective postponing, as it were, the present one actually delivered by Leona. Besides the bias may be traced as early as in the description of the voice "ragged and insistent, *but not yet hysterical*" (89) (my emphasis), a comment which we are retrospectively tempted to interpret as originating in Allie. Thus the first section of the short story is used to orient the reader's control of sympathy. However the end of the section introduces unobtrusive comments that instill in the reader some misgivings about Allie McGee's reliability. As the women gathered around Leona start crying, we are for the first time offered an outside description of the sensible neighbor: "She was stout, placid-faced, big-breasted; she had no children" (91). It is not so much the unflattering physical description that strikes a blow to the image of the competent woman as the mention of her childlessness. This sets her apart from the other mourning women, and suggests incapacity to empathize with the bereaved mother, questioning the legitimacy of her point of view: "In the dark overheated kitchen the women felt the dignity of this sorrow in their maternal flesh, they were humble before this unwashed, unliked and desolate Leona" (92). Her never having experienced in her flesh the bond of love may partly explain why Allie McGee cannot but look with contempt upon Leona's untidy body; her reaction to Leona's heartbreak is one of sympathy and falls short of true empathy. From then on, Allie McGee's point of view can no longer be considered as reliable, her hypocrisy being underlined when Patricia overhears her disparaging remarks to the shoe shop assistant, whether it be about the children's uncleanliness or Patricia's completely inappropriate pride in her new shoes. This invites us to return to the beginning where some phrases take on a more malicious turn than had initially been perceived: "Allie McGee thought, but she did not say so, *not at the time*" (89). The last phrase, suggesting later unkind gossip, further contributes to a reevaluation of Allie McGee who becomes part of the meanness evinced in the neighbors' comments. However, this does not completely erase her remarks about Leona, and the reader is left with no safe ground for evaluation.

The second section is an analepsis which places the reader with Patricia and the children in the Parrys' house just before the accident. Point of view oscillates between the third person narrator and Patricia, allowing both proximity with the young girl and critical distance, thereby

creating a form of superior understanding that leads the reader to feel some sympathy and compassion towards Patricia. Hence, when we move to Allie McGee's house in the next section as the narrative shifts forward this time, to the night just after Benny's accident but before his death in hospital, we are led to feel some sympathy again for Patricia, even though her behavior becomes increasingly awkward, revealing her inability to face the reality of the accident. It is to be noticed that the third section calls into question the temporality of the first for it covers a period starting from the immediate aftermath of the accident to the children's return home and Patricia's concert a few days after the funeral, implying therefore that the events in the first section must have been part of the time span covered by this third section. Temporal shifts thus blur landmarks, as do the shifts in point of view. Indeed in this section, point of view and voice fluctuate between the narrator, the children, Patricia and occasionally Mrs McGee, though some sentences cannot be ascribed with certainty to any particular speaker:

Mrs McGee took them downtown to buy them all new shoes for the funeral. Patricia was not going to the funeral because Leona had said she never wanted to see her again as long as she lived, but she was to get new shoes too; *it would have been unkind to leave her out.* (97 – my emphasis)

Whether the last sentence is Leona's or Allie McGee's seems impossible to decide. As Patricia closes in upon herself, living in her own parallel world cut off from reality, point of view becomes more and more detached, with the section ending on a terse statement: "Patricia did not cry" (98).

The scream episode is likewise described through external focalization, as though the narrator were trying to withdraw emotionally from an unsettling scene. About one of her characters in "An Ounce of Cure", Alice Munro writes:

When the girl's circumstances become hopelessly messy, when nothing is going to go right for her, she gets out of it by looking at the way things happen – by changing from a participant to an observer. This ... is what a writer does. ... I made the glorious leap from being a victim of my own ineptness and self-conscious miseries to being a godlike arranger of patterns and destinies, even if they were all in my head. [Metcalf 125]

When Patricia's defensive emotional insulation from reality collapses, the protective shielding is somehow transferred onto the narrator. As Karen Smythe points out: "the role of observer allows Munro (as model reader) to employ the 'twentieth century hybrid' of 'sympathetic identification and

aesthetic detachment' of which Lorraine York speaks" [Smythe 497]. Emotional detachment comes to a height in the last section with its impersonal outside description of the neighborhood which contrasts with the end of the previous section, an overhearing of the neighbors' nasty gossip. As opposed to this meanness – the only real target of Munro's condemnation – the plurifocalized and plurivocal narrative thwarts any clear-cut, side-taking judgment on the characters' behavior, leading the reader into a position of tolerance where, along with Munro, he becomes an observer of man's aspirations, limitations, and infinite complexity.

Denied the stability of point of view, the reader may also feel at a loss to give a coherent interpretation to the rich network of images and echoes that sometimes resists interpretation. The recurring presence of windows is one such instance. Indeed, Patricia is said often to carry Benny to the window, the 18-month-old baby enjoying to be thus held, looking out for hours at the dog and repeating "bow-wow", his only feeble grasp on language. Conversely, Patricia uses windows to look inside the houses uptown, prolonging the magazines exposition of rooms. Each time, we seem to be looking with the characters, be it inside out or outside in. The last image of the short story however places us outside looking at children behind the windows looking at us, their faces pressed against the windows. These children cannot but remind us of Benny, but the impression conveyed here is one of children caged in, as though we were the powerless witnesses to the antics of people trapped in their everyday environment. This placing of the reader on either side of windows is an apt metaphor for the handling of point of view in the short story with its constant shifts from internal to external focalization to eventually lead to a more remote overview.

In a similar way, the variation in voices is given a literal yet complex diegetic expression, from the awkward silence in the neighborhood just before the accident and at the very end of the short story, to the screams: Leona's hysterical shriek, Benny's atrocious squeaks, and Patricia's scream. In between are the whispers Patricia requires from the children at Mrs McGee's, the *soft* voice of Mrs McGee, thus described when she slanders the children with the shop clerk, and the "stately tones of ritual soothing" of the mourning women, together with the "gentle unchanging voice" and the "almost masculine voice" (91) of the two women from the Salvation Army. These controlled monotonous voices thus appear as insincere and artificial, without any anchoring in the body. They are to be contrasted with Patricia's strong voice and her beautiful singing, a

perfectly controlled voice but modulated and given resonance by her body, and of course with her scream, all the more striking since, as the uncharitable neighbors are quick to point out, she is destined to be a singer. As expressions respectively of culture and animality, the singer's voice and the scream are completely at odds, yet both are connected to the body. And so is the scissors man's dirge which elicits Patricia's scream, "his unintelligible chant, mournful and shrill, and so strange you would think, if you did not know it was the scissors-man, that there was a madman loose in the world" (98). This inarticulated chant appears as the authentic expression of mourning, devoid of the deceptive trappings of language, and at odds with the fake and artificial songs Leona chooses for Patricia's concert after Benny's death: "May the Circle Be Unbroken" and "It Is No Secret What God Can Do" (98). Both songs are a far cry from the experience of grief: all protective circles, that of the community, the family or the self are shattered by Benny's death, and God's designs when it comes to the death of a child remain far beyond human understanding, bringing the survivors close to madness, as the scissors-man unintelligible song aptly reveals. Besides, because of its inarticulateness and because of the connection between Benny and that man, we may be led to link this dirge with Benny's own modulations of his voice: "he would stand for hours just looking out a window saying Bow-wow, bow-wow, now in a low questioning tongue, now crooningly, stroking his hand down the windowpane" (93), the crooning also evoking Patricia. Thus a whole network of echoes, counterpoints is created, each with its own interest but almost to the point of saturation, which partly accounts for the fact that no consistent interpretation of the network as a whole is possible and Munro's figure in the carpet remains a secret.

This is no better evinced than precisely in her treatment of what could be seen as the epiphanic moment of the scream. Indeed the arrival of the scissors-man and Patricia's scream appear as a moment of revelation for Patricia: the sudden and violent facing of Benny's death and of her own responsibility. As suggested earlier, the fact that the snow – which is expected throughout the short story, as though time were arrested because of Patricia's unnatural behavior – starts falling right after the episode, could seem to point to a restoration of the cycles of the seasons and of time, as Karen Smythe points out while immediately questioning this

assertion⁷. However, the last paragraph undermines, without completely invalidating it, such an interpretation. Patricia's scream is indeed silenced and erased in the insentient description of the topography of the hamlet whose unchanging features are emphasized with the repetition of the existential phrase "there was" (99). The impression of stasis thus created seems to cancel the epiphanic moment of the scream, the release of tensions and return to normal. The snow does not melt on the "hard rock of the earth", which therefore cannot be seen as welcoming back Benny's dead body and turning it into one of the flowers in God's garden. The epiphany is also derided by the Star-of-Bethlehem quilt at Mrs McGee's, for the traditional design is part of her doll's house, and has lost all spiritual and religious meaning. The emphasis on this design comes besides as a cruel irony since what the children learn at her place is the death of their young brother. But conversely, it could also be argued that the first scene when the women are gathered around "the mother" could be seen as a scene of birth rather than of death:

Afterwards the mother, Leona Parry, lay on the couch, with a quilt around her, and the women kept putting more wood on the fire although the kitchen was very hot, and no one turned the light on. (89)

The indefinite nature of the *afterwards*, Leona's position, the hot kitchen, and the plaid – which we could imagine to be the Star of Bethlehem one – create confusion which, though soon dispelled, is nevertheless part of Munro's strategy to refuse the reader the comfort of a stable ground for interpretation. That the writer should apply this strategy of blurring and opacification to the time of mourning depicted immediately after the title, is telling of the extent to which she is bent on building a dense and elusive world around a central hole, a world which, like the liquefying world of Munch's painting, wavers and melts.

The scream does not bring any kind of resolution on the diegetic or the textual level, and cannot be explained; nor can Benny's death. This makes Munro's domestic Gothic stories - as she called them in an

⁷ "Though the snow falls, suggesting a normal continuation of the life cycle and a release of repressed grief for Patricia, the lack of any acceptable adult reaction to the original accident, or to Patricia's emotional condition, eliminate any sense of consolation and places the reader in a continuing condition of suspended emotion, caught between different ways of seeing, and grieving". [Smythe 1990: 46]

interview with Harry Boyle in August 1974⁸ - truly fantastic, to take up Todorov's definition. Indeed though steeped in everyday reality, describing events which were often reported in local newspapers of the time, the stories restore to these events their mysterious aura and prevent their being dismissed as banal. Though the insentient earth seems to silence the scream, the scream echoes and resonates in the reader's ears. The short story presents at once the times of death and the time of death, understood as an everlasting present, for nothing can ever erase the grief. Munro does not judge the characters and simply observes people trying to cope as they may with the unimaginable. The time of death, and the experience of the bereaved is a mystery which forever lies beyond the scope of language, be it rational or religious, and can only be approached through a poetic language which leaves tensions unresolved and obliquely suggests the horror and beauty of our mortal life.

⁸ This interview is mentioned by Robert Thacker in his biography where he says that both Boyle and Munro feel there is an element of the macabre, what Munro calls "a Canadian gothic", in the life of rural southwestern Ontario. As she points out, people were always being maimed by horrible accidents, living with untreated disease, singling themselves out by some excessive behavior.

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**The Butterfly Effect in Alice Munro's
"Day of the Butterfly"
Chaos, Empathy and the End of Certainty
- When Literary Discourse Analysis
Meets Chaos Theory**

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"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."
Hamlet, I, 5, 174-5

It started as a joke. Edward N. Lorenz, Professor of Meteorology at the M.I.T. was late giving the title of his communication; the organizer of the 139th meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science invented one: "Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?", which Lorenz humorously accepted. On December 29, 1972, at 10:00 a.m in the Wilmington Room of the Sheraton Park Hotel, the "Butterfly Effect", one of the most popular features of chaos theory, was born. To some, connecting chaos theory with literary discourse analysis and reading theory might look like a joke too.

This paper nevertheless aims at opening some privileged space where science and literature can be reconciled for a while, following an intimate belief that, in Siri Hustvedt's words, "no single theoretical model

can contain the complexities of human realities" (2012, X) nor provide a satisfactory way of interpreting a work of art.

First, a brief presentation of chaos theory¹ will reveal surprising and meaningful correspondences with the ways literary discourse is created and interpreted. And, although it was written a few years before "the Butterfly Effect" was given its name, a story called "Day of the Butterfly" seems a privileged object of focus. Furthermore, all Alice Munro's stories are intricately complex systems, and this early work is no exception. It is therefore my hope to offer useful if slightly unusual instruments to help the reader become more aware of reading trajectories, to decipher the mysteries of a writer who reveals complexity as part of her most intimate being, and who once described herself as "a friendly person who is not very sociable"², and powerfully asserted, when questioned by Paula Todd: "writing seems to be the best thing you can do with your life – telling the truth as near as you can do it – tackling the experience of being alive as best you can", before modestly adding, "I don't know".

A glimpse of chaos theory, butterflies and attractors

In *Chaos, Making a New Science*, James Gleick tells of how Lorenz, methodically studying weather prediction in his office at the M.I.T, for once entered rounded-off numbers in his computer. Instead of the six decimals (.506127), he entered three (.506), assuming that in his modelling of the earth's weather, the difference would be negligible. He let his enormous Royal McBee computer do its work, got himself a cup of coffee to get away from the noise of the gigantic machines, and came back some time later to read the results – which were astonishingly different from those expected. "That first day, he decided that long range weather forecasting must be doomed" (Gleick, 2008, 17). But Lorenz was also a mathematician; he therefore pursued his studies of what he described as dynamical aperiodic systems³, simplifying his weather model to a system of

¹ Inevitably entailing simplifications which I hope the physicists coming across this article will forgive; my only defence being that Lorenz himself used simplified models of the weather to theorize his findings.

² *Paris Review*, The Art of Fiction N°137

³ i.e. "systems that almost repeated themselves but never quite succeeded" (Gleick, 2008, 22)

three non-linear equations⁴. And, in spite of the fact that, as Gleick pursues, “analyzing the behaviour of a non-linear equation [...] is like walking in a maze whose walls rearrange themselves with each step you take” (22-24), he nevertheless established a link between aperiodicity and unpredictability and was able to evidence “Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions” (SDIC) the more serious-looking – though much less poetic – name for “the Butterfly Effect” and a defining feature of “unstable aperiodic behaviour in non-linear dynamical systems”, to take up the concise definition of chaos given in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

“But Lorenz saw more than randomness embedded in his weather model. He saw a fine geometrical structure, order masquerading as randomness” (Gleick, 2008, 22). Seemingly random and unpredictable behaviour does follow precise rules. And it is a major feature of chaotic dynamics to be confined to what is known as an attractor, revealing and structuring folding and stretching of trajectories. In a seminal paper published in 1963, “Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow”, Edward Lorenz drew a fragment of the trajectory of a point to illustrate the chaotic behaviour of a fluid as modelled by his three equations for convection:

⁴ “Meaning that they expressed relationships that were not strictly proportional”. (Gleick, 2008, 23)

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT IN ALICE MUNRO'S "DAY OF THE BUTTERFLY".
CHAOS, EMPATHY AND THE END OF CERTAINTY
WHEN LITERARY DISCOURSE ANALYSIS MEETS CHAOS THEORY

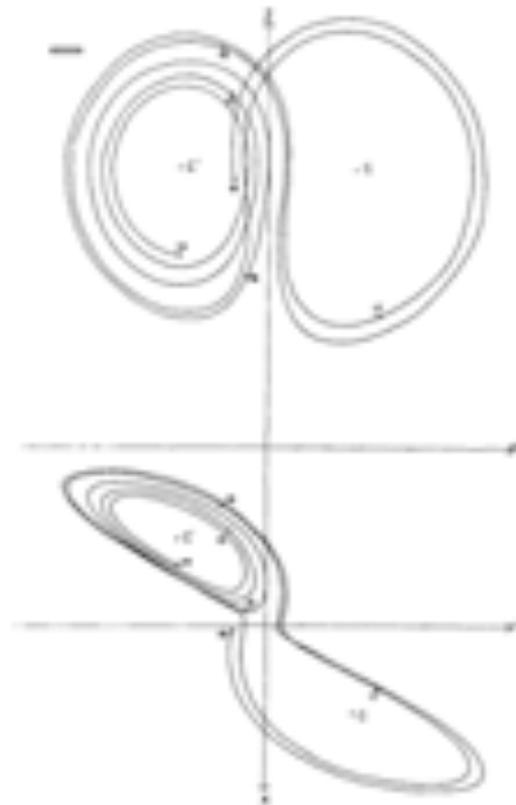


Fig. 3. Numerical solution of the convection equations. Projections on the $X-Z$ plane and the $Y-Z$ plane in phase space of the segment of the trajectory extending from iteration 1000 to iteration 10000. Symbols "C", "C'", etc., denote positions at iterations 1000, 1500, etc. Stages of steady convection are denoted by C and C'.

