

**Doktori (PhD) értekezés**

**ALICE MUNRO NEO-GÓTIKUS ÍRÁSMŰVÉSZETE:  
AZ 1990-ES ÉVEK ELBESZÉLÉSEI**

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# ALICE MUNRO'S NEO-GOTHIC: SHORT FICTION FROM THE 1990s

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Area and Objective of Research

My dissertation proposes to read Alice Munro's fiction appearing in her volumes of the 1990s as female (neo-)gothic fiction, which proposition challenges the entrenched critical view that, except for its early phase, it is to be seen as part of the aesthetic tradition of realism. I wish to prove that her two volumes *Open Secrets* (1994) and *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998) evince a gothic vision and follow a female gothic aesthetic practice. The double aims of the dissertation thus are (1) to interrogate the critical myth of Munro's realist impulse and (2) to define the outlines of her gothic vision. Both lines of argumentation lead to claiming Munro's fiction of the 1990s for a female gothic tradition, which, I claim, it critically interrogates. The prefix 'neo-' signals this meta-gothic impulse.

Reading Munro's work as part of a female gothic tradition means the joint problematization of gender and genre. I will argue that what Munro criticism somewhat enigmatically refers to as the "Munroian" (e.g.: Carrington, *Controlling* 39-40; W. R. Martin 8, 36, 43; Thacker, "Mapping" 127; Nischik 209; Redekop 230)<sup>1</sup> quality of her fiction originates in the use of female gothic representational strategies that take the patriarchal gender ideology at work in contemporary culture to task; at the same time, I will also demonstrate that Munro's fiction goes beyond the mere recycling of female gothic conventions by focusing on her neo-gothic challenges to some of the solutions the female gothic has found in order to rebalance gender inequalities in a fictional space. Underlying my proposition is the view that the gothic as an aesthetic category cannot be divorced from its ideological determination as it was invented as a corrective to the vision of the early realist novel, which subsists on a particular understanding of the sex-gender system of a newly evolving bourgeois culture; it is this system that the female gothic most extensively and intensively interrogates—and has interrogated ever since—in terms of the social and psychological meanings of gender for women.

The dissertation focuses on selected short stories as published in *Open Secrets* and *The Love of a Good Woman*. The reason for choosing these volumes as the object of study is both theoretical and practical. (1) It is theoretical in the sense that I claim *Open Secrets* heralds a new phase in Munro's aesthetic whose initial signs appeared in *The Progress of Love* (1986) and *Friend of My Youth* (1990). This aesthetic gained its full-blown articulation by the 1994 collection, making it a landmark in her oeuvre. Although critics tend to disagree about many things in connection with Munro's work, there is a critical consensus about the significance of this volume, which has "reinvented" (McCaig 81-111) the short story form. Munro's own comments about it as "risky" underlines its place as unique and as signaling new directions in

her writing career.<sup>2</sup> *The Love of a Good Woman*, praised by readers and critics alike, establishing her as *the* leading short fiction writer in English, is in many ways the culmination of Munro's risk-taking. Thus a discussion of *Open Secrets* and *The Love of a Good Woman* in tandem as representatives of a new phase in Munro's oeuvre is well-grounded. (I must note that her later volumes do not clearly follow in their footsteps.<sup>3</sup>) (2) The choice is practical in the sense that Munro criticism has been burgeoning ever since the 1980s; today her work belongs to the most researched works by a contemporary artist. Most criticism focuses, however, on her early volumes *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), and *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978). Book-length discussions of her fiction appeared mostly in the 1990s, which thus address volumes published before. Only three critical book-length studies discuss stories from *Open Secrets* to date (Howells, *Alice*; 1998; Cox; 2004; Hooper, 2008), and some of these had appeared by the time only in magazines and not as stories collected in volumes. This is significant because Munro is known to make considerable changes in the stories before they are published in book format.<sup>4</sup> In the present study, however, these changes and their possible ramifications will not appear as focal; I will concentrate on the texts published as stories in collections. The reason for this is the fact that, although Munro does not conceive of her short stories as episodes in novels or whole-books, she arranges them into groups that exert their effects entirely differently than when they are read individually. In sum, the practical reason for choosing these volumes as the object of examination here is the fact that these have not been discussed in a sustained study.

The selection of the short stories discussed is similarly governed by theoretical and practical reasons. The practical reason is related to spatial restraints. Since a full, detailed discussion of all is made impossible by their sheer number, not mentioning their complexity (Dennis Duffy has aptly characterized them as "add-water-and-stir" novels [179]), I selected those that most emphatically prove my thesis, though this means that I do not discuss some of her instant classics.<sup>5</sup> Also, I will not follow the method of discussing each and every story in the order they appear in print as seems to be rule in sustained studies of Munro's fiction. I arranged stories from both volumes into thematic groups. A theoretical consideration governing the selection of the short stories is related to the argument that the stories in these volumes are female (neo-)gothic because (1) they utilize fundamental female gothic conventions and because (2) they interrogate them in order to reroute the gender discourse of female gothic subjectification.

## 1. 2. *Position and Significance within Scholarship*

My reading of Munro's narratives as neo-gothic texts attempts to resituate Munro as a female (neo-)gothic writer. I engage with critical traditions in three ways:

### (1) *Challenging the critical tradition of Munro's realism:*

I argue that notwithstanding the varied critical approaches to Munro's fiction, realism (both as an aesthetic practice and as an ideological construct) has functioned as an insufficiently problematized reference point in Munro criticism, the reasons of which are to be sought in the histories of Munro and of gothic criticism rather than in her artistic vision and aesthetic practice.

The beginning of Munro's literary career coincided with the rise of critical interest in Canadian literature; therefore, the reception of her work was determined by the issues raised in the canonization process of Canadian literature. In the 1960s and 1970s several Canadian writers whose works displayed values "typically Canadian"—Munro among them—gained a widespread international recognition as a result of Canadian cultural policy (Hammill 538-39; Wolfreys 214-28). Consequently, it was the era and its cultural policy that set the course for the kind of questions that critics deeply immersed in the process of canonization asked in connection with her prose. Robert Thacker even claims that Munro seems to be "in many ways something of a paradigm case of 'the canonization of a Canadian Author'" ("Go" 157).

The Munro critical industry, set into motion by the first conference devoted entirely to her work in 1982 (University of Calgary) and never losing momentum since, started out on the premise that Munro is first and foremost a regionalist-realist writer of Canada. At the same time, the Munroian peculiarity of her prose was also registered, which critics explained by describing it as hyper- or super-realist ("hyper-" and "super" because it pays minute attention to surface details; thus the prefixes are used as synonyms for 'heightened') or magic realist ("magic" because the *effects* of her fiction—but not its techniques—may be compared to the magic realism of contemporary Latin-American literature; see discussions especially by Moss, *A Reader's* [215], Thacker ["Clear" 37-60], Struthers ["Alice" 103-12], W. R. Martin [*Alice* xiv, 206], MacKendrick [1], Rasporich [131-32], Howells [*Alice* 4, 18], Canitz and Seamon [67-80]). Significantly, not even the postmodern turn in critical discourse has challenged the centrality of realism in Munro's fiction (see Hutcheon, *Canadian* 208).

Moreover, the critical tradition has been equally preserved in discussions that cannot be immediately linked to the canonization of Canadian literature. By the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, Munro was seen not only as the faithful recorder of small-town Ontario life but of female existence as well, which generated a myriad of studies written from a feminist critical point of view.<sup>6</sup> Because she is of Scotch-Irish descent and because in her later fiction

she has increasingly addressed her Scottish heritage her work also appears as rich material for Scottish Studies.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, because of her faithful portrayal of women's inner life, scholars of the intersections between Literature and Psychology are also apt to scrutinize her work. Furthermore, Munro in her very early interviews made it clear that she sees the influences on her work as rooted mainly in the literature of English Romanticism (the writings by and of Mary Shelley), English Victorian literature (the novels of Emily and Charlotte Brontë and of Thomas Hardy, the poetry of Lord Alfred Tennyson), and American literature (Willa Cather); especially, the literature of the American South (James Agee, Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O'Connor) (e.g.: Struthers, "American" 196-204; Metcalf 56), therefore, her work has become a critical favorite outside Canada; all the more so because she has won major literary prizes in the United States and in Great Britain as well. Such wide-ranging critical interests will understandably engender varied evaluations and interpretations; notwithstanding, realism as an aesthetic practice has functioned as a point of reference that Munro critics gravitate to, whether affirming or denying it (in encyclopedic volumes she is still customarily referred to as a realist writer [e.g.: Klinck 49; Keith 155, 161; Moss, "Introduction" 8; Woodcock, *Northern* 132; Stouck 269; Arkin and Schollar 832; Andrew Gurr qtd. in Holland 116; Magill 3395; Pryke and Soderlund 294; J. E. Miller 228; ; Huggan 221; New, *History* 238; Creelman 175; Kruk 93; Flamengo 251; Lawn 576; and Wishart 495]).

Yet, the compatibility of her aesthetic practices with those writers' who are traditionally seen as belonging to a realist canon has always seemed problematic, which is signaled by the fact that beside such supposedly neutral adjectives as "regional," "feminist," and "Canadian" there have also appeared others describing her fiction as "paradoxical" and therefore "contemporary" (Canitz and Seamon 69, 68), "inconclusive," "incongruous," and "accommodating" (Hoy, "Alice" 19), "grotesque" (Redekop 116), and "chaotic" and thus "defensive" (Lamont-Stewart 120). A variety of critics discuss profusely why Munro's fiction shows kinship with the tradition regardless of how much their own analyses gesture towards the inapplicability of the term. Rather than address the ideological underpinnings of her art, they validate their own insistence by calling Munro's vision dialectical (Thacker, "Clear" 58; Lamont-Stewart 120; Hoy, "Alice" 14; Osmond 92; Redekop 33), which, they argue, improves a putative naive, regionalist-realist-documentarist aesthetic practice by expanding its thematic, generic, and technical repertoire.

I claim that the critical framework of the gothic for the discussion of her work has numerous benefits: (1) it connects many of the previous critical discussions since her gothicism explains why in most discussions she is considered as part of the canonical realist



tradition notwithstanding the fact that there is a constant need felt to qualify her aesthetic practice and even why her fiction is sometimes referred to as postmodern. (2) It redraws the perimeters of her portrayal of female life by lifting it out of second wave feminist critical discourse that has proved to be an impasse while (3) it also accounts for the adaptability of her fiction for the problematization of gender and (4) for psychological-psychoanalytical interpretations of women's inner life. (5) In addition, it provides a so far unaccounted for link between her interests in Shelley, the Brontës, the literature of the American South, and even her view of her Scottish heritage, which have come to assume an increasingly significant point of reference in her fiction. (5) Furthermore, and not in the least, it provides a theoretical background against which to interpret the "Munrobian" idiosyncrasies of her fiction.

(2) *Widening the critical tradition of Munrobian Gothic:*

I claim that gothicism is not restricted to Munro's early fiction but is present as the major structuring force of her work of the 1990s.

Although several critics have pointed out affinities between Munro's fiction and the gothic (Rasporich xv, 22-25, 134-44; Redekop 65-67; Howells, "Canadian" 105; *Alice* 13-49; Duffy 169-90; Carrington, "Double-Talking" 71-92; McCombs 32; Becker 103-50; Szalay, *A nã* 23-46), only three accord a greater significance to it than a mere reference to some of its conventions merits: Coral Ann Howells has argued most persistently for the past twenty years that Munro's fiction evinces a gothic vision (moreover, she finds that *Lives of Girls and Women* best represents the tradition of Canadian gothic ["Canadian" 105]), while Suzanne Becker and Edina Szalay have discussed at length how it manifests itself in this novel (or, arguably, a volume of interlinked short stories also known as a whole book story sequence [Howells, *Alice* 55]). The privileging of *Lives* for a discussion within a gothic framework is not surprising since in a sense it invites gothic criticism: its main character is writing a gothic novel about her small town and its inhabitants. Becker and Szalay, however, go further and identify gothicism at work in the novel not only as a theme, but also as a formative convention in the creation of its plot, characters, narrative techniques, and figurality.

Becker structures her discussion of Munro's *Lives* in *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fiction* (1999) around the notion of gothic "excess" (1) which manifests itself in several ways. It appears, for instance, as the use of excessive gothic character types; but, most significantly, it also appears as a form of subjectification in Del's, the main character's, tendency to incorporate into her self all the women's life stories that she comes to be familiar with during her adolescence and young adulthood. Thus, Becker argues, she embodies the female gothic heroine in an excessively magnified form because she becomes who she is by engaging with all other characters around her (117-36, esp. 135-36).

Szalay's focus in her *A nő többször: neogótika és női identitás a mai észak-amerikai regényben* (2002) falls elsewhere. She argues persuasively that the protagonist of the novel makes sense of her life with the help of characters, tropes, and plot elements borrowed from the gothic novel. In the process Del not only incorporates the female characters and their stories into her self (thus producing what Becker describes as an excessive gothic subject), but she continually adjusts them at the same time to the dictates of her gothic narratives. Therefore, the gothic excess of the protagonist's subjectivity is made even more excessive by deliberate fictionalization. What both Becker and Szalay agree on is that in Munro's novel the gothic appears as a powerful fictionalizing strategy, which has its ramifications for the individuation of the main character as an excessive gothic subject.

At the same time, Becker holds that although the gothic appears as an adequate form to represent female experience, Munro still finds it limiting, and therefore she transforms it from within the gothic tradition into a neo-gothic form that acts as an educational tool in effecting a habit change in women (251-58). Szalay concurs and shows how an unquestioning surrender to gothic fantasy delimits women's choices, which prompts Del to free herself of such fantasies by the end of the novel. Likewise, in an early study of Munro's *Lives*, Howells also argues that Munro finds the gothic an "unreliable structure," which has prompted her to search for "other ways for talking about the strange and the grotesque" (*Private* 76; see also Rasporich 140-44).

In my dissertation, following in the footsteps of Becker's and Szalay's investigations, I will argue, first, that gothicism is not restricted to Munro's early fiction; instead, it is persistently present throughout her oeuvre, but especially in her fiction of the 1990s. Second, my argument runs somewhat counter to Becker's and Szalay's conclusions in that I think that the gothic is not presented in Munro's fiction solely as juvenile fantasy to be outgrown, even if *Lives* and her own later comments seem to suggest so (Munro qtd. in Blodgett 3), while it is undeniable that the popular gothic romance (love story), a conventional gothic plot element, is presented here as well as a wishful fantasy of dubious value.

My discussion of Munro's fiction of the 1990s within the framework of gothic criticism is not unprecedented, although studies in this vein are sporadic.<sup>8</sup> Even these consider the gothic as a set of conventions, a few of which appear in positions emphatic enough to allow for a brief discussion. Their approach is justified in the sense that gothic conventions definitely abound in these narratives. The setting is as ominous as any gothic setting could be; after all, most are set in the same Southwestern Ontario region as *Lives* was.<sup>9</sup> Characters are presented as gothic character types (the persecuted heroine, the missing mother, the villain, the Byronic hero, the villainess, etc.): they are denied any sense of individuality, and thereby

they appear solely as rehearsals of conventional stock characters following the path that their gothic predecessors have outlined. Moreover, the narrators and the characters of clearly autobiographical short stories likewise are presented as types devoid of any individuality, which contradicts the autobiographical mode itself. In addition, the short stories center on some kind of secret or enigma that the characters have to face, disentangle, and, in most cases, leave unresolved. Frames, letters, fake, lost, or found, embedded narratives also abound. In short, several gothic conventions line up in these stories also.

The three studies that accord importance to gothicism in Munro's fiction discuss only individual short stories. In addition, all the three set out from radically different grounds: Ildikó de Papp Carrington uncovers how a gothic "classic" is intertextually present in a short story in *Open Secrets*; Judith McCombs refers to the myth of Bluebeard and the figure of the mother in a story in *The Love of a Good Woman*; and Duffy emphasizes the significance of the gothic body in yet a third short story. I wish to prove that Munro's gothicism is not to be pinpointed as the use of a select number of conventions solely. My claim is that her fiction produces gothic subjects<sup>10</sup> who radically challenge not only the sex-gender matrix mediated by the ideological thrust of realism but of the female gothic as well.

### (3) *Drawing the Outlines of Munro's Female (Neo-)Gothic*

I understand the gothic as a carnivalesque site that makes ideological resistance to patriarchal gender discourses visible through its aesthetic practices and the female gothic as a mode within the gothic tradition positioned *vis a vis* the male gothic and concerned specifically with introducing the female perspective into the contestation. I argue that Munro does not merely adopt a repertoire of female gothic conventions but by revising them she meta-gothically interrogates the ideological base of the female gothic mode itself also, though without discarding it altogether.

The gothic is a contested category which is a result of at least three facts:

(1) It looks back on a long history of two and a half centuries and has proved to be extremely generative of texts as well as of qualifiers ("classic gothic," "female gothic," "queer gothic," "imperial gothic," "postcolonial gothic," "Canadian gothic," "neo-gothic," to quote a few). Because of its longevity and surprisingly easy recognizability it was, and has been, classified as a genre of formula literature with a set of firmly entrenched conventions.

(2) Several critics, seeking to account for its variety across the ages without producing an endless list of gothic subgenres, prefer to see it as a mode (a method, a manner and a style) or form rather than a genre since although some of its conventions are received, they are also adaptable to historical circumstances. They may be used and even transformed freely; none of them becomes an exclusive property of a specific subgenre or of a historical period. Thus, it is

not the conventions that define a work's gothicism but their relationship to its subject matter.<sup>11</sup>

These two disparate definitions, creating attitudinal barriers, can be found concurrently in contemporary critical discourse.

(3) The history of its criticism is concurrent with its practice and it well reflects the historical contingency of critical interests. Although gothic criticism looks back on a long history—it is practically as old as the gothic itself—its path resembles a meandering rivulet rather than a stately river running its course. It has been only in the past twenty years that gothic criticism has experienced a momentous change and established itself, and the gothic, as a literary matter of import (Castle, *Boss* 73-78). Whereas earlier it was considered as an enterprise for a few “bibliophilic cranks” (Richter 2), by today it has gained in respectability even in face of the fact that much of the gothic is a representative of what is casually referred to as popular gothic, whether in the form of romance (love story) or horror fiction. Nonetheless, the long critical history has left a troubled taxonomic heritage behind.

Following Robert Miles, I take two features to be the bottom line of the gothic phenomenon: (1) it is an ideological construct in the sense that it represents the contestation of several ideologies as ideologies; and (2) it has self-consciously developed strategies and techniques that are capable of delivering the full weight of the individual being under the siege of competing ideologies in a social discursive space.

This also means that the gothic is a disparate structure deliberately searching for ways to give expression not only to the multiplicity of experience but to its rejection of the unifying and centralizing efforts of a rival mode of literature concurrent with it (the realist novel) also. As such, it should be understood within the framework of heteroglossia and dialogicity as theorized by Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (*Dialogic* 259-85; esp. 269-73). The gothic consciously inserts itself into an “already existing discursive space as a response to both what has been said and what might be said” (Howard 2-3) by creating a fictional space for the carnivalization, as defined by Bakhtin (*Problems* 7-8, 122-34), of the social and ideological voices of its time.

Conceiving of the gothic in these terms and situating Munro's fiction within this tradition as heteroglot and dialogic, as well as deliberately baring some of its ideological voices (those of gender) explain why changing critico-historical contexts tend to downplay the role of its disparate voices; i.e., why contemporary Canadian critics tend to recognize its indebtedness to a dominant and prestigious literary mode (realism) solely—while also recognizing Munro's transformation of the mode (as hyphenated realism)—as well as why the shift to listening to its other voices has become possible at all.

In my understanding of the gothic I am also indebted to David Punter's work, who sees the gothic not only as a social, cultural dialogue about ideals in times of social and cultural turmoil but also as a fantasy discourse aimed at recuperating a psychic loss. Accordingly, I think of female gothic fiction (especially the Radcliffean tradition) as an extended and elaborate daydream that seeks to intervene into discourse about women in western society and culture at large and to reinstate a female point of view about true (wo)manhood. (This does not mean though that I wish to promote a view of the female gothic as a novelistic effort at recuperating an ahistorical "female self" in the manner of pre-1970 gothic criticism that linked female gothic fiction to sexual maturation. If the critical history of the gothic has taught a lesson, it is one in understanding how closely intertwined historically contingent times and their respective ideologies are.) Munro intervenes into this fantasy discourse by highlighting the impasse it has lead to.

I argue that Munro's fiction of the 1990s belongs to the tertiary phase of the female gothic, which has also deflected attention away from considering her narratives in the framework of the gothic, since in the tertiary phase the system of conventions is not simply consciously used as inherited but also applied in radically new ways (A. Fowler, *Kinds* 162). While in the primary phase of a genre's lifecycle writers are not conscious of the system of conventions as they are in the process of codifying them, and in the secondary phase a full repertoire is already available to them, writers in the tertiary phase have an ambivalent bond to the already codified generic conventions (162). They typically shift from acceptance to self-conscious redefinition and deliberately transform them in terms of content. Thus in the tertiary phase appropriation does not entail an unconditional acceptance of conventions representing or gesturing at some ideological imperative, just the contrary, the historical embeddedness of their system resonating with cultural memories offers a broader perspective unavailable to writers working in earlier phases.

One cannot discuss the gothic without a reference to realism as a literary language in the Bakhtinian sense in response to which it was created (Miles "What" 191; Moglen 1). My discussion of realism is limited to two issues: (1) how it differs from gothic fiction in its ideological stance and its conceptualization of the individual and (2) what techniques it developed to universalize and centralize its language in the social and ideological space of its rise since it is these that the gothic as a different literary language responds to. Therefore, of the vast body of critical writings on realism I concentrate only on those that seek to account for its rise and success—Ian Watt's seminal study, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957) and Michael McKeon's revision of Watt's theory in his *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (2002)—, which accounts themselves may also be

highly ideological in the sense that they privilege a selfhood which is already informed by outside pressures but which seeks to create an isolated inner space inaccessible to outside influence rather than intervene into the clash of ideologies.

My understanding of realism is influenced by feminist revisions of the rise of the novel, which posit that realism also should be thought of as a gendered response to the social, political, and cultural attempts at the codification of “(wo)man,” projects underway in (and ever since) the eighteenth century. I am especially indebted to Helene Moglen’s *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the English Novel* (2001), which argues that the rise of the novel is the result of two competing, but mutually definitive literary traditions: the realistic and the fantastic (1), while Michael McKeon’s definitive studies in the history of the novel also provide a theoretical background.

My approach to the joint problematization of gender and genre in Munro’s texts is informed by Foucauldian theories of the gothic (Moglen, Miles) and of the female gothic (Diane Long Hoeveler).

Some words about other contested concepts and definitions must also follow. When using the term ideology I do not mean “false consciousness” as it appears in Marxist thought. I use it to refer to a historical epiphenomenon concurrent with the birth of what political philosophy calls “modernity” starting with the period of Enlightenment. It became then possible for the individual to grow critical of authority instead of unquestioningly accepting traditional, inherited structures of power and their attendant values. This entailed that individuals, on account of their rational capacity and to the degree of their educational background, grew capable of choosing and shaping their individual destinies after having deciphered the true forms and rules of all things, including good life, for instance. That is, an ideology qualifies as such if it conjures up a conglomeration of values an individual valorizes and consciously adopts over others in an effort at self-definition. Ideology thus presupposes both an individual critically engaging with his/her present and a conception of an ideal towards which one could and should strive against all contestation. My contention is that realist, gothic, female gothic, and neo-gothic works are ideological constructs in this sense (Miles; Bell 476).

In my discussion I will use the term ‘neo-gothic’ as explained by Becker and Szalay because I find their approach to Munro’s early fiction especially informative. Becker links neo-gothicism to female consciousness-raising in the nineteen-seventies and -eighties and defines it as a conscious use of gothic conventions, which “overtly establishes Gothicism as an adequate and indeed appropriate feminine form of writing” (5). She establishes a long line of women writers from Mary Wollstonecraft through the Brontë sisters to contemporary

female authors, who all write in the gothic mode in order to argue with gender inequalities. Neo-gothicism, nonetheless, also means that gothic representational strategies are not simply inherited: neo-gothic writers, like Munro, *revise* the gothic. Becker calls their revision a “stripping” process—a process in which gothic conventions are stripped one by one and then taken on again but now filled with new meaning (5). Similarly, Szalay discusses *Lives* as a neo-gothic work and emphasizes that female neo-gothicists consciously mine the gothic mode to call for a re-evaluation of the position women willingly accept in society by giving in to the fantasy world that the popular gothic love story offers. Thus, neo-gothicism means the conscious use and revision of female gothic conventions in an effort to intervene into the ideological gender discourse of the female gothic. Although at present the prefix ‘neo-’ in connection with ‘gothic’ also makes its appearance in critical writings as a term to designate a temporal dimension simply meaning ‘recent, contemporary,’ in the dissertation it is emphatically used to highlight this meta-gothic impulse. ‘Neo-gothic’ will be used both in its adjectival and noun forms, however, when using its adjectival form together with ‘female gothic’ I will spell it as *female* (neo-)gothic to underline that neo-gothicism means by definition that a work dwells within the female gothic tradition.

Becker calls Munro a Canadian neo-gothic writer situating her in a Canadian gothic tradition as well. In Canada the gothic looks back on a long history; moreover, it is the gothic which several critics take to be the adequate expression of the Canadian experience (Sugars and Turcotte, “Canadian” x-xvi). It is the gothic that is able to mediate that violence of inhuman proportions that its inhabitants face *vis a vis* the haunting presence of the land, of the traces of its colonization, of its in-betweenness between colonization and post-colonialism, and of the uncanny lack that Canadian national identity represents.<sup>12</sup> Even Canada’s literary landmarks bespeak this close link to gothic experience: the first bestseller was a monastic gothic in the Lewisite school,<sup>13</sup> Susanna Moodie’s gothic autobiography *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), which describes the landscape as strange, frightful even terrifying, fit only for wild beasts, and John Richardson’s gothic romance *Wacousta; Or, The Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas* (1832) are cited as foundational works of Canadian literature.<sup>14</sup> The Canadian landscape has been customarily figured as menacing and monstrous ever since. In the nineteenth century, Canada, troubled by its powerful neighbor, appeared over and over again in literary and cultural productions as a troubled maiden threatened by rape, figured like the persecuted heroines of the gothic.<sup>15</sup> More recently, however, Canadian artists and critics emphasize the uncanniness of Canadianness: the paradoxes of national identity, the dullness and the grotesqueness of life there,<sup>16</sup> the ongoing engagement with a hostile land, and recently with the contemporary city.<sup>17</sup> It seems that Canadian artists find the gothic an exceptionally

suitable mode to express feelings of disorientation, fragmentation, alienation, centerlessness, and emptiness (Sugars and Turcotte, *Unsettled* esp. xviii). Becker places Munro's *Lives* within the context of this tradition by establishing a Canadian neo-gothic tradition as well upon examining the novels of women writers in the nineteen-seventies and -eighties. My discussion however does not focus on the "Canadianness" of Munro's female (neo-)gothic.

### 1. 3. Thesis Outline

By offering a gothic reading of Munro's short fiction of the 1990s, I will argue that her work belongs to a female gothic tradition since it uses its representational strategies motivated by an urge to give voice to the dominant gender ideology at work in contemporary culture, while Munro also consciously revises its conventions in order to reroute its discourse about "ideal femininity." Thus, Munro's female (neo-)gothic narratives confront the inherited female gothic impulse to measure female individual success and value by the standard of gender expectations.

Yet, I do not wish to undermine the relevance of realist aesthetic concepts for the discussion of her work; rather, I intend to put them into a new perspective. Most critical readings have highlighted the elements of her fiction gesturing towards the realistic mode so far, implying that she provides a window onto her world of a specific time and location, though the scene seen is somewhat strange because like the protagonist of "Walker Brothers Cowboy," who looks at the roadside through the rear window of her father's car, the reader also sees experience flowing backwards and sideways at the same time. Since Munro's fiction defies easy confinement within any conventional modes of fiction, valorizing her realist aesthetic practices at the expense of others means that her gothic vision, looking backwards and sideways also, can be lost. I will argue that her fiction is a distinctive blend of regional realism, portraying a particular time and location, and of the female gothic romance that makes visible to what extent narratives of origins (geographical location as the home, family history as family destiny; one's sex as gendered destiny) are questioned as legitimate sources of one's self-fashioning.

The dissertation is divided into four main chapters: Chapter 2 outlines my understanding of the gothic and realism by juxtaposing their differences despite their common roots; I will then situate Munro within the female gothic tradition by pointing out how it shares in its vision as well as in what ways it intervenes into it. Chapters 3 to 5 provide a close reading of individual short stories grouped around major female gothic conventions. I will argue that Munro challenges these conventions in order to thematize her concern with their ideological thrust. Chapter 3 focuses on the bifurcation of the textual world into two, which



creates the basic situation of the female gothic narrative. Chapter 4 investigates the erotic plot of the female gothic double plot structure, which focuses on the heroine's finding a companionate husband culminating in a happy ending whereas Chapter 5 discusses the quest/ambition plot that is traditionally motivated by the search for a mother figure. Lastly, I sum up the results of my investigations in the Conclusion.

The second chapter starts by posing the question on what grounds the almost unanimous critical consensus about Munro's realism has been formulated. All of her early critics have emphasized that Munro undermines realist representational strategies; yet, they have also insisted that her efforts at their invalidation work exactly the opposite way: the more she calls attention to the failure of realist representation, the more realist she becomes because she extends realist fiction onto terrains it had not tread before traditionally as well as because she supplements the conventional repertoire of realist representational techniques. That this argument did not convince all of her both early and later critics is signaled by the hesitance that some showed in the face of a putative pure realist-regionalist Munro. A few of her early critics located her fiction within the bounds of literary modernism (Martin 1-13; Crouse 51-51), whereas some of her later critics argued for its affinity with the aesthetics of canonical postmodernism (Nunes 11-26; Heble 4-9).

Via a discussion of the common roots of realism and the gothic as theorized by Moglen and Miles, I argue that both realism and the gothic are responses to the same dilemma crystallizing around the place of the human subject in the world (Moglen esp. 1-12; Miles, "What" 180-96). But whereas realism responds with the creation of certain subjects characterized by autonomy, harmony, and what Catherine Belsey calls knowingness,<sup>18</sup> representative of the coherent, "autonomous and knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects" (Belsey, "Constructing" 52-52) able to readily convince the reader of the transcendental existence of truth and knowledge, the gothic has traveled a different path. It was invented as a carnivalesque mode, developed in part to counter the formulating realist tradition. Therefore, in some respects it displays a fiercely anti-realistic attitude that does not seek to harmonize differing points of view and elevate the individual above society. Instead, it seeks to intervene into the ideological grounding of society and, sometimes, as is the case in the female gothic, establish a new order. The question of the gothic is not whether an individual fits in or not, but whether a redrawing of the lines between the individual and the world is possible or not (Miles, "What" 191).

Therefore, while realist works focus on the individual's struggle in the textual actual world, the gothic has developed a technique to destabilize it by bifurcating it into two possible worlds at ideological odds with each other: one traditionally seen as, in the terminology of

gothic criticism, the real world presented in terms similar to the textual actual world in realist fiction (the place of origin, the home where the protagonist sets out from), and a second unreal or gothic (other)world, (the gothic castle, the place of contestation, traditionally seen as a place of otherness where what the protagonist avows as “commonsense” rules do not apply). It must be noted though that more often than not the real world of the gothic, even if presented with the means of verisimilitude, is conceived of as a fairy-tale idyll of wishful fantasy whereas the unreal gothic (other)world is governed by the rules as known and perceived in the actual world but in a magnified form; their only difference is their scale and not their ideological thrust. This is why the inherited gothic terms ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ occasion some ground for confusion. The contradiction can be resolved when the relationship between the two worlds is seen through the prism of possible worlds theory, and the convention is seen as a device of recentering (Ryan 553-55). The concept of recentering allows for the distinction among the (authorial) actual world, the textual universe, with the textual actual world at its center, and the text reference world, which is the system that the textual actual world represents (555), while the text may mobilize several alternate possible worlds as well. Accordingly, the ‘gothic otherworld’ is the textual actual world, which hyperbolically magnifies the ideology of the reference world (the ideological organization of the actual world) whereas the (gothic) ‘real world’ is to be conceived of as an alternate possible world. In the dissertation, in compliance with gothic studies terminology, I will refer to the place of departure and final re-integration as ‘the real world’ and to the place of contestation as ‘the unreal gothic otherworld.’ Here I opt for ‘otherworld,’ although ‘underworld’ is also in common usage, in an effort to avoid the spatial metaphor of surface and depth reminiscent of psychological readings.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, I will help an easier navigation among the possible worlds of the gothic with the terms of possible worlds theory as well: thus I will differentiate between actual, textual actual, and alternate possible worlds (Ryan 553-55; Eco 65-67).

The gothic plot is predicated on the juxtaposition of these two worlds, where the hero(ine) embarks on a quest in the manner of the mythological hero Joseph Campbell describes. She crosses the “threshold of adventure,” the boundary between the two worlds (journey to an otherworld, to the gothic castle), here her strength of character is tested as she is besieged by “unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces” (threat to her physical integrity by a close familiar, a puzzle to solve that will answer questions about her family’s history), she has to steal the boon (she has to work the puzzle out in secrecy) that ultimately “restores the world” (she is reinstated into her rights, a new gender economy steps into the place of the old one) (Campbell 245-46; for the parallel between hero journey and the female gothic see

DeLamotte, *Perils* 54). The boon the female gothic heroine finds is redemptive knowledge: she learns her own (family's) history that allows her to free the world of the usurper of her rights and to establish a new world where she will not be endangered by those "strangely intimate forces" (Campbell 245) that embody the patriarchal gender norms of rising capitalism in the eighteenth century and their full-blown articulation in Munro's times.

The gothic otherworld as a suffocating and incarcerating textual actual world from which several alternate possible worlds may spring (dreams, nightmares, apparitions, etc.) offers the opportunity to unearth and compare different perspectives, accounts, and interpretations and, because of its uncanny similarity to the actual world of gothicists and their contemporaneous readers, it offers an illuminative background against which to interpret their own experiences. In the paradigmatic female gothic story the boon of redemptive knowledge brings good fortune since the heroine finds out the truth about her origins that prove the legitimacy of her claims for self-determination, so she can rise from the (textual actual) gothic otherworld into a newly reconfigured (alternate possible) real world. She becomes a social being inserted into a larger context (she starts out mostly as an orphan closed off the world) who has a right to participate in social exchange (she can choose her husband and thus the new guardian of her body and property). This (alternate possible world) resolution is ideally designed to effect a shift in the reader's ideological allegiances as well—since the gothic has what may be termed as an educational mission. That is, readers should arrive at questioning the gender norms that relegate women into a position that puts them at the mercy of others.

In Munro's female (neo-)gothic two major revisions will be highlighted: (1) the ideological thrust of the female gothic fantasy becomes the new gothic otherworld itself; i.e., the fantasy that worthy heroines will be rewarded with a companionate husband keeps women imprisoned. (2) The heroine's relationship to other female characters is revised.

Whereas critics insisting on Munro's belonging to a realist tradition argue that her mapping of a parallel, for a realist writer formerly unauthorized, world of experiences (women's daydreams, female fantasy, women's relationship to their bodies) extends, deepens or heightens the thematic, generic, and narrative repertoire of the realist tradition according to the principle of supplementing I argue that she metaphorically transforms the gothic convention of parallel worlds to problematize the ideology of gender as presented in the (alternate possible world) female gothic resolution. I argue that her narratives of the 1990s interrogate to what extent the female gothic resolution corroborates the upholding of the patriarchal sex/gender matrix of western societies by presenting heroines who (1) fail to be deserving heroines (Chapter 3), (2) opt out of the female gothic romance (Chapter 4), and (3)

who seek connections other than the heterosexual companionate family that consists of the heroine and her adequately (re)-engendered husband (Chapter 5).

The third chapter examines how Munro's fiction in the 1990s revises the central gothic convention of the bifurcation of the textual world. It argues that bifurcation appears in a threefold manner: (1) as the often discussed presentation of "worlds alongside" (Nischik 206), i.e., the portrayal of others' parallel lives, (2) as a narrative method of intertwining parallel narratives within the space of one short story reflecting upon each other as the technical manifestation of "others' lives" or "worlds alongside," and (3) as the separation of the world of action and the world of memory into a textual actual and an alternate possible world (the interiorization of the convention).

