The Canadian Literature Symposium 2014

The Alice Munro Symposium

May 9-11, 2014
Department of English
University of Ottawa

Program

Friday Afternoon, May 9

1:00-3:00
Registration (Arts Building 257)*

3:00
All Sessions and Coffee Breaks will take place at Arts 257
Lunches and Friday’s Reception will be held in Arts 509

3:00
Welcome
Antoni Lewkowicz (Dean, Faculty of Arts)

3:00-4:30
Session 1: Writers’ Appreciations
Chair: Gerald Lynch

Steven Heighton (Kingston ON)
Robert McGill (University of Toronto)
Lisa Moore (St. John’s NL)
Aritha Van Herk (University of Calgary)

5:00-6:30
Session 2: Keynote Address
Chair: Tracy Ware

Robert Thacker (St. Lawrence University, New York State)
“This Is Not A Story, Only Life’: Wondering with Alice Munro”

6:30-9:00
Reception (Food and Cash Bar, Arts 509)

Saturday Morning, May 10

8:00-9:00
Registration, Continental Breakfast (Arts 257)

9:00-10:25
Session 3
Chair: Janice Fiamengo

David Bentley (University of Western Ontario)
“Alice Laidlaw at the University of Western Ontario, 1949-51”

Gwendolyn Guth (Heritage College, Quebec)
“Parentheses, Prolepsis and the Paradox of Tolerance in ‘Dance of the Happy Shades’”

Tracy Ware (Queen’s University, Ontario)
“Momentous Shifts and Unimagined Changes in ‘Jakarta’”

10:25-10:45
Break, Refreshments

10:45-12:15
Session 4
Chair: Cynthia Sugars

Patricia Magazoni Gonçalves (São Paulo State University, Brazil)
“[…] deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum’: the representation of memory and the metafictional discourse of Alice Munro and the Brazilian author Clarice Lispector”

Tina Trigg (King’s University College, Alberta)
“Bridging the Gaps through Story Cycle: The View from Castle Rock”

Ryan Porter (Algonquin College, Ontario)
“Munro’s Small-Town Place and Memory”

Saturday Afternoon

12:15-1:15
Lunch (Arts 509)

1:15-2:40
Session 5: Keynote Address:
Chair: Tom Allen

Charles E. May (Emeritus Professor, California State University)
“Living in the Story: Fictional Reality in the Stories of Alice Munro”

2:40-3:00
Break, Refreshments

3:00-4:30
Session 6
Chair: Josephene Kealey

David Jarraway (University of Ottawa)
“‘Something’: The ‘Dark Sides’ of Alice Munro’s Story-Telling in its American Context”

Carol L. Beran (St. Mary’s College, California)
“Invasion Narratives: Alice Munro’s ‘Free Radicals’ and Joyce Carol Oates’s ‘Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?’”

Michelle Gadpaille (University of Maribor, Slovenia)
“‘Stories that would Curl Your H[ere]’: Munro from Elsewhere”
4:30-  
4:45  
Stretch Break

4:45- 6:15  
Session 7: The Career  
Chair: Ian Dennis

Virginia Barber (New York)  
Ann Close (New York)  
Douglas Gibson (Toronto)  
Daniel Menaker (New York)

Saturday Evening

7:15  
Symposium Dinner (Empire Grill, 47 Clarence St.)

Sunday Morning, May 11

8:00- 9:00  
Continental Breakfast (Arts 257)

9:00- 10:25  
Session 8  
Chair: David Jarraway

Maria Löschnigg (University of Graz, Austria)  
“‘Carried Away’ by Letters: Alice Munro and the Epistolary Mode”

Sara Jamieson (Carleton University)  
“Can you say any recitations?: The Memorized Poem in the Stories”

Ailsa Cox (Edge Hill University, England)  
“First and Last’: The Figure of the Infant in ‘Dear Life’ and ‘My Mother’s Dream’

10:25- 10:45  
Break, Refreshments

10:45- 12:15  
Session 9  
Chair: David Rampton

Ian Dennis (University of Ottawa)  
“Alice Munro’s Art of Deferral: ‘Royal Beatings’”

Tim McIntyre (Queen’s University, Ontario)  
“What Makes You Think You Have The Right?’ ‘Family Furnishings’ and the Struggle With Ethics as Career Catalyst for Alice Munro”

Julie Rivkin (Connecticut College, Connecticut)  
“Dupes of the Plots of our Lives, or Design and Error in ‘Tricks’”

Sunday Afternoon
12:15-  Light Lunch (Arts 509)
1:00

1:00-  Session 10
2:25  Chair: Gwendolyn Guth

Dennis Duffy (Emeritus, University of Toronto)
“A Hero of Our Time: Alice Munro's Russian Novel”

Linda Morra (Bishop’s University, Quebec)
“Autobiographical (Non)Disclosures in Alice Munro's The View from Castle Rock”

Marilyn Rose (Brock University, Ontario)
“‘Slightly Off-Kilter’: Affect in Alice Munro's Dear Life”

2:25-  Break, Refreshments
2:45

2:45-  Session 11
4:15  Chair: Sandra MacPherson

E.D. Blodgett (University of Alberta)
“Time and Fallibility in the Narration of Alice Munro”

Laurie Kruk (Nipissing University, Ontario)
“From Munro’s Lives to Shields’s ‘Scenes’: A Canadian Female Bildungsroman that ‘fit[s] into the hollow of her hand’”

Magdalene Redekop (University of Toronto)
“On Sitting Down to Read ‘Lichen’ Once Again: Rereading Alice Munro”

4:15-  Stretch Break
4:30

4:30-  Session 12: Finale
5:30

Ian Dennis (University of Ottawa)
Janice Fiamengo (University of Ottawa)

We are grateful for a Connections Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and for funds from the Faculty of Arts and the University of Ottawa Research Fund.