“To plot just these seven loops required 500 successive calculations on the computer” Gleick explains, pursuing “because the system had three independent variables, this attractor lay in three-dimensional phase space. Although Lorenz drew only a fragment of it, he could see more than he drew: a sort of double spiral, like a pair of butterfly wings interwoven with infinite dexterity [...] those loops and spirals were infinitely deep, never quite joining, never intersecting. Yet, they stayed inside a finite space” (2008, 139-41). Eventually, Lorenz’s strange attractor would look somewhat like the following image⁵

⁵ To be found in Larry Bradley’s site, Department of Physics and Astronomy at Johns Hopkins University: <http://www.stsci.edu/~lbradley/seminar/attractors.html>



It thus appears that chaotic systems are dynamical, non linear systems which exhibit Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions and whose apparently erratic behaviours in fact trace precise trajectories that fold and stretch along underlying structures known as strange attractors⁶.

Literary chaotic systems: dynamism, non-linearity and SDIC

In *Prospecting, From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Wolfgang Iser asked two essential questions that seem to echo Lorenz's concerns: "how shall we then describe the **dynamic** character of a text? Can one, in fact, assess the **keen disturbance** so often experienced in reading serious literature?" (1989, 3, emphasis mine). Should we pay close attention to words, it naturally follows that literary texts in general, and short stories in particular, are complex⁷ chaotic systems.

First and foremost, they are dynamic, non linear systems. To exist, they combine writing and reading, two intensely dynamic processes.

⁶ Some attractors are called "strange attractors" when they have a fractal structure, which is very often the case in chaotic systems. Although this probably opens innumerable interpretative possibilities, it would require more than the limits of this paper to develop them in an intellectually honest way.

⁷ Edgar Morin also reminds us that "la complexité est un tissu (complexus: ce qui est tissé ensemble) de constituants hétérogènes inséparablement associés: elle pose le paradoxe de l'un et du multiple." (2005, 21). Therefore, text and complex share the same Latin etymology of *textus*, woven; by nature, texts are complex systems.

Michael Toolan, in *Narrative Progression in the Short Story* calls readers "prospectors", trying to understand

how it is that great writers fashion stories in ways that lead us on, sometimes leads us astray, draw us in, take up all our powers of attention and concentration, and induce in us that whole gamut of reactions and emotions- including desire, revulsion, inspiration, grief and fear." (2009, 12)

Although at first sight, it might seem slightly provocative to describe a piece of writing as non-linear, we only need to consider the eye movements on the page to see horizontality and verticality combine to draw serpentine lines – and that in most languages, albeit not from the same starting point. Furthermore, reading itineraries are known to imply tracing cohesion networks that involve jumping over bits of text, making anaphoric or cataphoric moves, drawing oblique lines to make connections inside a textual space turned chess-board. They might also possibly even entail exophoric excursions to the real world to make better sense of words on a page, identifying potentially enlightening referents in the case of autobiography or symbolism for instance. We trace "chaotic lines" over the text, reminiscent of Deleuze's "lignes d'erre" (1996, 155), following some strange and intimate design which yet remains to be identified.

Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions is another essential feature of reading literature. In a short story, the first "initial condition" a reader encounters is the title; Munro's initial title to "Day of the Butterfly" was "Good-by Myra". In terms of framing and raising expectations, the difference is radical. "Good-by Myra" merely leads the reader to expect a linear story about separation, possibly death. "Day of the Butterfly" is more demanding in terms of interpretation. We have to make hypotheses and multiply prospecting directions. "Day of" suggests it is a special day, possibly a birthday, or else, because of the collocation, Day of Judgement, Doomsday, Day of Wrath. "Butterfly" evokes metamorphosis and ephemerality because of our knowledge of the world and butterflies. To poetry lovers, it might evoke Robert Frost's poem "Blue-Butterfly Day"⁸:

It is blue-butterfly day here in spring,
And with these sky-flakes down in flurry on flurry
There is more unmixed color on the wing

⁸ Originally published in *The New Republic*, March 16, 1921.

Than flowers will show for days unless they hurry.

But these are flowers that fly and all but sing:
And now from having ridden out desire
They lie closed over in the wind and cling
Where wheels have freshly sliced the April mire

Or indeed any butterfly poem that they might know, like Emily Dickinson's

From cocoon forth a butterfly
As lady from her door
Emerged- a Summer Afternoon- Repairing Everywhere –

Without Design - that I could trace"⁹

Symbolically, the butterfly is often associated with the soul, the Other World, death and resurrection. As is often the case with intertextuality and symbolism, although definite connections with the author's intentionality are impossible to make, the richness of echoes and associations is complex and dynamic – possibly chaotic. The title might indeed, as it did for me, evoke the "Butterfly Effect"; how a tiny detail might have unfathomed consequences. Initial enigma creates defamiliarization that inevitably generates a profusion of meanings and defines the reading pact as interpretative quest. It places the reader in the position of co-creator of sense, and because we stand on the textual threshold of the paratext, in a privileged relationship with the author herself, tightly secured by Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle. There is meaning in that title, and it is our role to let it resonate.

The readers' relative autonomy in this non-linear and dynamic deciphering process eventually also signs a difference in literary category. Barthes, in *S/Z*, opposes "readerly texts" to "writerly texts". "Readerly" texts are linear, unidirectional, relatively simple to understand, they make easy, pleasurable reading; "Good-by Myra", originally published in July 1956, in a Canadian woman's magazine *Chatelaine*, in columns framed by advertisings for "Viceroy Household Gloves", "Pink Ice" washing up liquid, "Princess Pat Hair Nets", next to the detailed answer to a Reader's Question about how "to remove machine oil from a man's white shirt?"

⁹ See Emily Dickinson, *Complete Poems*, Faber and Faber, 1970, n°354

would belong to that category¹⁰. A "writerly" text is more complex; it requires dynamic understanding and interpretation which, in Barthes's words, means "apprécier de quel pluriel il est fait" (1970, 10); as such, it is potentially chaotic and is defined as *texte de jouissance*.¹¹ "Day of the Butterfly", revised to be part of *Dance of the Happy Shades* in 1968, would belong to that last category, as a comparison between the two versions of the last paragraphs shows. The first version reads:

"You take it" said Myra, in such a soft voice that I could hardly hear her. But I still felt her touch, not with my mind but with the nerves of my skin. I understood the demand that made. And it was too much.
The nurse came back, carrying a glass of chocolate milk, and she said: "What's the matter, didn't you hear the buzzer?"
"All right" I said. I said to Myra, "Well, thank you for the -thing. Thank you". I hesitated, trying to think what else I could say. "Thank you. Good-by".
At the door I had to pause some more and look back at her sitting in the high hospital bed. I thought that soon I would be outside. So I called back quickly, treacherously *in fact* [corrected in Munro's hand - the original can't be read]. 'Good-by'.

The final one:

"You take it". She put it into my hand. Our fingers touched again.
[...]
The nurse came back, carrying a glass of chocolate milk.
"What's the matter, didn't you hear the buzzer?"
So I was released, set free by the barriers which now closed about Myra, her unknown, exalted, ether-smelling hospital world, and by the treachery of my own heart. "Well thank you," I said. "Thank you for the thing. Goodbye."
Did Myra ever say goodbye? Not likely. She sat in her high bed, her delicate brown neck, rising out of a hospital gown too big for her, her brown carved face immune to treachery, her offering perhaps already forgotten, prepared to be set apart for legendary uses, as she was even in the back porch at school. (110)

The disappearance of all the *inquirits* and the slipping into Free Indirect Style foreground interiority and offer unmediated blurred clear-sightedness to the reader. The interweaving of viewpoints -- Myra's

¹⁰ A facsimile of the original publication is to be found in JoAnn McCaig, 1997, 252.

¹¹ For a synthetic vision of the opposition between *texte de plaisir* and *texte de jouissance*, see the brief interview of Roland Barthes: <http://www.ina.fr/video/CPF10005880>

interpreted viewpoint embedded in Helen's, "her offering **perhaps** already forgotten", Helen's remembering "as she was even in the back porch at school" interweaving with the adult's enigmatic wording of the child's perspective "prepared to be set apart for legendary uses" – all these create a complexity and a demand for interpretation that is totally absent from the first, much more explicitly descriptive, version. In "Good-by Myra", we are told by the retrospective narrator about the character's ambivalence: "I understood the demand that made. And it was too much", "I thought that soon I would be outside", "treacherously in fact". In "Day of the Butterfly" we experience ambivalence, we feel it. It leaves us perplexed rather than evaluative; it remains interpretatively unsolved. Munro's revised story, like all "writerly texts" whose meaning is not immediately given, can thus be described as a non-linear dynamic system sensitive to initial conditions; as a chaotic system.

Strange textual attractors?

One of Lorenz's major discoveries was that chaotic dynamics is characterized by folding and stretching of trajectories that are confined to some strange attractor. If the complex dynamics constituted by "Day of the Butterfly" and its reader qualifies as chaotic, it necessarily supposes the existence of such an attractor.

In the context of literary discourse analysis, reader-response theory focuses energies around a multi-tiered system that is deeply sensitive to initial conditions too, the empathy system¹². At reader level, we have already seen how Munro's final title triggers a chaotic reading process. Yet, initial conditions are not limited to the paratext; they also concern the *incipit* of the short story¹³, the initial paragraph, and might even be thought of as part of the thematic structure at paragraph and sentence level.

The initial paragraph of Munro's story reads as follows:

I do not remember when Myra Sayla came to town, though she must have been in our class at school for two or three years. I start remembering

¹² Empathy in literary discourse analysis exclusively concerns the capacity to adopt a point of view and must clearly be dissociated from the more subjective notion of sympathy.

¹³ For a precise definition and classification of *incipits*, see Bonheim, 1982.

her in the last year, when her little brother Jimmy Sayla was in Grade One. Jimmy Sayla was not used to going to the bathroom by himself and he would have to come to the Grade Six door and ask for Myra and she would take him downstairs. Quite often he would not get to Myra in time and there would be a big dark stain on his little button-on cotton pants. Then Myra had to come and ask the teacher: "Please may I take my brother home, he has wet himself?" (100)

The opening, "I do not remember", creates tension based on paradox and reveals complexity; the narrative is established as retrospective while memory is said to fail. What then follows is a name "Myra Sayla", which might stop the reader because of its phonetics. The first name is unusual; we are not quite sure about the pronunciation of the second: /sai/ for assonance reasons, or /sei/. We are not now, nor will we later be, given any information about the geographical origins of the girl. Her name poetically chimes, ra / la, Myra rimes with "admire"¹⁴, but also, potentially ominously with "mire", the final word in Robert Frost's Blue-Butterfly Day. Sayla, depending on the pronunciation chosen might evoke "saying" or "sighing". We might also be sensitive to vocalic echoes between Myra and butterfly and possibly between Sayla and day, initiating a privileged network between Myra and the butterfly¹⁵. Once more, the puzzled, meditative reader wanders on interpretative uncertain pathways. Although it might seem futile, this has major consequences on our positioning with respect to the narrator and a character we presume is going to be central in the story.

Kuno and Kaburaki (1977, 627-672) were the first to systematize an empathy hierarchy in interaction, stating three major rules¹⁶:

- Surface Structure Empathy Hierarchy

¹⁴ And as we shall see later meaningfully with "sapphire" in the epiphanic scene

¹⁵ Which will indeed be pursued in the course of the story, in particular through the colour blue, associated to the butterfly and Myra's dresses: "she glimmered sadly in sky-blue taffeta" (106)

¹⁶ And 3 main principles :

- The Ban on Conflicting Empathy Foci

A single sentence cannot contain logical conflicts in empathy relationships

- Word Order Principle

If you are going to introduce anew into the discourse an object A (e.g. John) and another object that is defined with respect to its relationship with A (e.g. John's brother) introduce them in that order.

- Syntactic Prominence Principle

Of the people whom you are describing, give prominence to the one you are empathizing with.

It is easiest for the speaker to empathize with the referent of the subject ; it is next easiest for him to empathize with the referent of the object [...] it is next to impossible for the speaker to empathize with the referent of the by passive agentive.

- Speech Act Participant Empathy Hierarchy

It is easiest for the speaker to empathize with himself; it is next easiest for him to empathize with the hearer; it is more difficult for him to express more empathy with third persons than with himself or with the hearer.

- Topic Empathy Hierarchy

It is easier for the speaker to empathize with an object (e.g.person) that he has been talking about than with an object that he has just introduced in the discourse for the first time.

In a literary narrative, it therefore follows that the speaker/narrator primarily empathizes with herself, then possibly with the referent of the subject, all the more so if it corresponds to a person/character she has been talking about, in other words, that she knows well. A rather easy translation to the other side of the interaction relation enables us to postulate that for the reader, empathy is easiest with the subject of the speech act, i.e. with the speaker/narrator, then possible with the referent of the subject, i.e. possibly a character – all the more so if the character is well known, due to narratorial choices of foregrounding. In our story *incipit*, empathy with the narrator is problematic since she “do[es] not remember”; Myra Sayla, whose name is doubly foregrounded, and who is the next “subject” we meet, is the most immediate next candidate, but she is a third person. The epistemic modality “she must have been” nevertheless seems to elicit double empathy from the start: with the narrator who is interpreting, and indirectly with the character whose unexplained transparent presence implicitly becomes a problematic object of focus¹⁷. The next sentence starts with the same theme: “I start remembering her”, tilting the empathy balance back on the side of a narrator resuming her full narrative power. The themes of sentences four and five are temporal: “Quite often” and “Then”, the latter being tinged with a sense of inevitability, confirmed by the deontic modality “Myra had to come and ask”, the result of Helen’s deciphering of the situation.

¹⁷ There are many, more explicit, occurrences of this phenomenon of embedded perspective: “Perhaps they watched the baseball games, the tag and skipping and building of leaf houses in the fall and snow forts in the winter; perhaps they did not watch at all.” (101), or “Perhaps she thought I was playing a trick on her” (104)

At the end of the first paragraph, the reader is therefore faced with three variables that define the three dimensions of the complex textual attractor:

- a retrospective self-conscious narrator who is reporting fragmented memories while trying to make sense of her position,
- a central object of focus, Myra, who, at the outset of the text, is defined by her role as her little brother Jimmy's helper, sees herself and is seen as marginal, inevitably trapped in embarrassing situations because of him,
- and another character who emerges as a textual watermark, the narrator's younger self, a witness of Myra's predicament whose degree of emotional involvement is rather difficult to identify (whom we shall, for the sake of clarity, call Helen, although we do not learn her name until quite late in the story).

This snapshot of initial conditions makes it rather easy to predict that the short story is going to be about relating; relating with the other as individual and with the others as group (I/ Myra/ our class), relating with the self, but also relating as telling, logically developing into the problematics of reading as relating. Yet, what is much more difficult to predict, although it is clearly dependent on those initial conditions, is the evolution of the reader's position in this relational interlace – which supposes a closer investigation into the structure of what can now be defined as a multidimensional "empathy attractor".

Folding and stretching trajectories

The major consequence of the ambivalence of the narrator's position, which mimetically reflects and articulates the complexity of the characters' relations and predicaments, is the complexity of the folding and stretching of reading trajectories; the reader inevitably finds themselves looking for elements that concentrate and momentarily stabilize meaning.

Miss Darling, the teacher, can be thought of as a possible *origo* for the empathy attractor. Although she is not a major anchor for empathy in the story - she is caricatured at the beginning, described by a narrator who chooses to remain close to the perspective that was hers at the time of the story - she remains a figure of reference for the reader, a stable point, albeit a complex one. She is an oxymoronic character, "a cold, gentle girl",

displaying “stiff solicitude” (101). She focuses on the importance of formulation, offering as an alternative to the embarrassing “Please may I take my brother home, he has wet himself?” the euphemistic “My brother has had an accident, please, teacher” which is obviously more ‘politically correct’, but primarily meant to work as a strategy against mockery. This thereby clearly signs her positioning on Myra’s side, in keeping with the semantics of her name, and foregrounds what will be a major thematic of the short story, the articulation between feeling and telling¹⁸. She becomes a main actor, a main helper, in the narration, structuring the narrative plot around key moments. First, she draws attention to Myra, and on her problematic exclusion from the group:

“Well, why is she never playing with the rest of you? Every day I see her standing in the back porch, never playing. Do you think she looks very happy standing back there? Do you think you would be very happy if *you* were left back there?” (102)

Interestingly, Miss Darling uses empathy and mirror situations as argument; although, as the narrator recalls, it is cruelly counterproductive at the beginning, giving an ironically condescending tinge to her name: “We had not paid much attention to Myra before this. But now a game was developed; it started with saying, ‘Let’s be nice to Myra!’” (102), it creates awareness conditions for the privileged encounter between Helen and Myra.