I will argue that Munro's concerted revision of the fundamental convention of the bifurcation of the gothic textual world into two systematically interrogates the construction of the female gothic heroine by undermining the female heroic value of irreproachability, which traditionally guarantees the female gothic romance closure (happy ending). I will point out how the revision of the convention of the two worlds affects the major female gothic topoi of "seeing differently" (Wall 208), "conscious worth" (Radcliffe, *The Mysteries* 272; see also DeLamotte, *Perils* 36-38) and redemptive knowledge. "Seeing differently," the capacity to enlarge the world through vision that goes beyond perception dramatizes the heroine's worthiness; "conscious worth," the heroine's conviction of her own irreproachability, underlies all her actions, even those that transgress the boundaries of feminine proprieties, for which she would deserve punishment (in the alternate possible/real world) were they not necessary for her survival (in the textual actual/gothic otherworld); whereas redemptive knowledge is the gothic boon that she finds when wandering in the gothic otherworld, which is the key to her release and successful social reintegration. "Conscious worth," which lends a sense of inevitability to the heroine's success at creating a new (alternate possible/real) world as the closure of the erotic plot, is interrogated through the topoi of "see[ing] differently" (Wall 208) and of intentional blindness; whereas redemptive knowledge, a key to the successful resolution of the quest plot, is undermined by the theme of complicitous knowledge.

Munro's heroines of the 1990s are far from being irreproachable: they build a "spiritual class barrier" (DeLamotte, *Perils* 36) of "conscious worth" between themselves and others on false grounds, which eventually crumbles; they are intentionally blind to the victimization of others; they lie, simulate, become accomplices in the covering over of crimes; and the (gothic boon of) knowledge that could redeem them is the acknowledgement of dark otherworlds in their unacknowledged parallel lives or within themselves as well as of their

own complicity. This revision reroutes the female gothic closure since the happy ending (as a reconfigured heterosexual partnership) cannot be formulated in the moral language of right and justice (Gilligan esp. 73, 174), that is, whether the heroine *deserves* it or not, or if it still is, the question is what kind of a relationship she deserves.

The chapter opens with a discussion of two stories in *Open Secrets*, “Open Secrets” and “Vandals.” I will argue that while “Open Secrets” sets the course for reading the rest of the collection by bringing the gothic otherworld closer to home, “Vandals” complicates its presence by conjoining it with the theme of intentional blindness.

Intentional blindness is not used in the medical sense, though it is closely related. It is used to describe the impulse not to notice phenomena that would force one to revise one’s perceptual hypothesis because of the scarcity of information or because of one’s expectations. Several of Munro’s heroines expect their lives and the heroes’ acts to follow a course aimed at union in marriage, the happy ending of female gothic romances confirming the heroine’s worth. When they do not move into that direction, characters learn not to notice the concessions they make to be able to uphold an illusion of their worthiness. In short, intentional blindness as a strategic move to counterbalance unpleasant truths allows these characters to see only what their mind’s eye will.

In the chapter I also argue that the intense visual quality of Munro’s recent short stories constructs her fiction as gothic because description serves a radically different end from what realist critical accounts suggest. Whereas most critics see her meticulous portrayal of surfaces as a sign of documentary realism, I claim that its role is to be sought elsewhere. On the one hand, descriptive passages are sites where the two realities clash; on the other, vision, what characters see, also acts a test—it is here where the validity of their perception is decided about. Female gothic heroines literally see things and persons into being, when they look at something or someone that is not just looking but seeing in the sense of making sense because seeing requires that they practice several faculties: the faculty to see, think, interpret, and feel. That is, gothic works suggest that there exists an underlying reality, which can be experienced only when due weight is given to cognition, imagination, emotion, which together will lead to valid judgment. What characters see is not in the service of authorizing a fictional world through the particularization of the scene but to emphasize that there are several ways to experience reality (DeLamotte 46). Visuality, thus, does not stand in the service of realist particularization, instead it acts as a test to decide whether gothic protagonists are able “to see differently” (Wall 208).

The import of the protagonist’s ability “to see differently” also signifies where the gothic stands *vis a vis* the realist tradition in the cultural transition of the eighteenth century

from an oral-visual-communal culture to a textual literate-verbal-private one. Whereas realist fiction dwells in Enlightenment rationality which prefers “summarization, codification, schematization” (Stafford 103) and hypervisibility to thick and suggestive description, the gothic deliberately halts the eye turning it into a learning interface. Whereas the former guarantees controlled private behavior and its systematic reproducibility through education, the latter underlines the importance of individual sensation and reflection in the learning process. In short, gothic visibility stands in the service of problematizing individual experience as opposed to the realist tendency to (re)produce a consensus about its essence.

The fourth chapter focuses on Munro’s traveling heroines—although till the appearance of *Open Secrets* the critical commonplace that Munro’s characters live a guarded and circumscribed life in their native Sowesto region, or at the most in British Columbia, seemed to be a truism. Indeed, up to her *Open Secrets* there have been only few references to places outside Canada in her fiction spanning over three decades.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, this volume alone features three protagonists who travel overseas into regions as far as Albania, New Zealand, and Australia; moreover, one character is reportedly abducted by aliens and she travels into outer space.

Travel in the life routes of female gothic heroines occupies a pivotal position. On the one hand, it establishes the basic situation (the topos of crossing the threshold [Campbell 245-46])—the heroine must leave the place of origin so that she can challenge the legitimacy of the rules that threaten her physical, social, and psychic integrity—and thus it provides her an opportunity to prove her strength of character (or, in Ellen Moers’s rendering, her heroism). Moers identifies four kinds of heroism: traveling, loving, performing, and educating heroism (*Literary* 101 *passim*); the gothic heroine is a traveling heroine. It is during her travel that she can confront scenes unavailable to her in the confinement of her home and thus she can practice her faculty “to see differently” (Wall 208). On the other hand, traveling heroism also points to the paradoxical nature of the female gothic as both subversive and accommodating. Moers conceives of travel as a device to send maidens, both fictional and real (its readers), on distant and exciting journeys without offending the female proprieties to substitute for the male picaresque tradition as female travel fantasy (*Literary* 122-27), while the heroine’s experiences also serve to hammer in the truth that nothing can supersede domestic happiness.

I will discuss three short stories in detail in which the heroines’ travel into a far-away, different, almost unreal world forces them to see and interpret everything around them just like in paradigmatic female gothic fiction where the heroines’ adventures similarly start by a travel to a (gothic) otherworld. What they see or do not see—or even will not see—will then

define how they will reinterpret their position in the world as well as negotiate the terms on which they will be able to redefine themselves *vis a vis* the gender roles they inhabited previously. Munro's neo-gothic heroines, however, opt out of the promise of domestic bliss, the happy ending of the erotic plot in the female gothic double plot structure.

The fifth chapter examines the roles dictated by gender ideology from a different perspective since it focuses on the other rite of passage into full femininity beside marriage, motherhood. Chapter 3 shows how Munro's heroines do, or do not, become heroines by proving their worthiness, or lack thereof, through their capacity to see; Chapter 4 argues that her narratives problematize the gender lesson the female gothic romance ending—somewhat hesitantly but still—inculcates; whereas Chapter 5 discusses how Munro neo-gothically challenges the premise of female gothic domestic bliss; i.e., that happiness dwells in the undisturbed home of a companionate heterosexual couple. I show how Munro “writ[es] beyond the ending” (DuPlessis 4) of the female gothic romance to search for adequate ways to connect female characters—mothers, daughters, and female relatives—the gothic romance has not found ways to conceive.

The failure of the female gothic romance to address motherhood adequately partly originates from its double plot structure, its division into a quest/ambition plot and an erotic plot. The quest/ambition plot of the female gothic is mostly motivated by a female-female desire where the heroine finds out the truth about other female characters, most particularly about her mother. With this knowledge, she is then able to find out who she really is and what position she enjoys in the gothic familial world. This knowledge will lead to the redefinition of herself, most visible in her changed relationships to the villain and the hero, who is mostly absent throughout the plot but still arrives just on time to prove the heroine's worth by marrying her. This is the happy ending of the erotic plot that confirms the completion, and thus the end, of the quest/ambition plot as well: the heroine's travel and quest are over, she can exist as a happy wife forever and ever. (This is a highly schematic summary of the two plots.)

Whereas Chapter 4 argues that Munro problematizes the erotic plot of the female gothic by investigating what comes after the happy ending, this chapter problematizes the quest/ambition plot by examining familial relationships between women: the entry into motherhood, the mother-daughter bond, as well as the connectedness of women. In Munro's female (neo-)gothic the main emphasis falls on the revision of the mother-daughter relationship, which appears as one particularly ridden with conflicts, which yet does not recycle the underlying, and almost compulsory, theme of the female gothic, that of matrophobia.

Female gothic fiction for long was seen to thrive on the fear of the mother: the fear of identification with the mother as well as separation from her, her body especially (esp. Kahane, "Gothic Mirror" 336-37; Modleski 70-71). Added to this, the fear of becoming a mother also permeates these narratives. Therefore, it was a long held tenet that one of the legacies of the female gothic is the conviction that the death of the mother is the necessary prelude to entering female autonomy.

Since the 1970s, however, readers can witness a shift from matrophobia to an engagement with her in women's fiction. It is not her absence any longer, physical or emotional, but rather her presence that defines contemporary narratives. Women writers are no longer daunted by the mother figure; just the opposite, they seek to speak in her voice. Marianne Hirsch hypothesized two decades ago that daughters speaking in their mothers' voice should necessarily express their anger at being unable to be both mothers and successful people in the world of work. Adalgisa Giorgio has shown that, indeed, daughters speaking for their mothers voice their mothers' projected anger springing from a frustrated ambivalence towards the maternal role.<sup>21</sup>

Munro's fiction fits into this shift, but with a difference. She, like many of her contemporaries, rewrites the mother-daughter plot from a new perspective: mothers are no longer absented or rejected, and neither are they glorified. But Munro's maternal voice is not only that of anger—although in some of her stories young mothers are especially ambivalent *vis a vis* their own motherhood—but one of reconciliation that still cannot be seen as the complicitous ideology of the beaten enabling them to bask in the light of fake autonomy.

The focus on the mother-daughter theme is not novel in Munro's fiction. Her earliest works have already addressed this rather troubled relationship; in a sense, the mother-daughter theme acts as a recurring and unifying subject throughout her oeuvre. The figure of the "Gothic Mother" (Munro, "Peace" 195) in her earlier fiction, amply discussed by several critics (e.g.: Redekop 4-10, 52-54; Howells, *Alice* 20-24, 38; Rasporich 135-39, esp. 137-38), however is recast in her fiction of the nineties. In a sense, this figure modeled upon Munro's own mother<sup>22</sup> disappears entirely and gives her place over to three kinds of adult female figures. One of these is not a mother, since she lives out the female gothic dream of finding a deserving, i. e., sufficiently tamed, husband with whom she can form a companionate family that children would complicate beyond a tolerable extent. The other two, however, have not sidestepped motherhood, though only one of them welcomes it. These mothers approximate the two models proposed by Adrienne Rich, who argues that women should reclaim their experience of motherhood by rejecting it as an institution regulated in the interest of patriarchal society (225). Thus, I have termed one type of Munro's recent mother figures as



“institutional mothers” and the other as “reluctant mothers.” While the former sacrifices herself at the altar of motherhood in pursuing an ideal that leads to her own repressed anger and resenting children (akin to the mother figures speaking through their daughters Hirsch hypothesized earlier), the latter consciously rebels against motherhood as an institution. Her rebellion is directed at the joint institution of housekeeping—as women’s only tolerable desire—and motherly self-sacrifice. The first of these institutions encloses women into the home—and women have long been associated with the house in gothic fiction—while the second transforms them into a maternal body—an equally disavowed prospect.

By discussing three short stories, I will argue that Munro reroutes the conventional hostility of female figures and proposes a break with female gothic technologies (such as portioning out unwanted aspects of femininity among female monitory figures) by writing them into connection with one another.

The theoretical background to the discussion of female monitory figures (such as the monstrous housekeeper and nurse) is provided by Bakhtin’s and Mary Russo’s theories of the grotesque, whereas to the discussion of the mother figures various psychoanalytical theories of the maternal and mothering will be enlisted. The turn from mostly Foucauldian theories of the gothic (Miles, Moglen, Hoeveler) to psychoanalytical theories of the maternal is justified for two reasons: (1) in Munro’s fiction the topos of desire as a treacherous experience enticing one with the promise of self-abandonment beyond self-consciousness occupies a pivotal position. Although desire has been proved to be related to cultural norms and produced by culturally and historically specific discourses, in part produced by language (Noble 16-22), cultural and historical accounts by themselves cannot account for its *truth*, where ‘truth’ does not mean an abstract, hypothetical true meaning but its experience as something real. (2) Psychoanalytical theories are not invoked to prove them right through Munro’s texts; neither is the coherence of the texts proven full with their help. Rather, in line with William Patrick Day, I believe that one cannot ignore the obvious links that exist between the gothic and psychoanalysis on thematic and structural levels as well since both are attempts to account for “the turbulence of [individual’s] psychic existence” (179) in their different languages. Conceiving of their compatibility in these terms means that the parallels between them are neither the result of their inherent traits, nor produced by conscious choice. Instead, they are produced in culturally and historically specific circumstances as a result of their separate yet related responses to their times.

Of the psychoanalytical theories, the discussion will utilize Melanie Klein’s theory of the archaic mother and splitting, Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject, and Barbara Creed’s theory of the monstrous feminine, while I will hypothesize that Munro’s proposal for a

reconfigured model of female-female connection is to be sought in Jessica Benjamin's intersubjective theory of mothering based on the ideals of relationality and reciprocity while also recognizing the conflicts that perpetually need to be negotiated.

#### *1. 4. Methodology*

My aim is to show to what extent Munro's fiction of the 1990s is gothic in its resistance to conform to several expectations in its negotiation of ideologically conceived boundaries while, with a meta-gothic impulse putting the gender ideology of female gothic fiction also in relief. Therefore, against the background of systematic close reading the dissertation aims at a theoretically informed but rigorously text-centered focus that builds its argumentation on close engagement with the selected narratives while bringing together a range of theoretical and critical tools and sources.

The reasons for privileging close reading are threefold. (1) On the one hand, as the history of Munro criticism shows, because of their extreme complexity notwithstanding their shortness, Munro's narratives easily yield to theoretical readings: the same text may be read to support fundamentally different theoretical frameworks. (This is why I also include short summaries of the few pieces of critical readings that have appeared on the stories I discuss, even if they do not directly support my gothic reading; these pieces serve as a reminder of the dialogicity of Munro's texts, which should propel one to continue the search for diverse premises on which to address a Munroian short story since within their own frameworks these explications are also fully justified.) (2) On the other hand, it is my hard-earned conviction that any attempt at interpreting a Munro text best compares to creating a Shelleyesque "botched-up" monster, which, however much it might seem like a whole, will yet always spill over at the stitches, transforming the interpretive act into a performance of gothic excess. Thus, I find that small, focused—local—analyses are needed. (3) Also, my claims go against the grain of Munro criticism; therefore, I think my position needs to be elucidated on a closely textual basis.

Therefore, the discussion of individual short stories starts with a tendentious reading for their plots. This approach is justified by two reasons: (1) No summary does justice to a Munro story<sup>23</sup> and as disparate critical explications attest there is no such thing as equivocal meaning even on the level of the plot when reading a Munroian narrative. My interpretations of the individual texts have been reached by placing them against the background of a female gothic tradition. I do not exclude the possibility that against a different background, different plots may be retold. (2) My approach is thematic; without providing an overall account of the

individual narratives I could not point to specific loci where Munro's female (neo-)gothic diverges from an overall tradition.

To do justice to the complexity of the narratives without compromising the integrity of the diverse theoretical approaches, I felt compelled to fall back on the use of extensive endnotes to clarify my theoretical standing in particular issues, though I am aware of their limitations. The difficulties of balancing textual and theoretical complexities were further exacerbated by the unresolved taxonomic status of the field of gothic studies as well. This is also reflected in matters as mundane as spelling: throughout the dissertation I use lower case spelling for "gothic" both as a noun and as an adjective although I am aware that some critics insist on the upper case whereas others prefer the lower one. My spelling does not reflect a theoretical allegiance.

The version of English used is American English, except in titles and quotations where the original spelling has been preserved. In terms of manuscript style, my text conforms to the current MLA standard; it diverges in three minor respects: the lines are fully justified for aesthetic reasons, the endnotes are not single-spaced for readability, and paragraph numbers are supplied when quoting an electronic source without pagination.

My discussion seeks both to recognize and participate in an almost three-hundred year long series of critiques, debates, and negotiations about gender. My argument is appreciative of the various subversive strategies female gothic novelists have engaged in ever since they started to question the gender ideology at work in western middle-class culture, even if much of my argument turns on showing how Munro's female (neo-)gothic works to refute concepts that have been spawned by what Hoeveler calls "gothic feminism" (*Professionalization* 7). Yet, my translation of the Murrovian text's ideological thrust does not seek to critique to silence the voices speaking in "gothic"/ "victim feminist" (N. Wolf 136-7) language. (Hoeveler finds the source of "victim feminism" to lie in eighteenth-century discourse about the rewards of female innocence, which she interprets as an attempt to re-position women in a gender dichotomy, therefore, she equates the two [xi-xii].) Rather than show where and why "victim/gothic feminist" language fails, I emphasize how contemporary fiction contemplates some of its enduring legacies. Behind this lies the conviction that even popular female gothic fiction forces readers to reconsider typological gendered concepts as their reinstatement already carries a weight of subversion. My claim is that Munro in her fiction of the 1990s revises female gothic conventions not so much for discrediting a popular gothic tongue but to sharpen it to a fuller potential of subversion.

## 2. *Deceptive Surfaces*

When looking at the critical history of Munro's fiction, one cannot but wonder about the insistence to read it as realist fiction *par excellence*.<sup>24</sup> I propose that this insistence has been made possible by the intersection of two major critical discourses: the canonization of Canadian literature and a particular understanding of realism. I want to challenge both by (1) highlighting how critics sought to balance their endeavor to create an unbroken tradition of Canadian regional realism and their agreement that what Munro's fiction portrays is "the other side of dailiness" (Munro, *Lives* 249); and (2) by pointing to the assumptions underlying their shared understanding of realism that leads to a strategic blindness to the gothicism of her narratives.

In what follows, I first offer an outline of the ways Munro's critics accounted for the divergence of her fiction from an assumed ideal of realism manifested in the aesthetic practices of its canonized representatives, though never specified in detail. I claim that they failed to negotiate whether Munro's fiction conforms to its ideological underpinnings also; without doing so, however, they could not but resort to characterizing her fiction as a devious discourse that works according to the logic of supplementation: it supplements the thematic, generic, and technical repertoire of canonical realism. Second, I point to the assumptions Munro critics share about what constitutes realism, whose roots are to be found in the critical history of the early novel rather than in any inherent characteristics of realist discourse itself, by arguing that Watt's theory of realism and its revision by McKeon have served to privilege realist discourse. Third, I suggest that Munro criticism has unquestioningly, but strategically, accepted the heritage of the premises on which the history of the early (realist) novel was initially built and has measured her fiction against it. Fourth, leaning on Moglen's and Miles's revisions of the history of the early novel, which in their rendering does not comprise of realism (understood here not as a canonized tradition but as an aesthetic practice subsisting on a specific ideological base) only but of a different mode as well (Moglen calls it the fantastic [1] whereas Miles the romantic /anti-/novel or philosophical romance ["What" 180]—of which the gothic is a subset), I propose a historical and critical context of the gothic in which Munro's narratives seem less eccentric. I will further narrow my focus on to the female gothic in the comic mode, and by pointing to one of its major conventions, the bifurcation of the textual world into a textual actual (unreal gothic otherworld) and an alternate possible (real) world, I argue that her fiction of the 1990s belongs to the tradition of the female gothic. Lastly, I propose that Munro deliberately interrogates the ideological legacies of this tradition by revising its several conventions as well as argue that her fiction should be conceived of within a contemporary formulating tradition of female (neo-)gothic.

## 2. 1. Munro's Realism: A Critical Overview

Munro's critical career started after the publication of her second volume *Lives*, which brought her both popular and critical success. It was this novel that set the course of later criticism: her subject matter (women's lives) was highlighted, her own comments on the autobiographical sources of her fiction received ample attention, her setting, Southwestern Ontario (the place she grew up and later returned to), were often referred to, which all lead to thinking of her fiction as a fairly transparent representation of the author's (actual) reality. One critic states, for example, that Munro's "photographic or documentary realism is an essential aspect of her art" (Keith 162), while another claims that she is a folk artist, whose medium is that of "common clay, of rural life and custom, and mass popular culture"; her subject matter is "the ethnic realities of a multicultural country," "regional cultures," and "'real life' lived by the people" (Rasporich 89) complemented with the confrontation of "her own femininity" (92).

Nonetheless, critics also signaled their unease to claim Munro for a "realist" literary tradition, though for various reasons. What becomes conspicuously clear when systematically perusing critical opinion about why, or why not, her fiction is part of the tradition is the fact that the term itself seems to be used on account of its elasticity, out of critical desperation rather than on the base of any firm conviction. Except for one critic, maybe: he suggests that although her documentary methods make her into a realist, she "has never mastered those transformations of form with which major writers handle the great climactic shifts of life" (Woodcock, "Plots" 250); i.e., to his mind, realism is constituted as a well-defined (i.e., canonized) set of norms with a thematic and technical repertoire that Munro has missed by aiming too high.

Others chose different routes and instead of decrying her inability to live up to the norm set by more accomplished realists, they defend her art by pointing to her conscious challenge to the canonical realist tradition, which has proved to be too narrow for her. If her challenge is not immediately noticed, it is because she veils her manipulation all too well. E. D. Blodgett was the first major critic who in his landmark critical volume of Munro's work in 1988 argues that: "To believe [ ... ] that Munro is *primarily* a realist, that her knowledge depends exclusively upon relations with 'family, neighbors and friends,' is to forsake fiction for the kind of self-righteous and self-serving arrogance that small-town journalism cannot live without" (*Alice* 1; emphasis mine). That is, she does not simply record what happens in the world but she both records *and* transforms events, characters, etc., into art. Almost a decade later, Christa E. Canitz and Roger Seamon still feel the need to defend her by

claiming: “While Munro is certainly a realist, she is not naive” (68) because what might be seen as an impulse to document her time and world is in fact a conscious use of several most sophisticated rhetorical strategies. Fellow writers similarly see her to have “deepened the channels of realism” (Mukherjæ 31) by “penetrat[ing] the smooth surface of reality” (McCarthy 1078) and thus “push[ing] her fiction beyond realism” (Coldwell 778).

Her manipulation of the traditional thematic and technical repertoire of canonized realist fiction was noted early; critics pointed out that Munro’s fiction pushes at its limits along the lines that the logic of supplementation dictates. While it represents the everyday (ordinary people in an ordinary setting with ordinary experiences), it also fully mines the possibilities that parallelism as a structure offers because it embraces modes, genres, themes, and techniques that do not conventionally appear in realist fiction. Her parallelism, however, enriches rather than undermines her regionalist-realist endeavor. The parallel structures that her fiction thrives on have been formulated in critical discussions as: (1) the juxtaposition of the underlying assumptions of the canonical tradition of realism to those of another literary tradition, as (2) the widening of the thematic repertoire of canonical realism by including what it has traditionally omitted, and as (3) the problematization of some of its technical means.

(1) Critics have identified three literary traditions to which Munro’s realism can be juxtaposed since it incorporates some of their insights. These are: modernism, fantasy, and autobiography. Although all critics underline that these significantly influence the ways Munro’s fiction is perceived, they still assume that they do not constitute a serious challenge to the privileged position of realism in Munro’s oeuvre. W. R. Martin, for instance, argues that whereas “the exact tone or texture of how things are,” “a kind of super realism” (Munro qtd. in Martin, *Paradox* 10; ‘super’ is used here synonymously with ‘hyper-’) is an essential aspect of her art, she blurs the line between the strange and the familiar by using both parallel and paradox in the description of the same setting, character, or event resulting in “a complex counterpointing of opposed truths” (Martin, *Paradox* 1). Thus, he compares her to William Blake and James Joyce, with whom she shares an innovative (anti-traditional, anti-realist) vision. Their innovation lies in their willingness to deal with oppositions, tensions, paradoxes, sometimes, even failures, who yet provide—even if only implicitly—resolutions in the end. Because of these “moments of vision in which the oppositions are reconciled or are seen as parallel, at least in imagination” (Martin, *Paradox* 13), Munro becomes a modernist writer since her “stereoscopic” vision (1) develops as an interplay between realist and super-realist representation, and their contradiction is reconciled in a dosing (modernist) epiphany. In short, Martin argues that although she seems to undermine the realist faith in representation by creating a tension through the joint use of paradox and parallel, which results in a

suspension of equivocal truths, she resolves the tension with the help of a modernist epiphany, to yet arrive at a final modernist-realist resolution in the Brechtian sense.<sup>25</sup>

Fantasy, especially female fantasy, is singled out by Howells as the tradition in conjunction with, or in juxtaposition to, Munro's realism should be interpreted. Although Howells also allows that Munro's stories are "firmly situated within the conventions of realism," she adds that her presentation of setting is "very much in the manner of the documentary photographers of the American South" (*Alice* 18). She continues, "such scrupulous attention to details reveals the 'other side of dailiness' where people's lives [ ... ] are not only 'dull and simple' but also 'amazing and unfathomable' (*LGW*, 249)" (*Alice* 18). This is achieved by "working within a referential framework and then collapsing it by shifting into a different fictional mode," argues Howells (31). In Munro's fiction thus:

Both realism and fantasy are revealed as narrative conventions for translating reality into words though they work according to different principles, each leaving out a dimension which the other includes and each disrupting the other's design. [ ... ] [In her fiction] both kinds of discourse are present. Indeed, they are interchangeable, so that the familiar and the unfamiliar are both contained within the same narrative structure. (32)

Thus, what Martin sees as a clash between an essentially modernist(-realist) vision based on paradoxes and parallels and final resolution, Howells sees as the tension between interchangeable discourses. Yet, both insist that Munro's fiction provides a textual mapping of an ordinary, Canadian world and an imaginary (fantasy) or hitherto unknown (e.g.: history, women's secret inner lives) one.

Margaret Gail Osachoff and Thacker attribute the surprise that her short stories cause to her manipulation of the autobiographical mode, which leads to the reader's recognition that normative generic expectations govern the reading process. Some of Munro's narratives have their acknowledged origins in her personal life, misleading readers and critics to read her fiction as autobiographical. This impulse then sharply contrasts with the transformation of supposedly autobiographical events into material for fables (Thacker, "So" 155), blurring the boundary between life (the author's actual world) and fiction.

In sum, these generic challenges ("super/hyper-realism," female fantasy, autobiography) running parallel to an essentially realist text enrich Munro's realism.

(2) The reference to Munro's contribution to the thematic repertoire of realism by showing a parallel, or alternative, actual world has been another major line in critical discussions. The thrust of the argument is best summed up by Howells, who considers Munro's fiction to expose the limits of canonized realistic fiction by including what the realist tradition omits: "what is usually hidden or unspoken within the acknowledged order of small-town social life" (*Alice* 4). Thus, women's secret lives and (voluntarily or traditionally forced)

silent knowledge about their bodies, relationships, and the costs they pay for staying within the bounds of female propriety surface in gossip and female fantasy, “open secrets” themselves, deemed unworthy for realist representation earlier. But Munro lifts these also into her fiction by exposing the arbitrary limits of what is permissible within the bounds of portraying the everyday through her challenge to the dominantly male perspective that canonical realism displays (Howells, *Alice* 3-6; see also Rasporich 90-100; Godard, “Heirs” 43-71; Kamboureli 31-38; Irvine 99-111; Redekop 2-35). What Munro adds is a female real (actual) world “out there.” Barbara Godard reasons in a similar vein, when she claims that Munro writes as a woman because she engages in double talk. Since language does not accommodate the female experience, Munro has searched for ways to express the lived experience of women (“Heirs” 43).

(3) A third major line of critical discussion arguing that Munro’s fiction pushes at the limits of a canonized realist tradition focuses on the technical aspects of her writings. The underlying assumption of this critical line seems to agree with the view advanced by David Lodge that a major distinguishing feature of realist fiction is that it invites discussion in terms of ethics and thematics, rather than poetics and aesthetics (52). Since Munro’s fiction constantly calls attention to its technical repertoire, it defies easy categorization into a realist canon; yet, critics insist, Munro supplements an already existing body of techniques because, as they are, they are not adequate for the representation of her themes.

The roots of this argument are to be found in Martin’s critique. He provides the cue for subsequent scholarship by pointing to the importance of the conflicted—“stereoscopic” (*Paradox* 1)—representation of surface detail (“Strange” 214 *passim*) in Munro’s fiction. He remarks that the close attention to surface detail (as a realist technique to promote verisimilitude) becomes in her work a defamiliarizing technique, which defamiliarizes realist representation itself. This insight is reverberated throughout Munro scholarship (e.g.: Howells, *Private* 195; Twigg 13; New, *History* 238; York 23; Rasporich 131; Woodcock, *Northern* 132; Smythe 187; Redekop 3; Ross, “At Least” 112).

A similarly significant line of argumentation concentrates on her sophisticated use of point of view. Carrington has highlighted the presence of various points of view in relation to any character, event or setting, the proliferation of the metaphors of splitting, and the “fantasies about words” (20) in Munro’s fiction. She claims that these function as indices of the fact that reality (the “out there” and the “what happened” of both the actual and textual actual worlds) is incomprehensible and uncontrollable in its totality to characters, readers, and the author as well; ambiguity permeates her narratives because Munro’s conception of the artist and her perception of the actual world as fragmented and constantly shifting does not



allow for any kind of unifying vision. In her opinion, documentary realism, the fact that Munro presents her recognizable, everyday settings in dense details, “connotes neither permanence nor control” (*Controlling* 4). As she puts it: “The documentary solidity of her surfaces is deceptive, for these surfaces repeatedly split open to reveal uncontrollable forces, both within and without” (4). Tim Struthers similarly accords a significant role to point of view in Munro’s art. He argues that the various points of view direct attention away from theme—Munro’s stories are notorious for not lending themselves to summary—, which explains why the stories seem to be motivated more by the need to tell and analyze experience than by the events of the story itself (“Alice” 108). This is the reason why Munro’s fiction does not easily fit into the now known realist canon: it invites discussion in terms of technique and not in terms of theme.

Other technical devices, less associated with the realist canon (such as description in the service of verisimilitude and point of view) have also been scrutinized. By investigating the narrative device of the catalogue, Marjorie Garson comes to the conclusion that Munro’s employment of the catalogue attests to a high degree of self-consciousness, which makes it impossible for the reader to interpret it as a naively realistic (as a synonym for transparent mimetic) method of representation. In Munro’s fiction it functions to raise the reader’s awareness about the gap between fiction and the world (45-63).<sup>26</sup> But the collusion of different representational forms (letters, newspaper articles allegedly printed in small-town papers) also work this way, which results in the recognition of these forms as “unstable, discursive, and infinitely repressive infrastructures” (Clark 53). These, eventually, denaturalize realist, used here to denote transparent mimetic, representation with the help of realist representational techniques themselves (53).

Munro’s challenge to the canonical tradition of realism, whether in its references to several literary tradition, the introduction of non-traditional themes, and the use of technical devices, is not unique on the Canadian literary scene, though. In fact, Linda Hutcheon argues that Munro neatly fits into a specifically Canadian paradigm in the way she meditates on literary representation. Hutcheon’s claim is based on her notion of Canada’s ex-centricity, which she understands as a Canadian impulse to define “Canadanness” against centers. Munro yields to this impulse by rejecting a central tradition of literature, realism. But rather than discard it altogether, she challenges it, as repressed minorities or women would do *vis à vis* hegemonic establishments. Hence is the interconnectedness of *her* realist practice and the privileging of the repressed dimensions of women’s life. Accordingly, even if Munro worked in isolation in her early career, she still epitomizes the Canadian impulse to deconstruct traditional representational modes from within the modes themselves (Hutcheon, *Canadian* 4-

5, 208). As such, her fiction compares to Latin-American magic realism since magic realism itself is also less a rejection of than a challenge to realism through fantasy and oral storytelling (208). This argument surfaces from time to time (e.g: Rasporich 131; Woodcock, *Northern* 132; Smythe 187; Redekop 3; Delbaere 78; Ross, “At Least” 112; Stouck 259; Moss), alone and also in conjunction with John Moss’s description of her fiction as “super-” or “hyper-realism” (*Readers* 215) prompted by Munro’s own comments. (In an early interview she expressed her preference for “a kind of super realism” as in the paintings of Edward Hopper, which has been cited ever since [e.g.: Martin, *Alice* 10; Howells, *Private* 195; Twigg 13; New, *A History* 238; York 23].)

At the same time, it also needs to be noted, there appeared critics who vehemently reject the relevance of realism, in its Canadian understanding as well, for a discussion of Munro’s oeuvre. To their minds, her fiction is fully responsive to the postmodern aesthetics because it deconstructs the notion of all stable systems preempting the possibility that “truth” (a term gesturing at “reality as stable, intelligible, and masterable” [Heble 6-7]) and “the real” (“a world ‘out there’” [4, 6])—concepts upon which realism (as an ontologically grounded faith in the possibility of representation) subsists—exist. Ajay Heble especially argues that in Munro’s “paradigmatic discourse” (5-7) the meaning of any event always comes into being through its associations with all kinds of other events which it follows and precedes (80). That is, “‘versions,’ ‘legends,’ and ‘fantasies’ replace the actual events of the past” (42); nothing is free from perpetual re-interpretation; “truth” (Heble 6-7) and “the real” (4, 6) are utterly contextual and associational. Her art is a “poetics of mistrust” (82), since, against all semblance, nothing is stable or transparent in it. Thus, Munro not only foregoes linear representation by shuffling time sequences thereby problematizing the cause-and-effect pattern (a fundamental feature of the realist tradition), but she also undermines all distinction between past and present, truth and imagination. In a similar vein, Mark Nunes posits the absence of any ontological center, pre-existent truth, whole or reality at the center of Munro’s fiction. Instead, with an essentialist stroke of the hand, he claims it to display a “female consciousness” that accepts conditional, contingent arrangement and “metastable” ontologies (11) in place of a given (pre-existent) “‘really there’ prior to narration” (12).

On perusing the critical opinions above about whether, and if yes, in what sense and to what extent, Munro is a realist writer, what jumps to the foreground is the very indefiniteness of the concept of realism. All quoted critics use it in reference to something else. Whereas for critics like Beverley J. Rasporich “realism” connotes a faithfulness to the reality (“out there,” “really happened”) of experience (Munro as an autobiographical author, as a woman writer, as a feminist or regionalist writer); for Carrington, Howells, and Thacker it means an

epistemological quest (how can we know the real—"out there," "what happened"—when there are divergent points of view due to differences in the subject, subject positions, contexts, etc., representable through various discourses); for Martin, Garson, and Miriam Marty Clark it can be pinned down in its formal techniques (realism as set of narrative techniques); while for Nunes and Heble its distinguishing feature (*vis a vis* postmodernism) is its investment in an ontologically grounded universe. Consequently, Munro's fiction supplements the realism of canonical realists either because it includes literarily unauthorized experience (thematic supplementation), or because it shifts the issue of how we come to know to what ways of knowing there exist at all (widening the epistemological quest), or because it uses realist devices in an innovative manner (supplementing an existing technical repertoire), or because it creates an undecidability on account of the many competing alternatives in place of an intelligible meaning of any event (gesturing at an ontological crisis by exploring the ways in which the "reality effect" of any event is reached).

To clarify why such disparate conceptualizations may exist side by side, I now turn to the rise of realism, as well as to the rise of its criticism, both of which are inseparable from the rise of the novel. This will lead to a conceptualization of the gothic as inseparable from realism as I argue that realism and the gothic derive from the same source, they register the same historical and social changes in their disparate voices (heteroglossia), but critical history has covered up the ways in which they participate in a dialogue about individual identity and the value of personal experience in their texts.

## 2. 2. *The Rise of Realism*

In the followings I attempt to retrace the source of the various conceptualizations of realism encountered in the history of Munro criticism by going back to a pivotal moment in the critical history of the concept. By addressing its grand theory as formulated by Watt, which has defined its understanding ever since, as well as McKeon's grand revisionist theory, which has shed light on different aspects of the historical context in which the realist novel came to rise, I propose a working definition of its fundamental formal and ideological characteristics *vis a vis* the gothic.