*Registration fee covers all conference meals and refreshments with the exception of the optional conference dinner on Saturday night, which is to be paid individually.

ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTERS

Alice Laidlaw at the University of Western Ontario, 1949-51

D.M.R. Bentley, Western University
This paper would be sharply focused on the short stories that Alice Munro published when she was a student at the University of Western Ontario from 1949 to 1951. During that period Munro – then Laidlaw – transferred from Journalism to English and published three short stories – “The Dimensions of a Shadow,” “Story for Sunday,” and “The Widower” – in Folio, the English Department’s literary magazine. Although the three stories have been briefly discussed by Robert Thacker and others, they are usually regarded as pale precursors of Munro’s later work. In view of the fact that two of the three are set in villages or small towns and all include some vividly realistic descriptions of their settings and characters, this is entirely understandable. Nevertheless, such an approach ignores the very considerable differences between the first two stories, which were published in 1950, and the third, which was published in 1951. The protagonists of both “The Dimensions of a Shadow” and “Story for Sunday” are females who experience sexual infatuations, one with a boy approximately half her age and the other with a man much older than herself. Moreover (and as the “Shadow” of the first story’s title might lead one to expect), both stories draw on the psychological theories of Carl Jung, specifically his concepts of the persona, the animus, and, of course, the shadow. By contrast, the protagonist of “The Widower” is an elderly male whose behaviour after the death of his wife is depicted without apparent recourse to Jung. A further difference between the first two and the third stories lies in the less obvious indebtedness of the third to James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence, particularly the Joyce of Dubliners and the Lawrence of “The Horse-Dealer’s Daughter,” echoes of which are more audible in “Dimensions of a Shadow” and “Story for Sunday” than in “The Widower” (which nevertheless ends with an epiphany). Through an examination of the three stories as an ensemble, the overall aim of the proposed paper would be to show that, while aspects of them certainly echo forward to Alice Munro’s later work, they also contain elements, including a formalism reflective of early-twentieth-century modernism, that make them distinctive and of their time.

Invasion Narratives: Alice Munro’s “Free Radicals” and Joyce Carol Oates’s “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”

Carol L. Beran, Saint Mary’s College of California

Alice Munro’s “Free Radicals” (2008) and Joyce Carol Oates’s “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” (1966) each tell the story of a woman at home alone whose solitude is invaded by a sinister male. Each story evokes gothic conventions to recount a male/female power struggle in the context of a female/female one. Both stories contain troubling ambiguities that leave readers with unanswered questions. Reading each story in the context of the other not only calls attention to similarities but contributes to readers’ experiences of both narratives by highlighting differences related to concepts that have been seen to distinguish Canadian and USAmerican thinking and by pointing to the metafictional aspects of each story. Oates evokes an American suburban Eden in which characters are pursuing happiness, but in which the American Dream becomes ultimately a nightmare. For Oates’s Connie, the myth of the tender happily-ever-after romance is undercut by Arnold Friend’s threatening narrative of rape; Connie is a storyteller not only in the lies she tells her parents but in her daydreams and in what some critics see as her dream or dream vision. Munro uses Margaret Atwood’s identification of survival as the quintessential Canadian theme as Nita realizes her desire to survive not in the context of her cancer but in her dialogue with the invader, re-imagining a story out of materials from her life to save her life.

Time and Fallibility in the Narration of Alice Munro

E.D. Blodgett, Emeritus, University of Alberta

The question of Munro’s realism has always been moot. W.H. New summarizes the issue by placing her fiction between Garner-esque realism and and Colville’s ‘super-realism’ (New: 251). My own reading of Munro, coloured by Derrida, problematised the real entirely. The search for the real in all its multiplicity appears, however, to remain stubbornly at the heart of Munro’s writing, and it is often accompanied by the realization that desire does not always reach fulfilment, as if the real were always shadowed by a réel manqué. As the narrator remarks at the end of Lives of Girls and Women, “The hope of accuracy we bring to such tasks is crazy, heartbreaking” (Lives: 253). The conclusion of “The Ottawa Valley” reaches the same frustrated conclusion. If language does not fail denotation entirely, it tends to break things apart and
project meanings from different angles.

The angle I propose to discuss in this paper is that of time. Characteristic of Munro’s style is her approach to linearity, which is attacked in her reading of Uncle Craig’s notion of history and the past in which his death is played off against the marvellous metaphor of a dead cow. The insufficiency of metonymy is dismissed in favour of her mother’s tendency for telling stories in the form of discontinuous spirals. While her “stories of the past could go like this, round and round” (Lives: 79), “scenes from the past were liable to pop up at any time, like lantern slides, against the cluttered fabric of the present” (Lives: 74).

The germs of Munro’s real lie in this psychological sense of time in which events share the same space as desire and hope. A construction of the real requires intervention into the linear notion of time through the multiple perspectives of characters and narrator. Fallibility is inscribed in the process; the narrator is always “at the mercy.” Exemplary of this narrative procedure is “the Progress of Love,” which I will read along these lines, teasing out the joint rapport between time and fallibility.