The “complicating action” of the story¹⁹ constitutes another major complex space of the attractor:

One morning in the winter I was walking up the school hill very early; a neighbour had given me a ride into town. I lived about half a mile out of town, on a farm and **I should not** have been going to the town school at all [...] I was **the only one** in the class who carried a lunch pail and ate peanut butter sandwiches in the high, bare, mustard-coloured cloakroom, **the only one** who **had to** wear rubber boots in the spring, when the roads were heavy with mud. I felt a little danger, on account of this; but I could not tell exactly what it was.

I saw Myra and Jimmy ahead of me on the hill; they always went to school very early- sometimes so early that they had to stand outside waiting

¹⁸ Which also concerns Helen; see for example “I felt a little danger,[...]; but I could not tell exactly what it was.” (103)

¹⁹ This refers to Labov (1972) defining six stages in oral narratives: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, coda.

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for the janitor to open the door. They were walking slowly, and now and then Myra half turned around. **I had often loitered in that way**, wanting to walk with some important girl who was behind me, and not quite daring to stop and wait. Now it occurred to me that **Myra might be doing this with me**. I did not know what to do. (103-4)

Helen and Myra have their difference to share, parallel constraints to bear, and discover they have the same reading references; although the encounter is strangely dissonant at the beginning: "'Have some more Cracker Jack', I said. 'I used to eat Cracker Jack all the time but I don't anymore. I think it's bad for your complexion.'" (104), it develops into a privileged instant of intimacy crystallizing around the discovery of the butterfly:

Myra looked into the box. "There's a prize in there", she said. She pulled it out. It was a brooch, a little tin butterfly, painted gold with bits of coloured glass stuck onto it to look like jewels. She held it in her brown hand, smiling slightly.

I said, 'Do you like that?'

Myra said, "I like them blue stones, Blue stones are sapphires".

"I know. My birthstone is sapphire. What is your birthstone?"

"I don't know."

"When is your birthday?"

"July."

"Then yours is ruby."

"I like sapphire better," said Myra. "I like yours." She handed me the brooch.

"You keep it," I said. "Finders keepers".

Myra kept holding it out, as if she did not know what I meant.

"Finders keepers," I said.

"It was your Cracker Jack," said Myra, scared and solemn. "You bought it."

"Well you found it."

"No –" said Myra

"Go on!" I said. "Here, I'll *give* it to you." I took the brooch from her and pushed it back into her hand.

We were both surprised. We looked at each other; I flushed but Myra did not. I realized the pledge as our fingers touched; I was panicky, but *all right*. I thought I can come early and walk with her other mornings. I can go and talk to her at recess. Why not? *Why not?* (105-6; italics are in the original)

The power of the scene rests in tiny details. Myra and Helen have an equal share in the description of the butterfly. Myra discovers it, reveals it as a

treasure in her “brown hand” - the darkness²⁰ of her skin, mentioned here for the first time, possibly giving an odious reason for her being ostracized at school. The narrator partly describes the brooch, but it falls to Myra to add the touch of colour, expressing a liking for blue sapphire²¹ that subtly metamorphoses into a deep longing for the Other: “I like them blue stones”- “I like yours”. Paradoxically, though very realistically, her desire manifests itself through stupefaction (“Myra kept holding it out, as if she did not know what I meant”) and awe (“scared and solemn”). The emotional interlace reaches a climax when the two girls’ fingers (the first person plural appearing for the first time in the story: “**our** fingers”) touch in a gesture interpreted by Helen as sacred²². Fear is another feeling they share, though “scared” and “panicky” are differently connoted. But the full epiphanic dimension of the scene is reached in the repetition of the “Why not?”, whose first instance could be attributed to the character’s Free (in)Direct Thought²³ and the second to the retrospective narrator’s, the italics being a written, therefore also potentially an authorial manifestation of subjectivity and emotional involvement²⁴. Why not indeed, the reader might wonderingly echo.

Even if they eventually clearly structure around the gift of the butterfly, which could also be identified as the “magnet” Munro refers to in the interview with Geoff Hancock²⁵, empathy trajectories become increasingly complex. They can be seen as folding, without ever exactly corresponding, recalling Deleuze’s analyses of Baroque aesthetics, “le pli qui va à l’infini” (1988, 5), “le pli du monde et de l’âme” (37). Helen and Myra first appear to be enclosed in the same narrative perspective; the use of Direct Style with minimal framing of speech ensures transparency and V+ing forms, observability. We are clearly in the “showing” mode. They are close to each other, though not exactly in unison, and we follow their perspectives on the butterfly. When the narrative voice does transmit interpretative positioning, it concerns Helen’s reading of the situation and is presented in a consonant way, without any evaluative distancing. The

²⁰ Dark hair is also mentioned in the story.

²¹ Sound indeed enhancing some mysterious correspondence with Myra.

²² Which, interestingly, is an anagram of scared.

²³ There being no conjugated verbal forms, opting for Free Direct Style or Free Indirect Style is here impossible.

²⁴ The same analysis could be made of the other phrase in italics, “*all right*”

²⁵ Quoted in Bigot and Lanone (2014, 19) “I have this picture. It generates some other images and attracts them like a magnet. Things stick to it, anecdotes and details”.

reader is therefore led to empathize with all three instances without any clear guiding hierarchy, which makes the position slightly unstable and might consequently account for a stretching impulse out of the three folding trajectories, out of the empathy entanglement.

It is one of the mysteries of intertextuality to have narrative elements reverberate over time and memory, back to another short story by another writer, which presents a very similar narrative situation: Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House". In a small, closed New Zealand community, the Burnell girls have been given as a present a beautiful doll's house and they invite all their school friends to come and see it²⁶. Two young girls, Lil Kelvev and her little sister, "Our Else"²⁷, are excluded from the group. The younger Burnell daughter, Kezia, who is particularly fascinated by a little lamp in the doll's house, feels uncomfortable about the situation:

'Mother', said Kezia, "can't I ask the Kelvevs just once?"
'Certainly not, Kezia'
'But **why not?**'
'Run away, Kezia; you know quite well **why not.**'(341)

The little girl will get no further explanation. One afternoon, as Kezia identifies the Kelvevs walking past their house²⁸, she decides to invite them in:

'Hullo', she said to the passing Kelvevs.
They were so astounded that they stopped. Lil gave her silly smile. Our Else stared.
'You can come in and see our doll's house if you want to,' said Kezia, and she dragged one toe on the ground. But at that Lil turned red and shook her head quickly.
'**Why not?**' asked Kezia.
Lil gasped, then she said, 'Your ma told our ma you wasn't to speak to us'
'Oh well,' said Kezia. She didn't know what to reply. 'It doesn't matter. You can come and see our doll's house all the same. Come on. Nobody's looking.'

²⁶ Katherine Mansfield (1953, 337-344); all page references are to this edition; emphasis is mine.

²⁷ A rather unusual name, though an extremely meaningful one in the economy of the story. Our Else indeed is the figure of the Other.

²⁸ The description is like a mirror scene to the encounter scene in Munro's story. "Presently looking along the road, she saw two little dots. They grew bigger, they were coming towards her. Now she could see that one was in front and one close behind. Now she would see that they were the Kelvevs."(342)

But Lil shook her head still harder.
'Don't you want to?' asked Kezia
Suddenly there was a twitch, a tug at Lil's skirt. She turned round. Our Else was looking at her with big imploring eyes; she was frowning; she wanted to go. For a moment Lil looked at our Else very doubtfully. But then Our Else twitched her skirt again. She started forward. Kezia led the way. Like two little stray cats they followed across the courtyard to where the doll's house stood.
'There it is', said Kezia.
There was a pause. Lil breathed loudly, almost snorted; our Else was still as a stone.(342-3)

They are suddenly chased away by Kezia's aunt, but the story ends with the two sisters and the shared mystery of revelation:

Presently our Else nudged up close to her sister. But now she had forgotten the cross lady. She put out a finger and stroked her sister's quill; she smiled her rare smile.
'I seen the little lamp', she said softly.
Then both were silent once more.(344)

Mansfield's "The Doll's House", like Munro's "Day of the Butterfly", unites young girls that are poles apart socially, having them share a central epiphanic experience which revolves around a tiny detail, a little tin blue butterfly, a tiny lamp in a doll's house. The subversive question is the same: "Why not?"; the moment of communion, preceded by a moment of stupefaction results in the same smile. Kezia is more determined, more openly transgressive and less ambivalent than Helen, and the reader's position in "The Doll's House" is clearly on the side of the children, and more particularly Kezia and our Else, against the prejudiced world of adults.²⁹

Another "stretching trajectory" might extend to autobiographical reference and partly explain the complexity of the narratorial positioning. In her talk with Paula Todd (2010) Munro tells about her dreams: "I would go to England and meet Laurence Olivier [...], and I would have a wonderful blue velvet ball gown", and recalls:

"I had a long walk home from school and it was quite a brutal walk but I made up stories all the way and did that every day, and I would be very annoyed if anybody picked me up and gave me a ride and took away that

²⁹ There is a teacher in Mansfield's story, but, unlike Miss Darling, she is as prejudiced against the Kelveys as the rest of the adult community.

time. Because I wasn't brought up in a community that thought what we now call creativity was sort of normal".

The blue gown connects her with Myra; the long walk to and from school and the sense of difference, to Helen. In "Dear Life", she recalls her brief "friendship" with a girl she calls Diane, which seems a distant echo of Helen and Myra's relationship:

"A girl whom I'll call Diane arrived partway through my second year [...] We went to her place after school [...] my mother [...] discovered my whereabouts. On the way home, I was told that I was never to enter that house again. (This proved not to be a difficulty, because Diane stopped appearing at school a few days later – she had been sent away somewhere)"(301).

She later learns "that Diane's mother had been a prostitute and had died of some ailment it seemed that prostitutes caught" (303). The metamorphosis of reality also is a dynamic, multifarious and mysterious process indeed, involving endless stretchings and foldings of empathy trajectories too. Far from simplifying the picture, the sequel of the narrative questions to the very end the possibility of resolution.

The unsolved question of homeostasis

The emotionally intense and complex experience of the gift of the butterfly is followed by Myra's absence from school. She is ill. Miss Darling decides to go with some of her pupils to visit her in the hospital and organize a birthday party, on the 20th of March, although her birthday is in July, "Because she's sick" she insists "with a warning shrillness", paralinguistically foregrounding deficiency in intuitive understanding of the implicit. The relationship between the two girls is a secret they share with the reader, who is sensitive to echoes that take us back to the butterfly episode: "I said, 'Her birthday is in July'" (107), "Myra said 'My birthday is in July'" (108). Helen, whose name is revealed by Myra to us for the first time in this second half of the story seems to understand her friend; the epistemic modality has disappeared: "Myra did not look at us, but at the ribbons, pink and blue and speckled with silver, and the miniature bouquets; **they pleased her, as the butterfly had done.** An innocent look came into her face, a partial, private smile" (109). Myra is now in the same position as Helen was when she insists on her taking

accessories that are symbolic of womanhood and a clear object of desire for Helen:

“You take something” [...] “Well you take something,” Myra said. She picked up a leatherette case with a mirror in it, a comb and a nail file and a natural lipstick and a small handkerchief edged with gold thread. I had noticed it before. “You take that,” she said.(110)

The same gesture is repeated, with the same consequence: “She put it into my hand. Our fingers touched again.” Some kind of equilibrium – homeostasis, seems to be reached through the interlacing of echoing and the acceptance of an invitation that resonates for the reader, who deciphers “Akemia”(107) as leukaemia, as a way of conjuring death:

“When I come back from London” Myra said, “you can come and play at my place after school.” “Okay,” I said. (110)

Yet, dissonance wins over:

Outside the hospital window there was a clear carrying sound of somebody playing in the street, may be chasing the last snowballs of the year. This sound made Myra, her triumph and her bounty, and most of all her future in which she had found this place for me, turn shadowy, turn dark. All the presents on the bed, the folded paper and ribbons, those guilt-tinged offerings had passed into this shadow, they were no longer innocent objects to be touched, exchanged, accepted without danger. I didn’t want to take the case now but I could not think how to get out of it, what lie to tell. **I’ll give it away, I thought. I won’t ever play with it. I would let my little brother pull it apart.** (110, emphasis added)

The reader is left puzzled and unsettled by the violence of Helen’s feelings, once more truthfully transmitted by the narrator, while acknowledging that indeed the offerings qualify as “guilt-tinged” and accepting the impossibility of objects being touched, exchanged or accepted without inciting danger. But Helen’s clear-sightedness and unmitigated self-indictment, implied by the slipping into Free Direct/Indirect Thought³⁰ remains highly disturbing; it is both jarring and inevitably stretches out to “the treachery of [our] own heart[s]”. Ending

³⁰ The first person points to FDT whereas the use of “would” points to indirectness.

the short story on Helen's enigmatic final sight of Myra, intimately interlacing this with the narrator's no less enigmatic retrospective interpretation, leads the reader on the path of remembrance too in an ultimate quest for equilibrium; the text almost folds back on itself, but not quite. "[Her] brown carved face immune to treachery"(110) evokes "They were like children **in a medieval painting**, they were like small figures carved of wood, for worship or magic, with faces smooth and aged, and meekly, cryptically uncommunicative" (101, emphasis mine) while "as she was even in the back porch at school"(110) takes us back to "So Myra and Jimmy spent every recess standing in the little back porch between the two sides"(101). The interpretative process is pertinently close to what Guillemette Bolens described as reading a medieval interlace:

La répétition des signifiants et de leurs synonymes dessine des lignes qui s'entrecroisent pour ensuite disparaître et refaire surface plus loin, semblables aux entrelacs picturaux des enluminures médiévales [...] Lire un entrelacs consiste à porter attention à des signifiants dont la réitération indique qu'ils jouent un rôle distinctif dans la construction de la narration (2008, 36-7).

There is a tiny difference between now and then, which, once more, has immense consequences: Myra is all alone now. Emotion is intense and one more time, closure refused. The ultimate question to be solved then is why narrative framing and stylistic near-symmetry are here unable to secure a cathartic sense of equilibrium in the reader, why the story remains to the very end "cryptically uncommunicative".

Concluding trajectories: Mirror Neurons, Far-From-Equilibrium Systems and the end of certainty

Using Lorenz's weather model as a toy-model for understanding "Day of the Butterfly" revealed that literary text reading means tracing empathy trajectories in a chaotic system, deterministic, dynamic and non-linear. As readers we strongly depend on initial conditions that embark us on multidirectional trajectories that are eventually revealed as following and tracing complex interlacing patterns intricately structured around some central, seminal moment of experience. In Munro's story, reading trajectories, as is to be expected in an autodiegetic narrative, follow the double empathic threads of Helen the narrator and Helen, her former self, a character in the diegesis. Yet, the ambivalence that characterizes their

interaction with the surrounding textual world further complexifies the position of a reader who, in his quest for equilibrium (and hence understanding), develops an intertextual and symbolical trajectory around the episode of the little tin blue butterfly. The insistent uneasiness the story creates in us leads us to question a positioning we cannot doubt is voluntary on the author's part. In the case of an autodiegetic narrator, because of commonly accepted empathy rules such as the ones developed by Kuno and Kaburaki, we tend to think that empathy naturally is with the first person, including in the complex although frequent case of a split between younger and older self. It is more difficult to imagine that empathy could in fact also be organized around a third person, whose point of view we might intuitively follow. In "Day of the Butterfly", the character of Myra, although she is clearly not a reflector, seems to attract and concentrate empathy in a way that almost overpowers the empathic compound of the narrator-character. But to evidence that, we need to turn to what might be the most fascinating discovery of neurosciences for stylisticians with a special interest in reader-response theory, the existence of Mirror Neurons.