"Realism" is a problematic term. This comes hardly as a surprise if one looks at its critical history starting with Watt's compelling explanation about the origin of the term and its meaning in his landmark study, *The Rise of the English Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957). Here he explains that the term derives from the French word *réalisme*, which was first used as an aesthetic description to differentiate Rembrandt's paintings of *verité humaine* from the neo-classical paintings of *idéalité poétique* (10). The term was later

extended to denote literary production: it was used as an antonym to “idealism,” which was later extended to refer to the depiction of so-called “low subjects”<sup>27</sup> and “allegedly immoral tendencies” (10). As Watt warns, however, realism in no way can be equated with either “low subjects” or their doings, because, although realist works attempt to portray a great variety of human experiences, ultimately, what matters is not what they present but how they present it. Watt defines it, in short, as “truth to individual experience” (13).

As he explains, the rise of realism was made possible by a shift in cultural paradigm starting in the seventeenth century but finding its full-blown articulation in the eighteenth century. (When talking of a paradigm, I will use it as it is understood in social sciences and those schools of political economy that emphasize the embeddedness of any economy in a social and political fabric, i.e., it refers to a historically constructed, shared set of internalized and [often] unarticulated assumptions, beliefs, premises and norms in a society that results in a widely accepted model or pattern of values, thinking, and behavior.) The new cultural paradigm accorded much greater importance to the individual’s experience than earlier eras, which also meant that collective traditions of earlier times lost in their significance. This largely affected literary expression as well, since the author’s task was no longer to fully master pre-established formal and thematic conventions; instead, he or she had to “convey the impression of fidelity to human experience” (I. Watt 13). This was accomplished in various ways: “To begin with, the actors in the plot and the scene of their actions had to be placed in a new literary perspective: the plot had to be acted out by particular people in particular circumstances, rather than, as had been common in the past, by general human types against a background primarily determined by the appropriate literary convention” (15). The particularization of the setting and the characters, naturally, influenced narrative technique as well, since new ways had to be devised to lend particularity to former conventional settings and character types. The realist novel—because Watt treats realism and the novel as coterminous—thus is first and foremost distinguished from all other literary productions in two ways: (1) in its individualization of its characters and (2) its particularization of background or the setting (18-27). The former is accomplished by the designation of a proper name, for example, the latter, by attention to the physical surroundings against the backdrop of which the plot is acted out.

A third, and a most significant point, however, also has to be highlighted. (3) A new consciousness of time evolved ensuing John Locke’s definition of personal identity “as an identity of consciousness through duration in time” (I. Watt 21). The invention of duration was significant because thus, as Watt explains: “the individual was in touch with his own continuing identity through memory of his past thoughts and actions” (21). This has a far-

reaching consequence for the individual and his or her relationship to community because it means that the source of personal identity comes to be located in personal memory as opposed to, say, status in society. In fact, it is the realist novel that adopted this idea in its formulating a subject matter which hinged on the exploration of personal identity “as it is defined in the interpretation of its past and present self-awareness” (21).

Realism in literature thus means an attention to an individualized character’s experience in particularized time and space in duration. Life is presented “by time” (E. M. Forster qtd. in I. Watt 22). Also, causation takes precedence over coincidence, exchanging a largely ahistorical outlook for historical process preparing the way for the development of characters. What found its way into literature from “philosophical realism” (as truthfulness to individual experiences, personal identity as an identity through duration, causation) in the form of certain narrative techniques evolved into “a set of narrative procedures,” called by Watt as “formal realism” (32)<sup>28</sup>; i.e., it is an attention to setting, proper names, portraying “life by time,” and a referential use of language (verisimilitude).

McKeon is fully responsive to Watt’s formulation of realism, which emerges both as a habit of mind (“philosophical realism”) and as a narrative technique (“formal realism”), because it insists on a historical and contextual discussion of the rise of the novel. However, he extends and, to some extent, problematizes it both in its quality as a vision and as a technique. His challenge to Watt’s formulation can be summarized in the short proposition that many realist works in fact continued to recycle stock situations, stock characters, and other conventions from the medieval romance tradition.<sup>29</sup> In addition, many of those works that Watt designates as realist (i.e., faithful to the particularized individual’s personal experiences), soon engendered formulas—or were formulaic themselves—contradicting the statement that particularization is an essential element of the realist novel. In fact, the realist novel is highly conventional.<sup>30</sup>

As regards McKeon’s other claim (i.e., the realist vision is more problematic than Watt allows it), he argues that the realist works of art in the eighteenth century evolved out of a crisis in values. To begin with, he states that the eighteenth century experienced two great categorical instabilities: one regarded generic instabilities, while the other social ones. These two appeared in tandem and, therefore, they can be studied in tandem. Generic instabilities presented themselves as a crisis in “how to tell the truth in narrative” (McKeon, “Generic” 383), where McKeon defines “truth” as an epistemological crisis that titillates between received “truths” and experiential “truths” with a claim to historicity (what “really happened”; 386). Whereas prior to the crisis, set conventions helped to lead eternal, received truths to light—truths that were independent of any human individual—in the early eighteenth century

old conventions, especially romance conventions, were re-evaluated. They came to represent an outdated, idealist way of knowing. In addition, the medieval romance came to stand for a kind of deceit because it deliberately includes lying and fictionalizing (“Generic” 385). Thus, people understood the old feudal order to have produced the romance, which is nothing but a deliberate lie in the service of aristocratic values and an outmoded status quo. In opposition to this, the new social order produced “progressivist” pieces, which claimed to represent the (historical) truth—truth as history. These “progressivist” pieces are known to the reader as “true relations” narratives,<sup>31</sup> which thrive on and foster “naïve empiricism.” Naïve empiricism, however, soon came under attack because the works engendered by it display a value system that accords an overwhelming importance to personal experience. By privileging personal experience they also redefine the source of truth (from tradition to individual) because in order that the source of truth can be securely located within the individual, writers call upon circumstantial evidence to prove the protagonist worthy of the trust of readers.<sup>32</sup> In consequence, the source of personal value is refigured. The protagonist has to earn the reader’s trust, and thus value is no longer signified by the status that birth confers upon the individual. Instead, value, virtue, and honor are hard earned by experience. In short, these narratives foster a view in which the individual gains value by experience: you are what you experience and what you accomplish. It is your achievement and the ensuing just reward that show who you are. Real honor is personal honor (McKeon, “Generic” 391), real value is personal value.

Thus, on one side there is the old tradition and old value system finding its literary expression in the highly conventional romances, on the other side, at an opposite pole, there are narratives that promote both a naïve empiricism and personal value above social value. McKeon identifies a middling literary phenomenon that he sees to profess a conservative value system. Although the literature of this kind denies the rigid, aristocratic, convention- and rule-bound, anti-individualistic, pro-status quo ideology, it does not subscribe to the naïve, progressivist, individualistic ideology either, because, to the conservative mind, it represents “the naked cash nexus” (“Generic” 392), i.e., you are what your experience has earned for you. To McKeon’s mind, the realist novel, and thus realism, evolved out of this conservative ideology that was neither aristocratic, nor upstart middle-class. However, neither could this conservative ideology specify where exactly it stood and what values it professed. It defined what it was by pointing to what it was not. That is, realism, both as a vision and as a set of formal techniques, is produced by the logic of neither-nor. Realism is a habit of mind that raises questions of truth (is it eternal or experiential?) and value (where is it located?) together while privileging private experience.

The result is a mixed, rather contradictory, middling sort of literary production, which generated a “different standard of truth” (McKeon, “Prose” 243). The new concept is referred to as novelistic truth, characteristically found, naturally, in the novel. It differs both from the eternal truth of medieval times and the eighteenth-century concept of historical truth<sup>33</sup>—and this recognition became common knowledge by the end of the eighteenth century (243). By the mid-eighteenth century most readers, writers and critics agreed with William Godwin, who wrote: “I ask not, as a principal point, whether it be true or false? My first enquiry is, ‘Can I derive instruction from it?’” (qtd. in McKeon, “Prose” 252). Thus, the novel came to be seen as an educational and socializing tool of a formidable novelistic pedagogy, which subsists on a specific kind of truth: truth as a historically non-verifiable but socially useful, educational tool.

In sum, according to Watt’s and McKeon’s proposition, when one claims realism to inhabit a particular work of art, what is meant is that the work subscribes to the Lockean view of the individual. That is, the individual develops an understanding of the world by and through exchanges between his or her mind and the world of objects. These exchanges happen in time, in duration, and follow a cause-and-effect pattern. The exchanges are mediated by language, which necessitates a referential use of language, as opposed to figurative language use. Because private experience and personal relationships form the backbone of the realist work, certain narrative techniques (Watt’s “formal realism” or verisimilitude) are used to particularize both the individuals and the setting. These are however techniques only that often mask to what extent other narrative conventions are set into play. Lastly, realist works of art mediate a novelistic truth, which is by no means to be conflated with historical truth.

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth formulates this novelistic truth as consensus, which she describes as follows:

The genial consensus of realistic narration implies a unity in human experience which assures us that we all inhabit the same world and that the same meanings are available to everyone. Disagreement is only an accident of position. However refracted it may be by point of view and by circumstance, the uniformity at the base of human experience and the solidarity of human nature receive confirmation from realistic conventions. All individual views derive from the same world and so, with enough good faith, enough effort, enough time, problems *can* be solved, tragedies *can* be averted, failures in communication *can* be overcome. (65)

In Ermarth’s view, realism thus also depends on an agreement that people inhabit the same world, regardless of how much they may differ in their individual interpretations. Therefore, it summons differing points of views so that by the end they could be homogenized as “an aesthetic form of consensus” (ix). It suggests, in fact, that whatever differences there may be, human nature is collective. This truth is conjoined with issues of value (virtue and honor),<sup>34</sup>

which together constitute the subject as separate from the external social and historical forces.<sup>35</sup> The protagonist usually triumphs at the end by disengaging from the external forces that constitute him/her and thereby s/he reassures the reader that whatever happens, the truth will come out, social order will be reinstated by eliminating what is unwanted, and the virtuous individual will triumph.

### 2. 3. *Munro's Realism Re-assessed*

When reading Munro's fiction against Watt's, McKeon's, and Ermarth's theories of realism that have provided the background for subsequent understandings of and challenges to the realist canon, I claim that (1) Munro's fiction utilizes several conventions that characterize realism as an aesthetic practice, while (2) it does not share the ideological premises on which realism as an ideological construct is built.

(1) Munro's prose utilizes several fundamental realist conventions, such as the individualization of the protagonist, the portrayal of the protagonist's life as time in duration, the clash between points of views, and the particularization of the physical setting. Her settings are recognizably Canadian; moreover, she particularizes them in such a way that they become faithful replicas of places in her native Ontario, of the very places where Munro has spent her life. Thus she doubly reinforces the impression of authenticity: on the one hand, the settings not only resemble real places but they also gain authenticity because of their reference to the author's personal experience. (It is a common rhetoric device of her reviewers to feign surprise at discovering that Hanratty, London, and Clinton [her fictional towns] are real items on the map [e.g.: Reynolds 1; Merkin 1]). The protagonist and her remembering and remembered selves are also realist devices: the character who is portrayed "by time" (Forster qtd. in I. Watt 22), who gains her experience in time. It is true that many times these selves harbor different ideas and points of view, but realism subsists on this difference. In fact, this formulation of Munro's realism is highly reminiscent of what McKeon describes as a "naive empiricist" project advancing the notion that Munro's fiction mediates both historical and experiential truth; it is no wonder then that Blodgett felt the need to defend her fiction by saying that she "transforms" the events of her life into art (68).

(2) With reference to Munro's acceptance of the ideological premises of realism, the realist habit of mind, it would be hard to make a truly affirmative statement since her fiction defies or problematizes most of the features that Watt, McKeon, and Ermarth find fundamental it, such as the privileging of personal experience, the harmonization of points of view to arrive at a common understanding of what constitutes value and knowledge, and a referential use of language.



But, channeling Munro's fiction into a realist (i.e., a prestigious because canonical) tradition has also been a critical strategic move indulged in by both critics intent on canonizing Canadian literature and feminist critics in the past thirty years. On the one hand, Munro's attention to a specific Canadian region and the supposedly eventless lives of its inhabitants, their struggles directed inwards (as opposed to the American myth of individualism) or against nature were seen to support such theories of Canadian literature as "garrison mentality," "the Wacousta syndrome," and "survival." Thereby, a continuing literary tradition could be manufactured lasting from the nineteenth century into contemporary times, into which Munro could fit as a writer in a national tradition.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, this regional literature portraying and valorizing lives outside mainstream world political events also gave an occasion for national pride as an antidote to a Canadian inferiority complex *vis a vis* the neighboring super power in world politics, the United States.<sup>37</sup>

Feminist critics, on the other hand, found situating Munro in this tradition useful as self-defense. What their insistence on Munro as a realist writer suggests is that they feared two things. One is that her fiction might seem petty if she is considered an autobiographical writer. Autobiographical, or confessional, writing was highly fashionable in the seventies, but it also tended to be dismissed as women's lament or self-indulgence.<sup>38</sup> Thus, if all Munro provides is a fictional self-portrait spiced with the gossip and day-dreams produced by limited life trajectories in a neglected corner of the world, her fiction too might be easily discarded. Rasporich and Godard therefore insist on Munro's realism (a canonical tradition of high prestige)<sup>39</sup> because they find that only thus can they guarantee that the women's lives in small-town Canada that she depicts will be taken seriously. Female experience as human experience gains value through a respected literary tradition. Nonetheless, they also emphasize that Munro finds this tradition too limiting—too patriarchal—, so she pushes at its limits. She includes gossip, which is really folk art (Rasporich 89-90; Godard, "Heirs" 54), the discourse of fantasy (Howells, *Alice* 32), and discourses on the female body (Rasporich xvii-xviii; Godard, "Heirs" 43). She literally speaks "with a forked tongue" (Godard, "Heirs" 43). She uses realist representational strategies and parallel to them she includes women's formerly unauthorized lives and modes of expression, earlier considered as inadequate literary material.<sup>40</sup> In addition, several strategies found in women's writings also appear in her fiction. To their mind, her fiction thus supersedes realism because it supplements a canonical tradition with a female perspective.

The realist habit of mind is characterized by the privileging of personal experience, through the historicity of which questions of truth, knowledge, and value are raised together (McKeon, "Generic" 382-84). As argued by Ermarth, realist works of art share the impulse to

harmonize all differing points of views and arguments about what constitutes the truth and knowledge by establishing what values are *unwanted* in any individual as a social being (65). This agenda is carried out in the faith that language has a referential capacity, i.e., it is a transparent medium which does not obscure meaning. Munro's fiction problematizes all these characteristics (e.g.: Carrington, *Controlling* 20; Howells, *Alice* 18).

Regarding the privileging of personal experience as it unfolds in time, a lot has been said before. Munro's fiction is deeply invested in the representation of individualized human experience. The time dimension is of crucial significance since experience typically does not unfold in front of the reader's eyes in a, mostly, chronological order, but is remembered. This should not necessarily affect the typical realist cause-and-effect pattern which figures the intertwining of time and experience (I. Watt 22). But in Munro's short stories time produces differences in selves that are not coded as a cause-and-effect progressive development from unknowing to knowing selves. In realist fiction these differences are understood to produce a development towards a final understanding, a harmony of vision most clearly embodied in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. Munro's fiction makes reference to this convention but many times the differences between the remembered and remembering selves, present and past consciousnesses are set into a continual play against each other without closure. Often, it is not memory but fantasy, imaginings, legends, day-dreams, etc., that provide the differences in selves. Sometimes, several of these can be found at the same time. This also means that the meaning of experience broadens significantly. Experience takes place not only between the individual and the world of objects and other persons but also inside the character. The alternate possible worlds of memories, fantasies, day-dreams, etc., produce many alternative selves which may also have a historicity. This leads to a never-ending proliferation of variant-selves.

In the end, these differences are however not harmonized into the "aesthetic consensus" of realism (Ermarth ix). Instead, the many selves of the protagonist and the characters produced by the workings of memory and other discourses remain in circulation leading to a crisis in closure, i.e., in values. It remains unclear which value system, which ideology the fiction does *not* promote. (Because, realism works in the negative; its logic is the neither-nor.)<sup>41</sup>

In addition, Munro scrutinizes language also. As argued above, realism evolved in the eighteenth century as a species of counterdiscourse to idealist ways of knowing, which relied on received authority and existing traditions (McKeon, "Generic" 384). Formerly, the excellence of the author was measured by his or her masterly skill in handling received forms as well as by his or her verbal skills, which resulted in a highly sophisticated figurative

language use. In opposition, the “naive empiricism” (McKeon, *Origins* 41) of the early eighteenth century subsists on the concept of language as a transparent medium, which makes it possible for all individuals to deliver experience to others. The conviction that language is originally transparent but that it was corrupted by “romancers” (deceivers, liars) also bespeaks the middling, realist stance: realist writers sought to apply less figurative language (I. Watt 27-30). Munro, however, strategically calls the referential capacity of language into question by several means. Sometimes, she defamiliarizes it to the extent that language, words, become nothing but sounds devoid of meaning<sup>42</sup>; other times, she plays with homophones. She is also known to fabricate short verses, rhymes, even ballads, which she integrates into her stories—these then reflect on the plot in unique ways. She does not shy away from dirty language; in fact, the *New Yorker* has refused a few of her stories for not passing its dirty language policy (Beran 209). Many times, her characters are able to speak several “languages”: the language they are supposed to have mastered in their social position, the language appropriate to their social status, and some other “languages” (sophisticated or, just the opposite, low languages), which they use only under certain conditions. Thus, when one reads Munro, the reader is always made aware of the extent to which language participates in experience: it does not merely mediate; the referentiality of language is wishful thinking.

Munro’s fiction thus, on the one hand, uses several representational techniques and strategies that are characteristic of realism as an aesthetic practice, while, on the other hand, it continually challenges its ideological thrust. It thus embodies what Hutcheon calls “duplicious critique” (“Incredulity” 188): it is double-coded in that it both inscribes and subverts realism. Hutcheon finds that typically it is postmodernism which engages in “duplicious critique”; therefore, there might be a good reason to locate Munro’s fiction in the postmodern tradition. However, Hutcheon also points out that feminisms too build on this strategy but with a significant difference. Whereas postmodernism seeks to avoid the temptation to yield to the metanarrative of the stable self, feminisms boldly rely on “their historical particularities and relative positionalities” (188). That is, postmodernist writers tend to discard the notion of the stable self as a concept generated by the metanarrative of Humanism; feminisms, on the other hand, must place their faith in a species of the self even if not identifying with the metanarrative of Humanism itself, which has strategically left considerations of gender outside its field of vision. Otherwise, they could not grant value to the notion of experience (190). Should they not be able to rely on the shared experience of women, it would risk their agenda of initiating change in cultural and social practices. Although the debate continues about the viability of such a move, Hutcheon’s notion of “complicitous critique” (188) lends itself to a discussion of the female (neo-)gothic literary

tradition exceptionally well, since it accounts not only for the divergences of this tradition (and of Munro's fiction) from the ideological premises of realist discourse but also for why it continues to be debated whether the female gothic supports or undermines a patriarchal social structure. This is all the more so because Munro's fiction as female (neo-)gothic fiction, testifies to the importance of experience, even if she problematizes it by magnifying all involved in creating it: the persons and their versions in time or in different situations, all embodying different relative positionalities, the circumstances, and the language(s) through which experience becomes accessible at all.

But the gothic tradition, in both male and female modes, does exactly that. Although for long unacknowledged, the gothic has been equally definitive and generative in literature since the eighteenth century, and it has been practically continuous for the past two and a half centuries. In addition, it accords a central position to the very issues that Munro's fiction investigates: the self, experience, truth, knowledge, value, women's life, and the referentiality of language, while also intent on mediating a novelistic truth that is formulated as a device of novelistic pedagogy. Should she be seen as a part of the larger gothic tradition, it would explain what is registered by critical discourse as unease in her stories because the gothic subsists on both realist formal conventions, such as the particularization of setting and character, *and* a challenge to its ideological base, which allows for the intrusion of the mysterious, the ambiguous, the strange, the uncontrollable, the unfathomable, and the fantastic.<sup>43</sup> Locating her in the gothic tradition would explain why her fiction seems so strange, so "Munrovian," because the gothic provides a less sleek and polished but a decidedly carnivalesque textual space for the deliberation of the cultural and social dilemmas of the same historical context as realism does.

Therefore, I now turn to an account of the rise of the gothic that relies on feminist, Foucauldian and Bakhtinian revisions of the rise of the novel, both in its gothic and realist mode.

#### 2. 4. *Realism and the Gothic*

The gothic has long been seen as the period literature of the eighteenth century born in times of tumultuous changes in production, social and cultural practices; but it is also seen to permeate our culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to the extent that Angela Carter's famous declaration in the nineteen-seventies—"we live in Gothic times" (122)<sup>44</sup>—is quoted as a truism. Whether right or wrong, the formulation suggests that the gothic is a literary response to historical, social, and cultural instabilities—it is not to be wondered then that it appears as "a staggering, limping, lurching form" (Punter and Byron xix),<sup>45</sup> which in

calmer times seems rather passé for cultivated taste. But as Carter warns, the gothic cannot be simply dismissed; rather, it should be understood and interpreted.

To understand why the gothic is such a “staggering, limping” form and why gothicists do not mind that it is so, one needs to see how it participates in the rise of the novelistic tradition in the eighteenth century. It is necessary to track down how and why it was invented because the history of its rise and splitting into two major traditions provide an explanation for two phenomena: (1) why it so relentlessly persisted in critical disfavor up to the end of the twentieth century—which also explains why critics of Munro have referred to the gothic texture of her work till recent times surprisingly sparingly; and (2) why it is suitable for the representation of personal experience notwithstanding its fantastic subtext, which Munro has found especially apt for the fictionalization of her concerns. By leaning on Moglen’s revision of the history of the novel focusing on gender, on Jacqueline Howard’s revision of the rise of the gothic with reference to Bakhtin’s concept of dialogicity, and on Miles’s re-conceptualization of the gothic, also sensitive to gender, I will argue that the gothic is a novelistic tradition that has consciously positioned itself in opposition to realist discourse; that it split into a male and a female gothic mode to respond to the historical and social circumstances at the end of the eighteenth century; and that its female version has sought to intervene into the gender economy of the rising capitalist society.

#### 2. 4.1. *The Rise of the Gothic*

The discussion starts with a provocative question: what happened in between the rise of the realist novel as recounted by Watt and McKeon and its triumph in the middle of the nineteenth century, since it seems that traditional histories of the novel are curiously closemouthed about this period. Watt names the first realist landmarks (Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* [1719] and *Moll Flanders* [1722], Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* [1729], as well as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* [1740] and *Clarissa* [1748]), although he notes that these works “show so little sign of mutual influence and are so different in nature” that the literary historian might attribute their appearance to “‘genius’ and ‘accident,’ the twin faces of the Janus of the dead ends of literary history” (9). The next generation of realists was comprised of Charles Dickens, Margaret Oliphant, and, to some degree, the Brontë sisters. But what happened between the publication of Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749) and Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860-61)? According to traditional histories of the novel not much happened except that there was a Jane Austen, a Mary Shelley, and a Walter Scott proving the validity of the hypothesis about solitary geniuses, since they were separated by time, geography, and interest. Seen in another light, however, it is the gothic that happened, that

long disdained literary black sheep in the family of fiction that dealt with real and entirely fictive demons as well, making its presence felt in works by Austen, Shelley, and Scott alike.

The first self-proclaimed gothic novel was Horace Walpole's immensely popular *The Castle of Otranto* published in 1764, i.e., at a time by which what Watt identifies as the realist novel tradition had gained momentum.<sup>46</sup> Although literary scholarship has firmly established by today that it was not at all the first one of its kind, it was Walpole, who articulated the novelty of his production.<sup>47</sup> But he did more than that: he consciously located it in a long-standing literary tradition as well as in a relatively new one. He claims in the preface to the second edition of *Otranto* two progenitors to his work: the medieval and the modern romance.<sup>48</sup> He contends that in his gothic story he intended to blend these two, and explains his understanding of the difference between them as follows:

In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. [ ... ] the author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of [ ... ] creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak, and act as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions. (vi-vii)<sup>49</sup>

That is, he envisions the gothic as a mode that is at liberty to create unusual situations (ancient or medieval romance), but in its portrayal of human beings it strives after verisimilitude (modern romance)—in the manner of Shakespeare's plays, he adds.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, he wishes to distance his novel from neo-classical dehistoricized representation also. So, of the medieval romance he borrows adventure, excitement, "fancy" (Walpole, "Preface" vi); of the modern novel he borrows the philosophic realist attitude (the realist habit of mind) and representational techniques.

Walpole's *Otranto* was extremely popular; it soon went into several reprints,<sup>51</sup> so much so that by the second edition Walpole found the courage to give his name to the previously anonymously published novel. Soon a host of imitators sprang, among them quite a few who greatly improved on Walpole's formula. Ever since, gothic moments, motifs, tropes, characters, plot devices borrowed from these novels have proved to be extremely mobile and elastic, traveling across historical periods and geographical boundaries.

Generic studies have painstakingly catalogued the conventions that the gothic frequently parades. Its principal features are its nightmare world, the portrayal of extreme states of mind, the struggle between what could be called as the good and the evil. Structurally, it employs mediated narration and the story-within-a-story structure, embedded narratives, several frames, unreliable narrators. The obfuscation of the narrative's origin is

also a common feature, i. e., the gothic story itself comes to light from lost and found manuscripts, letters, etc. Nonetheless, the text itself insists on veracity. Among its plot devices dreams and/or mirror plots often appear. The setting is mostly a remote and isolated place, such as a medieval castle or monastery (or its metaphoric equivalent: a dark, gloomy house set apart or unapproachable by outsiders). The characters are mostly types: persecuted heroines, disinherited sons, villains (tyrannical fathers and suitors) and villainesses, outsiders, etc. The “shopping list” approach (DeLamotte, *Perils* 5)—the cataloguing of gothic devices—may, and does, produce endless lists. It is virtually impossible to list all that makes the gothic gothic: it is impossible because during the past centuries it has produced innumerable varieties, and impossible because the gothic has been especially ingenious to invent, borrow, and use devices from elsewhere. This is why Fred Botting is led to announce that “in the twentieth century Gothic is everywhere and nowhere” (*Gothic* 155).

The gothic has been traditionally held in low esteem—one could read several scathing critiques about it as early as in the second half of the eighteenth century. Eighteenth-century critics found two great faults with it: first, gothic works are wildly unbelievable, often scandalous, even blasphemous; they are works that corrupt their readers by presenting action that turns on giant helmets falling out of the sky (as in *Otranto*), suggestions of priestly misbehavior, impropriety, incest, and murder (as in Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk* [1796]). Secondly, writing the gothic soon became business—what is even worse, business that could be conducted by women—it was quite clear that many turned to writing the gothic out of financial considerations. That is, they wrote it because that was what readers were ready to pay for.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the gothic soon became the emblem for the advance of capitalist production practices that transformed writing literature into production and its reading into consumption corrupting writers and readers alike.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, in literary criticism the gothic became doubly scapegoated: it corrupted its readers by its strange anachronism and its look back to the medieval romance; its notorious attachment to a supposedly aristocratic, conservative value system has often been cited in critical commentaries.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, it encouraged writing on the line, i.e., it offered a formula that made mass production possible without a need for either erudition or “genius” on the part of the writer—hence one of its connections to the rise of the middle class.

In short, it took the worst from the two competing social and cultural paradigms in the turbulent times of the eighteenth century. In a sense then, it originates in the same crisis of values that McKeon identifies in connection with the realist novel: both realism and the gothic come about as a result of a generic crisis at work. The eighteenth century is in several respects a transitional period in which two historical, cultural, and social paradigms were contending

for authenticity: it is this that the realist and the gothic novel register, but in different forms. But whereas the realist novel has commanded respect, the gothic has suffered indignities—interestingly enough, today the same arguments are used against what we call the popular female gothic of the Harlequin romances and against horror fiction that eighteenth-century critics formulated.

It comes as a shocking surprise then that, notwithstanding this notoriety, certain “geniuses” (Austen, Shelley, and Scott), as well as the great nineteenth-century realists (Dickens and Oliphant), yet turned to the gothic at certain stages in their personal and literary careers. The literary historians suspecting treason explained the instances when the gothic made its appearance in their works as youthful enchantment grown out later, as juvenilia, a kind of apprenticeship (Austen), as nightmare-inspired fiction rooted in a kind of truth or dare game by the fireside in the foreboding Swiss Alps in a stormy season (Shelley), in Scott’s case critics were pacified by attributing its presence to high-standing national(ist) interests and a search for authentic cultural roots (J. Watt 26). Other times, the gothic appeared because of a personal crisis (Dickens’s childhood and Oliphant’s loss of her children) (Milbank, “Victorian” 161).

Recently, however, as a result of Moglen’s, Howard’s, and Miles’s investigations, the relationship between realism and the gothic has been reconceptualized. As recounted above, histories of the novel assumed that the early nineteenth century represents a hiatus in fiction writing except for the occasional appearance of masterpieces by solitary geniuses because the era of Romanticism was first and foremost a poetic tradition. That is, the novel rose, and then it withdrew only to emerge and triumph in mid-nineteenth century again. Miles seeks to fill in that hiatus in the history of the novel when he argues that the era produced novels but that these novels are significantly, largely, and meaningfully different from the realist novel. They are romantic anti-novels, or to use his preferred term, philosophical romances, of which the gothic novel is a subset. But Moglen’s and Howard’s studies also show that realism is not at all the dominant tradition of the novel, but rather one of its modes that registers social and ideological voices in specific ways. All these serve to support Bakhtin’s claim that “the whole of the Gothic is the history of realism” (qtd. in Hirschkop and Shepherd 53).

Moglen’s feminist study of the rise of the novel challenges two assumptions that historians and critics of the English novel, following Watt’s and McKeon’s theorization, generally share. The first is that the novel rose because it registers the shift to a capitalist social paradigm as well as the rise of the middle class to power; and the second is that realism represents the novel’s dominant tradition, which is also underlined by Watt’s use of “the novel” as coterminous with “realism.” Instead, Moglen attributes the rise of the novel (not



synonymous with realism) to a newly evolving sex-gender system from the seventeenth century on, and she claims that it incorporates two closely interlinked traditions: the fantastic and the realistic (1). Thus, Moglen's investigations put Walpole's preface quoted earlier into perspective: earlier criticism looked upon his claims there with bafflement, not clearly understanding how medieval romance conventions transform into "more interesting situations" (Walpole, "Preface" vi-vii). These transformations could not be attributed to anything but his "genius" or "accident," Watt's "dead ends of literary history" (9).

Moglen, however, proves that the major difference between the two modes does not lie in what they think of as "more interesting situations" (Walpole, "Preface" vi-vii)—a giant helmet falling out of the sky as in *Otranto*, incest, murder as in *The Monk* or life on a desert island as in *Robinson Crusoe*—but rather how they relate to the self-awareness made possible by individualism. Both realism and the fantastic (in Moglen's terminology) focus on self-awareness, although on different aspects of it. Whereas one investigates self-awareness as experienced in relationships, the other is characterized by an intense focus on the self (4). But what is true for both is that they both negotiate, as well as expose, "the social and psychological meanings of gender difference" (4).

Accordingly, Moglen distinguishes between the two on the basis of what they put into their focus. Realism is more outward-looking, it scrutinizes the self as it enters into relationships with others in its moral, ethical, and psychological dimensions; it is primarily social in the sense that it mediates between self-interest and social integration; in terms of its formal methodologies, it strives to create coherence with the help of one central perspective, it presents truth as a function of representation, its language is capable of reflecting its characters' interiorities, these interiorities are not only accessible but also meaningful, its narration tends to linearity, and it presents personal history in synchronicity with collective histories; eventually, it affirms "psychic wholeness and structured desire in conformity with communal need," which appears as a confirmed social consensus that, at the same time, rejects eccentricity (5).

Independent of Moglen's re-conceptualization of the rise of the novel, Miles arrives at uncannily similar conclusions, though from another direction, when he examines the novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His argument turns on the insight that the critical tradition of fiction has unknowingly interiorized the tenets of realism, which explains why the critical history of the romantic novel (or philosophical romance)—and thus the gothic—has become a history of embarrassment ("What" 180), i. e., it is not the romantic novel that is embarrassing but how it has been represented in critical histories. He attributes the main source of embarrassment to the fact that it was the critical framework of the realist

novel that was used for discussing the romantic novel—and that this framework has been handed down and accepted from one generation of critics to the next unquestioningly.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, he seeks to define the romantic novel in another framework.

The most distinguishing feature of the romantic novel (philosophical romance) is that it registers social and cultural changes arising from the clash of two competing paradigms (aristocratic and bourgeois) from the second half of the eighteenth century on—just like McKeon argues. However, it does not commit itself to either of the paradigms; rather, it takes issue with both while at the same time it borrows elements from both, just like the realist novel. It is all the more difficult to disentangle where the romantic novel stands in relation to the two paradigms because the clash between them manifests itself on many levels and in many forms.<sup>56</sup> The philosophical novel thematizes the changes resulting from the clash but in radically different ways than the realist novel. Instead of fostering a cult of the individual and of harmonizing different visions, it first of all interrogates the foundational moment of society and culture in transience; in addition, it does so in not immediately recognizable forms.

First, thematically the philosophical novel is preoccupied with rightful and/or challenged legitimacy, often, but not always, through the issue of “suspect genealogies” (Miles, “What” 192). By that, in essence, it negotiates the known social and cultural narratives by proposing and experimenting with alternatives. In several gothic works, for instance, the persecuted heroine fears violation by a close relative who turns out to be a wrongful usurper of her own wealth and rights, and not related to her at all. By the end, however, she finds out the truth about herself and is often restored to her rightful place. She dares to question narratives about her origin and search for alternative ones.

Second, the philosophical romance is highly theatrical, which is a key to its understanding because theatricality signals a staunch antagonism to the realistic novel. Gothic characters often engage in operatic displays of action, violence, and emotion. They “draw aside veils, lift palls, wrench open chests and coffins, rip up floorboards and wainscoting” (DeLamotte, *Perils* 49); they murder or die in plain sight; they cry eloquently, violently, or inarticulately. Miles prefers to call works in this vein romances exactly because they consciously turn away from realist/novelistic techniques and towards the excesses of the medieval romance (“What” 191).

Third, the philosophical romance dwells in Enlightenment public visual culture and not in private verbal culture fostered by the novel: it educates through vision, through scenes that meticulously portray settings, characters, and events. The work, so to say, comes alive in front of the readers’ eyes—here is another aspect of gothic theatricality and the reason why the gothic is called an affective form.

Fourth, it tends to produce “parabolic narratives” in the Brechtian manner (Miles, “What” 195) “via several alienating devices” (196) that withstand the seamless but carceral transparency of the novel. Its alienating devices are many, such as “the invocation of pastiche (Walpole, Lewis, Beckford, Maturin), terror disclosed (Radcliffe), the self-conscious intrusion of political allegory (the Jacobin novel), dialogical irresolution (Hays, Dacre), or slippages in generic address (Edgeworth)” (196). It has a “piecemeal [ ... ] corporate identity” (Kilgour, *Rise* 8). All these work against the harmonization of vision; several points of views, perspectives, and truths remain in circulation even after closure, unlike in the realist novel.

Thus, when critics reared to address all novelistic, i.e., not poetic, works in a realist critical framework assessed gothic novels, they saw them as “schizoid” phenomena (Kiely qtd. in Miles, “What” 181). They appear as monstrous because they fail “to conform to and remain within accustomed boundaries” (Miles, “What” 181)—boundaries of taste, genre, and gender. They are very much unlike the realistic novel: they are scandalous in subject matter, they devise unrealistic (fancy) alternatives, they are too theatrical, too fairytale- or nightmare-like, and against all, obviously failing, efforts at particularization, they still seem too fictitious.

But Miles concludes that this is the point because “insofar as it makes sense to refer to the Romantic novel, the Romantic novel is the class of prose fictions that has the historic mission of articulating ideology, as ideology” (185-86). That is, the philosophical romance does not show the individual *vis a vis* society as the realist novel does. Instead, it makes plainly visible how ideology works to define the place of the individual in general by showing events in one paradigmatic character’s life—how social standing, birth, and gender define one’s possibilities, for example.

Moglen’s study supports Miles’s reading. She claims that the fantastic mode, as the more inward-looking mode than realism, has an intrapsychic focus. It, first of all, “reveals the psychic costs of social deformation” (9), attending the individual’s social accommodation. By pointing to the roots of the individual’s vulnerability, texts in the fantastic mode (like the gothic) present the faith in autonomy as fake, the self as divided, a subject who knows itself mostly only as an object, and a struggle for social integration that is doomed to failure (7). Also, whereas the realist narrative disguises inequities of gender by naturalizing them (5), the fantastic shows the costs of “the cultural imposition of gender difference” (11), which incarcerates individuals into an arbitrary, but socially useful, gender ideology.