Works Cited

‘First and Last’: The Figure of the infant in ‘Dear Life’ and ‘My Mother’s Dream’
Ailsa Cox, Edge Hill University, UK

The title piece in Munro’s most recent collection, Dear Life, is one of four ‘final’ works that she claims are ‘not quite stories’ (Munro 2012: 255). According to their author, ‘they are the first – and last – and the closest – things I have to say about my own life’ (255). Munro’s assertion may be seen by those readers familiar with previous statements concerning the autobiographical basis of her work as a tease or a conundrum. My intention is less to unpick that conundrum than to examine the figure of the author as infant in a reading of ‘Dear Life’. Like ‘My Mother’s Dream’, which is also positioned as the final story in a collection (The Love of a Good Woman, 1998), ‘Dear Life’ reconstructs events from a first person narrator’s infancy, events which she lived through, and in which she played a key role – but which she cannot possibly remember. I shall compare the ambiguities of focalization through the mother in all of ‘My Mother’s Dream’ and much of ‘Dear Life’. I shall discuss infancy as a liminal condition, before the acquisition of language and the attainment of individual identity. Both works convey the fragility of infancy, and of the human condition itself, through panics and false alarms. But the baby also stands for continuity and endurance, ensuring the family’s survival and representing its hopes for the future. I shall argue that that the figure of the infant mediates between past, present and future, as a repository for memories which will be reconstructed and fictionalized throughout her own lifespan, and beyond. Drawing on Bakhtinian theory and Bergsonian concepts of time, I shall also discuss a confluence between endings and beginnings, in life, in fiction and in the nonlinear structure of Munro’s stories.

“Alice Munro’s Art of Deferral: ‘Royal Beatings’”
Ian Dennis, University of Ottawa

While every story delays or defers its outcomes and revelations in order to be a story at all, the degree of tension such operations generate, the means by which they are performed, and the effects these exert upon the work’s anticipated or potential meanings are the very essence of its ethical and aesthetic character. The extraordinary resourcefulness, indeed boldness, of Alice Munro’s technique in this regard is a key to assessing her achievement. All fictional or indeed artistic deferrals, furthermore, are ultimately of readerly desires and resentments—of the imagined appropriation or consumption prompted by those desires—and a close observation of how and when these passions are intensified, flattered or gratified, allows for a better understanding of the cultural and social purposes of any work of art. The proposed paper will attempt a
close analysis of one notable Munro story, using the heuristic offered by the “Generative Anthropology” developed by Eric Gans and others. Desire and deferral operating at the level of plot, of visual detail and tonal resolution, of personality and even of diction will be examined, and the implications for genre considered.

“Stories that would Curl Your H[ere]”: Munro from Elsewhere
Michelle Gadpaille, University of Maribor, Slovenia

In the opening story of the collection, Too Much Happiness, Alice Munro’s narrator tenders the potential for “stories that would curl your hair.” The habitual reader of Munro’s previous fiction nods knowingly and settles in for this semi-voluntary tonsorial adventure. Familiar with early stories such as “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You” or “White Dump,” the reader anticipates delicious neo-gothic twists. The savor of the narrative recursiveness, however, rests partly on the very familiarity of the territory. We’ve been to southwestern Ontario, actually or narratively and engaged with its “set of ideas about itself” (Enright); the unexpurgated ordinariness of place both piques and comforts. After all, what price the curl of the wildest rollercoaster ride if life itself did not normally unfold in the horizontal?

It is from this contention that an integral “here”—a location both socio-historical and epistemological—informs most of Munro’s fiction that I began my exploration of the way Munro is read in Central Europe—specifically in Slovenia, where I have taught for many years. Surprisingly, Munro’s fiction is not much read or translated in this milieu. Unlike the works of Margaret Atwood, Munro’s fiction lags behind in the translation record (Mohar; Blake). Her stories fail to catch the interest of undergraduate students of English. At the level of graduate studies and scholarship, Munro receives her due of interest, and much of that scholarship centers on the perceived gothic-ness of the writing (see Szabo; Sikora; Zsizsmann; Vancopernolle; Berndt; Szalay). There is less interest in the mundane “here” of the stories.

Based on work done at the University of Maribor on the gender effects of socialism and post-socialism on values and perceptions (Klajnsek; Musil), I am exploring the possibility that reader response to Munro’s fiction may reflect post-socialist premises about norms in the narrative of actual and fictional lives of girls and women. From what position are my students reading Munro? And do alternate epistemologies and ideologies construct new readings of the mazes and spirals of the Munro narrative? In short, does it take something different to curl the hair when “here” is in fact “elsewhere”?

Work with students on predictive responses to “Dimensions” and “Wenlock Edge” (both from Too Much Happiness), will form part of a larger project on Munro in the e-generation of post-socialist Europe (Mohar).