In the 1990s, a team of scientists working at the University of Parma, discovered the existence of Mirror Neurons in the cortical motor system of macaque monkeys: the same neurons fire when a monkey grasps a peanut as when it watches another monkey (or a human) grasp another peanut³¹! Hence their name. The research team then went on to evidence the presence of those Mirror Neurons in humans before addressing the question of emotions and discovering another "Mirror Mechanism embedded inside our emotional centres", which, in Rizzolatti's words, "is extremely interesting because it is another way in which we communicate, given that communication is understanding the others from the inside"³². Other scientists then chose to investigate the question of mirror mechanisms in art, the question of what happens when we are watching a character in a painting doing something, feeling an emotion, or when we are reading about such events. Wojciehowski, Associate Professor of English at the University of Texas, and Gallese, Professor of Physiology in the University of Parma Department of Neuroscience, and a member of

³¹ Rizzolatti explains the discovery of mirror neurons in the following video: <http://www.gocognitive.net/interviews/discovery-mirror-neurons-1>

³² The same on Mirror Mechanisms; <http://www.gocognitive.net/interviews/emotional-mirror-mechanism>

Rizzolatti's team, set out from their different backgrounds to trace "one important level of our relationships with narrative – namely, our empathic co-feeling with others activated by writings and registered within our bodies" (Wojciehowski and Gallese, 2011). The study, they claim, takes us beyond intentionality and what is traditionally known as Theory of Mind (ToM) to what they call "Feeling of Body (FoB)"³³. When we read a text, scientists tell us, we experience in our body what we are reading about, and this, independently of any empathy hierarchy, and also irrespectively of the sacred frontier erected by generations of narratologists between reality and fiction.

Unlike Helen, who mostly observes and describes, Myra often acts. The narrative of the discovery of the little tin butterfly follows her actions: she looks into the box, pulls the prize out, she holds it in her hand, she smiles. Given Mirror Mechanisms and Embodied Simulation, **we** look, **we** pull it out, **we** hold it in **our** hands, **we** smile; Myra's actions find an echo in **our** brains without any intermediary (while obviously physical action remains inhibited – except maybe the smile, which might find its way on our lips). This contributes to the building of a privileged, quasi autonomous relationship with the character that develops independently from the narrator's mimetic reporting of Helen's ambivalent relation with Myra; we are therefore able to disengage momentarily from what we feel to be an uncomfortable narrative mode and reading position. The major problem raised by Mirror Mechanisms in literature is that they potentially concern all characters, irrespectively of their role in the story. Far from simplifying the picture, they add a multiplicity of possible empathic reading trajectories to the already complex interlacing in textual strange attractors. This might ultimately take us beyond chaos, to Far From Equilibrium Systems, powerfully eschewing all form of resolution, irremediably marking the end of certainty.

As Siri Hustvedt notes:

³³ "Frequently...[...] cognitive literary theory draws on so-called ToM, the notion that we can reconstruct the minds and intentions of other people through our own mental meta-representational processes[...] what we shall ultimately propose, then, as a complement to ToM, is the **Feeling of Body (FoB)**, its possible links to the experience of narrative[...] We will argue that FoB is the outcome of a basic functional mechanism instantiated by our brain-body system, **Embodied Simulation**, enabling a more direct and less cognitively-mediated access to the world of others.[...] According to this hypothesis, intersubjectivity should be viewed first and foremost as intercorporeity". Wojciehowski and Gallese, 2011. Emphasis is mine.

It isn't easy to make forays out of one's own discipline. The experts lie in wait and often attack the interlopers who dare move onto their sacred ground [...] To my mind conversations among people working in different areas can only benefit everyone involved, but the intellectual windows that belong to one discipline do not necessarily belong to another. The result is a scrambling of terms and beliefs, and often a mess is made. The optimistic view is that out of the chaos come interesting questions, if not answers. (2012, 124).

This modest excursion into scientific fields which were, until recently, thought of as irrelevant to literary analysis might hopefully offer a replicable method to address in any short story Iser's compelling question of how to account for the dynamic character of a literary text, and how we "can assess the keen disturbance" one feels when reading serious literature. Myra was a lover of **Art** and **Arithmetic**; this tiny detail might be invitation enough to multiply perspectives with the hope of elaborating a clearer mental representation of the mystery of "Day of the Butterfly", and beyond it, of our world and our relation to it, a mystery that, Iser says, fiction endlessly and inevitably probes:

If the borderlines of knowledge give rise to fictionalizing activity, we might perceive an economy principle at work: namely what can be known need not to be staged again, and so fictionality always subsidizes the unknowable (1997, 5).

What might therefore forever remain untouched is the ultimate mystery of being moved by words. In her Nobel Interview, Alice Munro, when asked about the impact she hoped to have on her readers, made the following answer:

I want my stories to move people [...] to be something about life that causes people to feel some kind of reward from the writing [...] everything the story tells moves **the writer**³⁴ in such a way that you feel you're a different person when you finish.

What strange attraction phenomenon makes her say "writer" where we expect to hear "reader"? What infinite respect for readers, invited to be the creative writers of the stories they read...

³⁴ Emphasis mine.

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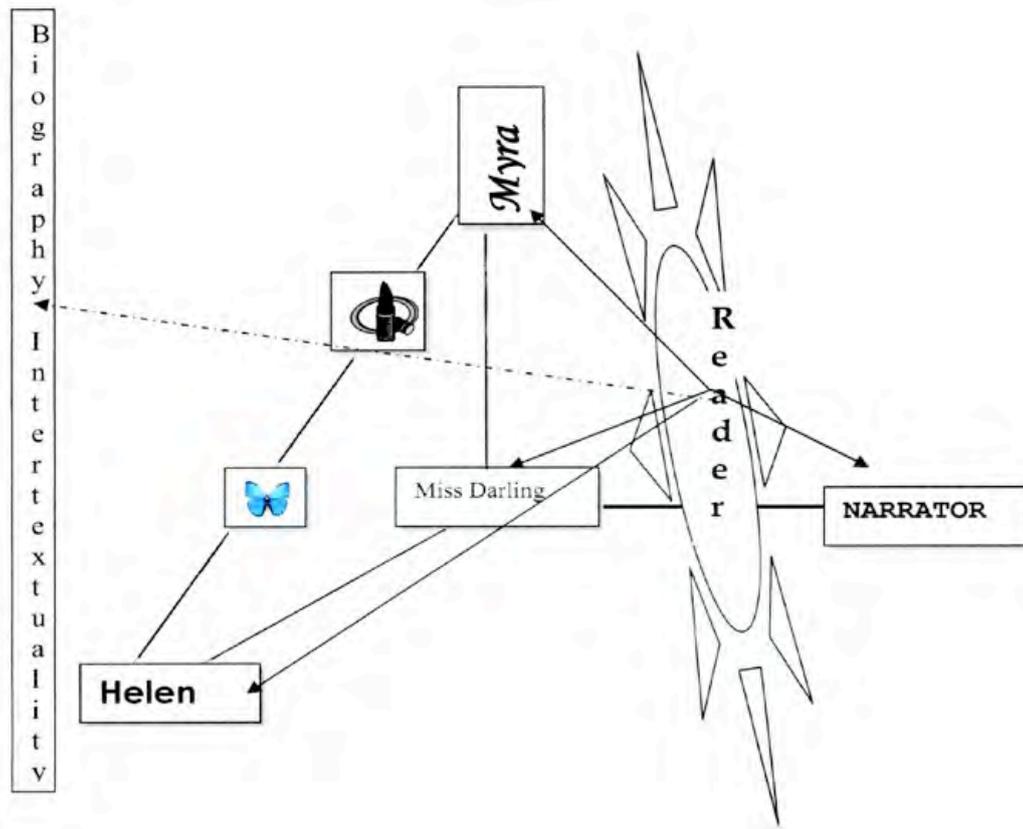
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Diagram of empathy attractor in “Day of the Butterfly”

Below is a *possible* simplified representation of what a strange attractor in “Day of the Butterfly” might eventually look like; you have to imagine all arrows as developing into folding and stretching trajectories.



Girl power in ‘A Trip to the Coast’

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1. Some background about the *Dance of the Happy Shades* collection

Although Alice Munro had previously written individual stories for radio broadcast and magazines, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) was her first book publication, and her first presentation to a wider, international readership. She was a writer from childhood; but the account of her difficulties in finding the time and space to write in Victoria, British Columbia, having married right after university and now with commitments as a wife and mother is well known. Mr Malley, in the story called ‘The Office’ in the collection, is in addition to his other qualities perhaps also a metaphor for all the kinds of needy encroachments of others that prevented Munro progressing with a big, novel-length project—and forced her to accommodate to a stop-start work rhythm and the production of shorter fictions. These factors lie behind the *Dance of the Happy Shades* collection (which, we should note, Munro dedicated to her father Robert E. Laidlaw, aged 67 when it appeared). In her 1994 *Paris Review* interview, Munro reveals how in 1967 a publisher advised her that if she could write three more stories ‘we’d have a book’; and so she wrote ‘Images,’ ‘Walker Brothers Cowboy,’ and ‘Postcard’ during the last year before publication, and these were added to the dozen written, Munro says, up to fifteen years earlier:

‘The Day of the Butterfly’ was the earliest one. That was probably written when I was about twenty-one. And I can remember very well writing ‘Thanks for the Ride’ because my first baby was lying in the crib beside me. So I was twenty-two.
(McCulloch, Jeanne, and Mona Simpson. 1994: 228)

So while *Dance of the Happy Shades* is the first mature flowering of this major writer, it is also work from a significant span of the young author's life, from age 21 to 36. Given that span of crucial, technique-perfecting years, the stories are remarkable for their collective coherence, with minimal disparity of style and tone.

In them, the twenty-something and then thirty-something Munro by no means writes about everything she knows: there is relatively little in them about young couples, consummated sexual relationships, babies, or affairs and infidelity. Instead she mostly writes about those things she has known about for a decade or two, and now has some distance from: the lives of girls, their mothers, their grandmothers, and the unmarried, in varied situations of emotional, intellectual, or material confinement, in small-town Ontario in the 1950s and 1960s.

What are the stories' themes? Most centrally I believe they are about struggle and hostility between a girl approaching puberty or emerging into adulthood and her mother or grandmother. Generally, these older female 'opponents' present models of the feminine which their reluctant protégées find entirely uncongenial. At the same time no radically alternative female role-models seem available: the lives of the wives and mothers are seen by the girl narrators-focalisers as mostly repellent, but worse are the lives of the women who are not wives or mothers. Even a story that does not have this as a main topic, like 'Images', conveys this message. In 'Images' the young narrator accompanies the father she is devoted to when he goes to check the traps which he sets in the river to catch and kill muskrats for their fur. Escaping the house for the day gets the girl away from the hearty Mary McQuade, an unmarried cousin of her father's, mature in years and rough in manners, who has descended upon the family to tend to the girl's mother, who is evidently dying. Of her father's side of the family, the narrator comments:

A bad thing... was to have them say you were sensitive, as they did of my mother. All the aunts and cousins and uncles had grown tremendously hardened to any sort of personal cruelty, reckless, even proud, it seemed, of a failure or deformity that could make for general laughter. (35)

There is no shortage of meanness and cruelty and petty sadism in these stories, born presumably of crushed hopes and frustrated ambitions—or resentment of others' successes.

Towards the end of their long day checking the traps, father and daughter encounter the crazed-seeming and easily-misinterpreted loner called Joe Phippen (faint echoes here of ‘eccentrics’ in the first two stories in the *Dubliners* collection). Or rather, Joe creeps up on the father, wielding an axe and failing to recognise him, while the girl says nothing, as if to observe her father pass a test of masculine coping with violent danger. He does, and they visit with Joe in his shack long enough to watch him feeding toxic moonshine whisky to his cat. This in turn provides material for the father’s joshing of his spinster cousin, when they get home: ‘We found the one for you today, Mary!’, he begins. In such ways, we and the witnessing girl are to understand, men and women in this part of rural Ontario rub along toward the grave.

Like all Munro stories, ‘Images’ has many layers. At one level it is about a young girl coming to terms with the approaching death of her mother—although the mother, suffering from an unspecified condition, is only briefly described: a powerful absence. At another level it is about the curious, quasi-marital relation that the girl sees emerge ‘naturally’ in the temporary co-habitation of her father and Mary McQuade. It is also about her seeing that this is an option or privilege sometimes available to men, but never to women (another, altogether more poignant, developed, and erotic version of an alternative but denied pairing, again briefly glimpsed by a focalising daughter, appeared in the opening story, ‘Walker Brothers Cowboy’). At yet another level the story is a day-long venture into real-world education, paradoxically characterised in the final paragraph as almost fantastical, from which the girl returns ‘dazed and powerful with secrets’. At least two of those words—*power*, and *secrets*—resonate through the entirety of the Munro oeuvre. But it is useful to think of all these stories as empowering their young female narrator-focalisers with secret knowledge, or of them cumulatively empowering a composite female young adult consciousness that emerges in the course of the sequence of stories. A consciousness that is wise and mature enough both to be Helen and to understand Maddy, at the end of ‘The Peace of Utrecht’.

2. ‘A Trip to the Coast’ in the context of the collection

‘A Trip to the Coast’ has been described by Munro as her least favourite story in the *Dance of the Happy Shades* collection. It has certainly been

overshadowed by the more powerful and nuanced final stories, 'The Peace of Utrecht' and the title story 'Dance of the Happy Shades', masterpieces in different ways. But there are many wonderful things in 'A Trip to the Coast' which make it worthy of the closest reading. It is the kind of story that, given its place in the sequence of this collection, makes you think how carefully Munro and her editors have planned that ordering, and the concomitant thematic progression that is detectable (again, Joyce's *Dubliners* is just one of the precursors that may have influenced Munro). The age of the female protagonist or observer, broadly speaking and with admitted exceptions such as 'Thanks for the Ride', gradually advances as the stories proceed. And likewise the age of the female antagonist, broadly, moves from younger to older: in the final three stories, for example, the antagonists are the grandmother, on her last day alive, in 'A Trip to the Coast'; the recently-deceased mother of Helen (the narrator) and Maddy in 'The Peace of Utrecht'; and the soon-to-be deceased Miss Marsalles in 'Dance of the Happy Shades'. Each of the fifteen stories is at the same time different from the others, and certainly the first six in the collection are absorbingly varied in topic, age of protagonist, and setting. But the next triple, the seventh to ninth stories placed at the middle of the collection ('The Time of Death', 'Day of the Butterfly', and 'Boys and Girls'), display linkages: in each we witness a young girl react to a death (of a sibling, caused by negligence; of a classmate, by illness; and of a loved horse, by commercial necessity, respectively). In two of the following three stories, 'Red Dress' and 'Sunday Afternoon', a late-teenage protagonist is about to embark on a sexual life of their own. And chronological age and sexual experience notwithstanding, there is something of the naïve teenager in Helen, the jilted mistress who imagined she was an undeclared fiancée, in the third, 'Postcard'.

3. Smells, Tastes, Shapes

There is another preoccupation of these stories, again perhaps indicative of the focalisation repeatedly coming from a young female narrator who (whether she likes it or not) is 'sensitive' to such details: body smells, and the body shapes of men as well as women. So strong are these preoccupations that in effect Munro has the senses do part of the telling: time and again, an individual's smell, or shape, or colouring, or the feel of their skin, or what they *sound* like (their body noises as well as any speech

and accent idiosyncrasies) is remarked upon. Even, in some cases, a taste is attributed to a character: the girl narrator in 'Images' recalls not only Mary McQuade's unwelcome smell, but also an alien taste in all the food she prepared 'and perhaps in all food eaten in her presence...--something foreign, gritty, depressing' (32). Here, and generally, the smells, sounds, and tastes of these Others whom Munro's narrators comment upon are almost always unpleasant -- a reflex, perhaps, of the focalisers' heightened pubertal sensitivity to everything emanating from the body.

One implication of the intense narratorial awareness of sense impressions is that this assumes an exceptional implied *proximity* of the narrator, and by extension of the reader, to the character depicted. We can contrast this with a narration of characters' words and actions that includes little or no mention of their smells, or the little sounds they make—a silence about such matters which could be entirely reasonable, for example if such physical details are not deemed relevant, or if the narrator simply lacks such proximate and even intimate knowledge of the characters. You can hear what someone says, and report it in a narrative, without being close enough to them to be able to describe their visible detail, or their smell, or the feel of their skin. But there is no such character-narrator distance in these Munro stories.