Yet, not all gothic texts (philosophical romances/in the fantastic mode) close on the note of simply baring the process and cost of the configuration of modern subjectivity. Sometimes, these do not only articulate ideology as ideology but also intervene and devise, or

at least experiment with, alternative ones. The female gothic, in the Radcliffean mode at least, has exactly been doing that from the eighteenth century onwards: it seeks to transform patriarchal gender norms by, first, highlighting gender inequity through re-contextualizing the forms in which it appears, and, second, by inventing structures that reroute the engendering process in the acutely polarized sex-gender system of bourgeois ideology.

#### 2. 4. 2. *The Female Gothic*

Ann Radcliffe's philosophical romances in the second half of the eighteenth century take issue with gender ideology from a female perspective, and they also devise alternatives, making her the fountainhead of a female gothic tradition. Although some even suggest that it is in her novels that the gothic mode finds its full expression (DeLamotte, *Perils* 10), she thought that she was working in a mode distinctively dissimilar to the one established by Walpole and continued by her contemporaries, such as Lewis. In the Radcliffean female gothic one can read about innocent heroines living an idyllic and sheltered life, from which they are ripped out. They set on a journey, but before arriving at any satisfying conclusion, they have to endure a period of imprisonment. The plot usually ends with the heroine happily reintegrated into society. Although Radcliffe's novels are supposed to roughly follow this plot formula, no two novels are the same since each successive work greatly changes in scope and execution. Yet, her *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), her "most female-centered" narrative (Williams 162) can serve as a model for the paradigmatic female gothic narrative.

*The Mysteries of Udolpho* centers on the adventures of Emily, who at the start of the novel lives with her parents in perfect harmony till she loses her mother at the end of chapter one. Shortly, her father also dies, but before he does so, he gives his consent to the union of her daughter with a young and attractive gentleman, Valancourt. Now orphaned, she must join her widowed aunt, Madame Cheron, a woman in whom the worst of both aristocratic and bourgeois values are combined, who not only disapproves of her suitor, but soon remarries to a darkly mysterious Italian. They move to his ruined castle, where he tricks Emily to give full authority over her property to him, removes her from the company of her aunt, sending her to speculate about her aunt's possible fate, and tries to force her to marry a man of his choice. As she explores his castle alone, she finds mysterious clues that all point to a woman possibly murdered by him as well as to the imprisonment of her young suitor. Her aunt eventually dies, Emily learns that the man in his captivity is not Valancourt, and she manages to escape from the castle only to find herself with other family members, whose home is as mysterious and terrifying as Montoni's castle. In addition, she learns that Valancourt has disgraced himself in various ways while she was away. She moves to a convent only to be confronted with further

mysteries that in the end explain the mysteries of both of her temporary homes. Fortunately, Valancourt corrects his ways, and the two marry and live happily in Emily's idyllic childhood home.

The plot is complicated, the events hide possible threats to the heroine, who must move along constantly fearing not just for her property, but for her physical and psychological integrity as well. Yet, Radcliffe does not see the main difference between her kind of gothic and that of her male contemporaries in terms of plot. In a posthumously published essay entitled "On the Supernatural in Poetry" she explains what she means to accomplish. She elaborates on the Burkean concept of the sublime and makes a distinction between the concepts of terror and horror. She describes the first as a concept characterized by obscurity and indeterminacy, which "expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life," while the latter, in contrast, as something that "freezes and nearly annihilates them" with its open displays of violence (6). In her novels the heroines merely fear that what they consider the worst is impending, which stands in sharp opposition to male gothicists' scenes of open violence and gore. Critical accounts of the gothic still use Radcliffe's terms and refer to a feminine terror gothic tradition (established by Radcliffe) and a masculine horror gothic one (as exemplified by Walpole's *Otranto* or Lewis's *The Monk*).

The critics of the nineteen-seventies added another dimension to account for the peculiarities of the Radcliffean gothic. Leonard Wolf, for example, writes in a book review in 1973:

Despite the triumphs of Lewis and Maturin, the Gothic novel was something of a cottage industry of middleclass women—as if women, oppressed by needlepoint, whalebone stays, psychic frustrations, shame and babies, found in the making and consuming of these fictions a way to signal each other (and perhaps the world of men) the shadowy outlines of their own pain. (2)

Notwithstanding the somewhat condescending tone, Wolf sensitively combines the motif of obscurity (emphasized by Radcliffe) with women's feelings of oppression and entrapment in a domestic setting, all of which are encoded in female gothic works. Accordingly, Radcliffean gothic came to be re-conceptualized as fiction to reflect women's pain resulting from the terror of the familiar and the horror of restricted life. The two modes of gothic (Radcliffean and Lewisite), thus, came to be seen to correspond to the sex-based concerns of the separate spheres. Whereas the Lewisite school concerned male identity and presented horrendous spectacles, the Radcliffean addressed the female lot in the home.

Moers further refines the understanding of female gothic texts when she argues that they are coded expressions of women's fears of entrapment within the domestic *and*, she adds, within the female body. In *Literary Women* (1976), Moers defines the female gothic as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth

century, we have called ‘the Gothic’” (“Female” 90). Though this definition is, she admits, rather ambiguous and not only because she assumes that the gothic is that which “has to do with fear” (90), it still has exerted a powerful influence upon later studies. The novelty of her definition lies in its assumptions. She does not only hypothesize a tradition of great women writers, but she connects their writing, female writing, to the female body. Female gothic after Moers’s criticism has been conceptualized as a mode that registers, to quote Juliann Fleenor, “various feelings of terror, anger, awe, and sometimes self-fear and self-disgust directed towards the female role, female sexuality, female physiology and procreation” (7).

Today Rictor Norton summarizes the long-held critical consensus about the two modes as follows:

These two schools are often portrayed as emphasizing, respectively, sensibility versus sensationalism. Although the “machinery” of the Radcliffe School is often mocked, the agents and incidents of terror in this stream are usually *internal*, whereas the agents and incidents of horror in the Lewis School are usually *external*. The former is characterized by mystery and corner-of-the-eye creepiness, whereas the latter is characterized by violence and raw-head-and-bloody-bones. (ix)

Norton, however, explains that this supposed dichotomy calls to mind at least two stereotypes: that about women being good at portraying emotions and that about men excelling at relating action. These differences, however, warns Norton, cannot be maintained along historical principles (ix). Nonetheless, the female gothic has long been quoted to express women’s secret fears, anxieties, and, by roundabout ways, desires, and thus it has come to be interpreted as fiction structured by a conflict over female identity.

Although Miles similarly argues against reading philosophical romances along gender lines, he admits that male and female gothicists have tended to address the same ideologically grounded issue differently. Accordingly, when questions of legitimacy are meditated on, for instance, male gothicists emphasize certain themes (e.g., social taboos) and characters (such as the figure of the outsider) and present these in a spine-chilling manner, whereas writers in the female gothic mode underline certain other themes (e.g., forced marriage, seizing the heroine’s rightful inheritance, tricking her to deed away her property, the threat of rape to win consent to a legal relationship), other characters (e.g., the figure of the absent mother, the female who yields to her passion for luxury or to her sexual passion) in a suggestive rather than in an outright violent manner—since events of violence are recounted, imagined, read and heard about, but never presented on scene. The worst is only feared, but never encountered by the female protagonist.

Much of the critical debate has focused on deciding whether Radcliffe’s female gothic sublimates female fears and anxieties by engaging in wishful thinking that still reinforces

women's oppression in a culture based on inheritance rights that clearly privilege the male or, on the contrary, it renegotiates the cultural terms on the basis of which women's place and role in society are defined. Proponents of the former view argue that the Radcliffean female gothic with its Cinderella fairy-tale plot provides readers with the dream that against all odds women (persecuted heroines) will be united with their family and with a satisfactory husband in the end. This view is concisely summarized by Michelle Massé's statement that the female gothic convention of happy ending (the fulfillment of love) promotes nothing other than masochism in the name of love (2), Rachel Blau DuPlessis concurs and adds that it fosters "sexual feudalism" (*Beyond* 44) since even if heroines perceive, reason, and act throughout the events, in the end they yield to the fantasy of self-fulfillment in self-abandonment to love. The latter view, i. e., the female gothic intervenes into gender ideology by proposing alternatives, is held by both Anne Williams and Hoeveler, for instance, although for radically different reasons. They argue that the female gothic after Radcliffe is an entirely novel expression of how women seek to redefine their place and their selves *vis a vis* the ruling ideology of separate spheres.

Such disparate readings are possible because the female gothic also is enmeshed in the conflicted circumstances of the late eighteenth century. Thus, it had to define itself against the historical, social, and cultural background of the era and against the kind of ideological investment that the novel in the realist mode represents, as well as against the kind of gothic that Walpole and Lewis wrote (identified as horror gothic by Radcliffe, but known as male gothic today). In addition, the female gothic as codified by Radcliffe re-contextualizes several discourses of the late eighteenth century that constitute different languages in the Bakhtinian sense, such as sensibility, the sublime, taste; middle-class values like restraint, reason, and obedience; superstition and fairy tale, etc., and thus it becomes an illustrative example of Bakhtin's heteroglossia (Howard 6-7).

However radically different assessments arise about the office that the female gothic serves when gothic critics fail to address its dialogicity, it is generally agreed that the conventions of the gothic (and the female gothic) are not to be dismissed too easily as mere ingredients required by the recipe. The convention of the happy ending in the female gothic, for instance, may mean various things in different critical frameworks ("sexual feudalism" [DuPlessis, *Beyond* 44] or reintegration into society on entirely new terms [Williams, *Art* 148]). Rather, conventions function like signposts: they show their readers into certain directions and signal at the boundaries of clearly recognizable modes in which the works are positioned. Thus, when Radcliffe's readers read about trapped, pursued heroines, whose primary source of threat is embodied in a male but who still find their adequate partner, they

know how to interpret it—not as events in a “true relations” narrative but as events to prepare for novelistic truth. Thus even a wild or a fairy-tale-like make-believe world is capable of recognizably mirroring the world as known. Exactly because by the time Radcliffe came to write her novels the conventions of both the realist and the romantic/philosophical novels had been solidified, they could be seen for what they were: conventions, elements of a symbolic language. This explains why one cannot simply look at the Radcliffian female gothic as an artistic reflection of the reality of women’s fears, anxieties, and desires. Rather, it is formula literature, but with a difference (DeLamotte, *Perils* 10).

On the one hand, Radcliffe fuses the gothic with the tale of Cinderella, which thus becomes in a way the artistic reflection of victimization experienced in real life, as indicated by Wolf and argued by Moers, as well as it becomes the expression of a longing for a fairy-tale-like happy ending. On the other hand, Radcliffe’s innovations do not stop at this point because she examines female identity through familial ties and roles from a novel perspective, which supports Miles’s hypothesis that the philosophical romance challenges narratives of origins. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* for instance Emily retraces the history of her family through the personal histories of various female figures, which drives her home the lesson that her father sought to impart: the only real happiness is “rational happiness” (Radcliffe, *Mysteries* 274). Her experiences in fact are directed at learning what “rational happiness” means, which she does by perceiving and recognizing ambiguities. This learning process enables her to distinguish between good and bad through apprehension—and here apprehension means, as Williams explains, both learning and fear (*Art* 165). Furthermore, Eugenia C. DeLamotte points out that there is a crucial element that makes a difference to the paradigmatic gothic Cinderella tale in the Radcliffian novel: it is the heroine’s experiences that occupy the focal position. The reader follows her through on her literal and metaphorical journey from shelter via imprisonment to an assumption of some degree of agency and reintegration *as she sees and interprets it*. This is an invention that Radcliffe has been credited with, and which formula she brought to triumph in her novels (e.g.: DeLamotte, *Perils* 32; Williams, *Art* 141, 143-45).

In sum, Radcliffian female gothic sustains a critique of the ideology of the sexes through the literalization of victimization in the theatrical mode of the philosophical romance and allows its readers to refocus their attention by concentrating on parabolic female experience and its interpretation. Through the theme of suspect genealogy, it renegotiates the foundation of the aristocratic and the evolving bourgeois social and cultural paradigms, both depending on the exclusion of the female point of view. Meanwhile, it also seeks to put



female protagonists into new relations; though, it suggests that, without their active participation, this would not be possible.

#### 2. 4. 3. *Two Worlds*

A fundamental convention (and alienating device) of the female gothic is the bifurcation of the textual world into a real (alternate possible) world and an unreal, magical and threatening otherworld or underworld (textual actual world). Although the relationship between the two realms was long interpreted in a Freudian psychoanalytical framework,<sup>57</sup> as a result of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal study that denies the validity of surface-depth structuration for the interpretation of several gothic conventions, such as the bifurcation of the textual world into two (*Coherence* 142), by today it has been established that the function of the (textual actual) unreal world is not connected to the manifestation of psychic distortions in either the actual or the textual actual world. I equally do not share the opinion that the convention of an otherworld has been especially appealing for female gothicists because it allows for a range of victimization, which is still better than the passive endurance of the female lot (e.g., Haggerty, *Unnatural* 13), or that its function is to substitute for the (male) adventure novel (Moers, *Literary* 122-27) solely.

The conceptualization of the gothic as a carnivalesque discursive space characterized by heteroglossia deeply invested in the interrogation of the ideologies in which its texts are produced creates a different context for the interpretation of the bifurcation of the textual world since it veers away from a general, aestheticized critical discourse to historically specific interpretations. In this critical framework the bifurcation becomes a convention of recentering, where recentering is to be understood as theorized by Marie-Laure Ryan. The concept allows for the distinction among the (authorial) actual world, the textual universe, with the textual actual world at its center, and the text reference world, which is the system that the textual actual world represents, in which several alternate possible worlds may take shape (553-55). I argue that female gothicists find the convention of the two worlds especially ingenious because it creates the possibility to formulate their concerns in a fictional space without acting against contemporaneous female propriety. They can represent the victimization of women by patriarchal gender ideology when combined with the bourgeois domestic ideology (the text reference world the textual actual world represents) that female gothicists and their readers experienced (in the actual world) by lifting their heroines from their idyllic homes (alternate possible world within the textual universe) and thrust them into a dark and menacing gothic otherworld (textual actual world). The female gothic becomes a devious discourse through the bifurcation of the world into two.

Moers ("Female" 90), Fleenor (7), Massé (2), DuPlessis (*Beyond* 44), and even Williams (*Art* 141-45) and Hoeveler (*Professionalization* xii-xiii) gesture at this understanding when they read the literalization of female victimization in the gothic otherworld as the thematization of gender-based subordination. What these critics do not readily agree on is whether the return from the otherworld represents a conservation of the status quo or its interrogation.

The devious discourse of the female gothic, which like Munro's fiction speaks with a "forked tongue" (Godard, "Heirs" 43), assigns several intratextual functions to the (textual actual) gothic otherworld.

(1) It is here that the heroine meets monitory female characters who experience the full weight of the text reference world gender ideology. Different female characters represent different aspects of femininity as it appears within the disciplining discourse of the eighteenth century known as the "hysterization of the female body" (Foucault, *History* 104) that the alternate possible world the female gothic devises rejects: the sexual seductress, the aristocratic woman, and the social climber represent unrestrained femininity (though class is a further factor in their construction), whereas the mother victimized by a male or who died of childbirth, (later, in the nineteenth century the dead-undead housekeeper, the nurse) represent too restrained femininity. The heroine has to find a suitable model of femininity for herself by negotiating which of these models she does not want.

(2) DeLamotte highlights another function of the gothic otherworld by adopting Campbell's hero-journey pattern:

The plots of most Gothic romances exhibit the essential outlines of the hero-journey [ ... ]. The basic pattern of this myth is the crossing of a threshold from the ordinary daylight world into a fabulous unknown world where after various difficulties, the hero manages to acquire some essential boon. He then recrosses the threshold [ ... ] this is essentially the pattern of Gothic comedy, in which the knowledge discovered at the heart of the alien world turns out to have some redemptive use in the ordinary world. (*Perils* 54)

Radcliffe's works are gothic comedies, i. e., the heroine can find redemptive knowledge (the gothic boon) here and thus return in order to redefine her relationships in the (alternate possible) real world also. (Not all female gothic works are comic; Shelley's *Frankenstein* is tragic, for instance.<sup>58</sup>)

(3) DeLamotte also notes that it is the place where the heroine is left alone to her own resources and is forced to see and interpret things, persons, and events around her. This is a realm where she does not have to—moreover, should not—accept others' dictates but has to arrive at the understanding of her situation by herself. Without her experiences here, she would not be able to practice her own faculties, and, consequently, she would not earn her

right for happiness. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily for instance appears at the very outset almost paralyzed by the idyll of her happy home: she is confronted with the insurmountable task of living up to the ideal of her home in her future adult life. Her parents' untimely death and her subsequent immersion in the gothic otherworld of Udolpho in a sense are the necessary prelude to her becoming an active, perceiving, and apprehending heroine.

(4) It is the place where she can prove that she is right in her "conscious worth." The term derives from Radcliffe's *Udolpho*. In a scene Emily is unjustly rebuked by Montoni, the villain, her heart, however, "swelled with the consciousness of having deserved praise [ ... ] and she was proudly silent. Montoni [ ... ] was a stranger to the luxury of conscious worth, and, therefore, did not foresee the energy of that sentiment, which now repelled his satire" (272). "Conscious worth" thus refers to the heroine's secure sense of her own worth, of her own irreproachability, which not even the darkest villain or greatest peril can erase (see also DeLamotte, *Perils* 36-38). This is significant since much of the action turns on the heroine not acting according to the rules of female propriety: she goes, peeks where she should not and she questions male authority; in short, she acts as an agent.

(5) It is the place in which the notion of experience is expanded without retribution: the fantastic subtext (generating several alternate possible worlds within the textual actual gothic otherworld) can unfold here as the protagonist meets otherworldly forces (ghosts, disembodied voices, for instance) which acquire a strange materiality. Though these are always explained away in Radcliffe's novels—the supernatural explained—, they challenge the contemporary rationalist discourse, while also proving the heroine's "conscious worth" as well as the reasonableness of the female gothic project of creating an alternate possible world less hostile to "feminine" values. She really saw moving pictures and heard strange noises: these were not produced by her imagination affected by female sensibility but are part of a secret design to control and/or discredit her.

## 2. 5. Munro's Female (Neo-)Gothic

The regionalist-documentary domesticity of Munro's fiction has distracted attention from her gothic characters repeatedly shown to be vulnerable to or to be at the mercy of a binarized ideology of the sex-gender system. Reading Munro's fiction as part of the female gothic tradition, however, sheds light on its peculiarities. At the same time, Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia is fully relevant to its understanding since it garners several competing, often contradictory discourses representing disparate ideologies relating to the sex-gender system of the late twentieth century, just like the female gothic has ever since its inception. Nonetheless, I venture to draw the outlines of her fiction of the 1990s by (1) defining its position vis a vis

patriarchal gender ideology, (2) vis à vis the ideological resolution the female gothic advances, (3) and by pointing to its major topoi and narrative techniques.

If her fiction is seen to focus on western patriarchal gender ideologies, it is less surprising that her fiction enjoys an international recognition from the United States through Europe to Australia (it has been translated into fourteen languages [McCarthy 1071]), not mentioning her native Canada, although it is outspokenly regional; and it is equally less surprising that it is seen as contemporary, although much of her late fiction takes place in the by now historical times of the 1950s and 1960s, or even earlier. Howells has wondered about the reasons of this unlikely popularity; her answer is that Munro is popular because her stories could take place anywhere, “any small-town, any farmhouse” (*Alice* 3), i.e., because they are so familiar, the experiences they represent are so familiar. Yet, in the context of *Open Secrets* and *The Love of a Good Woman*, the latter being her most popular volume, one cannot but ask: what is so familiar about the abduction of a teenage girl from a school hike (“Open Secrets”), a pedophilic Adam (“Vandals”), a respectful farmer killing a respected optometrist for no immediately recognizable reasons (“The Love of a Good Woman”), an old woman imagining her husband to be alive and hiding in exotic Jakata (“Jakarta”), a woman reminiscing about her lost love she never even saw and dead for decades (“Carried Away”), an unlikely bride becoming a wealthy farmer and hunter in New Zealand (“Real Life”), and the list can go on. These experiences are not immediately familiar on the level of plot, as Howells suggests; what makes them still resonate with readers in western societies is how they problematize the assumptions behind the life routes, choices, and decisions of the characters.

The known and the familiar, just like the home and hearth play a pivotal role in the patriarchal ideology of gender since the ideology proposes that violence can be managed if it is kept outside the home. Munro turns to the female gothic as a mode that theatrically inverts the relation between the home and the world: while patriarchal discourses of gender relentlessly try to portray the world as dangerous to women and keep them in the safety of their home, the female gothic situates the dangers in the home.

But the home is hardly ever only a home in Munro’s fiction: it is a heterotopia, an other place as well. When formulating his concept of heterotopia, Michel Foucault points to the function of places that are other in every culture: they represent and reveal the contradictions a given society produces by providing a space for their staging; they subvert commonsense rules of places while through their otherness they reinforce them. Thus heterotopias incorporate contradictions rather than resolve them (Foucault, “Of Other” 25). Some heterotopias provide an emplacement for crisis (honeymoon hotel), for containing

deviation (prison, psychiatric hospital, old age home), for festivity (fairgrounds), as well as for heterochronism (cemetery, museum, library), universalization (theater, cinema, zoological and botanical garden), for exposing the illusionariness of all other places (brothel), and for compensation (first Puritan colonies) (17-21).

In Munro's fiction of the 1990s homes are repeatedly shown to function as hospitals ("The Love of a Good Woman," "Cortes Island," "Before the Change"), old age homes ("Open Secrets," "My Mother's Dream"), and labor wards ("My Mother's Dream"). In Foucault's rendering these would function as heterotopias of crisis, but as he notes the function of heterotopias may change "for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society" (18). By the late twentieth century illness became a deviation rather than a crisis (Tonkiss 133), thus in the narratives the home becomes a heterotopia of deviation to contain those (the sick, the old, and, by a Munrovian leap that carries the analogy of the female gothic further, women) that are unwanted in normal social space.

Also, homes repeatedly prove to be treacherous, other than they are supposed to be according to the discourse of domestic ideology. Thus, heroines escape from them into libraries and bookstores ("Carried Away," "The Albanian Virgin"), heterotopias of heterochronism, where they can exist outside time independent of the discourses of their times. Homes created to enplace heterotopias of compensation (ideal places) turn into heterotopias of deviation (in "Jakarta" the home ballet school turns out to be the place of containment for the slightly deranged, obsessive ballet teacher, just like gated communities give home to slightly paranoid aging people). Homes are sacrificed for the sake of creating a garden, a universalizing heterotopia, that concentrates the world into a small place ("Vandals"), but this garden proves to a pedophile paradise of unspeakable victimization.

Foucault notes that heterotopias "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" (21). In Munro's stories of the 1990s homes function as places of curious exclusion: once you gain a full permission of entry, they cannot be left. They allow for one-way traffic only. Munro's mythical Sowesto region functions as a similar heterotopia: just like the family home, it compresses all times, places, social, cultural, and historical contradictions into one place that pulls one forever back.

However, Munro explodes not only the domestic ideology by showing the otherness of the home, but portrays the female gothic remedy to the detrimental effects of patriarchal gender ideology on women as a fantasy that can be equally incarcerating also. Fantasy is understood here as a discourse aimed at recuperating a psychic loss by the sublimation of those very fears that have brought it about. While the home (the textual actual gothic castle)

becomes an enclosing and dangerous place in the female gothic and the (alternate possible) world comes to harbor freedom, which is ideally resolved by transforming the (textual actual otherworldly) home into a re-engendered place and thus a safe haven, in Munro's female (neo-)gothic the fantasy that the home may be re-engendered becomes the means of incarceration itself. She shows to what extent the attractiveness of the fantasy of the home as safe haven is governed by a nostalgia for something that is impossible: an (alternate possible) world where fully gendered individuals corresponding to the opposite poles of a binarized sex-gender system (of the reference world, which the textual actual world represents) live as equal (i.e., ungendered, or bi-gendered merging both genders) partners in peace and unison. Her characters find themselves hopelessly locked into an inflexible sex-gender system, and they have thrown the key to the prison cell away because they want to believe the female gothic fantasy beyond tolerability that the ideology of gender inequity may be made safer for women from within the patriarchal gender ideology.

Notwithstanding, female gothic conventions abound in Munro's fiction. They can be classified as: (1) thematic conventions (centrality of secrecy, the conceptualization of evil influences, the focus on female body), (2) narrative techniques (theatricality, visuality, the typicality of characters in parabolic narratives, alienating devices such as self-reflexivity, generic indeterminacy, intertextuality), and (3) sites of ideological interrogation (the indeterminacy of meaning, dialogical irresolution, the eternally divided nature of the self, an unreachable ideal of autonomy, the importance of relationships).

(1) Thematically, her fiction of the 1990s recycles female gothic conventions, such as: secrecy stands in the center and, in female gothic fashion, it is represented to have a more corrupting influence than open outbursts of violence ("Open Secrets," "Vandals"); the evil is conceptualized as control untamed by feeling ("Vandals," "Real Life," "Cortes Island," "Before the Change"); and the female body always stands in the center of competing ideological forces (esp.: "Vandals," "The Love of a Good Woman," "Jakarta," "Cortes Island," "Before the Change," "My Mother's Dream").

(2) In terms of narrative technique: The narratives are as theatrical as Radcliffean gothic in the sense that they circle around theatrical events (murder, abuse, abortion, illicit relationships, splits between couples), although these events are never shown on scene; they are, in female gothic fashion, only remembered, talked and heard about, imagined, or feared.

The texts are obsessed with visuality, both as the characters' obsession to see, or see in their minds' eye (the inability to stop remembering, reminiscing), and as the impulse to document surfaces and sights to the minutest detail (mistaken for documentary realism).

The characters are types and Munro's naming practices also underline the rejection of the idea of character as a fully individuated vehicle of ideas. (Harold Bloom has noted recently somewhat condescendingly: "Her tonalities may be too consistent, her characters not sufficiently distinguished from one another to allow a tale as memorable as Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants' or Porter's 'Flowering Judas.' She seems to sacrifice singularities to her integral sense of the differences between women and men" ["Introduction" 2]).

Her alienating devices are many: the stories are compulsively self-reflexive, the events cannot be divorced from the telling process ("Vandals," "Cortes Island," "The Albanian Virgin," "Before the Change," "My Mother's Dream"). The texts are fragmented: embedded narratives and lost letters abound, foregrounding the impossibility of communication. Closure is suspended.

Generic indeterminacy repeatedly calls attention to itself (see comments about the autobiographical relevance of her fiction). She packs her fiction with deliberately ambiguous references to autobiographical details ("Cortes Island," "Jakarta," "My Mother's Dream"), turning some of her stories into carnivalesque autobiography, or self-parody, and herself into "a trickster figure" (Redekop 4), while also destabilizing truth claims to history and family history ("A Wilderness Station" as a female counter-narrative to the history of colonizing the wilderness), or autobiography for that matter. Her fiction of the 1990s is a tour de force of generic revisions of genres as different as autobiography, wilderness narrative, epistolary fiction ("Carried Away"), detective fiction ("Cortes Island"), and family history ("My Mother's Dream").

Her intertextual references, or as Martin puts it, "her almost mischievous private pleasure in devious or recondite allusions" (189) has only recently roused critical interest ("Open Secrets," "Vandals," "Jakarta," "A Wilderness Station," "The Jack Randa Hotel," "The Children Stay," "The Albanian Virgin").

Also, in Munro's fiction there are always "[t]oo many things. Too many things going on at the same time; also too many people" (Munro, "Differently" 498)—which is how a creative writer teacher describes a character's short story (an autobiographical reference again).

All of these narrative techniques together carnivalize the reading process. Bakhtin argues that there is a "carnival sense of the world" which fiction takes on since with its organized program it can temporarily suspend limits, invert binaries, transgress order while also calling attention to its own play-acting (*Problems* 122-23). Munro's texts are carnivalesque.

(3) Munro's stories neo-gothically challenge both the rigid and saliently binarized sex-gender system of patriarchal ideology and the female gothic resolution.

On the one hand, faithfully to the gothic origins, they foster an indeterminacy of meaning through dialogical irresolution and present the individual as eternally divided incapable of autonomy since all characters act out well rehearsed scripts in the gender drama of the middle-class paradigm. Munro seems to be telling the same parabolic story over and over again about villainous males dangerous to female physical and psychological integrity, all too obedient women rendered incapable of acting, virtuous maidens interrogating, to their minds, untenable rules of gender propriety, for which they are eventually rewarded with an adequate (i.e., properly re-engendered—reformed, since the nineteenth century tamed) male partner, the difficulty of imagining a satisfactory model of mother-daughter bond for which neither party must pay the costs, while still insisting on the importance of relationships

On the other hand, in the female gothic the foundational moment in characters' lives when they have the opportunity to reconfigure themselves to be able to stand on a different footing in their relationships appears as a moment of challenge to genealogical (il)legitimacy (finding out the truth about the father, mother, circumstances of birth, inheritance, etc.). In Munro's fiction of the 1990s this foundational moment is presented as the opportunity to decide whether female characters opt for or out of the female gothic fantasy by accepting or refusing the sole legitimacy of domestic—and chastely heterosexual—desire in women's life so that they could become love's heroines. Munro writes both in the comic and the tragic mode: whereas some of her heroines manage to escape, others fall prey to the female gothic fantasy.



### 3. Munro's *Two Worlds*

Although Munro's fiction has often been discussed as the representation of parallel realities, critics rarely connected its parallelism to the gothic convention of the two worlds. The oversight can be explained in at least two ways: first, as noted earlier, the gothic was not the mode in relation to which the canonizing discourse of the 1970s propelled the discussion of Munro's fiction; and, second, its indebtedness is not immediately obvious since it belongs to the tertiary phase of the mode, as this phase is characterized by the interiorization of the form as well as by the radically new uses to which it is put (A. Fowler, *Kinds* 162).

By close reading the title stories of Munro's volumes of the 1990s, "Open Secrets" (*OS*) and "The Love of a Good Woman" (*LGW*) as well as what can be considered their companion pieces, "Vandals" (*OS*), "Carried Away" (*OS*), and "Jakarta" (*LGW*), I will argue that they make use of the gothic bifurcation of the textual world in a threefold manner. (1) It appears as the theme of separate worlds side by side, just like Uncle Ben's or Garnet French's worlds apart in *Lives* (e.g.: Howells, *Alice* 19, 28, 31-32, 102<sup>59</sup>; Becker 133-34<sup>60</sup>; Szalay, *A nő* 33-34, and Nischik 206); (2) as the narrative technique of intertwining separate narratives that exist independently which yet reflect on each other in crucial ways; and (3) as its interiorization. The remembering narrator or protagonist, a staple character in Munro's fiction, thus is refigured. This last use conjoins the gothic convention of the two worlds with the realist convention of showing life by time.

(1) The first of these, the representation of "worlds alongside," is an integral part of Munro's writing aesthetic, argues Reingard M. Nischik (206), since it allows for "the contrasting of disparate interpretations, multiple views on a given event (by the same or by various other characters), juxtaposition of the past and present, and the constant deferral of fixed meaning [which] all stress the fluidity, incompleteness, variability, and the ultimate inexplicability of human experience" (206). To show how the "worlds alongside" in Munro's fiction of the 1990s re-surface, the discussion starts with a reading of "Open Secrets," which, though not the most accomplished short story in the collection, is programmatic in the sense that it redefines the worlds' relative position to each other. They are no longer conceived of as a normative, proper and a strange, unfathomable world topographically existing parallel to each other whose boundaries can be traversed only by a liminal character who does not yet belong to either but who is equally no outsider in them (like the teenage Del of *Lives*). Rather, these worlds are located within individuals' parallel, acknowledged or unacknowledged, lives.

In addition, placing the reading of this story first has the accompanying advantage that several of the recurring elements of the small town life that will provide a context for the rest

of the stories in *Open Secrets* will be introduced: the town of Carstairs, where the Doud family's piano factory employs the majority of its inhabitants; secrecy accompanied by constant surveillance; the ethics of restraint and self-control that support secrecy a lot more than the curtailing of extremities; a normative gender ideology that acculturates women into smiling self-sacrifice; all these together baring the faith in autonomy as fake; the conviction that the home should be kept a safe haven, or, at least, if violence cannot be kept outside its bounds, the semblance of safety should be preserved; the regular violation of female bodies; and (gothic threshold) moments of undecidability that throw the story line and the process of interpretation open. (These thematic connections have triggered comments about Munro's reinvention of the short story genre, since although the narratives can be read as individual pieces, together they offer a different reading experience [McCaig 81-84; Levene 81].)

(2) The second, her narrative technique of intertwining two or more parallel narratives that reflect upon each other, relying upon the logic of complementarity and explanatory gaps (Howells, *Alice* 10-11), has produced short stories that tend towards episodic dispersal, which thus resist linearity and closure. Her stories and her meanings can be approached only indirectly, transforming the reading process into a metaphoric wandering in the gothic maze. "Vandals," "The Love of a Good Woman," "Jakarta," and "Carried Away" will serve as examples.

(3) The bifurcation of the world also appears as the separation of the world of characters' action from their inner worlds, such as their memories or fantasies. The conceptualization of the relationship between these two worlds offers the opportunity to characters to see and interpret themselves and others in a different context that allows for the renegotiation of their connections as well as meditate on why certain choices have been made and what options have been discarded. This constitutes one of Munro's most radical neo-gothic challenges to the female gothic mode, since it frames fantasies and memories as discourses motivated by an urge to rationalize one's own choices predicated upon intentional blindness.

I will argue that Munro's appropriation of the convention in this threefold manner programmatically interrogates the female gothic resolution by undermining the female heroic value of irreproachability, which is conventionally rewarded by a happy ending.

I will point out how the neo-gothic revisions of the convention of the bifurcation of the world affect major female gothic topoi, such as "seeing differently" and "conscious worth," both closely tied to the construction of the heroine as a deserving character, as well as the topos of redemptive knowledge, which is the gothic boon she finds in the gothic otherworld leading to her social reintegration signaled by the happy ending.

I will argue that the narratives recycle the female gothic topos of “seeing differently”/“gothically” (Wall 208, 210), a structure that dramatizes the heroine’s worthiness, which Munro conjoins with her recurring topos of intentional blindness. I will also argue that she interrogates the topos of redemptive knowledge, which is a key to the successful resolution of the ambition/quest plot, through the theme of complicitous knowledge. I claim that these two undermine the heroine’s “conscious worth” (the heroine’s conviction of her own irreproachability), which lends a sense of inevitability to the female gothic romance ending. These will be addressed in the discussion of “Vanda,” “The Love of a Good Woman,” “Jakarta,” and “Carried Away” all of which end on the note of irresolution, prompting one to wonder whether there is any redemptive knowledge available in a world where even female gothic heroines doubt their “conscious worth” because they have been forced to leave their world built on intentional blindness and to face up to their own complicity in unspeakable acts as well as to their own unacknowledged parallel otherworlds.

I contend that Munro’s stories seek to redefine the happy ending, which is conventionally figured as arrival in the safe haven of marriage to an adequate male, by positing that the happy ending thus conceived is a fantasy that widens the distance between heroines and the rest of the female gothic textual world. These stories, instead of upholding the “spiritual class barrier” (DeLamotte, *Perils* 36) between the heroine and others, search for ways to reconnect them by systematically interrogating the discourse of heroic worth.

### 3. 1. *Worlds Alongside*

#### 3. 1. 1. “*Open Secrets*”

The title story of *Open Secrets* frames Munro’s gothic sensibility in its double vision of reality as both “touchable and mysterious” (Munro, “Everything” 33), “real” and “gothic,” at the same time markedly differently from her earlier fiction. Although the short story is highly reminiscent of the gothic vision of *Lives* as it directly reverberates Del’s recognition that people’s lives are like “deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum” (Munro, *Lives* 253), where the domestic kitchen proves to be a lot more treacherous and dangerous than the supposedly wild, hostile, and untamable wilderness outside the home, there are two crucial differences: (1) the mysterious world alongside does not result from a young girl’s aspiration to be a writer who deliberately fuses the world with her imagination to transform it into something less ordinary (Szalay, “The Gothic” 5); and (2) the wild and mysterious is inextricably linked with the ordinary and familiar, they cannot be kept apart, even within the life of an individual. Their coexistence is silently acknowledged; it is an open secret. Moreover, the dark gothic otherworld of the community is posited as the reference world

since it is the authentic motivator of the course of events in any character's life, whereas the discourses of propriety, self-restraint, etc., are relegated into the same category as fantasy; i.e., they are fictional alternate possible worlds in the manner of the conventional gothic alternate possible worlds generated by the textual actual gothic otherworld: ghostly voices, dreams, nightmares, visions, hallucinations, etc. The rules regulating social intercourse are part of a secret design to control and/or discredit those who dare to question their legitimacy.