“[…] deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum”: the representation of memory and the metafictional discourse of Alice Munro and the Brazilian author Clarice Lispector
Patricia Magazoni Gonçalves, Sao Paulo State University, Brazil

This comparative essay investigates the representation of memory and the metafictional discourse created by Alice Munro and the Brazilian author Clarice Lispector. To this end, the paper will interpret two texts, “Epilogue: the Photographer” and “Os desastres de Sofia” (The Misfortunes of Sofia), belonging respectively to Lives of Girls and Women, published in 1971, and A legião estrangeira (The Foreign Legion), which first appeared in 1964. Whereas the Brazilian book is classified as a collection of short stories and chronicles, Munro’s work does not present a definite classification and may be considered both as a collection of independent stories and as a novel. Based on Freud’s assumption that unconscious memory is a fundamental element in the psychic apparatus, this presentation focuses on how recollections suffer a spatial and temporal dislocation, and far from being faithful to what happened they present associations between memory, external contexts and imagined fantasies. By evoking childhood through memory, the two narratives enable a revision of the past and a reinterpretation of the happenings by means
of a selective process conditioned by the passage of time and the perspectives of the present, something that is constantly renewed and therefore never reaches completion. Since the past cannot be recovered intact, the two protagonists rework the previous experiences and fill the gaps and inconsistencies with the artful power of creative imagination. As a result, they create a metafictional discourse and find the support for their literary work beneath the deep caves of their own past and the kitchen linoleum that conceal the mysteries of daily life.

"The Memorized Poem in the Stories of Alice Munro"
Sara Jamieson, Carleton University

While Alice Munro is chiefly associated with the short story, her work incorporates a variety of poetic fragments from “scandalous doggerel” to “best-loved verses” (Clark 50). My paper focuses on instances where Munro introduces poetry into her stories by representing the recitation of memorized poems that was a standard pedagogical practice in North American classrooms from the 1870s to the 1950s, and that produced generations of people able to integrate poetry into their daily lives by drawing upon a stock of lines internalized in youth. Written in the decades after this practice had become all but obsolete, Munro’s stories participate in a process of collective reminiscence about recitation undertaken among those old enough to remember it: recent scholarly accounts of the history of poetry recitation have outlined the parameters of this collective remembering as it appears in a body of letters, autobiographies, and newspaper editorials whose cumulative tone is one of lament for a lost art, and praise for the memorized poem as something that unites communities across class, regional, and generational divides. By contrast, Munro’s stories, while they can be seen to perform an almost archival function in preserving, not without affection, the lost sound of the reciting voice, also manifest skepticism toward arguments asserting the value of recitation itself. In “The Ottawa Valley,” “The Moons of Jupiter,” and “Oh, What Avails,” characters recite lines of poetry at moments of impending dissolution, in familial contexts riven by generational and class tensions, yet these acts of recitation complicate rather than alleviate these tensions, undercutting claims about the community that recitation allegedly creates by drawing attention to those whom that community excludes. Surfacing in her stories in ways that are powerful, pleasurable, and troubling, the memorized poem is an important aspect of Munro’s ongoing exploration of the complicated relationship between literature and everyday life.

Works Cited

“Something”: The “Dark Sides” of Alice Munro’s Story-telling in its American Context
David Jarraway, University of Ottawa

Alice Munro’s story-telling is often compared to several modern American instances--to the story-telling of Flannery O’Connor, Eudora Welty, and Bobby Ann Mason most notably. But the “something” alluded to in my title honors an important debt that Munro herself, in a rare moment of artistic apology, discharges in homage to William Maxwell, the longtime fiction editor at the New Yorker magazine that had done so much to solidify Munro’s own reputation in the States (and elsewhere) over the years. Commenting on Maxwell’s novel, They Came like Swallows (1937), Munro writes: “. . . there is something new with each telling, some new action at the periphery or revelation near the centre, a different light or shading, a discovery, as there must be in the stories at the heart of our lives,” and goes on to link this moment to a similar one in Maxwell’s later novel The Folded Leaf (1945) when Munro further observes that “the friendship between [two adolescent boys growing into men] is turning into something they cannot bear” (“Maxwell” [2004] 40, 41). Wistfully reflecting on such moments ca. 2004, Munro speculates about a rhetorical means for retrospectively renovating her entire narrative canon: “If only I could go back and write again every single thing that I have written” (“Maxwell” 35). More precisely revolving that “something” at the centre of her work two years later, Munro offers a formulation that might strike some as distinctly postmodern when she further observes: “It’s not the story--it’s more like the spirit, the centre of
the story, *something there's no word for*, that can only come into life . . . when words are wrapped around it" (“Writing. Or, Giving Up Writing,” in *Writing Life*, ed. Constance Rooke [2006] 300, emphases added).

Ironically, as my paper purposes to demonstrate, that narrative “something” had long been a preoccupation of Munro as far back as *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1967): “. . . I feel my father’s life . . . darkening and turning strange, like a landscape . . . but changing [ ], once your back is turned, into something that you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine” (“Walker Brothers Cowboy” 18). And via her subsequent *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), that intriguing “something” reaches forward into a story collection as recent as *Too Much Happiness* (2009): “There is something, anyway, in having got through the day without its being an absolute disaster. It wasn’t, was it? She said maybe. He hadn’t corrected her” (“Deep-Holes” 117). American writers Joyce Carol Oates and John Updike, longtime readers of Munro’s work, remark upon that allusion to “something” in *Happy Shades* just noted in separate book reviews of Munro, and for good reason. In the case of Oates, that “something” plays into a notion of dissident subjectivity throughout much of her own prodigious narrative canon, and accentuates “the deep suspicion of people who seem to deviate from the norm, who threaten the protocol of narrow domesticity” (*New York Review* [2009] 4). And in the case of Updike, in alluding similarly to “a sort of wooing of distant parts” of the self with Munro (*New York Times* [1996] 1), it becomes the repeated occasion, as I argue elsewhere, for a kind of subjective “avoidance” within the larger interrogation of “house and home” underwriting much of American literary discourse almost from its inception (see esp. “No Place like Home,” in my *Wallace Stevens in “Other” Contexts*, forthcoming).