4. Grotesques

Narrative preoccupation with characters' shape, appearance, and presentation to the senses easily develops into an emphasis on the grotesque, and there is an element of the latter in character-descriptions in several of the stories, introduced for different thematic purposes. Characters in the early stories who shade towards the grotesque—a kind of representation of any difference or unconventionality or eccentricity as a cause for general censure, or even societal expulsion—include Mrs Fullerton in 'The Shining Houses' and Joe Phippen in 'Images'. In 'The Office' the description of Mr Malley, the man who rents a room for the narrator-writer to work in, moves in the direction of the grotesque too. His appearance in the narrative present of the story is contrasted unfavourably with his slimmer self seen in a grandly framed photograph, taken a dozen years earlier (63). Now he is heavy around the hips and thighs, and described as 'matriarchal' (gender is never far from the forefront of these narrators' minds) in ways that are impliedly unsettling. Most striking of

all, however, is the physical description of the grandmother in 'A Trip to the Coast':

Things dangled on her in spite of her attempts to be tidy and fastened up; it was because there was no reasonable shape to her body for clothes to cling to; she was all flat and narrow, except for the little mound of her stomach like a four-months' pregnancy that rode preposterously under her skinny chest. She had knobby fleshless legs and her arms were brown and veined and twisted like whips. Her head was rather big for her body and with her hair pulled tightly over her skull she had the look of an under-nourished but maliciously intelligent baby.

The grandmother is presented as an object of derision, an uncanny or impossible combination of features that is the essence of the grotesque: her bulging stomach would suggest she is carrying a baby, but her head if that of a baby. This is gratuitously cruel, even if we speculate that the assessment is largely May's, the teenage focaliser (it may well not be). The mocking and critical evaluations are loaded, or unreasonable: why should intelligence ever be characterised as *malicious*? It is interesting writing since it is memorable and funny, but it invites us to laugh at the character and, I suspect, is writing that in her later maturity Munro would eschew.

5. Shadows, foreshadowing, and prolepsis

At the end of the ominously titled 'Day of the Butterfly', the terminally-ill child Myra makes a generous gift to the narrator, Helen, and also invites her to come and play at her house at some future time when Myra has returned from the hospital she is to be moved to, in the city. These kind offers, received by the girl narrator who clearly grasps that Myra will not be returning from the hospital and who can also hear vigorously noisy children playing snowballs outside, have an unsettling effect:

This sound [of the children] made Myra, her triumph and her bounty, and most of all her future in which she had found this place for me, turn shadowy, turn dark. (110)

A shadow frequently serves as an emblem of death or the spirit, the reduction of body to a ghostly presence. But a shadow can also come before the thing it represents, e.g., when the sun is behind the entity; such literal foreshadowing is the source for uses of *shadowing* expressions to denote presaging, prolepsis, and premature glimpses of future plot

developments. A further characteristic of one's own shadow is that you can never shake it off: it is always there beside you, this attendance usually being understood as a burden rather than a comfort.

But the shadow motif is just one of the means by which prolepses are woven into these stories – including prolepses concerning minor but indicative characters as well as major ones. Examples of these can be found early in 'The Office'. Within just two paragraphs on page 62, the narrator provides a brisk evaluation of the lives and natures of Mr and Mrs Malley, the couple with whom she intends to make the purely business arrangement of renting an office to write in. Mrs Malley is described comparatively directly: 'She had the swaying passivity, the air of exhaustion and muted apprehension, that speaks of a life spent in close attention on a man who is by turns vigorous, crotchety and dependent.' And this we find is the case, and continues to be the case. As for Mr Malley, he is rather interpreted by means of a portrait of him, hanging on the wall, 'with its own light and a gilded frame'. In the portrait, our writer-narrator judges, Mr Malley is uneasy in his prosperous businessman role, perhaps inclined to be intrusive and insistent. But, she continues sharply, 'Never mind the Malleys. As soon as I saw that office, I wanted it.' (63). Everything foreshadowed here about Mr Malley is confirmed as the next weeks go by. The writer discovers that she cannot have the office without also 'minding' Mr Malley, with his 'accusing vulnerability' (65) and his 'craving for intimacy' (66). Never minding the Malleys is the one thing the writer-narrator is not allowed to do, in this almost-inversion of Melville's 'Bartleby' story.

Turning to 'A Trip to the Coast', we find just one use each of the words *shade*, *shady*, and *shadowy*. Most interesting of these is the last, which occurs when May gets up exceptionally early and imagines the day to be still pure and untainted by her mother and grandmother, since, she assumes, they are still asleep. 'The back yard at this time of day was strange, damp and shadowy', we are told, and May's imagining is called 'a delicate premonition of freedom and danger'. But in one of those moments of dry humour that Munro does so well, May is soon disabused of her romantic fancy: her grandmother comes around the side of the house carrying kindling, evidently having been up and out for some time. May suffers 'a queer let-down feeling that seemed to spread thinly from the present moment into all areas of her life, past and future.' Her grandmother is for her the worst kind of shadow: 'It seemed to her that any place she went her grandmother would be there beforehand.'

6. Prominent phrases and keywords: a corpus stylistic foray

In the latter half of this chapter I would like to take further the attention to specific word choices begun in the first half, by using simple corpus-stylistic methods to highlight some important kinds of lexical repetition or patterning. Single lexical words that are repeated many times in a story may be noticeable and noteworthy; but sometimes even more noteworthy are those few multiple-word phrases found to occur three or more times, either in the narrative (non-direct-speech) part of the text, or in the direct speech part. It is important to separate out the searching of the narrative and the direct speech (dialogue) sections, since their narratological status of each is normally quite distinct. By and large the narrative text is attributable to an author-narrator, who in principle may have different values and perspective from each of the characters and their ostensibly faithfully reported speech. By the same token, if a particular character is found to use a particular phrase several times over in their directly-reported speech, this is chiefly indicative of that character (they 'own' that speech) and may tell us little about the narrator and their stance. In 'Images', for example, Joe Phippen is reported saying 'I never knew it was you' twice over, and then 'I didn't know it was you, Ben', and these are indicative of his character and mindset; but they seem to have no resonance with larger themes in the story. With that qualification noted, we can say that paying attention to any simple multi-word phrases that recur three times or more in a story of the size of 'A Trip to the Coast', may help to alert us to kinds of emphasis and characterisation that might otherwise go unnoticed.

With a digitised and searchable version of the story, and using the N-gram function of the free online text analysing programme called *Antconc* or of such programmes as *Wmatrix* or *WordSmith Tools*, the recurrent multi-word phrases can be quickly identified. (An n-gram is a sequence of words of any number, 'n'. Thus a 7-gram is a sequence or 'string' of seven words, and free software will enable you to indentify in a text all occurrences of the same seven words in exactly the same sequence. In actuality, it is quite rare for a text to contain even a second occurrence of any of its seven-word sequences—unless that sequence is a quoted title, phrase, or proverb.) In the event, the most repeated multi-word phrases in 'A Trip to the Coast' are only of limited interest. As it happens, all three

occur in the direct speech of the travelling salesman who performs to deadly effect in the final pages of the story.

Using Antconc's N-gram or word clusters function, and setting the N-gram size at 5 words, we find that there is just one 5-word n-gram, which is used only by the salesman, a remarkable six times: *nothing to be afraid of*. This is the mantra that the salesman uses over and over again to the grandmother, as he hypnotises her with a metal bottle-opener. It is to her that he repeats this mantra that we can see, with hindsight and in the circumstances (it turns out that she is dying) as quite poignant. The salesman also asks the grandmother three times to *[just] keep your eyes* on the bottle-opener he is holding out in front of her; and, after she has 'gone under', he three times asks whether she *can still see*. But by this point the old woman has definitively gone under – the text describes 'enormous cold eyes and its hard ferocious expression' – so that his final repeated expression, 'wake up. Wake up', has no effect. We should not make great claims for this n-gram evidence, but it does clearly show that the one speaking character in the story who repeats themselves in multi-word phrases is the salesman; such repetition is in his character, and perhaps part of what makes him a salesman and a hypnotist.

N-gram searches have to be post-processed carefully, so as to set aside the relatively uninteresting but repeated phrases. Consider the repeated sequences of three words. As is to be expected, there are plenty of these, but some of the most frequent may not be of much stylistic importance. Thus by far the most frequent is *the old woman* (27 uses), followed by *her grandmother said* and *she did not* (9 occurrences of both these). In a story with a grandmother as one of the two main characters, none of these is unexpected or revealing. But the next 3-gram in the list, arguably, is. This is *as if she*, which occurs 8 times, always in the narrative text (i.e., not in the direct speech), mostly with the grandmother as the referent of the pronoun *she*:

. *Her grandmother looked at her as if she were a stove pipe and came ahead with its stained walls and calendars as if she had to keep it all in sight ; want-ad section of the city paper , as if she had no store to open or breakfast Candy Apples lipstick on and it looked as if she shaved her legs. 'We go to the in this same loud monotonous voice as if she were talking to a deaf person or held her head between her two hands, as if she were pressing something in . and then she ran out after him, as if she wanted to call something , as if as if she wanted to call something, as if she wanted to call ' Help '*

Among these, the fourth example should also be distinguished as quite unlike the other seven in structure and effect (*looked as if*, paraphraseable as 'seemed, appeared'), which are all adjuncts describing the manner of a preceding process.

Colligationally, *as if she* predicts a following finite predicate or verb phrase, one that describes a state, action or event which is not actually or certainly the case. That is to say, the sequence *as if she* predicts a following predicate like *had won the lottery* or *knew the bus-driver personally*; but the two examples also imply that it is not at all certain that the person denoted by *she* has in fact won the lottery or is acquainted with the bus-driver. Where literal factuality is concerned, if the narrator were certain, there would be no point to their hedging with the *as if* construction (it would be misleading). But often enough the construction is used in non-factual and figurative uses, as in the first example above: May incontrovertibly is not a stove pipe, but the way her grandmother looks at (or through?) her, it is as if she were no more than one. The *as if she [Predicate]* formulation, high frequency in this story's narration, draws our attention to a particular kind of distancing or negative-mode narration (Simpson 1993: 46-85; Toolan 2001: 68-76) that Munro resorts to quite extensively: the narrator cannot describe the situation in full and with certainty, but makes a defeasible suggestion which, once made, the reader cannot ignore.

Reflecting on the prominence of this construction in the narrative can inform evidence-based interpretation, even though we should recognise that the list above derives from the (frequent) instances of the specific sequence *as if she* in the narrative. For example, a fuller search of all instances of *as if*, followed mostly by other definite or indefinite pronouns, confirms that this distancing-but-interpreting narrative mode is even more extensive in the story. (But 'as if' only the *twentieth* most frequent two-word sequence in the text, so much less prominent than *as if she*, which ranked fourth). Narratologically it is an appropriate construction to use, where a narrator wishes to maintain a degree of mystery or uncertainty about actions, motives, and story trajectory. Every *as if* stimulates in the reader's mind the thought that, while the situation has been described in one way, the narrator seems to be conceding that a different explanatory description would be more accurate. By the end of the story, for example, we might want to revisit the description of how the grandmother 'held her head between her two hands, as if she were

pressing something in' and wonder whether, unbeknownst to the narrator, she is actually suffering a cerebral aneurysm or stroke at this point.

Also useful for its focussing function, as one embarks on interpretation, is the Keyword function (available via all three of the text-analysing packages recommended above). The Keyword function is a mathematical calculation that identifies those words in a text which, relative to a comparable body of texts (e.g., other modern narrative fiction), are disproportionately frequent or infrequent in the text under scrutiny. In the case of 'A Trip to the Coast', of course, various words such as character names (*grandmother*, *May*) or means of referring to characters (*old*, *woman*, *she*) turn out to be Keywords, but for the obvious reason that they denote central characters. Because these serve to name characters, they are not fully lexical or content items: they mainly refer, rather than carrying much meaning (of course names carry *some* meaning: most readers will have multiple associations with a word/name like *grandmother*, and the name *May* might also carry associations, being the name of a tree and of the Northern Hemisphere month when spring approaches summer, suggesting a burgeoning and blossoming and youth).

Slightly less predictable is the fact that *store* and *stove* are also Keywords; but *store* is the setting of much of the story, while *stove* occurs 8 times only: perhaps just enough to be noticeably prominent in the story. The stove seems to be the object around which the grandmother's life revolves: she cooks her food on it, spits into it, looks at May 'as if she were a stove pipe', sits for hours 'looking with concentration at nothing but the front of the stove', and describes her dream (a premonition of death, we assume) in which she is visited by 'the biggest bird you ever saw, black as that stove top there'. Most elliptically Munroian is the grandmother's seemingly throwaway remark 'I don't want to keep the stove on today any longer'n I can help.' Perhaps she says this simply because the coming day promises to be even hotter than usual; but later, with hindsight, the reader may wonder if the grandmother foresees her own death, and the need for her body to be kept in a room as cool as possible prior to burial. The grandmother is nothing if not practical, brutally practical even: were she to die on the mooted trip to the coast to see her son, she suggests, 'They could put me in that [train] car with the lettuce and tomatoes ... and ship me home cold.'

7. Key Semantic Domains

Wmatrix's ability to identify not only keywords but also key semantic domains in a text provides useful confirmation of what was noted on an intuitive basis earlier, about the stories' attentiveness to bodies, and the senses with which we apprehend bodies (sight, touch, smell, hearing, etc.). If a calculation of the story's semantic domains is performed, the following categories are noted as 'most key':

Freq in	and	% of story	Freq in	and	% of ref. corpus	Keyness	Semantic category
T3+	43	0.74	300	0.13		+72.23	Time: Old; grown-up
T1.3	91	1.57	1424	0.64		+53.30	Time:Period
O2	74	1.27	1045	0.47		+52.22	Objects generally
I2.2	29	0.50	221	0.10		+44.88	Business:Selling
B1	141	2.43	3057	1.37		+36.90	Anatomy, physiology
W2	5	0.09	0	0.00		+36.71	Light
Q2.1	142	2.44	3216	1.45		+32.12	Speech: Communicative
X2	9	0.15	22	0.01		+29.86	Mental processes
T1.1	5	0.09	4	0.00		+24.55	Time: General
F1	51	0.88	906	0.41		+22.87	Food
S2.1	37	0.64	586	0.26		+21.17	People: Female

As in the case of several of the highest-ranked Keywords, and for the same reason, a closer look at the text confirms that most of the above semantic categories listed here as key are not really so *on semantic grounds*. Take the most key category, Time: old. A quick click on the Concordance lines for these 43 instances reveals that the vast majority of them are simply uses of the phrase *the old woman* to refer to the grandmother. In the case of the second most key semantic domain, Time: period, again a click on the Concordance lines shows that the programme has classified every use of the girl's name, *May*, as a 'Time: period' instance, and this is the cause of this domain's high frequency. With the third most key semantic category, Objects generally, the analyser has more usefully highlighted the prominence of 'things' in this story. The importance of some of those Objects has already been noted above: *the stove, the bottle-opener*.

Still, the anatomy/physiology domain, although ranked fifth here, is reflected in a striking 141 words in the story (more than 2% of the whole text). As the label suggests, it is a hybrid category: it includes all mentions that someone *slept* (5), or was *asleep* (3) or *woke up* (3), along with single occurrences of *sleeping, yawning* and *tired*, i.e. bodily states and processes. But it also includes many mentions of body parts, in particular

someone's *face* (14), *head* (10), *hand* (8), *hair* (6), *feet*, *legs*, *hands* *eyes*, *body*, *mouth*, *arms*, *shoulder*, *elbows*, or *stomach* (to list only those items occurring more than once). In fact the 141 tokens come from 59 different types (thus, along with the body words listed above that occur several times over, there are plenty more that occur once only, but add to the 'body' emphasis in the story: *knee*, *chin*, *thumb*, *ankles*, *belly*, *fingers*, etc). The sheer diversity of these body words is important to the argument about semantic prominence; it is the opposite of semantic prominence created by the use, over and over again, of just one or two words. (As elsewhere, and being an automatic classifier, the software makes some mistakes, such as misclassifying several locative uses of *back* -- *the back yard*, *the back of the store* -- as though they were the body part.)

8. Conversational uncooperativeness

Many of the stories in *Dance of the Happy Shades* involve a humiliation, a defeat, or a victory, and these usually unfold in an environment of explicit competition and wilful hostility (cf. the grandmother in 'A Trip to the Coast', who from May's point of view forbids her from going swimming chiefly just to upset her, confronting her with hollow reasons and 'flourishing them nastily, only to see what damage they could do'). The milieu is one of struggle to be fit to survive and flourish. Indeed there is an element of Social Darwinian struggle in many of the stories. The struggle may be for survival, or for peace, or for a longed-for trip (to the coast or elsewhere), or for a boyfriend, or some other transitional experience, with its possibilities of escape from the entrapment felt by these girls going through puberty, or by these women resisting the conformities of motherhood and wifehood in small town Canada in the 1960s.