"Open Secrets" focuses on the now forty-odd-year-old Maureen, who "graduated" (Munro, "Open" 133) to becoming the second wife of the respected Lawyer Stephens after having run his law office for years in the small town of Carstairs. Although she is living a secret life with her husband parallel to her "normal" life (158) as well, she is confronted with the fact that people living around her likewise have their socially unacknowledged lives; moreover, she recognizes that these are common knowledge—even if no one talks about them. But, the glimpse into the dark life of her community leads her not so much to the reaffirmation of the truism that people wear a social mask of respectability but to the rise of the need to address her private visions that she occasionally experiences. She does not really know how to interpret these but she is still tempted to evaluate them as instances of a "fluke" (158), as an unexpected happy chance that allows her to see beyond the one reality she knows as real. Thus, she becomes the gothic heroine who does not shy away from the darkness that she may find as, propelled by curiosity and an optimistic self-assurance of her "conscious worth," she is ready to challenge the known order.

The story thematizes the curious balance that arises from people's willingness to dismiss open secrets, lest they also should admit how their secret lives stray away from normative social expectations. Where Munro's short story differs from critiques of small-town life is that it does not posit an ideal from which a corrupted community diverges in the tradition of the realist scathing critique. Unacknowledged lives and dark realities are not the underside of social reality; they are the norm, which social simulation governed by the fantasy that the norm can be changed from within itself covers over.

The central event of the story is an official visit to her husband by a strange couple who claim to have come for advice. They think they have some information in connection with the sudden disappearance of a teenage girl from town. Heather Bell, the only daughter of a single nurse new in town, has disappeared from the annual hike organized by a universally respected teacher, and the couple now claims that Mr. Siddicup, the village fool, might know something about the event. After the visit, however, Maureen spies on them and is led to believe that the couple know more than they pretend. She, however, does not act upon what she has glimpsed. Like the rest of the townspeople, she keeps silent.

The characters' double lives range from innocent, harmless duplicity through sexual violence to outright murder, as well as visionary encounters. The majority of characters resort to harmless duplicities. Frances, Maureen's cousin, for instance, who used to be the housekeeper under the first Mrs. Stephens as well, keeps jokingly undermining Maureen's authority in the house; she, in turn, allows Frances to gossip although she knows that in her position she should not encourage hearsay; Miss Johnstone, who led the hike from which the girl disappeared, deliberately calls Maureen Mrs. Stephens "as if it was a play title" (133). Her extreme politeness puts Maureen at unease since its ironic overtones are meant to be a challenge: she takes revenge for the unequal distribution of good luck (Maureen, the former pupil's rise to becoming Mrs. Lawyer Stephens from a country girl in comparison with the schoolteacher's relative deficiencies).

Less harmless, though still within the bounds of social lies is the duplicity that characterizes the way the whole town seems to think of the "wonderful" Miss Johnstone (133), in whose case the qualifying adjective refers to two things. First, she is wonderful because, although heavily affected by polio, which her body is a constant reminder of, she grew to be respected by all for her courage and energy. (But, as it turns out, the roots of respect rather lie in the fact that no one wants to contradict her openly, partly because of her physical deformity, and partly because she is a kind of village fool herself.) The second reason to call her wonderful relates to a vision she experienced in the hospital when seriously ill. Although she is in support of plain talk and prides herself on being practical and sensible, she talks about her vision of Jesus visiting her when lying in hospital in a doctor's white coat and talking to her in surprisingly colloquial language as if it had been no vision at all but plain reality. Her practicality and sensibility do allow for the invasion of the mysterious. Although the people in town have their own explanation for Jesus's visit, they let Miss Johnstone believe what she will because "she was entitled to" (158).

In contrast, Mr. Siddicup's double life is not within the bounds of social simulation. Once a respected piano tuner at Douds' piano factory, happily married, he has experienced downfall: he lost his voice due to an operation, probably because of cancer, his wife died, he lost his job (now a machine does the tuning in the factory), and gradually he has lost touch with the townspeople. After his wife's death he rejected all help, and in his doting love of her he has surrounded himself with her underwear sending the town speculating about his possible perversity. Now, he goes about groaning and whining with sudden and fleeting moments of his past self returning to him.

The structure of his double reality is repeated in Lawyer Stephens's life as well. Once a commanding man of the law, who never went in for sexual intimacy (he stopped sleeping

with his first wife after the birth of their second child, and with his second wife after a miscarriage), ensuing a stroke he develops an unusual sexual appetite. He acquires habits that are in direct opposition to his former practices and convictions: uncurbed desire takes the place of restraint, violence that of gentleness, and imprudence that of discretion, all of which send Maureen after his attacks “to hang onto the banisters, she felt so hollow and feeble. And she had to keep her mouth closed not on any howls of protest but on a long sickening whimper of complaint that would have made her sound like a beaten dog” (156). The honorable lawyer, the mainstay of the small-town community, who all look up to as “a man in a million” (138) also conducts a parallel life.

Unusual though Mr. Siddicup’s relation to feminine clothing and Lawyer Stephens’s to sexuality are with hints at an underlying violence, the deepest darkness is yet suggested by Maureen’s intimation after Marian Hubbard and her husband’s visit. Marian, the independent and hard-working woman is rumored to have bought herself a husband, although other rumors suggest that she might have been fooled into marriage. Whichever gossip is true, she has been married for two years to a man who is remarkably silent during their visit when Marian suggests Mr. Siddicup might have something to do with Heather’s missing. What she relates does not accuse him directly, yet the circumstances of her telling, her acting out his gestures clearly implicate him in a possibly sexually motivated murder. Lawyer Stephens, who is only interested in verifiable facts, sends them to the police. But when they leave, Maureen is “not quite satisfied” (153). So she watches them through a small window, and what she sees shocks her.

Marian and her husband leave and sit down a few steps away “as if taking a rest in the midst of hard shared labors” (153) even though they were seated throughout their visit. They seem “united,” notwithstanding the move by which Marian stops him from stroking the feathers of her hat “as if he were pacifying a little scared hen” (153) “with a burst of abhorrence, a moment’s break in her tired-out love” (154). The allusion to John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* and the violent smothering hands is obvious, which is further supported by Maureen’s sudden and impromptu vision of Marian’s punishing hands that press her husband’s fingers on hot burners. Maureen intimates that Marian’s husband might have something to do with the sudden exit of Heather Bell from the small town’s world, which they then in a complicit act of accusation try to blame on the somewhat crazy old piano tuner, who has been the butt of the community’s jokes and apprehensions for his rumored sexual indecency anyway.

Maureen remains silent, though she knows well from her own example that parallel to their everyday lives, people lead a secret, mysterious one as well. But *Open Secrets*, the

volume as a whole, just as the whole of *The Love of a Good Woman*, does not stop at laying bare “the wild-at-the-door” (Atwood, *Strange* 5), or rather the wild-within-the-home.

Vision, as a message from a different world, intrudes the text on three occasions: (1) Miss Johnstone’s vision of Jesus in the hospital, (2) Maureen’s vision of fingers pressed on a hot burner concluding the short story, and (3) a vision Maureen experiences after the visit and a sexual attack of her husbands. The latter provides a clue to Munro’s vision of the relationship between separate worlds. Maureen ponders:

Sometimes when she is just going to sleep but not quite asleep, not dreaming yet, she has caught something. Or even in the daytime during what she thinks of as her normal life. She might catch herself sitting on stone steps eating cherries and watching a man coming up the steps carrying a parcel. She has never seen those steps or that man, but for an instant they seem to be part of another life that she is leading, a life just as long and complicated and strange and dull as this one. And she isn’t surprised. It’s just a fuke, a speedily corrected error, that she knows about both lives at the same time. (158)

Conceiving of worlds alongside in these terms is conspicuously different from Munro’s earlier fiction. Other, parallel realities existing side by side the one Munro’s characters live in are not ordered into a hierarchical structure; i.e., neither is the norm from which the other diverts. Moreover, they are able to reflect upon each other: Miss Johnstone’s vision enables her to survive and Maureen’s concluding vision supports her intimation about the disappearance of the teenage girl.

But visions as messages from another world do more than that. Underlying Miss Johnston’s vision (as well as the community’s reaction to its extraordinariness [“she was entitled to” it; 158]) and Maureen’s vision of punishing hands (hers and/or Marian Hubbard’s) is the discourse of what Carol Gilligan calls the ethic of justice (esp. 73, 174) that values rights and rules in the name of impartiality and objectivity as seen from a “shared or societal viewpoint” (73): Miss Johnstone deserves life as a human being, men victimizing women deserve punishment. But life as experienced contradicts this moral reasoning: Miss Johnstone functions as a village fool and both Maureen and Marian stick to their men; moreover they actively participate in covering over their crimes. This, however, unveils these visions organized by the moral language of right and justice as nothing but fantasies of a more just order where everyone gets what they deserve. The small-town society of the short story that has adopted the moral code of justice and right exists merely as the social simulation of a fantasy, an alternate possible world generated by the utterly gothic textual actual world.

Marian’s and Maureen’s complicity in keeping their husbands’ violence a secret (the same initials cannot be incidental) appears in a different light if one accepts that a community based on the abstract ideals of right and justice is a fantasy, like the ideal community of the alternate possible worlds of the female gothic: the happy family of stasis at the beginning and

the newly wed re-engendered couple at the end. Instead of endorsing this fantasy, they opt for complicity, which is organized by what Gilligan calls the moral language of care that privileges relationships and responsibility seen in their contexts (esp. 171-74).

In addition, Maureen becomes the model of Munroian female (neo-)gothic heroines exactly because of her complicity: on the one hand, just like conventional female gothic heroines, she does not shrink back from the darkness of her gothic otherworld but is ready to explore it; on the other hand, as opposed to conventional female gothic heroines, she wants to understand it and not erase because, as her complicitous knowledge has shown her, erasure is nothing but denial since the existence of an ideal world devoid of darkness is a fantasy. Thus in constructing her neo-gothic heroines Munro discards the female gothic ethic of justice (worthy heroines deserve a happy ending with the promise of a better world for themselves) and opts for an ethic of care: she writes her heroines into connection with others in the textual actual world rather than separating them from the rest of the characters by closing them into a hermetically sealed paradise.

“Open Secrets” is a programmatic piece because it posits that the textual actual world is the gothic otherworld (as well as the actual world to which the textual actual world refers to; our world is gothic) and that any attempt at dispelling it is to be seen as a fantasy, an alternate possible world arising from the gothic otherworld itself. Also, the (neo-)gothic heroine is one who recognizes this fact and, accordingly, does not yield to the impulse of creating a “better,” i.e., more suitable (alternate possible) fantasy world in order to evade the need to understand the complexities of anyone’s life.

It is this last theme that the volume-closing short story of *Open Secrets* explores.

### 3. 1. 2. “Vandals”

Whereas the gothic bifurcation of the two worlds appears in “Open Secrets” as the theme of “worlds alongside,” “Vandals,” the final short story in *Open Secrets*, which enlists various other gothic conventions as well, makes use of the juxtaposition of the real, ordinary (alternate possible) and the unreal, gothic (textual actual) otherworld in more complex ways. The bifurcation also appears within characters (world of action/world of memory), as well as in the juxtaposition of two storylines that complement each other. In addition, the story directs a radical challenge to fundamental female gothic conventions: the irreproachability of the heroine (“conscious worth”), the role of redemptive knowledge, and the ability “to see differently” (Wall 208), which is conjoined by another familiar topos from Munro’s earlier fiction, intentional blindness. This concerted revision of the mode’s defining conventions propels the story towards female gothic tragedy, making it an exceptional piece within



Munro's oeuvre. But, in line with Munro's neo-gothic challenge, tragic tonalities do not arise from the unspeakable act of the villain that occupies the central mystery of the short story but from the heroines' reluctance to engage with the complexities of their lives as well as their parallel withdrawal into an alternate possible fantasy world built and tailored to protect their reluctance.

Volume-closing stories are especially significant in Munro's collections because they tend to comment on the volume as a whole; Nathalie Foy outright calls this story a "coda" to all the stories in the collection because it "brings together the elements of magic, romance, memory, and writing woven throughout the collection" (147). Although Foy never makes mention of the gothic, gothicism appears untypically openly in its theme, character types, figurality, and narrative technique.

To start with, the short story is immediately at least two stories—reminding one of the typical gothic narrative device of embedded narratives—typographically separated from each other, which, in addition, has two gothic heroines, since it is as much about Bea Doud's dangerous love relationship to an aloof Byronic gothic hero,<sup>61</sup> Ladner (an Englishman injured in a war),<sup>62</sup> as about Liza's coming to terms with her relationship to Bea and to Ladner. My discussion follows the outlines of these two stories, which divert the attention from a third, radical neo-gothic subtext running parallel to the female gothic plots; this will be presented at the end of the discussion.

The whole *mise-en-scène* is gothic in the tradition of the female gothic: the setting is the isolated gothic house and its mysterious garden<sup>63</sup>; the characters are gothic types: a two-faced gothic hero (Ladner), a persecuted, motherless, semi-orphaned heroine (Liza, Bea), and a gothic surrogate mother failing to protect the girl entrusted upon her care (Bea)—although it is not clear whether she is a villainess or not in fact, who participates in the heroine's victimization. In the center there is a mystery of abuse, which is presented in not at all too easily recognizable terms: in half-sentences, allusions recalling Radcliffe's theory of the difference between terror and horror. Part of the story appears in Bea's unsent letter, addressed to Liza, which she obviously never gets. The two women's stories enfold upon each other, complemented with Warren's, Liza's husband's, story. This hero, however, fails to save the heroine (in female gothic narratives heroines save themselves by their own initiative, anyway). Narrative unreliability also contributes to the mystery of the story: Bea drinks to remember, Liza is intent on suppressing her childhood memories, and Warren, willing to forget his past, in turn, deliberately ignores what he cannot understand.

The narrative turns around the past in which Liza and her little brother Kenny in their early teens or younger are sexually abused by their neighbor, the pedophilic Ladner for

years—all unnoticed by Bea, with whom he has a standing relationship. Bea does not see what is going on in Ladner's land because she either does not want to see the brutal fact of Ladner's pedophilia (for she silently accepts complicity in bargain for a little love) or because she is really blind to the events. Liza, who can save neither herself nor her brother, would like Bea to be their saving foster-mother (fairy godmother), who puts a stop to Ladner's abuse, but she fails to do so. With Bea's inadvertent help (she gives her money to go to college), Liza manages to leave Ladner's abusive world—Kenny dies in a teenage car accident—and returns years later, after Ladner's death, upon Bea's request to check if everything is in order around the house. Liza arrives with her husband, and against the backdrop of his indifference, she vandalizes the house only to call Bea in a commiserating voice telling her of the vandalism some unspecified youth performed upon the house.

The setting itself encourages a reading in the gothic tradition. The story is set in Ladner's territory, a dangerous but enticing otherworld, suggestively called "Lesser Dismal" (Munro, "Vandals" 277), a truly magical land with stuffed animals hiding behind all kinds of vegetation as in a kind of "nature preserve" (266), an openair education center (a universalizing heterotopia). Ladner, a taxidermist by profession, takes pains to transform his property into a realm where everything has its proper place, everything is categorized, described, and explained. Lesser Dismal becomes the artwork of the "ordering of the world by the great architect" professing the supremacy of "order and permanence" (Ventura 310).

The place is first presented through the eyes of Peter Parr,<sup>64</sup> a teacher with whom Bea had been involved in a relationship before meeting Ladner. He introduces Ladner as a man who is recreating an Edenic world for the purpose of educating younger generations into the love of nature in order to counteract the devastating effects of a corrupt civilization. To his mind, Ladner is a man who

had come out here from England soon after the war [ ... ] he had decided to live like a hermit. He had turned his back on corrupt and warring and competitive society, he had bought up four hundred acres of unproductive land [ ... ], and he had created there a remarkable sort of nature preserve, with [ ... ] exhibits along the trails of lifelike birds and animals. [ ... ] He was a man who had been wounded and disillusioned in the worst way and had withdrawn from the world, yet gave all he could back to it in his attention to nature. (266)

He is of course totally wrong in every detail about Ladner. Yet, he is so convinced of the rightness of his interpretation that he cannot be made aware of his mistake notwithstanding Ladner's obvious hostility.<sup>65</sup> He is simply unable to see any other reality than the one he situates himself in; consequently, he has no access to the world in which Ladner is not an Adamic figure intent on recreating a lost Eden on earth.

This singlemindedness is repeated in Bea's reactions as well. Bea Doud, a schoolteacher, the daughter of the local factory owner employing almost all the people in the region (the Doud piano factory from "Open Secrets"), gets caught in Ladner's world as soon as she enters it: she transforms into a girl begging for attention; she is unable to leave. Although mystified by Parr's incomprehension of Ladner's putdown, she remains similarly misguided in her interpretation of his character because of her own blunted vision: while Parr is an enthusiastic educationist, she has a theory of love, which dictates her to think that most women, like herself, are "always on the lookout for an insanity that could contain them. For what was living with a man if it wasn't living inside his insanity? A man could have a very ordinary, a very unremarkable insanity, such as a devotion to a ball team. But that might not be enough, not big enough" (268-69). She decides that Ladner's insanity is of a certain kind and she is unwilling to revise her interpretation.

Bea thus represents a character type from Munro's early fiction characterized by intentional blindness, amply discussed by critics (e.g.: Becker 107; York 31; Howells, *Alice* 107, 136; Rasporich 106). Munro's female characters are especially prone to being blinded by their romantic fantasies and imagination, but eventually they consciously seek to distance themselves from the romantic notion of love and break away or out of it in search of a "real life" (Rasporich 106). Bea, however, has immersed herself in a notion of love that depends on the annihilation of her self (living inside a man's insanity). The scene of her second visit provides an example. After her visit with Parr, she returns alone and Ladner takes her on a tour of the place. There, with him, she completely loses her sense of direction. Her loss of orientation shows kinship with early gothic heroines' experiences in enclosed spaces, castles, dungeons, or labyrinths because just like them, she cannot seem to find her way out either:

She couldn't keep track of their direction or get any idea of the layout of the property. Did they cross different streams, or the same stream several times? The woods might stretch for miles, or only to the top of a near hill. [ ... ] and then they were in an old apple orchard, enclosed by woods, and he directed her to look for mushrooms—morels. He himself found five, which he did not offer to share. She confused them with last year's rotted apples. (272)

But while paradigmatic female gothic heroines constantly search for the boon of redemptive knowledge that will guarantee their release from the gothic otherworld, Bea does not want to dispel this world. Even if Ladner ridicules her for having dressed up as a temptress, "a tiresome vamp and a fraud" (272), she still tries to tempt her Adam—with rotten apples.

Her whole character is structured around her dedication to notice only what does not risk the preservation of her self-conceptualization as love's heroine; or if the damage is done, she deliberately misinterprets it. For instance, he tells her that he realized at one point that he could live with her but refuses saying that he *wanted* to live with her (274), he tells her that he

lives with her only because she has money (269), he rejects her sexual advance (274), he intolerably ridicules her in front of the kids (288), yet, she rejects the idea that Ladner might be telling her the truth. The only darkness that she acknowledges while living in Lesser Dismal is “implacability,” “ready doses of indifference which at times *might seem* like scorn” (269; emphasis mine). That is, rather than fight him, she accommodates: “[s]he learned, she changed. Age was a help to her Drink also” (274). This is why she consciously ignores Kenny’s explication of the sign “P. D. P.” scratched on trees—which he says means “Pull Down Pants.” She prefers to listen to Ladner’s sober-minded injunction—“Pay no attention to the dirty-minded juveniles” since it means “Proceed Down Path” (289)—even if the three letters are accompanied by three other ones: “L” for Ladner, another “L” for Liza, and a “K” for Kenny. She does not even measure the two rival claims as to the meaning of the ominous letters, which are, significantly, brutally scratched into the bark of trees notwithstanding Ladner’s manic attempts to create a perfect natural environment. The incongruity between the letters’ presence there and the other inscriptions, such as the names of the various plants and animals, providing information about their habitat, preferences, and behavior, as well as such quotations as “*Nature does nothing uselessly. –Aristotle*” or “*Nature never deceives us; it is always we who deceive ourselves. –Rousseau*” (271), all written on separate plates, escapes her. She is equally unwilling to interpret these inscriptions as cynical justifications for Ladner’s secret life (if nature does nothing uselessly, his desire is natural and therefore right; denying his desire is deception, therefore, he should act upon it).

Bea’s intentional blindness casts her into the role of a failing gothic heroine because, as DeLamotte claims, “[a]n essential activity of the Gothic protagonist is [ ... ] interpretation” (*Perils* 48); her single-minded dedication, however, always leads to the same conclusion. The greatness and radical novelty of the female gothic as inherited from Radcliffe lies exactly in its developing structures that construct the heroine through her engagement with the world. In her novels the heroine herself can, and should, experience reality in its fullness without being constrained to yield to interpretations pressed upon her by others; in addition, she is also ready to revise her own former convictions. She acknowledges that she may be misled as misinterpretation is part of the heroine’s trajectory of arriving at understanding: Radcliffean heroines are often misguided but the plot eventually validates their experiences (Williams, *Art* 145). Female gothic novels suggest that it is better to err than to accept or reject something at face value (160). Therefore, misinterpretation is nothing but a preparation for triumph (DeLamotte, *Perils* 43).

Visuality, which is a feature frequently noted in connection with Munro’s works as well (Conde 97; Rasporich 101-02, 179; Howells, *Private* 72; Gadpaille 79),<sup>66</sup> is one of the

structures that provides an opportunity in practicing interpretation. Radcliffe's novels, especially *Udolpho*, were long disparaged for their rather lengthy passages of description that many times stop the action—formerly interpreted as a cover for her inability to portray interesting action for a sustained period.<sup>67</sup> Recently, however, her visuality has been re-evaluated as the ground from which to approach her fiction. Two important points have been established: First, Radcliffe never makes description a background for action. Descriptive passages are not there for ornamentation and they are equally not authenticating devices of verisimilitude in service of realist particularization; instead, they function as “a self-referential system that begs for its own interpretation” (Wall 214). Thus, description is utterly anti-novelistic in Miles's sense of the term: instead of providing an explanatory background or context for characters' actions, they are designed to foreground issues of perception, cognition, and interpretation by focusing on enigmatic shapes, figures, and surfaces. This is why the female gothic heroine constantly looks around herself: she is continually engaging in a process of interpretation.<sup>68</sup>

Second, what matters is how characters respond to sights that belong to a different order for their response dramatizes their worthiness of a happy ending. Deserving heroines are willing to decode the enigma of sights and move from perception (attaining sensory information) through cognition (consciously refracting information through the mind) to interpretation (judging the degree of its familiarity and assigning a symbolic meaning to it) with an actively engaged mind; moreover, they are also willing to filter the sights through and infuse them with emotion. When Emily in *Udolpho* looks at something or someone, she is not simply looking but seeing: she is making sense; she practices her faculties to see, think, interpret, and feel (Wall 208 *passim*<sup>69</sup>). She sees things and persons into being, so to say; or as Cynthia Sundberg Wall succinctly puts it, a gothic heroine “see[s] differently” (208).

Visuality thus functions as a gothic test of vision: those who pass it, get hold of the gothic boon of redemptive knowledge and can leave the gothic otherworld to transform into a social being, as part of a larger familial world (DeLamotte, *Perils* 49-50). Maureen in “Open Secrets” “sees differently,” but Bea in “Vandals” does not, which eventually casts her into the role of the failing heroine. Overwhelmed by her theory of love, her vision does not enlarge the world by fusing it with other realities, as Maureen's does, but contracts it. Like Peter Parr, who does not perceive what does not fit into his world, and like Warren, who deliberately ignores what he does not want to understand (he sits through Liza's vandalization watching television), Bea does not perceive and understand either. But this way, she cannot ever get hold of the redemptive knowledge that will lead her out of Ladner's gothic otherworld.

So far, the discussion touched upon the figure of Bea as a gothic heroine, who, seduced by the two-faced gothic villain, is closed into his gothic otherworld because she fails the female gothic test of seeing. She wanders in his gothic maze mistaking rotten apples for morels and hostility for indifference, refusing to acknowledge the signs that point to Ladner's dark secret. But as noted at the outset, "Vandals" has two gothic heroines—Bea and Liza. Bea's function in the short story is twofold since she is both a motherless semi-orphan lost in Ladner's otherworld, unable to find her way out of it and a surrogate mother figure to another semi-orphaned heroine, Liza. In fact, it would be difficult to establish which of the two heroines is the main character in the narrative since the two plots around them are developed in tandem.

It is not uncommon for female gothic narratives to develop a subplot around the fate of a mother figure. Bea's contracting vision thus can be conceived of as a constitutive element of the female gothic subplot in as much as it explains why the gothic mother, who also was a gothic heroine once, failed. Gothic mothers often stand as a warning to heroines of what fate awaits them should they follow their mothers in their lack of discretion. At the same time, they also commonly function as scapegoats for transmitting the wrong lesson in femininity to their daughters.<sup>70</sup> Yet, as Tania Modleski explains, mothers still help heroines along in their own female gothic quest, since it is by the heroine's gradual distancing of herself from the home, and all those connected with it, the female figures and the mother—here the surrogate mother—in particular, that she is able to travel the whole course of the psychological trajectory towards understanding that she is different from them (70). Liza's vandalism is therefore not only the symbolic punishment of the body of the villain (his A-shaped house in *his* Adamic-Edenic world [Ventura 315]) but of the gothic mother (Bea) also for teaching her the wrong lessons of accommodation. It is the theatrical expression of her rejection to become like her surrogate mother.

To complicate matters, these two stories, plot and subplot (which can be read as a female gothic narrative in the secondary phase of the mode), meet in a second gothic narrative—and a third gothic plot—, which can be conceived of as the radical, and Munroian, reformulation of the gothic convention of the two worlds on a metaphorical level (tertiary phase). In this gothic story there are two heroines, Liza and Bea, both trying to understand their infatuation with Ladner as a foundational moment of who they have become, why even after his death they still cannot get rid themselves of him.

This third gothic plot is further complicated by the fact that their textual actual world is the same (Ladner's gothic otherworld), but their alternate possible worlds, without him, are different, though both are built on denial. As stated, the gothic bifurcates the textual world

into an alternate possible (real) and a textual actual (unreal) one, which always exist in relation to each other since they are conventions of recentering. In the textual universe of the short story, the textual actual world is the past in Ladner's *Lesser Dismal*, whereas their alternate possible worlds are markedly different: Bea creates an alternate possible fantasy world of her memories that are tailored to her wishes rather than faithful to her experiences, while Liza creates a world in which she does not have to remember her experiences.

Nonetheless, both are stuck in their (alternate possible) fantasy worlds predicated on intentional blindness. Neither can "see differently" (Wall 208), although Liza as a child seemed to be a deserving gothic heroine, who learns from her own mistakes (she looked, learned, made sense, used her imagination, and showed empathy—in short, she saw). In a scene recounted by the omniscient narrator, she catches sight of Ladner humiliating Bea and of Bea's concessions not to notice. One day, at the beginning of Bea and Ladner's life together, Liza is swimming in the pond Bea is about to enter. The water is cold, so she proceeds slowly but pretends that she likes it. When Ladner notices, he stops what he is doing and starts to imitate her:

Then he, too, started jumping up and down in the water. His body was stiff but he turned his head sharply from side to side, skimming or patting the water with fluttery hands. Preening, twitching, as if carried away with admiration for himself.

He was imitating Bea. He was doing what she was doing but in a sillier, ugly way. He was most intentionally and insistently making a fool of her. See how vain she is, said Ladner's angular prancing. See what a fake. Pretending not to be afraid of the deep water, pretending to be happy, pretending not to know how we despise her. (288)

Liza's first reaction is a shock; at the same time, she also longs for "the damage Ladner could do" (288). She distracts Bea's attention lest she notice what is going on behind her back but later she tries to make up to her by giving her the one precious thing she owns, a rhinestone earring she found on the road, which she believes to be a diamond. She even lies that it belonged to her dead mother—all because she hoped Bea "could rescue them—[ ... ] could make them all, keep them all, good" (293). Where she fails is that she does not understand Bea's situation; she wants to see her as a saving fairy godmother and does not see that Bea cannot save them because she is not a suitable person for the task. It has to be noted, though, that at this point she is a child, so she cannot even be expected to understand all. However, Liza does not want to understand Bea's situation in retrospect either.

Earlier it was noted that the mother-daughter mirror plot forms an integral part of the female gothic plot because what the daughter learns about her mother guarantees that she will not necessarily have to repeat her mother's fate. Modleski underlines this effect of the mother-daughter plot: "Gothics [ ... ] serve in part to convince women that they are not their mothers.

This difference is usually established through the discovery of what really happened to the victimized woman [ ... ]. Thus, 'separation' occurs partly as a result of developing an understanding of the 'mother's' difficulties" (71). The paradigmatic female gothic heroine thus can save herself only if she understands the mother's difficulties and thereby understands that she is in fact different from her. Liza, however, is intentionally blind to Bea. She refuses to see her as a person entangled in her own complex relationships.

But she avoids complexities in her adult life as well. Once she leaves Ladner's taxidermist Eden at last, she opts for a rule-bound new-born Christian alternate possible world: she transforms into a reformed Christian, carefully guarding that anything un-Christian should contaminate her world: she has stopped swearing, drinking alcohol, listening to music, and eating sugar. She has started however to count the strokes when brushing her teeth, to do knee-bends, and read the Bible in the morning (276) to prevent herself from remembering her former life. Significantly, she even insists that she vandalizes the house because they sent her to college and not because she was abused (275, 283). Her new life displays the same compulsive frenzy for artificial order and permanence that Ladner sought to instate in his magical land.

But without immersing herself in Ladner's (textual actual) gothic otherworld by remembering and searching for redemptive knowledge there, she cannot understand why "[i]n the secret life she had with him, what was terrible was always funny, badness was mixed up with silliness" (289-90). She equally cannot understand why "you always had to join in with dopey faces and voices and pretending he was a cartoon monster" and why "[y]ou couldn't get out of it, or even want to" (290).

Theories of trauma provide an illuminative background to the interpretation of this narrative also. Dori Laub relying on her research into Holocaust witnessing contends that the verbalization of a traumatic experience is an essential element of the healing process. Unverbalized trauma is prone to repetition and distortion, she states (63), since those who refuse to weave their trauma into a narrative which would both give meaning to their shreds of memories and accommodate them to their self-understanding are unable to "to go beyond" (62) the experience. The construction of Bea and Liza's characters repeats this pattern: both are unwilling to talk about life in Lesser Dismal, because they then would have to address their own complicitous participation, inaction, deceptions, and self-deception<sup>71</sup> in upholding the power of the villain also. Bea is compulsively writing unfinished letters in her mind circling around Liza's victimization; she in turn suppresses her past altogether. As a result of their refusal to verbalize their traumatic experiences, they are "submerged and lost" (Laub 62) in them. This loss is registered in the female gothic text of the short story as their inability to



arrive at the redemptive knowledge that would guarantee their social reintegration. Instead of working through the trauma, Bea chooses reminiscing about their (fantasy) happy life together, whereas Liza becomes the eponymous vandal.

Seen in this light, it seems reasonable to call “Vandals” a doubly tragic female gothic work in DeLamotte’s sense of the word: neither gothic heroine searches for the redemptive knowledge that would release them from the hold of the gothic villain. This means in the double plot structure of the female gothic, however, that they opt out of its quest plot. Consequently, they remain stuck in the problematic and utterly unsatisfactory erotic plot of the narrative that concerns their infatuation with Ladner. Here, they cannot renegotiate and redefine their relationship to each other, and thus to him, because in the tradition of the female gothic the road to the redefinition of the self leads through the understanding of the (m)other.

In sum, Munro’s neo-gothic revisions of the convention of the two worlds in “Vandals” challenges the female gothic mode itself in two ways:

(1) The female gothic after Radcliffe’s codification—as well as after the Brontës’ revision—of the mode does not easily lend itself to the tragic; there is only a handful of these works not written in the eighteenth century entering canonical traditions—Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* being one. The resistance of the female gothic to the tragic rests in its contextualization of vision and its close connection to knowledge as well as in its double plot structure of love and quest. Knowledge (reached by “seeing differently”), as part of the quest plot, always appears as redemptive leading to the social (re-)integration of the heroine; at the same time, her success (reaching knowledge) is signaled by the reward of a heterosexual relationship. Munro, however, seems to ask, in keeping with the proposition of “Open Secrets” that all people, including heroines, have a dark and unacknowledged parallel life: what if the knowledge reached as the key to social integration cannot be acknowledged? What if the knowledge of letting the evil happen can lead the heroine out of her own (metaphoric) gothic otherworld? Can this knowledge be redemptive? And what is its just reward? And what is its just reward if the free reign of the evil led to the unspeakable victimization of a mere girl and a boy? What relationship should it be? Bea as a failing female gothic heroine cannot find redemptive knowledge; she is destined to solitary drinking and musing instead. In Liza’s case, the situation is even more complex since she was a child at the time. Can she ever understand what her role was in her own victimization?

(2) These suspended questions, though tendentious, lead to Munro’s second neo-gothic challenge. “Vandals” closes at a threshold moment, when anything can happen. The vandalization of the house acts as a threshold between the two worlds, which brings a momentous change in both Bea’s and Liza’s life since they have an opportunity to leave their

self-created alternate possible fantasy world and can start to “see differently” others and themselves, and thus start their quest plot at last instead of being submerged in their erotic plot. Bea after a long time starts to communicate with Liza about her dreams, though only in unfinished and unsent letters. Liza, in turn, recalls some of what she learnt about animal and plant life and about the stars from Ladner and she shares it with Warren. The story ends without closure at a point when both Liza and Bea approach the gothic threshold. Yet, what counts is that the threshold invites one to the other side where they can open their eyes and “see gothically” (Wall 210). This is Munro’s neo-gothic happy ending for reproachable heroines: an opportunity to step out of an alternate possible fantasy world and to engage with the world of others.

### 3. 2. *Unhomely Homes and Homey Lies*

*The Love of a Good Woman* continues to reflect on the issues *Open Secrets* as a whole but especially the two stories “Open Secrets” and “Vandals” raise by carrying them even further. These issues comprise the recognition of the existence of “worlds alongside” in people’s lives, even within heroines, and the question whether complicitous knowledge can be redemptive. The first appears as a premise in both of Munro’s volumes of the 1990s, but the second is more implied than outright formulated in them. Yet, one cannot but notice how the issue moves center stage in *The Love of a Good Woman*. This becomes especially obvious when comparing “Vandals,” a pivotal story in Munro’s oeuvre, and “The Love of a Good Woman,” an equally important piece, which immediately became a contemporary classic. Whereas the former gestures at the difficulty of affirming the redemptive force of complicitous knowledge, the latter takes a less determined stance, which is also indicated by the semantic plurality of the “good” of the title.

Although this story also ends without romance closure, i. e., without rewarding the female gothic heroine with a heterosexual relationship on an equal footing, the ending markedly differs from that of “Vandals.” The reasons are twofold: (1) complicitous knowledge is framed significantly differently and (2) the heroine’s ability to “see differently” interrogates rather than proves her “conscious worth.”

(1) “Vandals” frames complicitous knowledge in the context of a female gothic scenario that represents the violation of female bodies as the unspeakable. The knowledge that should lead to the reintegration of the female gothic heroine thus concerns the knowledge of her, willing or unwilling, participation in the victimization of a female. What is really at stake here is whether she deserves social reintegration on these terms. “The Love of a Good Woman,” by contrast, frames it in reference to three major female gothic conventions: the

character of the femme fatale or villainess, the topos of “taming the husband,” and that of the *unheimlich* home. Complicitous knowledge facilitates, first, the proper punishment of the villainess, second, the “taming of the husband” so that the heroine’s and hero’s relationship could be transformed into one of equal partnership, and, third, the transformation of the unhomely home into a habitable one. The heroine’s recognition of “worlds alongside” in herself thus works towards a social and not an exclusively individual good.

(2) “Seeing differently,” as argued earlier, is a female gothic topos that is dramatized through gothic visuality. Thus, richly detailed descriptions appear as a technique that constructs the heroine’s worthiness of a comic resolution. In “The Love of a Good Woman,” however, the heroine’s ability to “see differently” undermines an underlying female gothic topos: that the heroine is different from the villainess. It is this “conscious worth” that the recognition reached by “seeing differently” undermines, since the knowledge reached this way leads to understanding that the heroine’s difference from the villainess can be measured in degree only.