Thus, in a pivotal collection like *Open Secrets* (1994)–pivotal both retrospectively and prospectively for the story-teller’s art I shall argue--Munro registers a considerable resonance in the context of American letters on the basis of an insistent “something” that refuses to be disciplined or domesticated or brought to rule: “Rhea and Lucille had rolled down the car windows for air. Outside was the night with the river washing out of sight . . . the dirt roads faintly shining on their way to nowhere . . . [so that] at a time like this [Rhea] could feel cut off and bewildered, as if she had lost something, instead of gaining it” (“Spaceships Have Landed” 205). And so with the maritally (and psychically) embattled Maureen elsewhere in the collection: “But suppose you did see something? Not along the lines of Jesus, but something. Sometimes when she is just going to sleep but not quite asleep, not dreaming yet, she has caught something . . . during what she thinks is her normal life . . . [and so] to be part of another life she is leading, a life just as long and complicated and strange and dull as this one” (“Open Secrets” 132).

Appropriate for rounding out a meditation of Alice Munro’s story-telling in this context, Richard Poirier, in an important essay on “The Reinstatement of the Vague” in American literature (*Poetry and Pragmatism* [1992]), cites a passage from William James (brother to novelist Henry James) in his *Will to Believe*. This reference to American Pragmatism resonates further with many of the ambivalences and contradictions of identity that Munro will repeatedly gesture toward throughout *Open Secrets*, and the bulk of her work more generally. According to James in this particular context, “The bottom of being is left logically opaque to us, as something which we simply come upon and find, and about which (if we wish to act) we should pause and wonder as little as possible” (qtd. on 279). That compelling tag, therefore, that Munro deposits at the end of her “Introduction” to her *Selected Stories* (1996) from Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, namely, “. . . we live amongst riddles and mysteries--the most obvious things, which come in our way, have dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into,” etc. (xvii)--that aperçu would arguably make James’s notion of self-opacity a fairly portable one throughout much of Munro’s own fictional career. As American poet Wallace Stevens was given to remark: “Reality is the great fond, and it is because it is that the purely literary amounts to so little” (*Letters* 505). But as with Munro, the fond notion of self-opacity I contend is one that also extends back to Melville and Whitman (if not beyond) where “the image of the ungraspable phantom of life,” in James’s decidedly Munrovian formulation, was perhaps first instated (James 279). Stevens’ punning “mystic eye,” indeed, can forge an even stronger linkage to Munro via William James and the phantom subject, so that it should not surprise us that Annie Herron, far from any “ordinary person” in a story like “A Wilderness Station,” would have an “eye that slid off to the side and gave her the air of taking in more . . .” (*Open Secrets* 182). With so many “dark sides,” to go with my
paper’s full title, that fleet and flighty character, as her name suggests, becomes something of a metaphor, I shall conclude, for Munro’s “House of Fiction” itself when viewed in its American context since, on the story-teller’s own authority, “You go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time” (Selected Stories xvii).

From Munro’s Lives to Shields’s “Scenes”: A Canadian Female Bildungsroman that “fit[s] into the hollow of her hand”
Laurie Kruk, Nipissing University

Alice Munro’s Lives of Girls and Women (1971) has been celebrated as a Canadian bildungsroman, a female kunstlerroman and a short story cycle. Carol Shields has declared Munro “our best writer” (Kruk Voice 203), and her own stories show strong evidence of Munro’s influence. Shields’s 1985 collection, Various Miracles, was written as a book of “experiments” obliquely addressing the theme of language (Kruk Voice 192-3). “Scenes,” from that collection, shows traces of Munro’s “female aesthetic” (Godard) and self-reflexive treatment of self. Marjorie Garson has argued that in Lives, Munro uses synecdoche to communicate “the inscrutability of human experience” (424). Borrowing Munro’s “synechdocal” strategy of offering parts for wholes, in “Scenes” Shields probes the nature of perception through an episodic biography of Frances, an inquisitive, bookish woman whose maturation echoes Del’s in many ways: from her dance between “the world” and “the other country” (McCarthy Macdonald), to her encounters with death and sex, growing expansion of self-awareness and intuition of life’s “unstoryable” essence. “Scenes” could also be called a “micro”-short story cycle in itself, sharing Munro’s commitment to including “gaps in this account of a girl growing up” (Meindl 21). As Simone Vauthier observes, “Scenes” ends on “four attempts to define these so-called scenes through comparisons and memories” (116): like the Easter egg that “fit into the hollow of her hand as though it were made for that very purpose.” Its conclusion thus parallels Munro’s metatextual epilogue, “The Photographer.” Both Munro and Shields enact a postmodernist scepticism towards mimesis while refusing to give up the artistic quest for something “radiant, everlasting” (Lives 210) or the “Various Miracles” born out of a loving attention to the interplay between sexuality and reality

Works Cited
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McCarthy Macdonald, Rae. “Structure and Detail in Lives of Girls and Women.” Studies in Canadian Literature 3.2:
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“Carried Away” by Letters: Alice Munro’s and the Epistolary Mode
Maria Löschnigg, University of Graz, Austria