In 'A Trip to the Coast' there are some echoes of other distinguished short-story fiction (e.g. Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find* collection), but there is also abundant narrative originality and stylistic accomplishment – especially in the three vividly-drawn figures of the grandmother, 11-year-old May who focalises the story, and the hypnotising travelling salesman. Even in the fairly conventional-seeming opening paragraph, which ironically takes half a page to describe the story's setting as a place with 'nothing there', it is the local turns of phrase that take the writing – not the setting itself – out of the ordinary. Those passing through the crossroads called Black Horse (it is implied that

everyone who sees it is only passing through) may notice *worn elbows of rock* and *harmonious woodlots* giving way to the *less hospitable scrub-forest*, where the trees seem to be retreating into the distance, *like a company of ghosts*. This last image, which ends the story's opening scene-setting paragraph, invites thoughts about its similarity to, and differences from, the title of the final story and of the collection as a whole.

The story is structured around a series of engagements with a winner and a loser, like a female domestic counterpart to a sequence of clashes between two rutting bucks, compelled to seek dominance. Unlike the bucks, however, the motivation is not directly a matter of breeding and sexual priority, but rather concerns grandmother and granddaughter keeping (or making) their own living space, in the face of familial constraints and obligations; so, territory-marking in a broad figurative sense.

May's first 'victory' is her excitement at having awoken and started the day (as she imagines) while her mother and grandmother are still asleep, and the 'freedom and danger' she feels. But as noted earlier, victory turns to defeat as she discovers her grandmother is already up and outside collecting kindling. Small skirmishes follow, woven into their dialogue (insofar as it is a dialogue: May's grandmother only answers when she feels like it, we are told). If May wants coffee, she must get her own cup, her grandmother announces. She responds in hostile kind by choosing to drink from a 'good cup with green birds on it'. No further textual explanation is given, but the reader is trusted to invoke background cultural knowledge about saving the 'good china' for use with 'company' and special occasions, proprieties which May calculatedly defies. All this the readers knows might have triggered a reproof from the grandmother, although on this occasion she chooses to say nothing.

Throughout this section of the story, charting May and her grandmother's interaction, asynchrony and a refusal to coordinate turns of talk are uppermost. An examination of the awkward relations between one turn and the next could be undertaken, showing how each speaker in turn seems bent on disregarding what conversational analysts call 'recipient design'. But equally we can bring out some of the evidence of hostility and disharmony by invoking Grice's idea that, other things being equal, we try in conversation to interact cooperatively with fellow conversationalists, composing our contributions so that they will be true, suitably informative, relevant, and orderly (these four adjectives are rough glosses of Grice's four conversational maxims). By the same token, when we produce

conversational responses that an interlocutor judges to be deliberate departures from what would be truthful, informative, relevant and orderly, then that interlocutor is entitled and expected to calculate what covert message is being conveyed. In the language of Gricean pragmatics, breaches of the maxims trigger the deriving of implicatures. Many such implicatures can be derived by the reader, as ‘overhearer’ of the conversation between May and her grandmother.

A glaring example is that of May announcing (‘conversationally’) that Eunie Parker’s cousin, Heather Sue, will be coming that day. Not only does this elicit no conventional acknowledgement from the grandmother, the latter instead embarks on an entirely unrelated topic, challenging May to guess her age. When May does guess, the grandmother withholds the normal teacherly third move (usually comprising a ratification and an optional evaluation: e.g., *Correct. Well done!*); she remains silent ‘for so long that May thought this was only another of her conversational blind alleys’. Thus the grandmother has embarked upon what Sinclair & Coulthard long ago identified as a classic IRF exchange (elicit-answer-feedback), only to breach her own interactional undertaking, in blatantly uncooperative fashion. Veering away from what she suspects is a blind alley, May can be forgiven for trying again with her own previously-launched topic of Heather Sue Murray: now she tells of Heather’s prowess at Highland dancing. We are unsurprised when this draws from the grandmother the reply ‘Seventy-eight’, and the added remark that ‘Nobody knows that’, which, as noted earlier, casts in an odd light her previous question to May about her age: if nobody knows her age, the earlier question clearly was not asked in good faith or a spirit of cooperative sharing. We hardly need to infer this, since the contrariness is embedded in the language of the exchange: ‘Do you know [X]?... Nobody knows that, I never told.’ The women are sitting at the same table, and talking to each other, but it is recurrently clear that there is no shared or ‘accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange’, to use Grice’s characterisation of the cooperative principle that he argued guides ordinary conversation.

Now the old woman’s talk turns to the financing of a headstone, at which May understandably protests ‘What do you want a headstone for?’, only for this to be nicely trumped by the old lady’s rejoinder ‘I never said I *wanted* one’. But before we are told of this reply, May’s memory of an earlier occasion is recounted, when she came home from school to find her grandmother laid out on the couch, as still as a corpse. This had prompted

fear and crying in the girl, at which, still without moving, the grandmother had opened her eyes to remonstrate, *faux innocent* but also with 'a curious spark of triumph' in her look.

9. Victory and defeat

The previous section began the exploration of the May-Grandmother relationship as a kind of struggle for supremacy, with regard to conversation; in this final section I wish to show how this theme of struggle, victory and defeat extends into the narrative and the action. If, as a fairly ordinary reader of Munro's story I have the impression that there is rather a focus on conflict, struggle, winning and losing in this story—that May, or the narrator insofar as the narratorial role can be distinguished from May's focalisation, sees relations between herself and her grandmother as shaped by competition (rather than love, affection, respect, mutual tolerance, or other desiderata of well-functioning family life) – is there some way in which corpus stylistic analysis can help confirm that impression? I believe there is, if we exploit the semantic tagging function of Wmatrix. This can be used to uncover how the semantic tagger classifies those words in the story that one instinctively notices as having to do with competition, defeat and victory. Hopefully, several of these words—such as *defeat*, *triumph*, *victorious* – will be tagged as belonging to the same semantic category. If they are not, we have to explore the implications of the automatic semantic classification diverging from the more situated and context-sensitive informal semantic classification of this real reader: one or other process may be faulty, or both may be.

We can begin with the word *triumph* from the phrase quoted at the end of the previous section (*a curious spark of triumph*): this word is classed as a X9.2+ item, semantically, in Wmatrix's UCREL semantic tagging system. The next word whose classification I will check is the near antonym of *triumph*, namely *defeat*, found in this sentence near the story's close: *Now for the first time it seemed to her she saw the possibility of her grandmother's defeat*. Very satisfactorily, for our purposes, this is classified as X9.2- in the tagging system. What about the story's final word, *victorious*? This is X9.2+ also. What do these classifications denote? The UCREL semantic tagset labels state that X9.2 words concern 'Success and

failure' in combination, with the plus and minus sub-types (X9.2+ and X9.2-) expressing success and failure respectively, taken separately.

At this point the corpus stylistician can simply reverse the procedure, and focus on the semantic class rather than any particular word. Thus one can ask the computer for a list of all the words in the story that are automatically classified as X9.2, X9.2+, or X9.2-. It transpires that no words are classified as of the higher X9.2 category (presumably because there are no joint mentions in the text of winning and losing, success and failure, or similar). Just two words in the story are classified as X9.2-: *defeat* and *lose*, while six words are classified as X9.2+: *triumph*; *came through*; *flourishing*; *prevailed*; *success*; and *victorious*. Now we must consider these eight instances in contexts, to see just how revealing they are in the flow of the text.

Of the two X9.2 'failure' examples, the one concerning *defeat* was noted above and is central to the idea that the story focusses on a struggle to 'win'; the second instance, the use of *lose* in *lose her breath a moment*, at first sight and in that truncated co-text appears inconsequential to the 'struggle for victory' thesis. But consider the fuller co-text. The grandmother has just taken up the challenge, from the hypnotising salesman, that he can put her to sleep (she, of course, is confident that he cannot). Now the salesman suggests she lie down, to relax better; but she replies:

'Sitting down--' she said, and seemed to lose her breath a moment—'sitting down's good enough for me.'

In *this* context, the seeming to lose her breath might be an actual losing of breath, the reader surmises. As such, it is another proleptic hint of what is about to happen; it foreshadows the grandmother permanently losing her breath.

As for the six X9.2+ instances, all but one support the 'struggle for victory' thesis, if we note their immediate cotexts (all of which are inspectable in the Concordance function of Wmatrix), with the 'success' word itself in bold:

1. innocence and a curious spark of **triumph**. 'Can't a person lay down around here
2. a hot, creeping wind **came through** the country grass . Because it
3. same reasons out of the bag, **flourishing** them nastily, only to see what

4. soft, and it penetrated and **prevailed** over the more commonplace odours
5. of it. I've had pretty good **success** with some insomnia cases. Not
6. grandmother lay fallen across the counter dead, and what was more, **victorious**.

Instances (1) and (3) and (6) I have discussed earlier; they clearly support the general thesis. Example (4) refers to the 'sweetish and corrupt' smell, as May registers it, of her grandmother's flesh. This is part and parcel of the grotesque or alienated description of the grandmother, and one has to remind oneself that the grandmother is very much alive at this stage, even though the phrase *smell of corruption*, which the text's phrasing skirts around but avoids actually using, often collocates with references to dead bodies. Again it is hard not to think of prolepsis at work here. Example (5), spoken by the hypnotist, would be an unremarkable turn of phrase in normal circumstances, but against the background here of competitive judging and scorning, and introduces a mildly disturbing complication, the voice and actions of a third party, volubly confident of *their* success—and a third party whom in a sense May deploys in her battle of wills with her grandmother.

The one instance that must be set aside as irrelevant—indeed as mis-classified—is example (2). *Came through* is plausibly classified as a single but multi-word expression. When used intransitively it often has the idiomatic meaning that a positive outcome has transpired—*my promotion finally came through*—but in the story it is used transitively—*a hot creeping wind came through the country grass*—so the automatic classification has erred in grouping it among the success/failure words. This is another reminder that the semantic tagger is an imperfect instrument: it may err in including a phrase as carrying a success/failure meaning when it does not. The tagger can also err in failing to identify a success/failure meaning in the text, particularly in a multi-word expression, where no single word carries the full success or failure sense. Thus the narrative reports that time and again May had hitherto 'watched her grandmother's encounters with the outside world', convinced 'that the old woman would get the better of it [sc., the world]'. The 'success, prevail' meaning here of *get the better of it* is not identified by the tagger, although in fairness it does classify the phrase as S7.1+, words with meanings of 'in power'. Likewise we might regard the text's use of the word *capitulated* at the story's high-point (*If her grandmother capitulated*

it would ... crack the foundations of her life) as clearly lexicalising the success/defeat/conflict theme; but again it is not grouped with the ‘success and failure’ words by the automatic semantic tagger. Not entirely unreasonably, it is classed as a G3 item (Warfare, defence and the army; weapons), the only item so tagged in the story. But these examples demonstrate the need to supplement any automatic search for instantiations of a more complex theme with further review from a human interpreter.

What I have hoped to show is that with the assistance of some quite simple text-analysing resources—principally, an application of Gricean conversational norms to the abnormality of the grandmother-granddaughter dialogue, and some use of corpus-linguistic searches—the stylistically-minded reader can not only find some degree of corpus-linguistic confirmation of readerly intuitions about the story, but may also find their attention directed to details of the text that they had to some degree overlooked. In the latter function, the searching and sorting arguably stimulate a fuller appreciation of the story’s narrative texture.

Several of the stories in this collection are focalised from the perspective of a teenage girl—younger, and approaching puberty, or older, already physically a woman and now negotiating the complex business of establishing her own identity, values, and independence. This pre-occupation is summarised in this article’s title as ‘girl power’, a provocative phrase. In an early wave of feminism that Munro certainly lived through, *girl power* was a still-patronising description of the assertion of kinds of independence by young western women: it was as if patriarchal society conceded to females that they should have some freedom and independence—but that they were still ‘girls’ after all. But this is not what girl power is about in the *Happy Shades* collection: for Munro, the first obstacle confronting girls is the women who raise them, and who would have their daughters confine themselves to the same circumscribed manservicing arenas (the kitchen, the secretary’s desk, the marriage bed) that the older women have accepted. So the power seized by the girls in these stories is a rejection of the attenuated power offered them by their female elders.

In the struggle not only to survive but to make a mark, to be a self—free enough to know and express their own wishes and seek to fulfil them—these girl-women must first fight their families, then their school-friends, and later sometimes their work or social acquaintances. ‘A Trip to the Coast’ is one such fight story, at the early, intra-familial phase. Also

striking is the *intimacy* of the setting, and the proximity of May's implied horizons. Everything is quite close: she sees, smells, hears nearby things (her grandmother especially, but also the house, her friends, the salesman, the surrounding scrubby hills) and these are what predominate in her thoughts and therefore the narrative. Only at the very end of the story does May become aware that she could take to the road and walk 'in any direction she liked', and that the world is now 'flat and accessible' to her. She has an intimation of such possibility at just about the point that the salesman appears: she is reported seeing a 'new light' in the world, and a power in herself, 'like the unsuspected still unexplored power of her own hostility'. This last phrase is a brilliant, disturbing encapsulation of May's situation, but has to be read carefully: it frankly recognises her hostility towards her grandmother (this is presupposed); it then asserts that there is a power in that hostility, which has not until now been recognised and therefore not yet explored and tested. Again the reader is given a glimpse of the narrative future, since we are here invited to expect that before long May *will* put her powerful hostility to the test, in some clash with her grandmother, which she does when she sides with the salesman and declares, concerning the question whether he could hypnotise her grandmother or not, 'I bet he could'. Of course there is irony and cold comfort in the grandmother lying dead but 'victorious' at the story's end; but it does at least leave open the possibility that she 'defeated' the salesman, by dying before his technique could take hold.

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Style and Blending in ‘The Peace of Utrecht’ by Alice Munro

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1. Introduction

When Margaret Atwood was once praised for being a great writer, she reportedly deflected the compliment by saying, “You call this writing? Alice Munro! Now *that’s* writing” (*Economist* 2009: para. 7). Munro modestly told *The Montreal Gazette* in 2013, “When I began writing there was a very small community of Canadian writers and little attention was paid by the world. Now Canadian writers are read, admired and respected around the globe” (qtd. in Medley 2013: A2). Munro obviously played a role in that change of affairs. Her talent has been recognized for decades, and no critic today would challenge the claim that Munro is a master of the short story. The long list of awards she has won, including the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature, demonstrates the respect her work commands. But to understand her development as an artist, it is fitting to read her first collection of short stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades*. Of particular interest in that volume is the penultimate story, “The Peace of Utrecht,” which my article here will focus on.

In 1950 when Munro was 19, she published her first short story, “The Dimensions of a Shadow,” at the University of Western Ontario (“Profile” 2005: 61). Yet *Dance of the Happy Shades* was published in 1968 when Munro was already 37 years old. Soon after her mother died in early 1959, she began writing “The Peace of Utrecht,” first published in mid-1960 in *The Tamarack Review* (Howells 1998: 14). Eight years later, it reappeared in *Dance of the Happy Shades*. “The Peace of Utrecht” is set c.1960 in the fictional Southwestern Ontario town of Jubilee, some thirty miles east of Inverhuron, a real town on Lake Huron mentioned in the story (1998: 192). In the story, two adult sisters in their early- to mid-

thirties spend several weeks together, in the summer following the death of their invalid mother the previous winter. Maddy, the elder, single and without children, works for the town clerk and lives alone in the family house. Helen, the younger sister, is also the story's narrator; she is married and has lived away in the Toronto area for many years. She has brought her two small children (a girl and a boy) with her for this visit, "on the last lap of a twenty-five-hundred-mile trip" by car (Munro 1998: 196). "The Peace of Utrecht" is an important story for Munro. She once said it was "the first story I absolutely had to write and wasn't writing to see if I could write that kind of story" (qtd. in Howells 1998: 14). Indeed, for Munro the story was "a breakthrough: confronting the fact of her mother freed her into autobiographical fiction (or 'personal stories', as she calls them), into her particular voice and material — though it did not free her from her mother, who remained a fraught presence" (Edemariam 2003: para. 12).

Much of what has been written about "The Peace of Utrecht" discusses its autobiographical content. Munro was the eldest of three children; she had a younger sister (by five years) and a younger brother. Her mother suffered from a severe form of Parkinson's disease from 1943 until her death in 1959; "The Peace of Utrecht" was the first story where Munro wrote about this subject (Thacker 2005: 150). While Munro and her sister did look after their mother, they both eventually left home. The sisters in the story are their mother's primary caregivers; no father is ever mentioned. Caregiving can have long-lasting adverse effects on caregivers, and Munro has explored this theme in other stories too. According to DeFalco, "Throughout her early work, in stories like 'The Peace of Utrecht' [1960], 'The Ottawa Valley' (1974), 'Winter Wind' (1974), 'Spelling' (1978), and 'A Queer Streak' (1986), one finds caregiving roles, young women saddled with the responsibility to care for older family members" (2012: 380). This is the situation both Maddy and Helen were in for several years before Maddy's "ten-years' vigil" alone with the mother (1998: 195). Having to care for their mother seems to have made the sisters love her, and each other, less.