In sum, in keeping with her challenges to female gothic conventions in *Open Secrets* Munro further explores the theme of complicitous knowledge, and in *The Love of a Good Woman*, she asks, does the knowledge of “(other)worlds alongside” in oneself (and their accommodation) qualify as redemptive if it redeems others as well?

In the following I will argue that “The Love of a Good Woman” and “Jakarta” neo-gothically challenge the female gothic topos of “conscious worth.” I will focus on the role of visuality, which beside intratextually dramatizing the hero/ine’s (“Jakarta” has a male hero) process of reaching complicitous knowledge also assumes a meta-textual significance. I will thus attempt to distance the reading of the richly detailed descriptions in the short story from the critical context of documentary realism.

I will also argue that the conceptualization of the loss of “conscious worth” (complicitous knowledge as the hero/ine’s recognition that s/he does not belong to a different order) as a positive result in the hero(ine)’s development is only seemingly paradoxical. It is the loss of “conscious worth” that enables social reintegration because, by not withdrawing into an alternate possible fantasy world of the few perfectly chaste and right heroines and heroes separated from the rest, s/he can transform the *unheimlich* home into a homey one that makes the (actual/gothic) world habitable for others.

### 3. 2. 1. “The Love of a Good Woman”

As soon as published, “The Love of a Good Woman” came to be recognized as “a representative or keystone text” (Duffy 172) in Munro’s oeuvre. It does not only recall several

thematic and stylistic parallels to other memorable texts written earlier, but it also attests to Munro's unceasing experimentation with the short story form. It makes use of "the slice of life" technique (Nischik 206) in a remarkable manner since—somewhat contrary to expectations *vis a vis* the form—it presents several slices from several lives. This is why it is a representative of the Munroian "add-water-and-stir" narratives condensing "a wealth of detail within a minute space that," Duffy states, "a lesser writer inflates into a novel" (179). As such, it also finely fits into the gothic tradition with its embedded and interlocking narratives.

What appears as rather conspicuous at the very first reading is that "The Love of a Good Woman" cannot stop beginning. It immediately has two, or maybe three, or perhaps four beginnings; it is difficult to say how many because just like "Vandals," it includes several embedded narratives that all reflect on one another. And equally conspicuously, although less surprisingly, it does not end either, or, at least, it ends without closure.

To start with the first beginning, the reader is presented in three paragraphs with the detailed description of an ophthalmoscope in a small town museum (a universalizing heterotopia) accompanied by various other objects such as "butter churns and horse harnesses, and an old dentist's chair and a cumbersome apple peeler and such curiosities as the pretty little porcelain-and-glass insulators that were used on telegraph poles" (Munro, "Love" 3). Apparently, the optometric instrument has become a local curiosity because it belonged to an optometrist who died an unusual death: he drowned in the river near the town. Then with a typographical break Part I of the story follows.

Beginning a story thus with the description of an image that falls outside the plot is unusual in Munro's oeuvre. Although critics have noted that she liked to close her early stories with an image that promises an epiphany of sorts for both characters and readers, in her later fiction she shuns such solutions even at the end of the stories, let alone at the beginning. The opening description is all the more unusual because the reader hears of the ophthalmoscope again only towards the ending, as if the instrument designed to examine the eye provided a frame to enclose the otherwise episodic dispersal of the narrative. This is why Carrington suggests that this beginning is really the ending ("Don't" 169).

The story that follows is divided into four major parts, each bearing its own subtitle, which appear in the following chronological order: Jutland, Heart Failure, Mistake, and Lies. The first part stands apart from the other three that constitute the story proper of "The Love of a Good Woman," which tells in Part II through Part IV of the mysterious death of the local optometrist, of the dying of a female patient, and of the nurse attending. The lives of these

three people are tightly entangled in the course of events, even though they would never have supposed so.

Munro is renowned for writing stories that withstand efforts at concise summary, which this story stands a living proof to. The story proper tells of a nurse, Enid, at the end of her thirties, called to attend to the mysteriously contracted kidney disease of one Mrs. Jeannette Quinn, the wife of a local farmer Enid knows from school. The doctor has given up all hopes of healing her, so Enid is left to alleviate her suffering at least. She proves an unpleasant patient though. She does not cooperate, she is rather testy, and she tells the virginal Enid a story of her contracting the disease that involves extra-marital sex with the optometrist, Mr. Willens, whose ophthalmoscope is described at the beginning of the narrative.<sup>72</sup> She claims that her husband caught them in the act, and in his wrath, he killed him. He then put his body in his own car and pushed it into the river as if Mr. Willens had driven into it by accident. Because she wanted to erase all signs of the homicide, she painted the floorboards stained by blood, and breathed the sickening fumes of the paint in. Enid finds herself in the dilemma of what to do with the information: on the one hand, she knows Mr. Quinn to be a peaceable man and Mrs. Quinn to be a nuisance. On the other hand, what if she tells the truth? For long, she cannot decide herself about what to do, but after Jeanette Quinn's death she prepares for direct confrontation with Rupert; by deliberately putting herself entirely at his mercy she offers him two options: either kill her also to secure her silence or turn himself in to the police and she promises to take care of his kids while he is serving his sentence. The story ends right at the moment Enid tells Rupert what she thinks she knows.

But this story starts to unfold only in Part II. Part I tells the story of three boys finding Mr. Willens's car in the river. It introduces the three boys, their friendship, their different familial attachments and life styles, and their difficulties in informing the adults in town about what they found. This section amounts to twenty-eight pages of the seventy-five pages total, which is two-fifths of the whole text. Considering the fact that finding the body has no direct relevance to the story proper, its presence there begs various questions. First, why is it included at all? The description of the ophthalmoscope at the very beginning of the short story alone introduces the mystery of Mr. Willens's death; the finding of the corpse does not necessitate such a lengthy discussion. This leads to a second question: then, why is it so long? And third, provided that it serves another function, or functions, besides introducing the mystery of the optometrist's death and that its length is comparable to its importance within the narrative: what does it contribute to the story proper of "The Love of a Good Woman"?

I argue that its function is to draw two thematic parallels with the story proper: on the one hand, it portrays a variety of unhomely (*unheimlich*) homes and thus it draws the outlines

of what a home should *not* be like; and, on the other hand, it dramatizes the difference between a mature (meaning: already initiated into the coexistence of otherworlds, even within the self) and an immature understanding of life. Thus, although the section gives a vivid portrait of life in a Canadian small-town in the early 1950s, it does not stand in the service of particularization as the critical tradition of Munroian realism would have it. My argument, however, does not contradict, but rather supplements Carrington's narrative analysis of the section as well as Duffy's thematic one.<sup>73</sup>

Munro introduces the three boys from different walks of life and their homes. Cece's home is ruled by unrestrained and irrational patriarchal power: his family consists of a largely incapacitated silent mother and an alcoholic father who proves his power by sudden and violent outbursts of aggression. Whenever the boy transgresses the boundary of gender economy (he performs the household chores to help his sick mother), he can count on being beaten up for being a sissy (for being a helping Cece) by his father. Bud lives in a home where women seem to reign: the whole house represents a "feminine" lack of restraint. It overflows with dresses, hairpins, and mirrors. Jimmy's home, in contrast to these two forms of unrestraint, is unhomey because of its extreme, Scottish Protestant, restraint. The whole life of the overcrowded family is organized around self-control, politeness, and the acceptance of calamities as the rule of nature. It is these models that the story's (ir)resolution discards as inadequate. I will return to this argument later.

The second thematic parallel it shares with the major text is its dramatization of the existence of "worlds alongside," as well as the definition of adult maturity as the ability to accommodate both. But before discussing the latter, I turn to the former.

The opening of Part I describing the setting itself suggests that there are worlds existing side by side:

This place was called Jutland. [ ... ] Many people believed that it had been named in honor of the famous sea battle fought during the First World War, but actually everything had been in ruins years before that battle ever took place.

The three boys who came out here on a Saturday morning early in the spring of 1951 believed, as most children did, that the name came from the old wooden planks that jutted out of the earth of the riverbank and from the other straight thick boards that stood up in the nearby water, making an uneven palisade. (These were in fact the remains of a dam, built before the days of cement.) (Munro, "Love" 4)

In the adult world, just a few years after the Second World War, the name of Jutland is attributed to war heroism; in the kids' world, the name is descriptive. Although both explanations are suggested to be wrong—since the omniscient narrator does not give away why exactly the place has received its name, both versions still remain in circulation for they represent viable alternatives in different worlds. The point is not whether they are right or

wrong; both are characteristic of the worlds in which the alternative explanations have sprouted.

Notwithstanding, the boys come here early spring in order to dare one another to swim in the cold river before the snow melts—which precondition is satisfied by one patch of dirty snow on the colder bank of the river. The act itself is indicative of their bravery and of their different standards set in sharp opposition to the adult world. When in Jutland, the boys live in another world, where everything is possible. Here they do not even use their names indicating that outside the bounds of town and the expectations of adults they experience times “of taking each other’s looks, habits, family, and personal history entirely for granted” (11), whereas when they are in town they are full of apprehension and are fully aware of what consequences their actions might result in.

This world sharply contrasts to the town with its distinct divisions based on age, gender, and class. In town adults greet boys with different appellations all meaning something definite: “boys” means that “a telling off was to follow”; “young fellows” means that the speaker wishes to “seem better disposed”; “sirs” means that the speaker does not want to be bothered by trifles (13). In town men walk home, while women are already at home. The less well-to-do fry eggs in a greasy pan, the better-off eat pie. Here Mrs. Willens does her gardening tranquilly, while she does not notify the police that her husband did not spend the night at home. In town there is “[n]othing hollow or ominous, nothing that said that Mr. Willens was not inside and that his car was not in the garage behind his office but in Jutland Pond” (23).

The boys realize that indeed they are confronting two irreconcilable worlds when Mrs. Willens gives them some flowers to take home to their moms:

The forsythia gave them something to think about. The embarrassment of carrying it, the problem of getting rid of it. Otherwise, they would have to think about Mr. Willens and Mrs. Willens. How she could be busy in her yard and he could be drowned in his car. Did she know where he was or did she not? It seemed that she couldn’t. Did she even know he was gone? She had acted as if there was nothing wrong, nothing at all, and when they were standing in front of her this had seemed to be the truth. What they knew, what they had seen, seemed actually to be pushed back, to be defeated, by her not knowing it. (24)

The same confrontation between two realities appears in the scene when the boys catch a glimpse of Jimmy’s mother dressing up a shopwindow dummy: Jimmy immediately thinks of her as he knows her from home: he “could hear in his mind the little grunts she would be making; also he could smell the stockings that she sometimes took off as soon as she got home, to save them from runs” (25). The “others hadn’t noticed her,” the narrator says, but then adds in parentheses “they had, but the idea of a mother dressed up every day and out in

the public world of town was so strange to them that they couldn't comment, could only dismiss it" (25-26).

The boys do not tell of their find because they came across it in another reality—in their adventurous boys' otherworld closed to adults and adult manners. In this reality Mr. Willens looks like a cartoon character "crammed into his little car as if it was a bursting suit of clothes" (6), his eyebrows are "thick and fuzzy like caterpillars stuck above his eyes" (7), his fingernails on his hands riding "tremulously and irresolutely, like a feather" (7) are "all like neat little faces, with their intelligent everyday look of greeting, their sensible disowning of their circumstances" (7). It is not to be wondered then that they cannot reconcile this otherworld with what is customarily referred to as the normalcy of the town—and it is not to be wondered either that it is Jimmy who ultimately tells, all the more so because he tells it to another trespasser between two worlds, his working mother out in the public eye. Cece cannot tell because he has learnt that trespassing into another world incurs punishment: if he is a "sissy" because he does women's work, he is beaten up. Bud in his daily squabbles with his sisters has learnt to carefully distance himself from girls' otherworld, and, in addition, he is often made to listen to his mother's injunction—"Stop swearing. Stop tattle-telling. Grow up" (19). He cannot tell about his find in his boys' world to his family in the real (adult) world.

Enid's, the nurse's, experience in the story proper parallels the boys' discovery: she too confronts a disparity between her known world and an otherworld, which forces her not only to contemplate whether to "tattle-tell" or not but also to rethink and reevaluate her position in both worlds. In one of the worlds, which she recognizes as her real world, "[h]er hope was to be good, and do good, and not necessarily in the orderly, customary, wifely way" (41). This is what she has been doing all her life: she was a class secretary in school, an organizer of bridal showers later, a favorite godmother even later, an honorary daughter to various old ladies, and a nurse to both young and old. When she goes to care for Mrs. Quinn, she expects what she has already experienced with other patients—even if she does not know what it is exactly she expects in return for her work. In her working career she has experienced that patients could be difficult: they would remark that "their visitors were only coming to gloat" (37) and that their family always hated them, they would ruin their belongings so that they would not pass on to survivors, but Enid understood that "that was the way some people were, before they settled down to their dying and sometimes even up to the event itself" (37). Thus, in her real world people are good—she is good—any diversion from this rule is a sign of restlessness at death's door, which makes feelings of compassion and sympathy possible for her.



When in the Quinn household, however, Enid is made to face up to the fact that her rule may rest on a wrong footing. With this patient, “she was at a loss. It was not just that she couldn’t supply comfort here. It was that she couldn’t want to. She could not conquer her dislike of this doomed, miserable young woman” (38). Enid’s discovery of her own revulsion as an unknown part of herself is made even worse by the fact that her patient knows well how she feels. Moreover, she taunts Enid with her knowledge, which thus becomes a sign of her triumph over Enid: the triumph of an otherworld.

Discoveries, however, do not stop here. Enid sleeps in Mrs. Quinn’s symbolically sepulcher-like room so that she could be of assistance when her help is needed. The room is suffocatingly hot and dark because Mrs. Quinn can stand neither wind nor light. In this room she enters the gothic underworld of nightmare, which she feels utterly embarrassed about:

In the dreams that came to her she would be copulating or trying to copulate (sometimes she was prevented by intruders or shifts of circumstances) with utterly forbidden and unthinkable partners. With fat squirming babies or patients in bandages or her own mother. She would be slick with lust, hollow and groaning with it, and she would set to work with roughness and an attitude of evil pragmatism. “Yes, this will have to do,” she would say to herself. “This will do if nothing better comes along.” And this coldness of heart, this matter-of-fact depravity, simply drove her lust along. She woke up unrepentant, sweaty and exhausted, and lay like a carcass until her own self, her shame and disbelief, came pouring back into her. (51)

Enid, however, who has shown remarkable aptness at rationalizing her choices and behavior earlier as well, comforts herself by attributing her dreams to the workings of “the mind’s garbage” because, on the one hand, she feels “insulted” by her own mind; on the other, in her religion there was no room “for any sort of rubbishy drama, such as the invasion of the devil into her sleep” (51). If her dream proves anything, it is that she also may be capable of acting like her patients at death’s door; there is a rational explanation for the ugliness of her dream, she insists.

What she does not see at this point is that all along she has always been governed by irrational choices, by a certain relish for drama. Though the only daughter of a well-to-do family, she goes to nursing school instead of college, because she would be too embarrassed to tell that her ambition was to be a missionary. She leaves the school just before graduation upon the deathbed request of her father, who asks her to promise not to become a nurse; yet, later she becomes one because “if Enid went into [people’s] houses to nurse them, not as a registered nurse but as what they called a practical nurse, she would hardly be breaking her promise, would she?” (43). Her mother suspected her true motivation since she implied that even when she made her promise she only played the role of a saint. She commented on Enid’s promise by saying: “‘Well, I hope that makes you happy.’ Not ‘makes him happy.’”

‘Makes *you*’” (40; original emphasis). To which the omniscient narrator adds: “It seemed that her mother had known before Enid did just how tempting this promise would be. The deathbed promise, the self-denial, the wholesale sacrifice. And the more absurd, the better. This was what she had given in to. And not for love of her father, either (her mother implied), but for the thrill of it. Sheer noble perversity” (40).

After waking from her nightmare, she understands something of both why her father did not want her to be a nurse and what her mother meant. In a scene that shortly follows her rise from the world of her dream, she looks out of the window and sees a few cows grazing in the little meadow that occupies the symbolically middling space between the house and the riverbank. She makes two statements, each representing a different reality. First, she thinks: “They have a lovely life, cows”; and, second: “It ends of course in the slaughterhouse. The end is disaster” (52). Upon contemplating the two realities of cow life, which she soon extends onto human life, she intimates that her life might represent a different reality to others, to her mother, and the doctors, who by now, sixteen years after her promise, all call her “an angel of mercy” (52). She ultimately asks herself: “The comforts of bed and the cows’ breath, the pattern of the stars at night—all that can get turned on its head in an instant. And here she was, here was Enid, working her life away pretending it wasn’t so. [ ... ] And all the time how many thought that she was a fool?” (52).

Instead of answering her question, though, she performs a series of symbolic household chores that right what the sloppy Mrs. Quinn has missed or failed to do, turning the unhomely home into a more habitable one. She washes the dust covered and grimy dishware and glassware, sets the contents of the cupboard in order, cleans away all the signs of the neglect that the soon would-be last lady of the house has accumulated. She pulls the weeds out of the garden, sits with Mr. Quinn out in the kitchen reading and doing crosswords puzzles in a wifely sort of way, and teaches the kids, who were “as wild as little barn cats” (34), how to eat nicely and how to say grace, till she is confronted with yet another question asked in the full innocence of childhood: “What does it mean ‘God bless’?” (53). One of Mrs. Quinn’s two daughters expects an answer and an explanation but Enid soon must face that she too has to decide what definition of “blessing,” “mercy,” “angel,” and “goodness” she accepts.

The need to answer the two questions in tandem (Is she a fool for having wasted her life on the illusion of helping people? What is a blessing?) appears all the more pressing because before Mrs. Quinn dies she tells Enid the story of Mr. Willens’s murder, but immediately in four versions. The main outlines are the same: Rupert catches Mr. Willens and Mrs. Quinn *in flagranti*, he kills him, and pushes him in his car into the river. But each

version aggravates Mr. Willens's actions—he first just “had grabbed her leg to keep his balance and her skirt scrunched up and her leg showed bare, but that was all there was to it” (57); in the second version he kissed her, “[i]f you could call that kissing, all that pushing up against her with the box still in one hand and the other grabbing on, and sucking away at her with his dribbly old mouth” (60); in the third version, they play a game of eye examination with “the dirty old cuss puffing away getting his fingers slicked in” (62); in the fourth he “get[s] her down and thump[s] her like an old billy goat” (62). Enid does not know what to do. She tries to sort out the truth from the dying patient's venom, but she seems unable to do so, till she walks to the meadow where the cows graze. The passage is worth being quoted at length since it repeats the Radcliffean gothic heroine's act of looking, her effort at “seeing differently” (Wall 208) which transforms realist detail into messages from another reality:

The cows hadn't cropped all the weeds. Sopping wet, they brushed against her stockings. The path was clear, though, under the riverbank trees, those big willows with the wild grape hanging on to them like monkeys' shaggy arms. Mist was rising so that you could hardly see the river. You had to fix your eyes, concentrate, and then a spot of water would show through, quiet as water in a pot. There must be a moving current, but she could not find it.

Then she saw a movement, and it wasn't in the water. There was a boat moving. Tied to the branch, a plain old rowboat was being lifted very slightly, lifted and let fall. Now that she had found it, she knew it, she kept watching it, as if it could say something to her. And it did. It said something gentle and final.

*You know. You know.* (63-64; original emphasis)

The heroine, Enid, does not simply look, but *experiences* the scene, as DeLamotte argues female gothic heroines do (*Perils* 46). She moves from perception to cognition and refracts it through emotion to arrive at an interpretation. The ordinary scene with the cows grazing in the background assumes a symbolic significance as it points to another reality and the redemptive knowledge (the boon) that could be found in this other reality.

The redemptive knowledge she finds is her acceptance of the existence of another reality in herself: her revulsion to her patient, her unthinkable dreams, the reasons for her theatrical deathbed promise, her breach of promise, and the usurpation of a dying woman's wifely and motherly role. Also, she recognizes that what she previously thought to be rational is most irrational for others, just as that for her to be an “angel of mercy,” her mother, “the mother of a saint,” must do “a devil of a lot of work” (44). In addition, even if it seems like the boat and the river tell her what to do (“*You know. You know*” [64; original emphasis]) and she seems to have decided to act upon the knowledge imparted, her final hesitation suggests that she still does not know whether Mrs. Quinn tells the truth or not; and if she does, which of the four versions is true. Also, she still does not know when she acts right: if she notifies the police, tells Rupert, or keeps silent either to protect him or because she dismisses his

wife's ranting as a dying person's wrath. Enid, just like the heroine of "Open Secrets," learns to see these parallel realities and to accept them.

This is a most radical revision of the Radcliffean female gothic as it undermines a fundamental theme. The female or terror gothic subsists on a variety of structures that portrays or creates anxiety as it dramatizes the search for knowledge; not knowing always seems worse than knowing the worst (DeLamotte, *Perils* 36-38). There is one thing, though, that is explicitly and irrevocably known: the heroine is always sure of herself, of her righteousness, i.e., of her "conscious worth." Enid, however, learns that there are dark "worlds alongside" in herself, which thus erases that "spiritual class barrier" (DeLamotte, *Perils* 36) between herself and Mrs. Quinn. Thus, what disappears is the boundary that separates her (the worthy and righteous heroine in full knowledge of her "conscious worth") from Mrs. Jeanette Quinn (the calculating French femme fatale who seduced the innocent Rupert so that she could behave like a queen [!]*—*she is a sloppy housewife*—*only to turn him into a murderer). The knowledge that Enid finds as the boon for her travails says then that she is no different from others; her "conscious worth" is undermined.

The loss of "conscious worth" is highly problematic for a female gothic comedy, though. Knowledge should redeem her from her suffering and the search for it is justified by the opportunity to reconfigure the pattern of male-female relationship portrayed as gender warfare earlier into a new heterosexual partnership resting on the base of gender equity. This reconfiguration has stood in the focus of female gothic fantasy (romance) since the Brontës' codified it as the theme of "taming" the two-faced hero. If, however, the heroine loses her claim for the right to reconfigure her relationship to the hero, the female gothic resolution of happy ending is endangered.

This is what happens in "The Love of a Good Woman." I previously suggested that the opening image of the short story the ophthalmoscope, which reminds one of a typical Munroian closing epiphany (Carrington, "Don't" 169), functions as a frame to enclose the episodic dispersal of the narrative. This enclosure, however, in no way implies closure. On the contrary, the frame is a trick that develops a structure that denies the possibility of romance closure. This way, it becomes a meta-textual device that problematizes seeing in all its meanings (perception, cognition, interpretation, and, with a female gothic impulse, the desire for closure).

Indeed, at the beginning I claimed that the text cannot stop beginning; it can equally not stop. This is one of the few stories of the 1990s in Munro's oeuvre that has been subject to critical reading, moreover, to several readings. Comparing their results, especially with regard to how they interpret the ending, is indicative of the ambiguity it presents. Carrington finds

that there is one probable ending, Enid keeps silent and marries Rupert, but there are two possible explanations for how the ophthalmoscope gets into the museum. In one, the more probable one, Enid does not tell Rupert that she knows, she marries him and in her wifely order-making, she finds the box of optometric instruments, the evidence of murder, which she deposits anonymously in the local museum. In the other explanation, the box is washed out of the car in the river, which one of the boys, probably Cece, finds and sends to the museum. McCombs similarly thinks that there might be several endings, but she finds the most probable to be the one in which Enid similarly does not tell Rupert anything, she marries him, finds the box, and keeps it. How the box gets into the museum remains a mystery (340). Duffy also believes that for all the ambiguity of the story, Enid and Rupert “begin cohabiting” (176), Enid donates the box to the museum, provided that “Rupert dies before she does, that he does not kill her at the river, and that she does not actualize her fantasy of turning him in after turning him on.” Though, he then continues with the ironic question: “Does the title indicate that the killer Rupert is redeemed, in Harlequin Romance fashion, by ‘the love of a good woman’?” (178). John C. Gerlach, in turn, notes that all that critical readings have provided is “a series of ‘perhaps’ conclusions” (149). Therefore, he suggests reading it through the lens of sideshadowing as a narrative technique to produce narrative irresolution, because it provides an explanation for the continuing sense of uncertainty the reader finds instead of thematic resolution (151-52).

The impulse to read the ending to confirm the heroine’s worthiness of a happy ending (marriage to Rupert with or without telling) is in keeping with the female gothic scenario, though, at the same time, one cannot but wonder about the semantic thrust of the adjective “good” in the title. Ultimately, this is what Enid’s, and the reader’s, dilemma crystallizes about, argues Gerlach also. He sides with Carrington and Duffy, who argue that Munro’s narrative defines “goodness” as the ability “to keep the world habitable” (Munro, “Love” 76). They support their understanding by pointing to a scene recalled by Enid: as a child she finds her father with a woman’s “fronts [ ... ] stuck in Daddy’s mouth” (75), which she tells her mother. Her mother, however, proves Enid intentionally wrong to forestall the disclosure of her father’s infidelity. She stops Enid from tattle-telling because she prefers silent complicity to direct confrontation. This same silent complicity governs her when she suggests Enid that she make a false promise to her father’s deathbed wish. She advises: “Oh, go ahead. Go ahead and promise him. What difference is it going to make?” (39). Enid at the time finds the idea of lying shocking, even if “[i]t was consistent with her mother’s way of looking at a lot of things” (39). Yet, when dressed up for her doom and ready to confront Rupert, she understands something of her mother’s motivation:

She hadn't asked him yet, she hadn't spoken. Nothing yet committed her to asking. It was still *before*. Mr. Willens had still driven himself into Jutland Pond, on purpose or by accident. [ ... ] And as long as that was so, this room and this house and her life had a different possibility, an entirely different possibility from the one she had been living with (or glorying in—however you wanted to put it) for the last few days. The different possibility was coming closer to her, and all she needed to do was to keep quiet and let it come. Through her silence, through her collaboration in a silence, what benefits could bloom. For others, and for herself.

This was what most people knew. A simple thing that it had taken her so long to understand. This was how to keep the world habitable. (75-76; original emphasis)

"Goodness" as the ability "to keep the world habitable" (76) by collaborating in silence, however, remains a highly irresolute term which resonates in and through the various possible endings. All the more so because the "goodness" of the eponymous good woman may hold heavily ironic undertones: Enid, on the one hand, may understand that keeping the world habitable is a value in itself, but, on the other, she may also delude herself; after all she is, in Duffy's words, "celibate, sex obsessed, naive, fussy, a master of casuistry, and as in love with death as any gothic heroine" (182). Moreover, Munro's fiction abounds in self-deluding or scheming nurses (Mary McQuade in "Images," Naomi's mother in *Lives*, Mary Jo in "Eskimo," Nurse Atkinson in "Friend of My Youth," the husband's new lover in "The Albanian Virgin," Mrs. Barrie in "Before the Change," and Iona in "My Mother's Dream"). Thematic irresoluteness thus underlines what Gerlach calls the "presentness" of the ending (151).

The ability to live with complicitous knowledge (both as the knowledge of oneself as incorporating dark otherworlds—the loss of "conscious worth"—and as collaborating in silence about Rupert's murderous act) is what makes Enid good. She becomes the eponymous "good woman" because at last she understands that by pulling down "the spiritual class barrier" (DeLamotte, *Perils* 36) for good, her sacrifice of the truth, maybe, of her righteousness, definitely, makes the world better a place. She chooses the moral language of care and responsibility instead of that of justice and right (see Gilligan esp. 19, 63, 73, 100). Rather than insist on her female gothic hero(ni)c right to enter into a heterosexual relationship where she can "tame" her future husband into accepting her equality, she renounces the rationalization of her "worlds alongside" into harmony with her claim to "conscious worth"; instead, she chooses to civilize two little girls and a once civilized man corrupted by an evil woman. After all, what would have happened if her mother had not covered up Enid's father's infidelity?—disaster, surely. Her life of caring for others thus is fulfilled.

On the other hand, and this is the source of thematic irresolution and the undecidability of the meaning of “goodness” creating a powerful irony, the loss of “conscious worth” cannot guarantee a happy ending in the romance mode. Has she not been governed all her life by selfish motives, has she not played saint all the time till realizing her own self-delusion? Here is a chance for an aging woman after the war with few available men around to procure a family—should she not take it? And how much this may be a motive in her decision to tell or not to tell is suggested in Rupert’s childless and similarly aging sister’s hasty preparations to move the kids to her house. Thus, whether her decision is governed by the tolerance of untruth in her own interest or by solidarity, a concept that embraces mutual attachment between individuals, remains unclear. In addition, Enid discovers a power in not telling—with her righteousness lost the possibility to reformulate, customize, and even submerge stories is open to her. (Carrington’s interpretation of Part I in terms of the power structure of narration also supports this reading.<sup>74</sup>)

Now, I return to the issue of maturity. The subplot of finding the corpse in Part I has two functions: (1) it plays a crucial role in highlighting the existence of parallel realities, but in its thematic reflection on the story proper, it does even more. Although the boys recognize that there are different realities, they are unable to bridge the gap between them or understand their relations to each other. Enid, however, seems to give up wanting to erase the otherworld: she accommodates living in them not as an either/or choice. Thus growing-up is defined as the ability to tolerate parallel realities and truths and the renunciation of “conscious worth.”

(2) The second function of Part I is similarly to dramatize maturity, but now in the ways telling is conceptualized. Maturity is characterized by not only understanding but also turning to one’s use the power structure that underlies telling. The boys find Mr. Willens’s car with his dead body inside in the river by accident. They unanimously agree that they run to town and loudly inform everyone there of their find. They plan that “[t]hey would come into town yelling and waving their news around them and everybody would be stock-still, taking it in” (Munro, “Love” 12). Instead, as soon as they enter town, they adopt town manners and behave as is expected of boys of their age and position. They slow down, they say “Hullo” when an adult greets them “because there might be some kind of trouble if you didn’t” (13), and even if they are somewhat confused, they reply “with the usual reticence” (13) when asked. They seem to have forgotten why they hurried back and they all go separately home, have lunch and meet again in the afternoon. None tells anything because “[i]t was just that their houses seemed too full. Too much was going on already” (22). In the afternoon, they walk to Mr. Willens’s house to look for signs that would confirm their experience. They find none. They then walk to the police office, but they feel intimidated by the presence of the

people there, so they do not tell. They decide to tell a once figure of authority past his prime, but he does not have his hearing aid with him, so he does not hear a word. At last, Jimmy tells his mom, whom he thinks to be powerless and incapable of action. He is mistaken. Yet, the section illustrates that telling is not an innocent act, it presupposes an intricate power structure, where the positions define what may be told, to whom and how.

While for long, Enid, just like the boys, cannot decide whether she should part with the information she received, after losing her “conscious worth” she understands how childish her idea of truth was on which she planned to build her action. Just before Mrs. Quinn’s death, but after her confession, Enid lectures the kids on why the truth should be told:

“What do you think,” said Enid, sitting on the grass with her head back and her eyes shut, “what do you think, if a person does something very bad, do they have to be punished?”

“Yes,” said Lois immediately. “They have to get a licking.”

“Who did it?” said Sylvie.

“Just thinking of anybody,” said Enid. “Now, what if it was a very bad thing but nobody knew they did it? Should they tell that they did and be punished?”

Sylvie said, “I would know they did it.”

“You would not,” said Lois. “How would you know?”

“I would’ve seed them.” [ ... ]

“Lois stold a green comb,” Sylvie said.

“I did not,” said Lois.

“I want you to remember that,” Enid said.

Lois said, “It was just laying the side the road.” (66)

Even though the children are unable to express themselves in a fully articulate manner, they seem to know the rudiments of constructing a case against someone better than Enid: they point to the need for evidence, at least as a trustable eye witness account, and to the role of circumstances. Enid has considered none of these when constructing a case against Rupert. However, after understanding her own dark otherworld, when she returns dressed to death or to glory, she looks around the place and sees plenty of sunlight spreading lightheartedness now, “‘Lies’ is the word that Enid can hear now, out of all the words that Mrs. Quinn said in that room. *Lies. I bet it’s all lies*” (74; original emphasis). She understands how she might have been fooled by Mrs. Quinn’s power game. With this mature knowledge then, she grows up and stops tattle-telling.

Maturity is thus doubly determined by the loss of “conscious worth” (as a source of self-righteousness)—the fundamental female gothic convention to guarantee resolution with a happy ending. But it is this maturity that can foster the creation of a home that neither reverberates the gender warfare (male- vs. female-ruled unhomely homes) nor erases all differences with the leveling power of self-restraint. Munro seems to suggest, the home can be made homey by those who instead of speaking what Gilligan (esp. 19, 63, 73, 100) calls the



moral language of right and justice speak that of care, who accept the importance of care, responsibility, and the recognition of the other in their context.

### 3. 2. 2. *“Jakarta”*

The story that follows “The Love of a Good Woman” in the volume of the same title is a curious one: its main character is male, which is, although not unprecedented, rare in Munro’s oeuvre. Nonetheless, the protagonist travels a similar trajectory to that of Enid’s leading up to the moment of a possible recognition that he has lived his life in a one dimensional world governed by concepts and ideas that have delimited his vision—his “conscious worth.” The ending reverberates the constitutive moment of “The Love of a Good Woman,” when the protagonist recognizes “worlds alongside,” options, alternatives, and new possibilities opening up if he allows for the intrusion of otherworlds.

The otherworld of “Jakarta,” however, differs significantly from these. While in “The Love of a Good Woman” Enid can be said to have lived in the (alternate possible) self-deluded irrational world of saintly self-sacrifice from which she steps into a world where she can do good (to the daughters and to a man good at heart regardless of whether he killed the optometrist or not), even if this is possible by embracing the possibility of evil, in “Jakarta” the move is from the rational world into an irrational one. The male protagonist, an aged man, a no-nonsense retired manager, meets with an old acquaintance “with a secret screw loose” (Munro, “Jakarta” 110) and soon he does not want “to go on, to go home” (116). Yet, if one considers how Munro builds the story around the juxtaposition of two irreconcilable worlds, the almost fanatic world of the old acquaintance and that of the sensible protagonist, the rational managerial world seems to be just as maniacally one-dimensional as the world of fanatics—since both are alternate possible fantasy worlds to escape the complexity of (actual/gothic) life. Therefore, the move away from the (alternate possible/fantasy) rational world and into, or at least towards, another (gothic) less rational one appears in a positive light because it suggests a mature understanding.

The story, as usual with Munro, is really two stories with two protagonists. The two stories separated by a three decade-long gap recount how the two members of a once married couple see and try to make sense of another married couple and their nonconformist life, or more exactly, of the unreasonable love that binds the wife to her husband. The short story is divided into four sections, each further divided into smaller parts by typographic breaks. The sections are not chronologically arranged; past and present—both in the form of a present-tense account—fit like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. Sections I and III focus on Kath in her mid-twenties, while sections II and IV focus on her husband, Ken, who, three decades later goes to

visit Kath's one time friend, Sonje. Sonje and her husband's world represents an otherworld for both Kath in the past and Ken in the present, but while Kath senses something in this otherworld that leads to a divorce probably very soon after the events described in her story, for Ken it takes a long time—and two other wives—to intimate that however irrational Sonje and her husband's otherworld may appear it still may hold a reflective truth.

The otherworld is Sonje's world but its otherness does not lie in what offers itself as an obvious otherness. Sonje is an American married to an American but living in Canada because they imply they have been persecuted in the United States for their political leaning. Her husband, Cottar, is a representative of the sixties' counterculture: as a journalist he expounds his leftist views openly, he does not believe in either monogamy or in such old-fashioned notions as love, he has lived in communes, and he fights capitalism wherever it springs, thus, for example, he eagerly subscribes to the practice of exchanging sexual partners both within and outside the commune to eradicate "the idea of sexual property" (97) in service of bourgeois ideology. He attacks the government, all governments and companies, for all the wrongs they have brought on mankind. At the time of Kath's story he is planning to travel to Asia to do some unspecified work, which he implies is in connection with exposing the working of capitalism. Ultimately, he dies there, in Jakarta shortly after his arrival. Nonetheless, for all his political views and lifestyle, he marries an unlikely girl, Sonje, who comes from a middle-class—bourgeois—family, is named after her mother's favorite actress, and is dreaming of becoming a ballet dancer, or as Cottar comments, hoping "that she'll turn into a dying swan" (83). Sonje is the opposite of Cottar in several respects: she is reserved, dignified, tactful, and so desperately in love with the always lecturing Cottar that she even surrenders to his expectation of sharing in the sexual exchange of partners against her own inclination. She does all that Cottar expects her to do in her agonizing love. She truly believes what she once tells Kath and that Kath finds shocking: "My happiness depends on Cottar" (85). Sonje's otherworld is her surrender to a notion of love. For this love she (somewhat like Bea in "Vandals") tolerates the life that Cottar offers, his scorn, his brashness, his self-satisfaction, his self-importance, his sexual adventures, all because she thinks it would be beautiful if a woman could submerge herself in a man's love (85), as she explains to Kath when discussing a short story by D. H. Lawrence.