Letters figure prominently in Alice Munro’s more recent work, standing as materialized items of truth (mis)construed by language. They allow the author to juggle multiple viewpoints and adopt a significant role in the deferral of truth in stories such as “Carried Away”, “A Wilderness Station”, “The Jack Randa Hotel” and “Dimensions”. Additional layers of meaning, though maybe not to such a great extent, are also provided by the letters in “Runaway”, “Chance”, “Vandals” and “Deep-Holes”. The story “Before the Change” is in its entirety an imagined letter which is addressed to the protagonist’s ex-lover. In “Hateship,
Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage”, too, letters play a significant role in undermining notions of certainty. In fact, Munro has increasingly experimented with multi-layered story structures, be it by working with intertextual elements, by including newspaper articles or other (pseudo-)documentary material or by featuring framing devices, just to name a few of the techniques the author has employed in order to raise awareness of the uncontrollability and inexplicability of human life and to question the reliability of truth. However, it is in particular in her experimentation with the epistolary mode that new developments in her writing can be traced. The impact of letters in Munro’s stories has so far received adequate attention only with regard to individual stories, but never been explored in a more comprehensive manner.

In my paper, I shall therefore look at the generic features of the letter form drawing on established narratological theories as offered e.g. by Joe Bray (The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness, 2003). In a next step I shall illustrate the various functions this mode can adopt in Alice Munro’s short stories, highlighting the author’s innovative handling of a time-honoured narrative form.

“Living in the Story: Fictional Reality in the Stories of Alice Munro”
Charles E. May, Emeritus, California State University

Regardless of how “realistic” a short story may seem to be, readers often feel that characters in stories behave in a way that most people in the “real world” would not. Whereas the novel may focus on cause and effect, Alice Munro, the consummate master of the short story, knows that what makes characters do what they do in short stories emerges from their often incommunicable secret life and is not so simple. For Alice Munro, as for Flannery O’Connor, the meaning of a story does not begin except at a depth where “adequate motivation and adequate psychology” have been exhausted.

Like many authors, Alice Munro was an avid early reader for whom stories often seemed more “real” than everyday experience, later becoming a student, who, like the young woman in her story “Wenlock Edge,” perhaps believes that one immersed in literature should see reality differently than others do. I will argue that the motivation of Munro’s characters is often mysterious because they act as if they were characters in a story--simultaneously “as if” and actual--rather than people in the real world. This, I will try to show, is one more indication of the complexity of Munro’s work.

“What Makes You Think You Have The Right?” “Family Furnishings” and the Struggle With Ethics as Career Catalyst for Alice Munro
Tim McIntyre, Queen’s University

The early 1970s was a time of personal and artistic crisis for Alice Munro. Her work from this period demonstrates a self-conscious struggle with the legitimacy and ethics of her writing. While, as Thomas Tautsky writes, Munro would remain “troubled throughout her career” about the legitimacy of art, after this crisis, “for the most part, she has chosen not to make this concern evident in her fiction” (Studies in Canadian Literature).

This paper will examine one return to the ethics of writing, “Family Furnishings,” to identify the central and continuing ethical tension in Munro’s work and to argue that this tension is key to her aesthetic achievement. Munro’s fiction often balances a drive to represent reality with the recognition of an alterity that escapes the possibility of representation. The gap between this irreducible alterity and fictional representation creates ethical risk, but it is also generative. “Family Furnishings,” like “Material” in particular, exposes the ethical risks in writing while celebrating the power of literature. Its use of retrospective narration to create a dialectic (a technique characteristic of Munro as Robert Thacker observes in Probable Fictions), its lack of a conventional narrative shape, and its subtle metafictional sensibility express Munro’s twin aims of creating a feeling of reality while recognizing that her material, in its plenitude, will always exceed her ability to represent.
Munro’s resistance of overt artifice and her ability to infuse a sense of difference into her psychological realism, however, are not only strategies to mitigate ethical risk, but are also sources of aesthetic innovation. As Munro learned, in David Crouse’s words, to “play the game of the realist, but use many of the metafictionalist’s tricks” (64), her work became more complex, varied, and experimental. This development helped Munro stake a place at the forefront of short fiction.

Works Cited

Autobiographical (Non)Disclosures in Alice Munro's The View from Castle Rock
Linda Morra, Bishop’s University

Alice Munro’s autobiographical text, The View From Castle Rock, would seem to lend itself to the terms of the “autobiographical pact”; as defined by Philippe Lejeune, it is a contract of identity between the narrator, reader, and publisher “that is sealed by the proper name” within an autobiographical text (19). Her foreword to the book, however, offers a contradiction: she claims that, in its writing, she was “exploring a life, my own life, but not in an austere or rigorously factual way” (np). Ambiguity arises from imaginative embellishment of the factual material about her lineage, which she uses to generate family mythology. This paper argues that such ambiguity becomes a part of a dual strategy by which to honor, not any such pact about truth telling, but rather the dignity of those about whom she writes. Her other strategy is to deploy shame as a device by which to suggest both the limits of and the right to proximity between reader and autobiographical text. Intimate disclosures are at times offered and at others denied the reader, who is implicitly challenged about the right to access the private details of Munro’s life—and those of others. So she asks in the last story, “What Do You Want to Know For?” As critic Elspeth Probyn notes, “getting too close can be a source of shame”—for the reader as much as the narrator. Munro’s strategies thus create an appropriate distance between reader and narrator, by which to draw the reader in, but not too closely. By calling upon theories of affect (Sara Ahmed), shame (Probyn), and autobiography (Lejeune, Sidonie Smith), this paper will examine Munro’s generic experimentation with autobiography, investigate how she tests the limits of the form, and explore how she uses shame and intimacy to create appropriate distance between reader and narrator. These strategies ultimately have repercussions for the genre in addition to the kind of pact Munro makes with her readers.