In the story, Helen feels her visit is a failure even though the sisters seem friendly at times, for example, while smoking cigarettes and drinking gin together during the hot and humid summer nights. But according to Dahlie, "For the two sisters ... neither life, nor childhood memories of Jubilee, nor the death of their mother is sufficient to create a bond between them" (1978: 58). This is the sad story Munro tells. While many

critics have discussed the autobiographical nature of “The Peace of Utrecht,” few seem to have discussed its style. As Jeffries and McIntyre (2010: 172) recently stated, “a general question about style may be followed by particular questions about formal features ... or by questions about the kinds of conceptual metaphor, blending or other cognitive aspects of the texts concerned.” In this article I shall therefore explore some formal and cognitive features of Munro’s style in order to shed some light on *how* she tells this unhappy tale.

2. Style

“The Peace of Utrecht” contains two parts. Part I is roughly thirteen pages long and has five subsections. Part II is roughly eight pages long and has two subsections. Although using Roman numerals to divide stories into parts is highly unusual for Munro, according to Zetu, “The two parts correspond to two sets of problematic relationships: the unresolved mother-daughter relationship and the bond between siblings” (2012: 363). That said, the way both parts begin offers strong evidence that this story is like a diary entry. Part I begins with Helen writing, “I have been at home now for three weeks and it has not been a success” (1998: 190), while Part II begins with Helen writing, “I have been to visit Aunt Annie and Auntie Lou” (1998: 202). Helen records conversations she remembers from the recent or the distant past, events during her visit (e.g. by using the present perfect here), and she reflects on what she is writing as she is writing it. For example, after describing Maddy’s odd friendship with Fred, Helen writes: “Now thinking of Fred Powell I admit that my reaction to this – this *situation* as I call it – is far more conventional than I would have expected; it is even absurd. And I do not know what situation it really is” (1998: 193). In the same passage, Helen writes of how Maddy teases Fred: “He allows it. (And this is what frightens me, I know it now; he allows it; *she needs it.*)” (Munro 1998: 193-194). Here and elsewhere, evidence of self-conscious narration suggests that the story is a kind of highly polished diary entry. Munro may be writing for us, but Helen is arguably writing for herself.

Munro’s style here is marked by many other features as well. Syntactic variation is one of them, as we can see in the very opening paragraph:

[1] I have been at home now for three weeks and it has not been a success.
 [2] Maddy and I, though we speak cheerfully of our enjoyment of so long and intimate a visit, will be relieved when it is over. [3] Silence disturbs us.
 [4] We laugh immoderately. [5] I am afraid—very likely we are both afraid—that when the moment comes to say goodbye, unless we are very quick to kiss, and fervently mockingly squeeze each other’s shoulders, we will have to look straight into the desert that is between us and acknowledge that we are not merely indifferent; at heart we reject each other, and as for that past we make so much of sharing we do not really share it at all, each of us keeping it jealously to herself, thinking privately that the other has turned alien, and forfeited her claim (1998: 190).

There are 141 words but only 5 sentences in this paragraph, yielding an average sentence length of 28.2 words. However, only sentence [2] comes close to the average length established within this paragraph (24 words vs. 28.2 words). Just as sentences [3] and [4] are surprisingly short (3 words each) within the context of sentences [1] and [2], so too is sentence [5] surprisingly long (95 words) within the context of this paragraph. There is thus *internal deviation* within the opening paragraph, although readers will see that sentence lengths vary throughout the story. As for *external deviation*, while sentences [1] and [2] are not far from the Ellegård norm of 17.8 words per sentence (Leech & Short 2007: 90), sentences [3], [4], and [5] deviate substantially from that Ellegård norm. If variety is the spice of life, Munro’s sentence lengths embody that proverb.

Subordination is another interesting feature of Munro’s style here. While sentence [2] could be a simple declarative sentence of 10 words, it gets interrupted and made complicated by a subordinate clause of 14 words. Sentence [2] is also *iconic* since its forms mimics its content. Just as Helen might feel “relieved when it [the visit] is over,” the reader may also feel “relieved when it [the sentence] is over.” The same is true of sentence [5], where subordinate clauses *defer* explaining clearly what it is that the sisters fear. Indeed, subordinate structures in sentence [5] iconically create distance between the sisters and what they fear.

Careful readers may also notice Munro’s intriguing use of the semicolon. This is true in *Dance of the Happy Shades* in general, and in “The Peace of Utrecht” in particular. In his recent study of style in another story by Munro, Toolan also noticed her use of the semicolon in compound sentences (2010: 324). In general, correctly using the semicolon in modern English is a sign of formal syntax and erudition, which is another reason why this story seems like a highly polished diary entry. Munro uses the semicolon so extensively that it is a foregrounded

feature of her style. This can be seen in the first paragraph of part I subsection 2 (1998: 194):

[1] The rhythm of life in Jubilee is primitively seasonal. [2] Deaths occur in the winter; marriages are celebrated in the summer. [3] There is good reason for this; the winters are long and full of hardship and the old and the weak cannot always get through them. [4] Last winter was a catastrophe, such as may be expected every ten or twelve years; you can see how the pavement in the streets is broken up, as if the town had survived a minor bombardment. [5] A death is dealt with then in the middle of great difficulties; there comes time now in the summer to think about it, and talk. [6] I find that people stop me in the street to talk about my mother. [7] I have heard from them about her funeral, what flowers she had and what the weather was like on that day. [8] And now she is dead I no longer feel that when they say the words “your mother” they deal a knowing, cunning blow at my pride. [9] I used to feel that; at those words I felt my whole identity, that pretentious adolescent construction, come tumbling down.

Semicolons, when they are used at all, can separate either items in a list or grammatically independent sentences (Swan 2005: 475). As sentence [2] here shows, the semicolon contrasts two independent clauses. But that is not its function in sentence [3], where what follows the semicolon is a long explanation of what precedes it. In sentence [4], we have a more standard use of the semicolon to separate related yet independent sentences. What follows the semicolon in [4] is evidence for the claim that precedes it in the sentence. In sentence [5], the semicolon is used as it was in sentence [2], for contrastive purposes. (About sentence [7], Helen later says she had “the excuse of a blizzard” (1998: 195) for not attending the funeral.) Sentence [9], however, is similar to sentence [3]; what follows the semicolon in [9] portrays in more depth how Helen used to feel upon hearing “the words ‘your mother’”.

In general, semicolons are very rare. In his study of the Brown Corpus, Meyer found that semicolons were used very rarely (1986), and Cook’s more recent data confirm that finding, showing a tremendous decrease in semicolon usage in the last few centuries (2000). Munro, however, loves semicolons. Five semicolons within eight consecutive sentences is well above the average frequency in modern English, even in fiction. Munro clearly uses semicolons for many reasons, including contrast, explanation, and summarization. Furthermore, she sometimes uses semicolons emphatically, as we see at the end of part I subsection 4: “Maddy; her bright skeptical look; my sister” (1998: 202). Subordination, apposition, and semicolons all give this story’s prose a halting, uncertain, and probing quality.

Apart from Munro's syntactic creativity, her semantic creativity is also noteworthy. According to Berndt, "The pivot of the tale is the 'Gothic mother' of Maddy and Helen – perceived by her daughters as a grotesque and monstrous creature – who has continued to haunt both their house and the town in spite of her death" (2010: para. 11). Berndt is right to mention the house, and Dahlie had noticed much the same thing: "Home, the past, family ties – forces which are conventionally interpreted as positive forces – are here dramatized as disturbing elements" (Dahlie 1978: 58). In the story, Munro uses the words *home* and *house* at least 14 times each. She uses the word *houses* once, and the incredibly rare word, *housewifely*, once as well. But how does Munro negatively depict home? The answer can be found in the co-text.

In the very first sentence of the story, Helen writes that her visit "home ... has not been a success" (1998: 190), thus equating *home* with failure. When she first arrives for the visit, she describes a *house* that is empty and notes that "[t]he red brick of which the house is built looked hard and hot in the sun" (1998: 197). Helen later explains how she felt returning to Jubilee for visits when she was in college, when she "exchanged the whole holiday world of school, of friends and, later on, of love, for the dim world of continuing disaster, of home" (1998: 191). She confesses that they intentionally kept their ailing mother "at home, away from that sad notoriety" of town (1998: 195), but their home was no safe haven. Helen later says "that discouraging house" is all Maddy has left in Jubilee (1998: 195), and she also calls it "that house of stone" (1998: 199), with the deictic distance of the demonstrative (*that*) adding to the awful impression.

What is more, when Helen writes of the past and caring for her mother in part I, the word *house* occurs more frequently than does the word *home*. Compared to the word *house*, *home* has what linguist Bill Louw would call a more positive "semantic prosody" (2008: 9). But that word is seldom used in this part of the story. Additionally, in part II subsection 1, when Helen later contrasts the apparent calm of her aunts' home in her youth with "the comparative anarchy, the threatened melodrama, of our house at home" (1998: 204), we see that Maddy and Helen's *house* and *home* have overwhelmingly negative connotations. In short, the co-text of the words *house* and *home* tells us that these words live in a sad neighbourhood in this story.

Finally, as Dahlie sensed (1978: 59), Munro's decision to use the phrasal verb *deal with* is also noteworthy here. In part I subsection 3,

Helen remembers her mother's plea for help, "A cry repeated so often, and, things being as they were, so uselessly, that Maddy and I recognized it as only one of those household sounds that must be dealt with, so that worse may not follow. *You go and deal with Mother*, we would say to each other, or *I'll be out in a minute, I have to deal with Mother*" (1998: 198). In modern English usage, *deal with* is most often used in negative contexts about problems. We *deal with* issues to sort them out; we do not usually *deal with* loved ones. But when Helen shortly thereafter writes of "our dealings with her" (1998: 199), this choice of phrase also shows how the daughters dehumanize their mother.

3. Cognition

Roughly half way through the story, in part I subsection 4, Helen finds an old notebook in which she sees written, in her own handwriting, "The Peace of Utrecht, 1713, brought an end to the War of the Spanish Succession" (1998: 201). This has "a strong effect" on Helen, triggering memories of high school and adolescence. Yet the reference to The Peace of Utrecht is even more significant than that, and the reason has to do with conceptual blending. Conceptual blending is a theory of cognition first presented in depth by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), and blending in narrative has been studied in detail recently (see Schneider & Hartner 2012). Munro's explicit reference to The Peace of Utrecht is clearly intentional. It is also meaningful for it evokes a conceptual blend.

Many readers may know little about the War of the Spanish Succession. According to the *New Standard Encyclopedia* (1970: S-488; U-166), in 1690s Europe people wondered who would succeed Charles II, Spain's childless king. Just before his death in 1700, Charles willed his throne to Philip of Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV. But Leopold I of Austria objected, and instead wanted his second son, Archduke Charles, to become Spain's king. Both Louis XIV and Leopold I were grandsons of Philip III of Spain, and both were married to sisters of Charles II; both also knew that the uniting of either Spain and France (Philip), or Spain and Austria (the Archduke) under one crown would destabilize Europe's balance of power. In the event, Philip of Anjou was indeed crowned King of Spain, but war followed.. Spain and France fought against an alliance that eventually included Portugal, Savoy, Austria, Prussia, Holland, and Great Britain. Battles were fought in Europe, Canada, and America from

1701 to 1713. Peace negotiations between diplomats started in Utrecht in January 1712 and ended only in April 1713. Philip of Anjou, a Bourbon, was confirmed as King of Spain, but now had to stay independent of France, his 'senior sponsor'. Meanwhile, France and Spain had to concede to the alliance many territories and trade rights in Europe and the New World. The political, military, and economical implications of The Peace of Utrecht were thus highly significant. How does all this relate to Munro's story? In other words, how does the blend work? As in most blends, according to the model developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), we combine information from at least four mental spaces. The two main *input spaces* are the historical Utrecht c.1713 and the fictional Jubilee of the story, c.1960. To fully interpret Munro's story in some detail is to run a conceptual blend based on these two distinct spaces. Each input space contains the specific information relevant to it. Abstract features that the stories have in common comprise the blend's *generic space*. In that generic space, we have an event (death), an inheritor, a challenger, their sponsors or allies, a goal, and the means to obtain that goal.

Asymmetrical relations and selective projection are common in blending. Some elements in one input space have no counterparts in the other, and still others are not useful for the blend. The generic space provides *roles* that we fill with *values* from the input spaces. That is how we can see similarities between the two stories. For example, just as Charles II died, the sisters' mother has died. Just as Philip of Anjou inherited the Spanish throne, despite objections from the alliance, occupying the old house is exactly what Maddy does. The sisters once dreamed of "much bigger things than Jubilee" (1998: 192), but Maddy has stayed put. Just as the French king and Austrian emperor both sponsored heirs to the Spanish throne, Helen and Maddy have their supporters. Aunt Annie openly prefers Helen to Maddy (1998: 205), and both Aunt Annie and Auntie Lou fear Maddy because she refused to bring her mother home from the hospital before she died. While Helen's own family and the two aunts might be her allies, Maddy's allies would include her friends at the party at the lakefront cottage, women from Jubilee who "seemed to be widowed, single, separated or divorced" (1998: 191). There is also Fred. Maddy says he "is her only real friend," but Helen is not sure (1998: 134). Moreover, just as France and Austria coveted the Spanish Empire, both Helen and Maddy want the same thing, as we see in the story's opening paragraph: "[...] as for that past we make so much of

sharing we do not really share it at all, each of us keeping it jealously to herself, thinking privately that the other has turned alien, and forfeited her claim” (1998: 190). What the sisters want is not a throne or empire; it is their past.

But there may be more to inherit in Jubilee than just the past. At the end of the story when Maddy accidentally drops a big cut-glass bowl, Helen notices that “her hands had begun to shake” (1998: 210). Zetu argues that the shattered bowl symbolizes Maddy’s true self (2012: 368), but Maddy’s trembling hands might be an early sign of “the Shaking Palsy” their mother had (1998: 200). Maddy might therefore be more similar to her mother than Helen is; in fact, Helen even rejects inheriting her mother’s mended clothes when Aunt Annie offers them to her (1998: 205). Ironically, since Fred’s “wife is an invalid” (1998: 193), Maddy might never become his spouse, a mother, or an invalid. In contrast, Helen has two children of her own who will also inherit whatever she has one day. This may make her “claim” more legitimate in the long term.

To continue, the conflict between Maddy and Helen is like the conflict between Philip of Anjou and Charles of Austria: Philip and Maddy seem to have something that Charles and Helen want. Neither Charles nor Helen is the eldest, they are challengers, although Philip and Charles are not brothers. Maddy and Helen are their mother’s daughters, but the Spanish king had no children. While a war with many battles took place in the early 18th century to try to settle the dispute, in “The Peace of Utrecht” we have a story “about a woman returning home after her mother's death from a Parkinson's-like disease and guiltily, defiantly facing the sister who stayed...” (Edemariam 2003: para. 12). Munro called her story “The Peace of Utrecht” rather than “The War of Spanish Succession,” but why?

After the War of the Spanish Succession, there was The Peace of Utrecht. The winter when the mother died made Jubilee look like it had gone through a “minor bombardment.” As Helen states, “A death is dealt with then in the middle of great difficulties; there comes time now in the summer to think about it, and talk” (1998: 194). It is now summer, but Maddy will not talk; she feels that “nobody speaks the same language” (1998: 209), so talking seems pointless. The Peace of Utrecht was a series of negotiations among diplomats that lasted more than a year, and it took another treaty a year later (in Rastatt) to get Austria to accept the agreement. When Helen arrives in Jubilee and tries to make friendly overtures (1998: 202), Maddy coldly tells her younger sister, “No

exorcising here” (1998: 191, 202). Silence is how Maddy maintains control. Helen reports Maddy’s remark indirectly, near the very beginning of the story (1998: 191), before describing events from the near and distant past over the course of ten pages. She then reports Maddy’s remark again, this time more fully, and in the context of Helen’s overtures (1998: 202). Thus concludes part I.