The sections dedicated to Kath depict how she responds to Sonje's love, how she protests against the notion of love that requires a woman's total surrender to a man. Although Kath shares a lot in common with Sonje, in several respects she is Sonje's opposite. Both are women in their mid-twenties, both have already passed a series of "examinations" in life, as she puts it (82): both have finished school, have married, worked in the local library, and now

both are renting a holiday home at the same place. In addition, both like to read books by Katherine Mansfield and Lawrence (although Sonje periodically forces herself to read books recommended by Cottar), both like to discuss them, and both dread being a Mother. Although Kath is a mother—she has a baby she is still breastfeeding—she dreads acting like one: like the women they call the Monicas, who go the same beach every day. The Monicas are mothers who all have two, three or four children, all are pregnant or look as if they were, all talk loudly to outshout their kids' squalls, and all they talk about is where to get food cheaply and which ointment works (79-80). Kath and Sonje dread them because "[t]hey turn the whole beach into a platform. Their burdens, their strung-out progeny and maternal poundage, their authority, can annihilate the bright water, the perfect small cove with red-limbed arbutus trees, the cedars growing crookedly out of the high rocks" (80). They are Mothers incarnate.

For Kath the Monicas represent a real threat: the threat of what she might turn into. So, out of protest against being a Mother/Monica—the identical initials are *sue*ly not incidental—she reads or smokes when she is breastfeeding her baby "so as not to sink into a sludge of animal function. And she's nursing so that she can shrink her uterus and flatten her stomach, not just provide the baby—Noelle—with precious maternal antibodies" (80). On the other hand, Sonje represents another threat for her, that of annihilation by love, to which she responds with a similarly incoherent protest: at the farewell party before Cottar leaves for Jakarta, she puts on heavy make-up and flirts openly with two men even if she cannot ever imagine a sexual partner other than her husband, Ken (97). On the whole, she is unable to articulate what she is protesting against—the ideal of motherhood embodied in the Monicas and of prostrating love embodied in Sonje—but she does not even want to speak or think about it lest she herself might have to reveal that she feels her struggle to hold herself separately (as a mother and as a wife) an impoverishment in her life.

But perhaps she does not formulate the targets of her protest because it is not directed against gender expectations in the joint institution of love in marriage and motherhood as a woman's profession and destiny only, or primarily, even if it could be easily argued that she does not want to surrender herself to social and cultural expectations, which is also true. The reason for her protests lies elsewhere, I claim. But what it is, is not to be sought in her story only; instead, it is revealed by the juxtaposition of Kath's and Kent's stories.

Kent is a pharmacist working for a drugstore chain. He believes that in his world "mistakes mattered, responsibility was constant, you did not have time to fool around with ideas about whether chain drugstores were a bad idea or indulge in some paranoia about drug companies. That was the real world and he went into it every day with the weight of his future and Kath's on his shoulders" (94-95). By contrast, he sees Cottar and the rest of the

“groaners” (95), as people “on the fringes of real life, haranguing and thinking themselves important, the way fanatics of any sort did” (94); to his mind, these people even lack the solidity that could elevate them to the status of enemy. Kent believes that people like Cottar play an irresponsible game, unlike him, because he is a serious man. Nonetheless, Kath is not always proud of him; on the contrary, she has misgivings about her husband, she even feels humiliated because of him, although Kent notices none of her uneasiness.

Her worst humiliation on account of Kent happens at a curry dinner with friends at Sonje’s and Cottar’s place. Most present are Cottar’s friends, Sonje invites the then still pregnant Kath, who introduces her husband to the hostess here. That the dinner would be ruined can be foretold already in Kent’s room when he is dressing: he puts on a shirt and a tie, the costume that most clearly signals where one stands in the fight between bourgeois capitalism and nonconformism. At the dinner

Kent took it upon himself to defend capitalism, the Korean War, nuclear weapons, John Foster Dulles, the execution of the Rosenbergs—whatever the others threw at him. He scoffed at the idea that American companies were persuading African mothers to buy formula and not to nurse their babies, and that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were behaving brutally to Indians, and above all at the notion that Cottar’s phone might be tapped. He quoted *Time* magazine and announced he was doing so. (92)

Kath is mortified by the act that her husband puts on there; mostly because on that occasion she does not understand how much it really is an act, a performance—but neither does Ken. A key expression in the passage is that he “took it upon himself” to defend anything that Cottar and his friends reject, but why he is doing so he does not know. (“He didn’t know what propelled him” [92]). Thirty years later, when visiting Sonje, he remembers the same evening and explains his behavior simply by commenting that he “couldn’t let it pass. He thought he might as well jump in then as later” (91). But if he is putting on a show in defense of ideas he would otherwise give more thought to or that he would outright reject, his opponents are his equals in their performances: a young man, who “talked to him with the *theatrical* rage of a son” (emphasis mine) is clapping his knees and wagging his head from side to side while *manufacturing* an incredulous laugh when Cottar speaks to him “*with the worn patience of a teacher* to a pupil” (emphasis mine). What Kath finds appalling about the evening, however, is not only the fact that “Kent was asking for most of this” (95): what she is most intrigued by is that “[e]verybody 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. Except perhaps for Sonje. [ ... ] But Sonje drew on Cottar; he was her certainty” (95).

Kath, in contrast to them, is uncertain of everything: of her husband, her motherhood, her life, her ideas, objectives, etc. Kent, always sure of himself, finds her indecisiveness

exasperating; he does not understand why she cannot tell a simple thing like what sort of a house she likes, for instance (94), but there are a lot of other things he does not notice in his self-assurance either. He does not notice, for example, that Kath stays out of the conversation at the curry dinner not because she supports him, as he believes, but because she is ashamed that he does not even realize that the company are tying him “up in knots” (95). She keeps silent because in her incertitude she evades all conflicts: she hides behind a cushion and wishes that her water would break to deliver her from the dinner. Other times, she covers up her lack of certainty by shortcutting any conversation that would force her to clarify where she stands with the help of arguments that she knows she herself does not subscribe to (like in her discussion of Lawrence’s short story).<sup>75</sup> She lives her life by passing one compulsory “examination” that she does not have a lot of influence on after another, although she notes that with the progress of years it is more and more difficult to tell what the next exam in line was (83).

The only time she shows few signs of hesitation is in the carnivalesque atmosphere of the party. Here she evades the “real” people living in the “real” world (like Ken) and seeks out the otherworldly Cottar, kisses a man she does not know, and symbolically changes into Amy, Cottar’s concubine, by wearing her make-up and lipstick. Under the disguise of the heavy make-up she veritably transforms into a temple prostitute as she prefers to see women like Amy, and Sonje, in the commune they have lived in. Yet, when she suspects that her performance in the role of a temple prostitute has been exposed, she retreats, she washes off her make-up and breastfeeds her baby.<sup>76</sup>

The act of removing the make-up is symbolic: when she cleans off its remnants, she steps out of the role that confers onto her a sense of inevitability, of self-assurance. Other members of the party, including her husband, are incapable of leaving their roles behind. They remain closed into their certainty that feeds on a theory of love, on dogmatic political convictions, or on maternal authority—their “conscious worth.” Kath, however, in her suppleness can change from a temple prostitute into a mother. It is her indecisiveness, her lack of certainty, her ability to assume roles as roles that makes her a survivor in the story. The fact that she is unsure about wanting to be a mother, a wife, a lover, that she is both drawn to and revolted by the ideal of motherhood represented by the Monicas and by the ideal of love represented by Sonje, or by Amy, just as the fact that she both loves Kent and is repelled by his brashness, i. e., the fact that she lacks the certainty conferred by dogmatic faith (as “conscious worth”) invests her with all those qualities that allow her to travel in and between different worlds and thus survive and be “all right” in the end (114). By contrast, both Sonje

and Kent are portrayed as people closed into their (alternate possible/fantasy) worlds, and, thus, lacking in some important ways.

Kent's sections are dedicated to describing his visit to Sonje, who appears three decades after the party as a crazy, talkative old woman fixated on believing her long-dead husband alive and living in hiding in Jakarta. She develops a whole theory about Cottar not being dead: "'Oh, I did [believe him dead] at first,' she said. 'It never occurred to me to doubt it. And then suddenly I just woke up and saw it didn't necessarily have to be true. It didn't have to be true at all,'" she says to Kent (107-08). So she weaves an unbelievable story not just about why Cottar himself sent a message of his death but also about how she is going to track him down, how she is going to travel to Jakarta herself and elicit information about him from locals notwithstanding the obvious unfeasibility of her plans. Kent is amazed and not only because of the elaborateness of her "theory" (107)—she has answers for everything: why he wants her to believe him dead (so she would take care of his blind mother, whom he really loves), how he has prompted a local doctor to write Sonje the news of his death in exchange for some money to keep a local hospital for the poor running, and how she is going to find him alive and well (she has even procured all kinds of maps to study the city).

The visit is partly embarrassing and partly enlightening for Kent because at one point he realizes that Sonje's dwelling in a world dedicated to her love of Cottar displays a pattern he has not recognized so far. He grows aware that this manic love is not simply the sign of her being "off her rocker" (110).

With every visit he had made on this trip, there had come a moment of severe disappointment. The moment when he realized that the person he was talking to, the person he has made a point of seeking out, was not going to give him whatever it was he had come for. The old friend he had visited in Arizona was obsessed with the dangers of life, in spite of his expensive residence in a protected community. His old friend's wife, who was over seventy, wanted to show him pictures of herself and some other old woman dressed up as Klondike dance-hall girls, for a musical show they had put on. And his grown-up children were caught up in their own lives. [ ... ] The surprise was that these lives, the lives his sons and daughter were living, seemed closed in now, somewhat predictable. (110)

At this point he still does not recognize though that his life is equally "closed in." While Sonje's world is closed because she opts for an elaborate theory of her own in which her mainstay in life is alive and his friend's is equally so because of his paranoid fears, Kent's "real" world is closed in by the measuring stick of success: a progression of wives, achieving children, and seemingly good health—*his* examinations in life. He, of course, thinks of his life as an accomplishment—he comes to boast of his good looks (his suntan and steady weight) administered to by his third wife, a year younger than his daughter by Kath, while he carefully guards that anyone of his age should notice the regularly needed medication to keep him

going. The value of his success is doubtful, though; all the more so, because neither of his marriages seems truly satisfactory, his children are not at all that happy—Noelle is leaving her second husband—and his health depends on his physiotherapist third wife and the little pill he takes in secret. In addition, Kent intimates that his visit to Sonje is a substitute for the missed opportunity of seeing Kath; he arrives here with “the silly hope that Sonje might report to Kath how well he was looking [ ... ] and how satisfactorily he was married. Noelle might have said something of the kind, but somehow Sonje’s word would count for more than Noelle’s” (114). Both Sonje and Kent deceive themselves, in a sense, but while Sonje’s self-deception is voluntary, Kent is not even aware of it.

Yet, in Sonje’s living room he experiences a moment that changes the way he thinks of Sonje’s otherworld all wrapped up in Cottar that redefines both Sonje’s otherworld and his “real” one. After a short period of being close to fainting induced by his failure to take his pill in time he contemplates:

Everything was in a hurry. Except when everything was desperately slow. When they drove, he waited and waited [ ... ] And then what? Nothing. But once in a while came a moment when everything seemed to have something to say to you. The rocking bushes, the bleaching light. All in a flash, in a rush, when you couldn’t concentrate. Just when you wanted summing up, you got a speedy, goofy view, as from a fun-ride. So you picked the wrong idea, surely the wrong idea. That somebody dead might be alive and in Jakarta. (115)

This leads him to not wanting to go on home with Deborah but staying with Sonje and listening to her talk about Jakarta.

The moment “when everything seemed to have something to say to you” (115) represents the climax of the short story; everything seems to point to this moment as a Munroian epiphany which allows Kent to reflect on what has gone wrong in his life. This moment then promises to create the opportunity to correct his vision by allowing for the intrusion of the extraordinary (Sonje’s otherworld) into *his* (alternate possible/fantasy) reality and thus to reconstitute himself. But the applicability of the concept of epiphany to Munro’s fiction has divided criticism. While Martin holds that the Munroian epiphany provides closure to her stories by reconciling two opposing ideas or concepts (here these would be Sonje’s fantasizing and Kent’s managerial shortsightedness) by erasing the dividing line between parallel realities (13), David Crouse, on the contrary, contends that Munro’s use of epiphany complicates the author’s vision instead of clarifying it. He argues that although it is undeniable that epiphany “implies a set of fixed values, a single correct way to see the world” (51), in Munro’s fiction it still moves away from explanation in its focus on small isolated moments. Thus, instead of clarifying, and bringing the opposites together, epiphany extends and expands time, ultimately, in such a way, that no moment becomes definitive (52).

Epiphany, therefore, Crouse argues, resists closure. The question is then: how does this moment function in “Jakarta”? Does it provide closure, as Martin’s theory suggests, that erases the borderline between Sonje’s and Kent’s worlds or does it resist closure by extending the moment?

Martin’s explanation is fully applicable to account for Kent’s sections. In the story that is outlined in sections II and IV, at the end of which Kent experiences this moment of insight, he appears to understand that both he and Sonje have lived in worlds that they have preferred to close themselves into (worlds of intentional blindness), and, in this sense, these worlds are not that different: the dividing line between the real and the extraordinary (otherworldly) crumbles.

However, Kent’s sections are only half of the whole story, and in Kath’s sections one cannot find any such constitutive moment. One might argue that the absence of such an epiphanic moment is intentional, after all the time gap between the sections might be regarded to serve the aim of creating a sense of development since the time dimension, the process of remembering, lends continuity, as well as a certain sense of teleology, to what are essentially isolated moments. Yet, there is a strong argument against seeing Kath’s sections as a backdrop to the main character’s, Kent’s, development. The two stories are not arranged in such a clearly hierarchic manner as in “The Love of a Good Woman,” for example, which argument is supported by the jigsaw structure as well. Neither can be easily pointed out as the main plot or, on the contrary, the subplot. Kent’s development towards understanding a truth is not the uniquely favored theme in the short story.

“Jakarta,” the short story as a whole, is built around the juxtaposition of Kent’s and Kath’s story, and what is missing in their interlocking stories is exactly that “set of fixed values, a single correct way to see the world” (Crouse 51) that would make Kent’s journey move into a set direction, towards an epiphany. Kath’s sections lack closure, the last time when the reader sees her is when she cleanses her face from all the make-up Amy put on her. Yet, the two parts belong together not only in their theme (seeing face to face with Sonje’s otherworld): their connection is emphasized by the mirror symbolism present in both. Kath at the embarrassing curry dinner pushes a cushion against her belly with a pattern that had gone silvery of wear while she entertains herself “twisting the cushion this way and that to catch the silver gleam” (95). Kent discovers similar shining silver spots on Sonje’s face thirty years later, which he thinks to be the remnants of skin cancer (87) and which he watches after his spell to pick up the light “like signals from a mirror” (115). What the signals tell, or what the mirror shows, in both, however, remains unclear; yet their function is the same: both are reflective surfaces in which Kath and Kent can recognize themselves through Sonje.



By contrast, if the moment experienced by Kent is not described with the concept of epiphany, since what is missing is what regardless of their differences of opinion both Martin and Crouse find a constitutive element of epiphany (shared values), but with a concept that the gothic dramatizes through its viscosity (the state of mind while experiencing reality in the process of seeing differently), the two sections seem to work their effects in tandem. The moment described represents not so much a moment of epiphanic clarification but one of confusion in that it is rooted in a state of different consciousness, a typical gothic situation. Kent is “seeing differently” for the first time, which enables him to leave his self-assurance conferred by self-righteousness. If seen in this light, the trajectory of Kent’s journey is from the enclosure of his “conscious worth” into a state that lets him experience the world through his senses, mind, and emotion leading to different interpretations.

This trajectory is underlined by the changes in passages of description also. Kent’s descriptions are factual throughout, one has the sense that he sizes up everything carefully as a realtor would do:

The dunes were covered with grass. They looked like ordinary hills, except where a naked sandy shoulder was revealed, to make the landscape look playful. (86)

The first thing Kent noticed about the house was that it was chilly. But houses in the Pacific Northwest are seldom as warm as they look—move out of the sun and you feel at once a clammy breath. Fogs and rainy winter cold must have entered this house for a long time almost without opposition. (89)

The two large connected front rooms were bare, except for an upright piano. The floor was scuffed gray in the middle, darkly waxed at the corners. [ ... ] (88)

The kitchen was another big room, which the cupboards didn’t properly fill. The floor was gray and black tiles—or perhaps black and white tiles, the white made gray by dirty scrub water. [ ... ] (89)

That living room had been heated by a stone fireplace at one end, and though the fire was going—the only time he had been there—old ashes were spilling out of it and bits of orange peel, bits of garbage. And there were books and pamphlets everywhere. Instead of a sofa there was a cot [ ... ] (90)

She was wearing one of his old shirts over jeans fastened with a string of safety pins. He had thought that a sloppy outfit to go out to dinner in, but concluded that maybe it was all she could get into.

That was right before Noelle was born. (91)

By contrast, Kath’s descriptions are like moving images following in quick succession, especially in part III. Kath’s eyes do not dwell on anything or anybody long enough to convey anything other than a fleeting impression. Her walk through the various scenes of the farewell party provides her and the reader with the kind of “goofy” view that Kent eventually

meditates on. When she looks at something, it is not to consolidate her preconceptions or to formulate convictions, but to find a connection.<sup>77</sup>

By the end of the narrative, though, after the altered state of consciousness Kent recalls scenery as seen from a moving car when everything seems to say something to him, which he is unable to make out (115). The message is there, but he needs to engage with the thing seen and not just to assess or pass judgment over it. It is no wonder then that the short story closes on this ambiguous note. It depicts the journey of the main character from the self-assurance of “conscious worth” to a state of mind required of the gothic heroine when contemplating a scene. At the end he is at a similar crossroads where Enid stands at the end of “The Love of a Good Woman”—he is contemplating a scene that tells him his world does not make sense any longer, but he has already started on the road of learning to “see differently.”

### 3. 3. *Changing Inevitabilities: “Carried Away”*

“Carried Away,” the opening story of *Open Secrets* is another immediate classic in Munro’s oeuvre next to “Vandak” and “The Love of a Good Woman.” It shares several thematic and stylistic similarities with both: its protagonist is lost like Bea and an old maid like Enid, who confronts death, mystery, and desire, in whose eventual marriage the ability to keep secrets plays a formative role. It is divided into four parts and enclosed by a frame, just like “The Love of a Good Woman,” and it ends on a similarly ambiguous note since it shows Louisa, the heroine “going under a wave” (Munro, “Carried” 50). There is one major difference, though. It shows an unprecedented interest in depicting historical changes and their ensuing social and cultural consequences.

The short story has been read so far as a key to Munro’s interest in social changes newly found in the late eighties and nineties. In a 1990 interview she explains: “When I got away from the personal things, I got interested in social changes—the way people are making society, if that doesn’t sound too grand. Things that happen in the world affect people in ways most of them don’t imagine, and that fascinates me. All kinds of things happen to you because of what is going on in the world outside” (qtd. in Bruckner 1). Clark and Robert Lecker discuss the story exclusively in light of the theme of social changes and both contend that it literalizes the clash between two kinds of production practices that profoundly influenced people’s lives not only in terms of work processes but also in terms of self-definition during and in-between the two world wars. Clark concludes that the story presents the victory of capitalist production practices over pre-capitalist ones, while also suggesting that there is an erotic, revolutionary, even anarchic force, which threatens the standing and the evolving order with disruption. Lecker takes Clark’s cue and similarly reads it as a memorial to the fight

between agrarianism and capitalism, but he believes that Munro's attitude as depicted in the narrative is nostalgic rather than revolutionary.

Munro's stories rarely provide an occasion for discussing abstract historical ideas so clearly implicated in an ideological warfare, but, as Clark and Lecker prove, this approach yields most interesting results, even if at first sight the story does not lend itself easily to such an exploration. In contrast, I will argue that the story can also be read within the framework of gothic criticism and that it fits nicely into Munro's reformulation of major female gothic conventions. It presents a female (neo-)gothic heroine who never had the chance to gain full possession of a self-consciousness of her worth because of the rapidly changing world around her. So Munro asks in "Carried Away": what happens to the inevitability of the female gothic romance (happy) ending, if a heroine is caught up in changing historical circumstances, and her loss of irreproachability is the direct result of the very same changing historical circumstances? Is she to be denied a happy ending because she responds to changing times? That is, Munro inserts the female gothic romance into historical time.

To support my reading, I point to the ways both Clark's and Lecker's analyses gesture at an underlying theme in Munro's short story: the manufacturing of selves. To their minds, the manufacturing of selves is made possible by the advance of capitalism, which propels one into isolation. The irresolution of the ending portraying the dissolution of Louisa thus dramatizes Munro's critique of the false promises of capitalism by disrupting reading on a meta-textual level (Clark par. 21) and her yearning for a nostalgic past when individuals were whole (Lecker 105). I will connect the theme of manufacturing selves with that of "worlds alongside" and argue that the story rather than decry the creation of selves in response to changing circumstances, in fact, frames it as a female gothic heroic virtue to experience multiple and conflicting experiences. It shows the heroine responding to her environment and others.

The time frame for the plot is of crucial significance exactly for this reason. It covers the period from the First World War to the mid-fifties, in which economic ups and downs quickly alternated and the relationship between the individual and state services greatly changed.<sup>78</sup> These two in tandem delimited one's possibilities and thus one's choices, and actions as well, just like the inherited scripts, roles, functions, theories, myths, etc., offered by gender ideology, and one of their vehicles, the female gothic romance. This might be the link to Munro's newly found interest in social history.

The plot focuses on Louisa, an orphaned small-town librarian in her mid-twenties, who works herself up to loving a soldier, previously a library-goer, writing letters to her from the front, even though she does not remember him. She expects him to return after the war but

he fails to show up. One day, however, she reads in the town newspaper that he has married a local girl. She is dumbfounded by the situation till on one busy day in the library she finds a note on her desk with the short message that he was engaged to the girl before going overseas. Most of this the reader learns in the second part of the story which takes place after the war and during the Spanish flu when Louisa tells about her epistolary love affair to a man in a hotel. After some tipsy teasing she gives in to the advances of the traveling salesman and lets him escort her into her room. The third part focuses on an accident in which the secret lover and traitor is literally decapitated by a sawing machine some years later. The owner of the factory, Arthur Doud (Bea's father in "Vandals") offers his help to the widowed wife, who asks him to take back some books to the library on her dead husband's behalf. He does so, but finds the librarian's distraught behavior rather peculiar when he presents her with the books that obviously have never been properly checked out in spite of the wife's assertion that her husband was a regular visitor in the library. Nonetheless, Doud develops a liking for the library—which apparently has nothing to do with the librarian—till one day, quite surprisingly, he asks her to marry him. The last part returns to Louisa, already old (Arthur is long dead), who travels to a heart specialist in the city. In the waiting room she reads a short note in the newspaper about a meeting to be held that day where a man of the same name as her never seen decapitated love is going to speak. She changes her plans and goes to the meeting, but leaves before it starts. In the bus depot waiting for her bus, however, she "goes under a wave" (50) and meets with her love long believed to be dead; they chat till she regains her consciousness only to submerge into another wave. The last scene returns to the young Louisa just arriving in town, getting a position in the library, and looking out of the window of her hotel room.

Reading plays a central role in the plot, as Clark shows, since it is through its changing role in life that Munro dramatizes historical changes. The pre-capitalist or agrarian eras are represented in the short story by Jack Agnew's, the decapitated lover's, non-reading father, who is a gardener living on the edge of town, keeping to himself, completely withdrawing from society, living by the work of his two hands, hunting and fishing whenever he feels like. In Lecker's rendering, he "is clearly associated with a vanishing pastoral ideal" (120) while his son, sneaking into the library, is cut off from the country, which is also underlined by his job: instead of continuing in the footsteps of his father he prefers to join the Doud factory, which "dictated the time for many to get up, blowing at six o'clock in the morning. It blew again for work to start at seven and at twelve for dinnertime and at one in the afternoon for work to recommence, and then at five-thirty for the men to lay down their tools and go home" (Munro, "Carried" 25). Jack's father, the non-reader, is a solitary man by his own choice

because he does not wish to adapt himself to the mechanized way of life. His son, in contrast, is fooled by what is traditionally taken to be a benefit of industrialization: he believes that education, and most importantly, the development of his reading skills will provide him with social advantages (Lecker 104). However, education does not only stand in the service of self-improvement but also in that of capitalist production practices because it cuts one off their community. The result of education is thus doubly tragic: on the one hand, it promises a rise on the social ladder; which it will not fulfill (Jack's life dictated by factory time is not qualitatively better than his father's) and it separates one from their community in championing an essentially solitary enterprise. After all, reading has not helped Jack to establish new connections after his estrangement from his father; just the contrary, it leads to total alienation—he is not sure his father is even reading the letters he sends him from the war (Munro, "Carried" 5) and he marries another non-reader who knows nothing about his aspirations. To cap it all, he is even forced to attend the library in hiding. Overall, what Lecker and Clark refer to is the historical juncture that instates the triumph of private verbal culture, which they evaluate as the loss of a communal idyll Munro feels nostalgic about.

In addition, the third tragic result of reading, and the one with the most far-reaching consequences, is that it is heavily implicated in the production of false selves. Lecker argues:

More sinister is her [Munro's] realization that the encouragement of reading, writing, and literary appreciation also allowed people to construct their own identities as readers, to fictionalize themselves as powerful by virtue of their ability to read. But because this form of power was an illusion, it was bound to fail, and in failing it was bound to reinforce the individual reader's ultimate sense of isolation and impotence. (Lecker 105)

Jack manufactures a self for himself through his readings, although he confesses that some of the books are way over his head (Munro, "Carried" 6), which results in a self-invented self that is unmistakably disjointed. On the one hand, he prefers to pose as a romantic adventurer and as a lover in popular romances (as suggested by his youthful attraction to Zane Grey and by his memory of a rainy day, which leads him to the ridiculous malapropism of comparing the sound of raindrops falling from Louisa's hair onto the radiator to grease sizzling in a frying pan [7] or by his fantasy of lifting her in the air in Hollywood fashion [11]). On the other hand, he is fascinated with war disillusionment, revolution, and worker uprisings (he reads H. G. Wells, Robert Ingersoll, G. K. Chesterton, and Lord Bertrand Russell [6; 26]). Louisa, more literate, and therefore more conscious of the inherent possibilities of manufacturing alluring selves, similarly embarks upon producing a self: a self in answer to a soldier's fantasy. But because she is not only a reader of, but also a professional in books, and in public image (she used to be a traveling saleswoman), she checks herself (she is not carried away as Jack is) and resists a total surrender to posing as a maiden popularized by fashion

magazines. (In the photo she sends him, “[s]he would have liked to wear a simple white blouse, a peasant girl’s smock with the string open at the neck. She did not own a blouse of that description and in fact has only seen them in pictures. And she would have like to let her hair down. Or [ ... ] piled very loosely and bound with strings of pearls” [10], she fantasizes.) Eventually, she poses as a kind woman, genuinely interested in him (she reports how his father is tending to the garden in his care), who is even ready to learn how to knit for his sake, although what she knits is truly impractical on the front: she knits a muffler—“For a soldier,” the narrator comments ironically (12). Her posture is just as fake as Jack’s; if it is any more serviceable than his, it is only because she is well-versed in the production of images and thus her product (her self) is more coherent than Jack’s. Literacy and reading in the short story, thus, are the central issues through which Munro explores her long abiding interest in the ways individuals invent multiple selves that are always “in search of a centre that can never be found” (105), Lecker concludes. All in all, “Carried Away” reveals the ultimate tragedy that “there is no self beyond story” (Lecker 105).

At the beginning of their correspondence Louisa writes Jack about her favorite authors: Hardy and Cather. She notes of Hardy in passing that although “he is accused of being gloomy” he is “very true to life” (Munro, “Carried” 6), Cather she does not describe. Carol L. Beran discusses in detail why Louisa, and Munro, find Hardy “true to life.” She argues that the short story is a retold version of Hardy’s “An Imaginative Woman” and that Louisa is modeled upon its heroine, Ella Marchmill, the wife of a thriving industrialist. But while Hardy’s story is an indictment against Victorian marriage, in which a woman is totally dependent upon her husband, Munro’s is an indictment against dowdy (Doud-y) life, where materiality displaces spirituality. Thus Beran contends that Munro juxtaposes a romantic bond (Louisa-Jack) to her “sordid” involvements with men (the doctor, the traveling salesman, Doud) to highlight the supremacy of “the spiritual affair” (“Thomas” 2).

Beran bases her reading partly on Hardy’s understanding of the clash between rural economies and industrialization, which leads her to agree with Clark and Lecker that “Carried Away,” on the hand, is a memorial to an idyllic world and, on the other, is a reminder of the fact that this lost, idyllic world will never return, however much people may wish for it. But while the fateful ending of Hardy’s story underlines the loss of idyll for good and thus it offers consolation in mourning; the ambiguous, hallucinatory ending of Munro’s story signals that there is no such consolation to be offered or to be found: the world is not fixed either in tragic gloom or in a happy ending. That is, when Louisa agrees to marry Arthur and accepts that the role he finds appealing for himself and for his wife means that she is ever getting more and more practical, she loses her connection to spirituality, which swells and breaks the

surface in her hallucinations at the end<sup>79</sup>—this is what Beran evaluates as Munro's modernization of Hardy's story (1).

Jack's decapitation by a machine is emblematic of the Hardy-esque tragedy of alienation that follows from self-invention. Louisa, with her cunning sales spiel, however, manages to construct a self for herself that makes her survival possible in the world of mechanization, because as a business manager (saleswoman, first, manager of books and looks, later, of the Doud factory, even later) she has adapted to inhabiting "a world in which textuality has displaced reality," Lecker states (115). Yet, Louisa, and the managerial world she represents, does not arise victoriously from the battle between the competing agrarian and capitalist worlds of production. The ending, its irresolution, the narrative dissolution that accompanies her mental dissolution that carries the reader back into a time when the young Louisa fantasizes about a pastoral ideal expresses a "desire for a natural, integrated self that predates literary constructions of the idea of self as a manufactured or narrated object" (Lecker 106). The hero, standing his ground against the wave of capitalism, is Jack's father, the solitary gardener and hunter in a world never to be recovered.

Although Clark's, Lecker's, and Beran's readings shed an illuminative light on the short story, their interpretations are predisposed against the kind of self-invention Louisa proves to be outstandingly effective in. For it is true, first, that Jack moves rather clumsily in and between various texts and, secondly, that he is unable to manufacture for himself a sufficiently integrated self; thirdly, it is also true that Arthur Doud is not an exceptionally gifted author (to appropriate Lecker's word play [124]), but their ineptitude is not the result of Louisa's artful manipulations. She does not emerge in any of the four sections—and neither does she in Bea Doud's, her step-daughter's accounts in "Vandals"—as either the cunning businesswoman Lecker describes her to be, or as the erotic body through whom the suppressed energies of pre-capitalist eras surge up, like in Clark's rendering, or as a woman preferring spiritual love to an economically viable companion in life, as Beran contends ("Thomas" 2). She is neither the beneficiary nor the victim of the contest between the two historical and social paradigms of production. She is not the plaything of time, but an individual who is an avid and gifted reader of books, signs, and people—a gothic heroine, in short, whose dissolution by the end of the narrative is tragic only in the sense that she has believed her own self-dramatization and that her recognition that there is another world beside the all too real business world is belated. Her tragedy is that she has opted for one (alternate possible/fantasy) world, just like Kent in "Jakarta," and did not accept the invitation of the threshold leading into the otherworld. It is this otherworld to return in her hallucinations.

Jack Agnew, as noted, invents for himself a disjointed self based on his haphazard readings. Yet, his wish to keep their correspondence a secret gestures at the possibility that he is aware to what extent his self-dramatization as a soldier dying on the war front writing to his unapproachable sweetheart does not harmonize with his image at home. He has separate personas for each of his worlds however self-contradictory they are: he is both a dreamer of romantic adventure, a “lone wolf” (Munro, “Carried” 5), and a lover in popular romance as well as a dutiful son to an uncaring father; he is both a man to keep his promises and a man who may sometimes be carried away. Jack Agnew as himself, however, never makes his presence in the story, he is present there only as a ghost. Not even Arthur can remember him although he was the one to find his severed head and put it back to where it belongs. His decapitation, his split into two, thus acquires further symbolic resonance.

While Jack plays his roles in his multiple self-dramatizations (which lack the adaptability and sensitivity of a gothic heroine though), Arthur’s problem is that he is unable to dramatize himself because the self he, so to say, inherited as the owner of the factory passed on to him after his father’s death does not suit him. His visit to offer his condolences as well as his contribution to funeral expenses at the dead man’s house after the accident is quite telling in this respect: he is first ignored, then taken to be the undertaker, and when this misunderstanding is clarified, he is ordered about by the women. His father was different, he was a legendary man to rule “by whims and decrees” (31) always obeyed and respected. However, the war changed a lot in the world of work because the shortage of workers accustomed people to a different treatment, which, although it was obvious that it could not be long upheld with the soldiers returning home and swelling the workforce, still changed the way people thought about their jobs. Arthur cannot follow his father’s methods of running the factory, “his way of proceeding was quite the opposite of his father’s. Think everything over and then think it over again. Stay in the background except when necessary. Keep your dignity. Try always to be fair” (32) are his rules. Their differences in management thus are rooted both in historical and personal differences, which is only exacerbated by the generation gap that allows some of the workers still to call him Arthur because they knew him as a boy (33). It is hardly a surprise then that he feels “like an impostor. Not steadily, but from time to time” (32). He plays the role of the factory owner without conviction. His actions are not inner-directed; he is constantly seeking to live up to others’ expectations, however steadily he keeps lamenting his situation: “They expected all to be provided. The whole town expected it. [ ... ] Ask and ye shall receive. Expectations at home were not lacking either. [ ... ]. It was necessary—he had to drive a new car, Bea had to go away to school, Mrs. Feare had to have the latest, and the trim had to be as fresh as Christmas snow. Else they would lose respect”



(32). His motivations for action just like his words derive from elsewhere: he acts mechanically after the accident in response to his audience watching him perform a role he has never felt to be his own. (Pressing the dead man's head to his chest he feels like "a wounded man. He was aware of them watching him and he was aware of himself as an actor must be, or a priest" [34].) Even when he speaks, he utters truisms wondering "if he had read that [sic] somewhere, or had thought it [sic] up himself" (30).

When he starts to frequent the library (a universalizing heterotopia of heterochronism), however, he finds a self there, though ready-made, that suits his inclinations. Here, he is able to dramatize himself as a "*public servant*" (31; original emphasis), whose proposal to another public servant, the librarian, is less surprising in this context. Arthur's choice of Louisa over Jane MacFarlane, the woman she meets after his wife's death, is otherwise hardly explicable. When he compares the two women he concludes that both are "good-looking," "plucky and stylish and good at her [sic] work" (39), the only difference between them is that while Jane "give[s] a man peace," Louisa presents him with a mystery (39). He is also aware that "he knew hardly anything about her—what kind of a person she really was or what kind of secrets she could have. He could not even estimate his own value to her. He only knew that he had some, and it wasn't the usual" (40). His proposal is so unexpected that Louisa even laughs when she hears it since she was just thinking he would never come to the library again. Arthur reads Louisa as a public servant, effective at her work with maybe a sweetheart lost in the war that made her sober because that is the kind of person he is seeking; his reading is, of course, a misreading.

There is only one detail about Louisa that he is unable to harmonize with his image of her. He sees her curiosity about Jack's accident at first as a kind of perverse interest, although it is really only Louisa's efforts at reading Jack's behavior. She is eliciting information about the details of the accident because she wants to picture it ("I think it's natural to want to know the worst. People do want to picture it. I do myself," Louisa tells Arthur [29].) He is similarly mistaken when he believes that the unusual value he had to her was "sexual." ("He heard a humility in her voice, but it was a humility that was based on some kind of assurance. Surely that was sexual" [38]). Yet, their decades-long life together and their struggle to keep the factory going by thrift and ingenuity in hard times eventually prove that he has found his match because Louisa could manufacture a self for herself in which she could be a help in supporting Arthur's image of himself. After all, what she boasts of in her imaginary talk with Jack Agnew is that she keeps the company afloat against all odds and that her mind, contrary to expectations, is not filling up with spirituality; just the opposite, it "seems to get more and more practical, trying to get something settled" (48). Even if Arthur misreads her at the

beginning of their relationship, she has learnt to fashion herself after his projections, which she continues even after his death.