Munro’s Small-Town Place and Memory
Ryan Porter, Algonquin College

Throughout her career, Alice Munro has consistently worked against any romanticized or simplified version of place in Ontario’s rural past, or rather a version akin to Stephen Leacock’s popular idyll. Her overarching artistic concern, it seems, involves the accurate, as opposed to the nostalgic, depiction of place. As she writes in “The Stone in the Field” from The Moons of Jupiter, “the life buried here is one you have to think twice about regretting” (35); those who regret the retreating past may know only too little of its hardships.

Her methods of depicting small-town place have varied during her career. For instance, in her early text Lives of Girls and Women, Munro’s narrator, Del Jordan, employs a type of transcendent memory in order to document the quotidian details of her hometown of Jubilee. This artistic method, I argue, has been informed by the very same forces that have shaped the topography of Wawanash County in which Jubilee is situated; the artist’s method, therefore, approaches an organic continuity with the history and landscape of place. In a later text, Who Do You Think You Are?, Munro’s approach to the memorial depiction of place
has changed. Memory is now distrusted, since the impressions of the past that it creates are based on aporias, misdirections, and circumscriptions. An understanding of place constructed through memory, therefore, cannot only be incomplete but also false and even hazardous when memory guides one’s present actions. This paper will explore Munro’s evolving depiction of the intertwined nature of small-town place and memory in her works Lives of Girls and Women and Who Do You Think You Are? in order to suggest that small-town place in Munro’s work is not a passive backdrop for the lives of its inhabitants, but something active, shifting, and symbiotic.

On Sitting Down to Read “Lichen” Once Again: Rereading Alice Munro
Magdalene Redekop, University of Toronto

When an interviewer recently complained to Alice Munro that people are disappointed by her decision to stop writing fiction, she responded: “Tell them to read the old ones over again. There’s lots of them.” Why reread the stories of Alice Munro? In On Rereading, Patricia Spacks noted that retirement led her to reflect on the larger questions around her choices, questions that have also been explored by Matei Calinescu and other scholars. The “downsizing” of retirement requires a ruthless weeding out. Why, when recently confronted with this task, did I keep all my Alice Munro books and send thousands of other books off to book sales and possible shredding? Munro’s stories offer approaches to such questions in their ongoing exploration of how memory and imagination change with the passage of time. My talk will focus on the pleasure of a particular text, using “Lichen” as a case study. It is what we do as literary critics: read the same text again and again. My rereading of “Lichen” takes me into a rethinking of the interpretation I offered in my book on Munro. How could I have failed to pay close attention to the fact that this is a story about pornography and gardening? How does my reading of this story change (or stay the same) because of how attitudes to feminism have changed in the years since my book was published? What do Munro’s own rereadings of Virginia Woolf have to do with the resonance of “Lichen”? I take the very open-endedness of these questions as proof that the story is a “classic.” Every word in it is exactly the right word in the right place and yet it is dynamic—alive and changing and full of surprises, just like the people who read and reread it.

Dupes of the Plots of our Lives, or Design and Error in “Tricks”
Julie Rivkin, Connecticut College

At the end of Alice Munro’s story “Tricks,” her protagonist Robin reflects on a not often acknowledged cost to the happy endings of Shakespeare’s comedies: one arrives at those joyful unions only by accepting that one has been a dupe, one of “those who were fooled.” Robin, who gets no such happy ending for the plot of her life story, at least becomes aware of the “tricks” that have turned her story awry. Like one of Shakespeare’s comic heroines, she discovers that she too has been fooled by twins; unlike such heroines, she finds out too late to get the promised “true love or something like it.” Her would-be lover is long dead by the time she discovers that what she took as his rejection was the act of his deaf-mute damaged twin. “Outrageous,” she thinks, voicing the response of the skeptical reader as well as herself. “This is ridiculous. This I do not accept” (267).

But it is hard to condemn twinning as an outrageous plot device when it is also linked to the genetic structure of identity. One of the patients on Robin’s ward—she works as a psychiatric nurse—is persuaded that he is an unrecognized discoverer of DNA, and his delusion of discovery contains a twinning plot of its own: “she always loves the part of the story where he describes how the spiral unzips and the two strands float apart. . . . Each strand setting out on its appointed journey to double itself according to its own instructions” (266). Yet if the structure of DNA is a genetic version of fate, his illness is sad testament to the way this genetic journey can go awry, as it also does for others of the story’s doubles. My project in this paper is to explore versions of design and error in “Tricks,” whether that design is figured as fate or DNA, and error as plot or chance or mental anomaly, as the story makes its way between the Shakespearean stage and the psychiatric ward.
Bridging the Gaps through Story Cycle: The View from Castle Rock
Tina Trigg, King’s University College

In the current literary climate of re-discovering memoir and autobiography, Alice Munro's *The View from Castle Rock* (2006) seems an obvious text to support this resurgence of interest. In the forward, Munro herself nods to the memoir-like quality of these stories, offering an account of their genesis. However, this nod of acknowledgement is immediately qualified, accompanied by a hesitation in voice and a carefully guarded description of this "special set of stories" as "not memoirs but ... closer to my own life than the other stories I had written" (xiv). In her insistence that "[t]hese are stories" (xiv), Munro's discomfort with the categorization of memoir simultaneously reveals a fascination with the blurring of generic boundaries – in particular, with the way that bridging these gaps between "family history," "memoir," and "fiction" enables the discovery of what she terms "the truth of a life."