In part II, Helen pays visits to their two elderly aunts in town, and imagines what she and Maddy will be like when they are old. When she returns after the third visit, there is tension. Maddy senses the aunts complained to Helen about Maddy leaving their mother in the hospital. First, Helen tells Maddy she has nothing to feel guilty about. Then, after Maddy drops the bowl near the end of the story, Helen tells her, “Take your life, Maddy. Take it” and “Go away, don’t stay here” (1998: 210). The story ends with Maddy answering, ““But why can’t I, Helen? *Why can’t I?*””(1998: 210). The answer is destiny. Maddy cannot leave because her destiny is fixed in stone, just like that of an heir to a throne. In a system of inheritance based on primogeniture, birth rank is destiny. This leads us to the blend’s key inference: Helen and Maddy’s emotional situation in Canada c.1960 is as *complex* as the political situation in Europe c.1713. Arguably, Munro could not have picked a more convoluted historical event to frame Helen and Maddy’s story.

Before concluding, let me say that other scholars have also noticed a blend in “The Peace of Utrecht.” Critics such as Heble (1994: 42), Zetu (2012: 368), and Berrett (2013: para. 36) have thought about the connections I have described here, yet they did so without knowing they were working with a conceptual blend. The apparent illusion is not their fault; blending is easy to “do” yet hard to explain. Munro only mentions “The Peace of Utrecht” twice (first in the title, then in the story); she never really refers openly again to that input space. But all spaces are not equal in a blend. Knowing about The Peace of Utrecht helps us understand “The Peace of Utrecht,” and that is Munro’s point. The connections we make between the history and the story are connections we make in our minds. Munro does not make them for us explicitly, nor does she have to. She can merely use the historical allusion as a means to an end, and count on readers to do the rest and make the inferences. The result is the emergent meaning I have discussed in this section, and it shows just how complicated Maddy and Helen’s relationship is.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that Munro cleverly combines form and content to probe complex feelings. While we may never be able to answer a question Helen raises in this story – “what will anyone ever know of us?” (1998: 202) – it is possible to learn *how* Munro tells this story. Her syntactic variations and deliberate semantic choices are noteworthy, and as the story’s enigmatic title suggests, understanding the story involves conceptual blending. Of course, in stylistics, analyses must be open to “falsifiability” (Jeffries & McIntyre 2010: 24), and only time will tell if that is true of my brief analysis here. My approach may be eclectic, but that is common in English stylistics. According to Carter (2010: 68), “The methodologies employed to advance the study of style are united by a determination to better account for the processes of meaning construction which are the basis for our understanding and interpretation of texts.... It is, as Toolan (1986) points out, the work of *bricoleurs*, not engineers.” Being a *bricoleur* can be useful in stylistics; it can show us things about Munro’s style we might have otherwise missed.

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Résumés

Corinne BIGOT

Corinne Bigot is Senior Lecturer (MCF) at the University Paris Ouest Nanterre. She received her PhD from Paris Ouest Nanterre in Canadian Literature with a dissertation on silence in Alice Munro's short stories. Her areas of specialization include Canadian Literature and narrative studies, and the representation of landscape. Her publications to date have focused on the Canadian writer Alice Munro with particular emphasis on the use of typography and reticence as a narrative strategy. She recently published essays on gender and colonial space and nineteenth-century Canadian women writers. She is currently working on several projects on Munro's most recent collections, and has just published a monograph on Alice Munro's stories with Presses Universitaires de Rennes, entitled *Alice Munro les silences de la nouvelle*. She published an essay on Alice Munro's use of italics with the *Bulletin de la société de stylistique anglaise* (vol 31) in 2008.

Abstract: the essay looks at Munro's use of dashes and parenthetical structures in four stories from the collection *Dance of the Happy Shades*. As stylistic devices they often illustrate the major themes of a story, and as they disrupt the surface of the text, they create entryways and exits; as they epitomize discontinuities, they are also elements that explain the interrogative quality of Munro's style.

Keywords: punctuation parenthetical structures dash discontinuity

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Linda Pillière is Professor of English language and linguistics at Aix Marseille University. She has published in the fields of stylistics,

intralingual translation and discourse analysis. Her current research interests include multimodal discourse analysis of American English and British English texts, narrative voice, and style and ideology in translation.

Abstract:

The aim of this article is to explore the conversational style of Alice Munro in the collection of short stories *Dance of the Happy Shades*. While several critics have commented upon this characteristic trait of her style, especially in her first-person narratives, few have analysed how it is actually achieved. Using recent research on the conversational genre, Biber (1988, 2004), Chafe (1982) and Tannen (1982, 1989), I investigate which elements of the spoken mode are to be found in Munro's writing, and how they are used in her fiction. Finally, I address the question of why Munro may have chosen to write in such a way, and the light that it may shed on her narrative technique in general.

Keywords :

Conversational, involvement, fragmentation, syntax, short story, first-person narrator, Alice Munro

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Giuseppina Botta (PhD, Salerno) is currently Research Fellow at the Department of Humanities of the University of Salerno, Italy. She has been part-time Lecturer at the University of Salerno between 2008 and 2010. In 2010 she took a Postgraduate Master in Translation Studies at the University of Siena. She has published articles on Margaret Atwood, Steven Heighon, Carol Ann Duffy and book reviews. Between 2010 and 2011 she has been Research Fellow at the Department of English Language and Literature of the University of Reading (UK) with a grant from the University of Salerno. She also translated into Italian with Eleonora Rao Atwood's collection of poems *The Door* (2007) for *Le Lettere* (*La porta*, Firenze, 2001).

Abstract:

In 'Walker Brothers Cowboy' the motif of identity intersects with the notions of space and place through the story of the Jordan family, which has fallen into disgrace after the Great Depression. Munro portrays both

the individual and the collective displacement in Canada during the economic crisis. The purpose of this essay is to discuss, through the lens of Geocriticism, the story's continual reference to the geographical dimension..

Keywords:

Munro, space, place, identity, Geocriticism

Eleonora RAO

Eleonora Rao teaches English Literature and Literatures in English at the University of Salerno, Italy. She has written extensively on Margaret Atwood and on contemporary Canadian women writers in international journals (Daphne Marlatt, Joy Kogawa, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, and Smaro Kamboureli). Her other research interest is British modernism. She is the editor (and translator with G. Botta) of Margaret Atwood's 2007 collection of poetry, *The Door (La porta, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2011)*. She is on the advisory board of *Aigne, Italian Americana*, and *Literary Geographies*.

Abstract:

This essay discusses the role of place, space and landscape in Alice Munro's "The Shining Houses", a short story from the collection *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968). It takes into consideration the theories of cultural geographers who consider place as a social construct and always in process, in order to illustrate Munro's skillful treatment of space. In looking at the creation of 'place' in the story the essay analyzes the dynamics of being 'in-place' and of being 'out-of-place' and their implications in the creation and the definition of what is left outside. In addition, the border between the inside and the outside proves porous and generates eerie transformations.

Keywords:

Space, place, landscape

Linda COLLINGE-GERMAIN

Linda Collinge-Germain is an Associate Professor at the University of Angers where she teaches English language and literature and is a member of the Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires en Langue Anglaise. Her areas of interest and publication are the bilingual works of Samuel Beckett, reception theory and more recently, the poetics of short story writing, and film adaptations of short stories as a form of translation. She has been an active member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of the Short Story in English* since 1997 and is currently Director of Publication.

Abstract:

The titles of “Images” and “Postcard” suggest that the visual is an important element of the stories and indeed these stories are pictorially saturated, to use Liliane Louvel’s expression. A short story is composed of words not pictures, but words can produce pictorial effects. These images appear in Munro’s two stories as devices of intensity; they contain and condense either elements of the story or the story itself, contributing to the “unity of effect” which is characteristic of the short story genre. Because the images show rather than tell, but also because they both reveal and conceal, they function in relation to the implicit.

Keywords: “Images”, “Postcard”, Text/image, implicit

Billy CLARK

Billy Clark is Associate Professor in English Language and Linguistics at Middlesex University in London. He has published research in a wide range of topics connected with linguistic semantics, pragmatics and stylistics. His book *Relevance Theory* was published in 2013 and his collection “Pragmatic Literary Stylistics”, co-edited with Siobhan Chapman, in 2014. His current research focuses on pragmatic stylistics, writing and intonational meaning.

Abstract

This paper considers some of the ways in which ideas from pragmatic stylistics (based here on relevance theory) can be applied in exploring aspects of the production and interpretation of Alice Munro’s story

‘Postcard’. It identifies some features of the story, considers the role of inferential processes in reading, writing and evaluating texts in general, and considers how focusing on inference can help in understanding specific effects of the story on readers. Finally, it considers how focusing on inference can help to account for what Stockwell (2009) terms the ‘texture’ of the story, i.e. what it feels like to engage with the story during and after reading it.

Keywords: inference, pragmatics, relevance, texture, characterisation, production, interpretation, evaluation

Christine LORRE-JOHNSTON

Christine Lorre-Johnston is a senior lecturer at Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris 3). Her research is in postcolonial literature and theory, focusing on women short story writers (Janet Frame, Alice Munro), the literature of the Chinese diaspora, and the links between postcolonial studies and other contemporary theoretical perspectives such as gender and globalisation studies.

Abstract:

Through a study of “Red Dress–1946,” this article aims at showing how Munro in her first collection develops an ironical style through which the narrator humorously looks back at her awkward teenage self and, in a more deeply affecting way, at her changing relationship with her mother. This work is based on a comparative study of the drafts of the story which are available in the Special Collections of the Taylor Family Digital Library at the University of Calgary, and the version collected in *Dance of the Happy Shades* in 1968, after being first published in 1965 in *The Montrealer*. The analysis will focus on two main aspects of the evolving and published texts: the dress as source of irony, and narrative voice (together with characterisation, setting, and ending) as a factor of reflexivity.

Keywords:

“Red Dress – 1946” – genetic criticism – irony – narrative voice – happiness – mother and daughter relations – gender relations

Ailsa COX

Ailsa Cox is the author of *Alice Munro* (Northcote House 2004) and has contributed essays on her work to many volumes of criticism, including *Critical Insights: Alice Munro* (ed. Charles E. May, Salem Press 2012). She is the co-author, with Christine Lorre-Johntson, of *The Mind's Eye: Alice Munro's Dance of the Happy Shades*, from Fahrenheit Editions, Paris. Her own short fiction has been widely published. Ailsa Cox is Reader in English and Writing at Edge Hill University, UK.

Abstract:

With her story 'The Office', Alice Munro begins an investigation into the fiction-making process that has continued throughout her later career. The autodiegetic narrator's attempts to resolve the clash between dedication to her art and the demands of motherhood parallel the evolution of Munro's own aesthetic. 'The Office' rehearses various styles of storytelling, including conventional literary discourse, oral storytelling and autobiography, displaying an ambivalence towards the conventional techniques of fiction and the division between life and art. The story articulates a self-reflexive poetics of distraction which may be related to fragmentation, digression and ellipsis in the short story genre as practised by Munro across her oeuvre.

Keywords:

Alice Munro, authorship, genre, abjection, autobiography, motherhood

Catherine DELESALLE-NANCEY

Catherine Delesalle-Nancey is Professor of English Literature at the University of Lyon (Jean Moulin – Lyon 3) and specializes in 20th and 21st century British Literature. She has published extensively on Joseph Conrad and Malcolm Lowry, to whom she has devoted a book entitled *Répétition, ressassement et reprise dans l'œuvre en prose de Malcolm Lowry*, published by Michel Houdiard in 2010. She has also published on Margaret Atwood, Kazuo Ishiguro, Janet Frame and A.S. Byatt, and in the last few years has been particularly interested in short fiction.

Abstract

In spite of its title, “The Time of Death” is built around a central ellipsis – the time of Benny’s death – while it presents the reader with “the times of death”, that is the different ways the characters experience and react to that death, reactions which all appear inappropriate. What we are made to see is what surrounds the gaping hole of death. This gaping hole around which the world is built may be linked to Edvard Munch’s famous painting, *The Scream*, which immediately comes to mind since the whole short story builds to a climax: Patricia’s wild scream. Although apparently a belated and completely inadequate response to Benny’s death, Patricia’s scream proves perfectly adequate, breaking through the polished surface of civilization to reveal the animality society tries to erase. However, the short story defies any clear-cut interpretation as the complex handling of point of view and voice as well as the dense network of images refuse the reader any solid ground on which to base a secure interpretation, creating a world which, as in Munch’s painting, wavers and melts, an apt rendering of “the time of death”.

Keywords:

Alice Munro; Edvard Munch; point of view; voice; evaluation; death; bereavement; authenticity; epiphany.

Claire MAJOLA-LEBLOND

Claire Majola-Leblond, professeur agrégée, is Senior Lecturer in Stylistics at Lyon 3 University, France, where she teaches literature, discourse analysis and a course on contemporary Irish short-stories. She is the author of a Ph.D thesis on point of view in Dylan Thomas’s *Collected Stories* and has published articles on the art of short-story writers such as Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce, Bernard MacLaverty, John McGahern, Colum McCann or William Trevor. Her current research interests are situated at the intersection between stylistics, arts and science with a special focus on the interconnection between the recent discoveries in neurosciences and the way we read and interpret fiction.

Abstract:

This paper aims at including in the stylistician’s tool-box possibly less familiar tools, borrowed from the scientific domains of chaos theory and neuroscience to develop a comprehensive analysis of literary texts. A close

reading of Alice Munro's "Day of the Butterfly" reveals the short-story to be a chaotic system, a dynamical, non linear system sensitive to initial conditions – to what is commonly known as the "butterfly effect". Reading such texts involves tracing precise trajectories that fold and stretch along underlying structures called attractors in chaos theory. Literary discourse analysis leads to analyzing attractors in close connection with empathy, a notion whose infinite complexity is now being further revealed by the recent discoveries around mirror neurons and the role of mirror mechanisms in the way we relate to the "real" world and art. Although following the itineraries of complexity tends to produce more questions than answers, and leave the reader in a challenging state of uncertainty, it meaningfully echoes our experience of Alice Munro's work.

Keywords:

Alice Munro, "Day of the butterfly", butterfly effect, chaos theory, sensitive dependency on initial conditions, empathy, homeostasis, mirror neurons, reader response

Michael TOOLAN

Michael Toolan is the author of many books and articles on topics in stylistics, narrative, and language studies, including *Language in Literature* (Hodder Arnold 1998) and *Narrative: a critical linguistic introduction* (Routledge 2001). He is Professor of English Language at the University of Birmingham.

Abstract

Focussing particularly on stylistic tendencies in 'A Trip to the Coast', this article situates that story within the collection as a whole, and discusses the interests of the story and the collection in the struggles of girls and women, and of girls against women, in a world often controlled by men. The girl vs woman fights are neo-gothic in intensity, and, figuratively or otherwise, 'to the death'. For the girl to become a free and independent person, the matriarch's power must be broken. While there is a mythic or folktale core to this story arc, this is submerged in the absorbing physical and psychological depiction of the girl, her grandmother, and a travelling salesman, and the women's conversational 'wrestling', full of feints and blocks and traps, as they strive to emerge from life's inconsequentialities unvanquished. My article introduces some simple corpus linguistic

methods for extracting, with a degree of objectivity, words and meanings that are prominent in the story text; these stylistically prominent features are then used in story interpretation. Several of the narrative preoccupations of ‘A Trip to the Coast’, which is focalised by the teenage girl, are discussed at length: body shapes and smells, conversational resistance, and uncertainty of narrative interpretation.

Keywords

Alice Munro, collocation, semantic keywords, conversational conflict, girl power

Craig HAMILTON

Craig Hamilton is an Associate Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Haute Alsace in Mulhouse, France. He has published extensively on cognitive rhetoric, cognitive poetics, and cognitive stylistics. He is a contributing author to *Persuading People: An Introduction to Rhetoric*, 3rd edition (Palgrave 2014). His research focuses on stylistics, rhetoric, figurative language, and cognitive linguistics. His articles have appeared in many journals, including *Style, Language and Literature*, *The Journal of Literary Semantics*, and *Cognitive Linguistics*.

Abstract:

In this article, I discuss linguistic and cognitive aspects of Munro’s style in “The Peace of Utrecht.” First, I examine how Munro uses subordination, semicolons, syntactic variations, and creative semantic prosodies. These features give the story’s prose its halting, uncertain, and probing qualities. Second, I explain the conceptual blend Munro evokes by referring at least twice to the historical event of The Peace of Utrecht (1713) in her story. Ending the War of the Spanish Succession was complex, but the relationship between the sisters in this story is equally complex.

Keywords:

syntactic variation; semantic prosody; conceptual blending.

Mots-clés:

variation syntaxique; prosodie sémantique; l’intégration conceptuelle.

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