Taking its cue from Munro, this paper will argue that the investigation of self and truth is inherent in narrative itself and, in fact, is most compelling in the form of a story cycle: a hybrid of short story and novel that inhabits a generic gap. Employing Margaret Atwood's story cycle *Moral Disorder* (2006) as a brief counterpoint, the paper will demonstrate how Munro's broader focus on multigenerational history in *The View from Castle Rock* meaningfully establishes self in the context of generational community (as opposed to Atwood's nuclear family). This wide-angled lens alters ways of understanding self and truth through its inherent acceptance of the gaps in individual and genealogical stories.

Far from precluding the construction of meaning, the inevitability of these gaps enables discovery. Martha Nussbaum contends that a reader's necessary comfort with ambiguities introduced by gaps uniquely positions narrative, as opposed to other discursive forms, to disclose the mystery or complexity of humanity; and, like Mikhail Bakhtin, she favours the extended form of the novel as the pinnacle of this representation. Building from Nussbaum and Bakhtin, and based on the form of the cycle itself, I will argue that *The View from Castle Rock* demonstrates that the dialogical power of the story cycle equals (if not surpasses) that of the novel. Both the individual and collective stories demonstrate insight, craft, and cohesion but the construction of this cycle also requires (rather than tolerates) the gaps in personal and communal stories to interrogate "the truth of a life." The individual-collectivity of *The View from Castle Rock* highlights the provisionality of self-truths, the communal nature of interpretation, and the power of narrative gaps to construct meaning. Munro's seemingly simple statement that "[t]hese are stories" is, in fact, a bold declaration of the narrative power of the story cycle.

Mysterious Munro; or the Runaway’s Runaway
Aritha van Herk, University of Calgary

Alice Munro’s figuration in the global imagination is for her readers robust and eloquent, her writing a source of joy comparable to the delight to a daily crossword puzzle, absorbing and endlessly rewarding. For writers, she occupies a more ambiguous position. Part shooting star, part icon, part anchorite, she tenants the short story as sacred site, she exemplifies the ne plus ultra of that form as intricate unveiling of subtle revelation. She is to writers both madly secretive and transparently revealing, a self-mythologizer cloaked in shyness. Both meek and fiercely presumptuous, she inhabits a plane that resists both criticism and admiration. She is a digital citation, a line of clean laundry, a rare silk scarf, a single struck note on the piano. Her work and her presence mesmerize by virtue of how much is withheld, how much mystery haunts the apparition of her many fictional faces and their writerly performance. Our own “familiar eccentric,” she embodies the austere vigilance of a unique Canadian aesthetic.

Momentous Shifts and Unimagined Changes in “Jakarta”
Tracy Ware, Queen's University

Because Alice Munro resists taking sides, her themes are more social than political. In a perceptive review,
Michael Gorra notes that most of the stories in *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998) “look back to the years around 1960. Read together, they so reinforce one another as to amount to nothing less than the portrait of a generation: a generation that came to adulthood with one set of rules and then found it could live with another; a generation of women through whom the great turn of our times first quickened into life.” In “Jakarta” (1998), Kath starts to distance herself from her husband Kent when a political argument leaves him “tied up in knots and he didn’t even realize it” (80). But even here Kath is caught between sides because “Everybody in the room was so certain of everything. When they paused for breath it was just to draw on an everlasting stream of pure virtue, pure certainty” (81). She is the dominant character, but she is not technically the protagonist because the story has two equally weighted focalizers, Kath and Kent, with the latter looking back from the 1990s on the events of more than thirty years earlier. For Kath, it seemed then that “life went on, after you finished school, as a series of further examinations to be passed. The first one was getting married . . . . Then you thought about having the first baby . . . . Then down the road somewhere was the second baby. After that the progression got dimmer and it was hard to be sure just when you had arrived at wherever it was you were going” (70). Her decision to abandon this conventional script is the crucial but unrepresented event of this story, which also involves a discussion of the short fiction of two of Munro’s main influences, D.H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield (Thacker 128-29). Disagreeing with her friend Sonje about Lawrence’s representation of women in “The Fox,” Kath feels that “Something is wrong with her own argument” (72) because she is conflating Lawrence’s fiction with her own life, just as she has previously done with Mansfield’s “At the Bay” when she fears that her husband is “something like” Stanley Burnell (71). Sonje’s husband Cottar is a radical journalist and one of those who argue with Kent, but Cottar is in some ways more patriarchal, controlling his wife’s reading and her sexual behaviour. Like other Munro stories about the fifties and early sixties, “Jakarta” is set in Vancouver, where she lived when she read Lawrence and Mansfield with her friend Daphne Cue (Thacker 128-29). A complex story involving key themes and influences, “Jakarta” supports an idea expressed in “Differently” (1989): “People make momentous shifts, but not the changes they imagine” (242).

Works Cited