But while Arthur finds assurance in his self-dramatization as a public servant, which he extends onto all his personal interactions, and while Jack is able to construct his selves as disjointed fragments, Louisa, as a truly gothic heroine, can live in different worlds: she resists both reduction to a single function and enclosure in one world. She constantly reads the signs around her, she learns the rules of each world and travels in-between them. Sometimes, she is carried away and she formulates her self so much in full accordance with a role available in the individual worlds that it will then temporarily enclose her and delimit her vision. This happens when she falls in love with the doctor in the sanatorium where she stays with TB. In the lush garden of the place, she fantasizes about romantic love returned, which the doctor, married with two children, probably gets weary of and leaves. For years she walks about as “a heroine of love’s tragedy” (9), although all that happened is that he explained to her about the plants of the garden and that they wrote letters to each other. (Louisa’s performance in the role of a jilted lover is so convincing that Jim Frarey misreads her because he believes that their relationship was consummated, which his own intimacy with her does not verify [20].) When Jack writes his letters, she begins to follow the war and walks “along the street with a sense that her head was filled with the same exciting and troubling information as everybody else’s. [ ... ] Now she felt [ ... ] You could look up from your life of the moment and feel the world crackling beyond the walls” (10-11). She even starts to frequent the Red Cross meetings where women—Jack’s fiancée among them—pack boxes, cut up and fold bandages, and knit clothing for the soldiers. Lastly, she adopts the role that Arthur finds appealing, which she has kept getting better and better at till the moment when her hallucinations warn her that there are other worlds as well.

Beran’s note on Louisa’s reference to Cather as her other favorite author next to Hardy provides an additional clue to understanding the function of her hallucinations in the short story. Beran reads the mention of Cather’s name as a nostalgic marker of Munro’s yearning for a pre-industrial form of existence, which Lecker’s argument also supports as he claims that the allusion indicates Louisa’s “interest in recapturing a more innocent, romantic past quite distant” (125). Nonetheless, both Beran and Lecker suggest that the reference to Cather bears witness to the recognition that the return to innocence is not possible; moreover, it is not even desirable. Cather’s presence then signals not only a yearning but also an acknowledgement that the past can never be recaptured in a single form. Beran quotes the ending of *My Antonia* specifically, where two seemingly contradictory statements may be true at the same time because “for Cather and Antonia, as for Munro and Louisa (who uses ‘and’

rather than ‘or’ in speaking of her two favorite authors [6]), multiple and conflicting stories are part of human experience” (Beran 13).<sup>80</sup>

Munro’s own comments also attest to this reading. In a note on the genesis of the story, Munro writes that originally she “had a pretty realistic story,” but “all the time [she] felt a parallel story going, in which the accident never happened and another reality developed [ ... ].” She wanted to achieve an “interchangeable” reality, “in which events, even drastic ones, do, and don’t, matter” at the same time (“Contributor’s” 371).

Consequently, because the realities are interchangeable, and none can be captured in a singular form it would be wrong to portray Louisa solely in the role of a victim, as Beran and Clark suggest. In some realities she is carried away to give herself over to a self-dramatization as a victim: such occasions are represented by her falling in love with the doctor and with the idea of a soldier who fantasizes about her overseas. During these times the “covers of books looked like coffins to her” (Munro, “Carried” 17). But in other realities she is definitely not a victim; for instance, when she poses as an experienced woman to Jim Frarey—and Munro takes pains not to comment on the circumstances of her defloration although Frarey could be an easy target of blame since, in certain accounts, he can be said to have abused the alcohol-induced irresponsibility of a single woman at a vulnerable age when “the husband prospects thinned out so dreadfully” (14). In certain realities she may even appear as a possible victimizer on account of her managerial qualities—Lecker in fact suggests a very similar point when he argues that it is indicative that on her meeting with her dream knight Louisa boasts of making her good fortune without him (124). She is both a victim and a victimizer, just as Carstairs is both an idyllic rural town and a place in which factory time dictates people’s lives.

In the multitude of all these realities, the reader does not know much. What is known however is the fact that when a character is sure of something, he or she is usually mistaken. Jack Agnew is sure he would die in the war, that is why he feels free to write; Louisa is sure Arthur Doud would never come to the library again; Arthur is sure he needs to provide for the community; he is sure Louisa is interested in him; Bea Doud is sure that “Bolshevism was some sort of diabolical and maybe indecent dance” (Munro, “Carried” 27) because she connects two irrelevant pieces of information. She catches a glimpse of a book’s title her father was asked to take back to the library for the dead Jack and is informed that Bolshevism is something in Russia which she conjoins with the news she has heard of the Russian Ballet. All characters manufacture meanings and stories, and even selves, on the same principle of connecting haphazard pieces of information which they then fill up to full-bodied stories; characters are in trouble only when they have adopted the manufactured story and/or self

wholeheartedly, when they do not find the way out of their self-produced selves growing irrelevant by the passing of time, when they remain stranded in one reality, in one world.

Louisa's self-dramatization as love's heroine is fated in a sense since it is based on culturally accepted clichés. When Jim Frarey escorts Louisa to her room they pass three different paintings on the wall: "the picture of a dog on his master's grave, and Highland Mary singing in the field, and the old King with his bulgy eyes, his look of indulgence and repletion" ("Carried" 20). Lecker argues that the dog "speaks of the cliché of loyalty," Mary "of loneliness and loss," the King "of the master, and what he has become" (117-18). Together these images create a certain safety—because there is safety in clichés, Lecker claims—out of which Louisa does not wish to break free. In the library, Louisa does not simply pass by pictures, she also has to listen to lectures about them, delivered by Arthur, on his visits to the library. Here there is a portrait of Arthur's father, an image of the battle of Flodden Field, one of the funeral of the Boy King of Rome, and one of the quarrel of Oberon and Titania. Louisa thus spends her life amidst these pictures; she walks every morning and every evening by the pictures in the hotel while she spends her daytime in the library. When one considers these images together, however, one can hardly see them as reassuring.

Unarguably, all these images are cliché-like in the way they thematize and romanticize loss, but there is a significant difference between the losses. While the paintings in the hotel create an atmosphere of an idyll which the old king looks at with satisfaction, this idyll is clearly irrelevant in a commercial hotel housing mainly traveling salesmen selling typewriters and agricultural equipment. In this world loyal dogs, just as singing maidens in the field, are scarce. The sense of irrelevance is only underscored by the replete king looking down with satisfaction at the only two guests daring to appear in public in times of the Spanish flu, which has taken just as many victims (sixty thousand, 1.5% of the Canadian population) within a year as the second world war (Brown qtd. in Lecker [114]). In addition, Louisa and Jim Frarey are preparing to consummate their non-existing relationship in clear opposition to Robert Burns's platonic love to his muse. If something is lost, it is a world clearly irrelevant in the here and now of the short story. The atmosphere of a reassuring safety in a lost idyll the images are meant to emanate cannot be but interpreted ironically.

The paintings in the library tell of a different loss. The time of Arthur's father, the founder of the factory, a patron, and a "Believer in Progress, Culture, and Education," a "True Friend [ ... ] of the Working Man," as the plate in the library announces (Munro, "Carried" 28), the time of the benevolent ruler is definitely over with the war, but it is not bemoaned by his true friends, the workers, who are "not prepared to take the same treatment" as before (31). The heroism of King James IV in Flodden Field is similarly reinterpreted with the war

over and in light of the returning soldiers, “the cases they were just getting to know about now—the stumps of men, the blinded, the ones made monstrous with the burns” (16). All the more so, because King James IV himself dies in the battle whose outcome could be foretold in advance. The life story of the Duke of Reichstadt, Napoleon’s son, speaks of a lost empire, of wasted effort, of an heir unable to grow up to the greatness of his father. Although it is not known who has placed this painting in the library, whether the father or the previous librarian, its foreshadowing proves wrong ultimately. Though Arthur is not a hero like his father (31), he is still able to keep the company running even in the hardest times. The son does measure up to his father. As for the painting of Titania and Oberon, the library is not the place any longer where one can find an easy and pleasurable escape into a dream world from the drabness of the real one. In the world one can read about here not “all’s well,” contrary to Frarey’s reassuring words to Louisa (20); the library is the place where Jack Agnew reads and learns about both the worlds of adventure and romance *and* of disillusionment and worker uprisings. The loss which these pictures indicate indirectly is the loss of the illusion that things mean the same over time and that this meaning can be identified with certainty.

This is the lesson imparted by the visual education of Munro’s gothic: what the pictures teach to a discerning gothic heroine capable of “seeing differently” (Wall 208) is that one does not have to feel sorry for the loss of illusion. After all, this is what Louisa’s hallucination also turns around. As argued above, you are most mistaken when you are sure because assurance is based on clichés that are mostly irrelevant. Arthur expects a mourning Mrs. Agnew when he goes to offer his help but finds her busy cleaning the house for the funeral; he expects the librarian to want to appeal to him sexually while she is provoked with him sitting in the library for hours. She thinks when looking at the back of his head and neck: “Ha, what if something should hit you there! None of that would make sense to you” (48). Louisa expects herself to be vengeful for Jack’s death maybe provoked by a careless factory owner, but she realizes that “it turned out to be something else I wanted entirely. I wanted to marry him and get into a normal life” (48). Jack is expected to have died of the accident but he lives on in a parallel reality; just as his family have a different life route: his wife did not remarry and his daughter has become a schoolteacher although in the reality known to Louisa until her hallucination she did not even finish high school. In other realities things do not work as expected.

Therefore, when Louisa goes “under a wave” she experiences a state of consciousness in which she is forced to “see differently” because expectations, clichés, and set roles are irrelevant there. At first, she communicates with Jack Agnew in clichés (“she fell back, ridiculously, on the usual courtesies” [46]), and she is shocked out of the world of set

question, answers, and images only when Jack challenges her with the most blatant one: “Love never dies” (48). First, she is impatient “to the point of taking offense” (48) and corrects Jack in a hard-earned illusion-free businesslike manner that “Love dies all the time, or at any rate it becomes distracted, overlaid—it might as well be dead” (48). Later, however, she feels a “widespread forgiveness of folly” only to affirm that “*Oh, never dies*” (49; original emphasis), as if she fell into her role as love’s heroine again.

Things change in the next scene: in the scene that immediately follows her words there appears a group of people in dark clothing. Jack calls them the Tolpuddle Martyrs and joins them to have a few words with them. This scene is the apex of the short story because this is the point where its many possible worlds meet. The Tolpuddle Martyrs, as historical personages, were a group of people, probably the first trade unionists in Great Britain, who were deported to Australia for taking illegal oaths. Jack in another (alternate possible) world has become a union spokesman who is scheduled to speak (in the textual actual world the speaker is, of course, a man of the same name) to commemorate the founders of trade unionism. Thus his association with them is quite natural. But their appearance even in this other reality is impossible since they lived a century earlier. To complicate the situation, a group of people really appear in Louisa’s textual actual world, whom she identifies later, during a temporary surfacing from under “the wave,” as Mennonites. At this point at least three worlds meet: the real (textual actual), the otherworldly (alternate possible) and a third that is otherworld to the living Jack’s otherworld. And a fourth as well, since Jack transforms into Jim Frarey.

Louisa’s reaction at this crossroads is neither dejection nor surrender. She pulls herself together and makes an effort to see—and what she sees instead of a faceless crowd all clad in black is difference:

But not all black, now that they were getting closer. She could see dark blue, those were the men’s shirts, and dark blue and purple in some of the women’s dresses. She could see faces—the men’s behind beards, the women’s in their deep-brimmed bonnets. [ ... ]

Once she knew that they were Mennonites and not some lost unidentifiable strangers, these people did not look so shy or dejected. In fact they seemed quite cheerful, passing around a bag of candy, adults eating candy with the children. (49-50)

The sharing of candy between adults and children is another reminder that the threshold between different worlds can be crossed and that they should not be sealed off hermetically from each other. Louisa is also offered a piece of candy, in contradiction to the rumored closedness of Mennonite communities, which she accepts to find herself in yet another world where “[l]ights have come on, though it isn’t yet evening,” where there are “lines of little colored bulbs” making “her think of festivities. Carnivals. Boats of singers on the lake” (50).

Importantly, Munro does not portray the back and forth movement shifting between the multiple possible worlds as mental breakdown, which is further underlined by the succession of the next scene that takes Louisa back to her youth, after having been accepted for the job of the librarian. She stands by the window of the hotel and looks out at the town. What she sees there is not only the snow-covered hills enclosing the town where houses are “built for lifetimes” (51) but her situation. This is the first occasion in the short story where a character does not live out a self-dramatized role but seeks to understand her position:

She was tired of lugging her sample cases on and off trains [ ... ] She went at once and talked to the people in charge of the Library. A Mr. Doud and a Mr. McLeod. They sounded like a vaudeville team but did not look it. The pay was poor, but she had not been doing so well on commission, either. [ ... ] She did not think it necessary to tell them that she had only worked there five months [ ... ] and spent four years in a sanatorium. (51)

The wording is straightforward, the information is factual. She steps out of her self-dramatized role without stepping into another and sees, thinks over, deliberates, engages with the world around her—as a true gothic heroine does.

Ironically, in the last two paragraphs of the short story, still within the past of her youth, she slips back into self-dramatization: “She was glad of a fresh start [ ... ] She had made fresh starts before and things had not turned out as she had hoped, but she believed in the swift decision, the unforeseen intervention, the uniqueness of her fate” (51). Carrington evaluates this shift back to the past under a Hardy-esque note as Munro’s tribute to Hardy and as her preoccupation with the theme of chance (“What’s” 563), just like Beran, who compares the “trick” of the ending to Hardy’s “trick” at the end of “An Imaginative Woman” (1), while Lecker argues that it “reinforce[s] the pervasive sense of isolation that haunts the story of love invented and love lost.” But, he claims, most importantly, that it yet expresses a yearning for “the mysterious, disappearing ‘country’ [ ... ] where there is a different kind of time, before machines” (126). Carrington’s, Beran’s and Lecker’s arguments are based on reading the last scenes as a typical Munrovian epilogue that not only summarizes the thematic thrust of the short story but that also returns one to the beginning of the plot, thus simultaneously creating a frame and preparing for closure.

By contrast, I argue that the short story can also be read as a dramatization of an equally persistently recurrent theme in Munro’s works, that of different and parallel realities. These realities provide an opportunity for the characters to dramatize themselves, to create themselves, their selves, anew while Munro also dramatizes to what extent the invention of selves may be circumscribed by ready-made fantasies: inherited scripts, clichés, roles, and functions. Characters who remain within the bounds of these scripts are repeatedly shown to

harbor a false sense of assurance while the readiness to reconfigure oneself, instead of persisting in the full self-assurance of one's irreproachability, allows one to survive.



#### 4. *Two Worlds – Two Plots*

Munro's heroines rarely traveled beyond the bounds of their home towns before *Open Secrets*; but they did not even need to since, Redekop claims, Munro has invented techniques of radical domestication that takes readers "through the homely to the *unheimlich* to the uncanny" (12). Thus, by defamiliarizing the domestic and the familiar through her meticulous attention to detail she invests them with the ominous atmosphere the gothic castle enjoyed earlier (Becker 104). Experiences at home can easily substitute for those abroad; therefore, Munro's female gothic heroines do not have to travel in search of adventure. With her 1994 volume, however, this radical domestication seems to give way to the conventional defamiliarizing device of sending heroines into places definitely other than their native Canada. *Open Secrets* is a "risky" (Munro qtd. in Howells, *Alice* 120) collection within the Munro oeuvre in this respect as well.

The volume features three short stories that recycle the ritualistic travel trope of the female gothic by "send[ing] maidens on distant and exciting journeys" (Moers, "Traveling" 126). "Real Life," "The Albanian Virgin," and "The Jack Randa Hotel" however also interrogate the trope in two ways: (1) they highlight it as a *device* to give an imaginary but still plausible form to female questing asking on a meta-textual level whether it is possible to imagine female quest in other ways as well and by that (2) they also point to its ideological underpinnings.

I will argue that the narratives that make use of the travel trope of the female gothic fit into a long tradition of women's writing that puts into relief the difficulty with which female subjectivity can be portrayed as not visibly split. I wish to prove that they appropriate the double plot structure of the female gothic which posits the antithetical nature of female quest and gender expectations. But rather than invent or use strategies that seek to cover over to what extent it is impossible to imagine a female subject independent of the discourse of (heterosexual) love and endowed with the properties needed for a questing subject (as Radcliffean female gothic to a certain extent does), they expose the gender ideology that constructs women as beings whose "natural" state is that of passivity. At the same time, I will also argue that on a meta-gothic level they lay bare to what extent the Radcliffean female gothic formula fosters what Hoeveler calls "professional femininity" through its romance closure, which cannot provide a resolution to the ideological conflicts surrounding gender it raises in a fictional form. Therefore, I will read the narratives within the context of the strategy DuPlessis has named "writing beyond the ending" (DuPlessis 4) and claim that they

examine alternative female life routes after the romance closure in order to highlight the inherent contradictions the female gothic (alternate possible/fantasy) resolution is used to mask.

What the three stories share in common, beside recycling the topos of the “traveling heroine” (Moers, “Traveling” 122), is that they start where the female gothic narrative, and the heroine’s quest, end: her union in marriage with a suitable partner. This allows Munro to address the impasse female gothic romance ending presents since the alternative female life routes the stories represent all point to the difficulty with which an ungendered/genderless female subjectivity can be imagined. This becomes especially obvious when the romance ending is read together with the convention that literalizes the heroine’s effort to create an un/re/gendered social unit less harmful to her integrity (taming the husband into a companionship based on equality), which is the ultimate female gothic fantasy.

The discussion starts with “Real Life,” which juxtaposes various marriages by following the course of three women friends’ lives after the wedding. I will argue that their juxtaposition points to the semantic emptiness of “happy ending” and that the short story experiments with an alternative form of “connection” that does not recycle the underlying principles of gender ideology. “The Albanian Virgin” will be read as a narrative that both literalizes the subjectifying/objectifying discourse of gender dichotomy and overturns it by presenting an un/re/gendered female gothic heroine/femme fatale. The un/re/gendering of this heroine, however, does not follow the Radcliffean female gothic formula that Hoeveler finds to be a blueprint of “professional femininity”; or rather, it does by literalizing the formula’s negotiations of gender performances propelling the short story towards a female gothic parody. Yet, it is “The Jack Randa Hotel” that presents a mock female gothic heroine, who embodies the female gothic (“professionally feminine”) strategy of passive aggressiveness, which the heroine eventually rejects as a model of subjectification.

#### 4. 1. *Happy Endings and “Real Life”*

“Real Life,” the second short story in *Open Secrets* continues where “Carried Away” closes. It takes up the theme of normalcy in marriage via presenting a traveling heroine unprecedented in Munro’s earlier fiction. Louisa in “Carried Away” realizes during her encounter with the dead Jack/Jim that all she wanted was getting into “a normal life” (48) by marrying Arthur, and “Real Life” investigates exactly that: what it means for a marriage to be “normal.”

The narrative falls back on the usual Munroian structure encountered in “Jakarta” and “Vandals” so far: it juxtaposes two characters and their life stories, which represent two

different worlds with different fields of possibilities. Here, the two worlds of the two characters and their marriages are contemplated by a third character, who by the end throws her own former convictions into doubt and finds herself in a position of in-betweenness where she has to re-evaluate her own views. Yet, nothing is decided by the end of the narrative, the reader finds the protagonist in the middle of a process.

The story focuses on Millicent, a social climber in a Canadian small-town, who has to make do with two social companions after having set her eyes on belonging to the good society of Mrs. Lawyer Nesbitt, Mrs. Dr. Finnegan and Mrs Doud—Louisa—and after having been refused by them on account of her social inferiority—she is a farmer's wife. One of her "friends" is Dorrie Beck, "a true Canadian primitive," as R. W. Martin and Warren U. Ober call her (1), who was once born into a wealthy family, educated at a college for girls on the "last spurt of the Becks' money" (Munro, "Real" 53), but who now lives alone in a house devoid of all comfort rented to her by Millicent in exchange for some help around the house. Her other companion, and supposedly her best friend, is Muriel the music teacher, whose sole goal in life is getting a husband, and who therefore employs all the artful tricks of femininity she is acquainted with: she always dresses dashing in her signature color of blue, wears perfume, paints her fingernails, and does exercise to keep her figure trim. The three women, all in their early thirties, in fact, could not be more different: Dorrie is a reserved trapper and hunter who keeps to herself (she shuns company to the extent that she prefers to leave her game on people's doorsteps instead of presenting it herself)—Millicent thinks that she became maybe a little "unhinged" (54) after the death of her beloved brother; Muriel, notorious for her love life, is yearning for a glamorous life; while Millicent's aspirations are rather down to earth. All she wants from life is a "sweetness of affection that had eliminated sex" (52) and the practical comfort of a bathroom, "a dining-room suite and a chesterfield and chairs," in exchange for which she is ready "to take what's coming," leading to three children—after which "Porter was decent—mostly [ ... ] he left her alone" (53).

One day a mysterious stranger intrudes into their world, a friend of the local minister, a visitor from Australia. Millicent invites him for dinner, at which Muriel is dressed up in turquoise crepe and smells of her select perfume because "[s]he might have written off the minister but she had not seen his visitor yet. A bachelor perhaps, or a widower, since he was travelling alone. Rich, or he would not be travelling at all" (61). Millicent is fretting about the food because Dorrie is late (she is hunting). When she appears, she looks out of place in her good dress "suitable for a little girl or an old lady" (63). Nonetheless, the visitor is tantalized by her and by the words with which she describes her outdoor experiences. Millicent believes that he is interested in her "as a novelty, a Canadian wild woman who went around shooting

things. He might be studying her so that he could go home and describe her” (64). Yet, some six months later, Dorrie announces that she is marrying Mr. Speirs, the visitor, whom she saw on that one occasion only but with whom she has since corresponded regularly.

The preparations for the wedding seem to fade out her memories of a trapper’s life and her dream of going beyond the Arctic Circle—or at least she is reticent about them until the day arrives when she is scheduled to marry her fiancé. Millicent senses that she may be about changing her plans, so she walks over to Dorrie’s place, in full fear of her having committed suicide since “what had happened this year made anything seem possible. The proposed marriage, such wild luck, could make you believe in calamity also” (73). She expects Dorrie to be dead, although as she realizes later her worst fear is yet that Dorrie might want to back out of the proposed marriage. She finds Dorrie cooking dinner for herself and saying that she cannot leave her home. With her premonition confirmed, Millicent searches for explanations (is he poor? No, he is rich. Is she worried about sex? No, she is not.) and when she finds none, she tries to cajole her into marrying Mr. Speirs by expounding her belief that “Marriage takes you out of yourself and gives you a real life” (75). When that fails, she literally blackmails her because “Nobody had any business living a life out ‘here’ if they had been offered what Dorrie had. It was a kind of sin to refuse such an offer. Out of mulishness, out of fearfulness, and idiocy” (76). Dorrie, cornered, consents.

She moves with her husband to Australia, where on his large estate they grow sugarcane and pineapples—after the death of her husband she continues to do so alone—she rides horses, flies airplanes, shoots crocodiles, and she eventually dies decades later when climbing a volcano. After Dorrie’s good luck Muriel decides to really find a husband and so she does, a minister, who brings significant changes into her life: soon she takes care of four children, is not allowed to play her favorite music, to wear make-up, or to smoke any longer, and she obviously has no time to care for her looks. Although in the practical-minded Millicent’s life seemingly nothing changes, she yet experiences Dorrie’s and Muriel’s turn of fate as a momentous change in her own life as well.

Although Millicent considers marriage to transform a woman’s life into a “real” life, Dorrie’s married life is as unreal, fabulous, and fairy-tale like for the Canadian small-town socialite as it can get: Dorrie is not only rich—after all she is comparable to the Queen of Tonga not only in her size—but she can also continue her life of adventure. The only difference between her unmarried “unreal” Canadian and married “real” Australian life is that instead of muskrats and feral cats she is shooting crocodiles. Marriage does not take her out of herself but simply transposes the scene of her contended life of primitive adventure from one continent to another. Muriel’s marriage is the perfect opposite to Dorrie’s: the beautiful, witty,

and liberal-minded music teacher transforms into an unkempt and bigoted mother and housewife. Her “real” life is by contrast all too real.

Martin and Ober hold that the short story demonstrates Munro’s comic spirit as it “lays bare the artificiality and hollowness of the social climbers Millicent and especially Muriel.” Yet, they claim that “the chief thrust in the story is the respectful portrayal of Dorrie Beck, a true Canadian primitive [who] is remarkable for her integrity and innocence, the genuineness of her interests, and the dignity and worth of her unpretentious and often socially despised avocations” (1). Thus, they wish to read “Real Life” as a social comedy that reinforces the faith in Canadian values since it represents the difference between the values that the inner-directed Dorrie, the Canadian wild woman professes and those of Millicent’s, which spring from a source “enclosed by bourgeois shibboleths and conventional attitudes” (Martin and Ober 1). They claim that while Munro treats Dorrie with respect, and makes Muriel the subject of mild satire, she depicts Millicent ironically because her social aspirations stop her from recognizing even at the very end of the narrative to what extent her own vision is circumscribed by her wish to achieve a higher status in polite society. On the whole, the story is structured to highlight the “contrast between bourgeois and rural life” and between “faults of taste and good sense,” Martin and Ober conclude (2)—the contrast between “unreal” and “real” values.

While it can be effectively argued that the story’s strength depends on its juxtaposition of the value of Canadian primitivism and of the fecklessness of aspirations for attaining a higher status in bourgeois society, interpretation in this vein neglects a most important theme in the short story, that of marriage. Marriage appears in the story not only as a social ritual of “courtship and mating,” as Martin and Ober claim (1), which provides pace to the natural rhythm of life but also as a problem through which it can be adequately explored what marriage means from the vantage point of a female perspective. Marriage after all is not only a ritual in our culture but also a narrative convention that for centuries has been used to provide closure to the quest of the heroine, provided she is found worthy of survival.

The differences in the life routes of the three women are expressed through the differences in their marriages, which recalls the female gothic mode since in female gothic narratives marriage appears in various manifestations; and as such, it has become a definitive convention of the form. As argued earlier, closure by a happy ending is a constitutive element in the Radcliffean gothic since it caps the heroine’s achievement: the heroine is first forced to enter a gothic otherworld where she confronts dark forces. Here she not only dares to question the foundational moment that is at the roots of the status quo but by her self-help she also conquers the darkness, and she eventually emerges into the ordinary world again as a

victorious maiden who has also found a suitable partner with whom to start a new life. She becomes a bride to whom the wedding bells confirm her victory.

At least, this is the way Williams likes to see the female gothic comedy; she argues: “[t]he female formula demands a happy ending, the conventional marriage of Western comedy.” As a result of her travails “[t]he Female Gothic heroine experiences a rebirth. She is awakened to a world in which love is not only possible but available; she acquires in marriage a new name and, most important, a new identity” (*Art* 103). All this is made possible by an oppositional conceptualization of the happy ending: it prepares the ground for a new kind of relationship between males and females unlike in the medieval romance, where the bride (bridegroom) is the prize for the successful completion of the quest. All the more so because, as opposed to the heroine’s victory, there also may appear various female monitory figures whose marriage skirts disaster (victimized mothers, for instance) or figures who may never have been married at all (in many cases villainesses). The happy ending thus serves the purpose of confirming the gothic heroine’s success at redefining her relationship to the world: her marriage rests on a different footing than that of the rest of the female figures.<sup>81</sup>

Several critics, such as Moers (“Female” 216), Massé (3), DuPlessis (16), and Nancy K. Miller (82), however, hold that the convention of the happy ending does not communicate the heroine’s success only. Instead of concentrating on its thematic thrust they point to its function, which, they argue, is twofold: on the one hand, it provides closure to the whole of the narrative by closing her ambition/quest plot (during which the heroine learns the truth about herself—redemptive knowledge—and then with its help she redefines her position *vis à vis* others), and, on the other hand, it both closes and opens a second, erotic plot. Throughout most of the narrative the heroine has to fear the violation of her body by a threatening male, but by the end of the narrative she yet finds her hero. Closure in the female gothic narrative with the convention of the happy ending thus signals the heroine’s success in both finding out the truth (redemptive knowledge) and finding a deserving husband. The perils that the heroine has to confront and the transformations they incur can be interpreted as the necessary prelude to the ensuing providential reward, which is becoming wife to the hero. Therefore, they argue, the meaning of closure can be described as ambivalent at least exactly because of the presence of the two plots.

This ambivalence is further reinforced by the fact that although the happy ending may be superficially held to prove the heroine’s success, what it really manifests is her *worthiness* for marriage—and by that it only highlights to what extent western civilization is incapable of conceiving of female subjectivity as independent of males. In western cultural narratives there is no room for stray females, they have to be attached to males. The female gothic thus is a

“make-believe puberty rite for young women” (Moers, “Female” 216) that initiates women into the social and cultural reality of gender expectations. In Massé’s formulation the popularity of the female gothic lies exactly in the fact that, with its happy ending, it fosters a “cultural amnesia” (3), which obscures to what extent our civilization depends on the destruction of women’s subjectivity as independent of males; in fact, it is nothing but “masochism in the name of love” (2). Heroines after having arrived in the safe haven of normative married life are silenced—just like the heroines who have failed to live up to the patriarchal norm, who, therefore, must die. Therefore, the happy ending is like death (N. Miller 82; DuPlessis 16; Hirsch, “Spiritual” 27; Booth, “Introduction” 2).

In sum, closure signals two things: (1) the beginning of an authorized erotic or marriage plot (the heroine no longer has to fear the invasion of her body from *unauthorized* males as she has found the rightful protector of her self, body, and property)—thus it literalizes the legal construction of woman as object; and (2) the end of her ambition plot. Even if for the greater part of the plot the heroine proves that she can be an active agent of her own fate, the happy ending opens the possibility to revert to her former, more “feminine,” i.e., passive and less ambitious, “natural” self. Thus, the happy ending re-affirms the ideological construction of woman as not an agent of action also.

Munro’s “Real Life” serves a perfect ground on which to examine the two radically different assumptions about and evaluations of marriage (marriage as a relationship on an entirely new footing or as death) since it explores what comes after the happy ending. More exactly, it experiments with various plots that develop *after* closure: one plot presents a questing heroine pursuing her avocation even after the wedding bells’ sound has faded, another shows a heroine who obeys the prescriptive cultural expectation and chooses marriage instead of her calling (which renders her dead to the world), and the third features a heroine who has made married life her vocation.

Dorrie departs with the tradition of transforming into a wife after the marriage vow and remains a questing heroine even after her wedding: she is an active dreamer, an agent of action, an adventurer, who does not frighten back from solitary enterprises. She is fully independent in her life and her dreams both before and after her wedding. By contrast, Muriel’s life runs a course driven by her investment in the erotic plot and carries the transformation to extremes. She becomes housewife and mother incarnate raising four children, two born in her widowed husband’s first marriage—where the dead mother is a further monitory figure—and two born in theirs while Dorrie is apparently childless. In addition, Dorrie appears as virtually sexless throughout the narrative: there is nothing about

her body that is feminine, yet she is not manlike either; she is like “a doll with a china head and limbs attached to a cloth body, firmly stuffed with straw” (Munro, “Real” 63).

While the happy ending to close the first phase of a woman’s life brings Muriel into an extraordinarily “real” life—where “real life” means drudgery and defenselessness against the traps of the erotic plot as the literalization of the threat posed at the physical integrity of women’s bodies—, the very same happy ending brings Dorrie into an extraordinary, sexless and childless dream world of adventure where she can follow her avocation unperturbed by her husband. Marriage does not put an end to her aspirations; just the opposite, she can explore new frontiers. In comparison, Muriel acts as a casebook example of Massé’s claim that marriage destroys independent female subjectivity (3). Muriel is totally transformed in her marriage, her transformation from a chic music teacher into a bigoted minister’s wife is figuratively articulated in her claim that her former life makes her stomach turn (Munro, “Real” 79)—a metaphor all the more apt because it is connected to the body. These extremes are contrasted with Millicent’s ordinary “real” life—a mostly decent husband, not unkind children, and a tolerable amount of work for the family, the management of which she has made the major goal of her life. She yet grows pensive on observing these two different marriages and what has become of her two social companions.

What the story thus also lays bare beside the ridiculousness of social pretensions as Martin and Ober claim is the conflict of interpretations over what the convention of the happy ending entails for women in marriage. Munro however does not suggest that either of the two “heroines” of the two plots is to be set as an example for women: neither Dorrie nor Muriel is to be followed or, on the contrary, to be pitied. Neither is truly successful since both lack something that the other has, although Millicent herself cannot verbalize this recognition, she yet senses it. In this regard, Millicent is the real heroine of the narrative and not Dorrie since she is the one who is able to contemplate life from a wider perspective.

Millicent is mostly portrayed as a practical woman with clear goals in her life and with a tiny streak for sentimentality, who thus nicely fits into the long line of asexual female characters in Munro’s fiction (Del’s mother in *Lives*, Et in “Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You,” Janet’s mother in *The Moons of Jupiter*, Phemie’s mother in *The Progress of Love*, etc.). She however proves on two occasions in the short story that for all her practicality and well-arranged life she is able to experience life in its complexity without wanting to force it into pigeonholed realities: first, when she walks over to Dorrie to force her back into her decision to marry Mr. Speirs, she weeps though she does not know for what reason, and, second, in the last scenes of the narrative, when she muses over the practice of collecting walnuts. Dorrie and her brother used to collect walnuts every year and then count them since



they were children. The results were written down as if in the annals of past times although the walnuts were subsequently thrown away. After Dorrie leaves, Millicent does not continue this “useless chore” (Munro, “Real” 80), yet, every year when the walnuts are falling she thinks of the practice and thinks of Dorrie, who “must have expected to keep it up until she died. [ ... ] must have believed that she was meant to live so, in her reasonable eccentricity, her manageable loneliness” (80). In the mean time she wonders in puzzlement why she does not pull down the dilapidated house. This same puzzlement appears when Millicent cajoles and then tricks Dorrie into her marriage “[a]t greater cost to herself, Millicent was thinking—greater cost than she had understood” (77). Although she never understands wholly what the cost is and why she is puzzled at all, she feels that it has an import for herself (she is a heroine learning to “see gothically” [Wall 210]).

At the beginning, Millicent is convinced—in full harmony with Dorrie and Muriel—that people need to live in relationships (Dorrie also must have believed what her brother, her only companion in life for long, told her: “people living alone are to be pitied” [55]); most significantly, that women need to get married. This view governs all the three women since their motives for getting married are not emotionally charged. Millicent marries Porter for he seems to be the prospective husband capable of furnishing her with everything she needs for her household management goals; Muriel probably marries the minister because her chances elsewhere have thinned out; Dorrie marries Mr. Speirs because she has believed her brother’s and Millicent’s words: she is in fact “conquered” and she, “mulish, obedient, childish, female—a most mysterious and maddening person” (76), consents. In Dorrie’s and Muriel’s extraordinary otherworlds apparently there is not much room for either love or ambivalence: Dorrie is solely presented as an adventurer with only some warm affection for her husband, Muriel by contrast is depicted as a stark woman willing to give up anything, her love of music, fun and people, her former friends, for the sake of marriage.

By the ending though Millicent is portrayed as one ready to “see differently,” to perceive, contemplate, feel—experience. She grows hesitant over her former conviction also that marriage is necessary for a woman to enter real life (loss of “conscious worth” as self-righteousness). This way, she is approaching the threshold where she can understand that her former conviction might be nothing else than a self-deluding, self-manipulative investment in avoiding a confrontation with an illusion that covers over an essential sense of powerlessness. Atwood calls the kind of complicitous avoidance Millicent immerses herself the Miss Flegg syndrome (*Lady* 149). The major characteristic of the syndrome is that its victim often voluntarily *chooses* containment in a delimiting cultural norm so that she can bask in the light of fake autonomy. This however also means that she avoids any recognition of the extent this

more or less conscious accommodation might prove detrimental in the long run because instead of plainly accepting her situation, she insists on complying with the cultural norm. Millicent, however, is starting to see that it is not marriage that she should expect to offer her and other women a graceful existence.

At the same time, she is led to the threshold of recognition that there is a definitive relationship—though not an interpersonal one—that does not render one other than herself implicated by the catapult into “real life.” Relationships between individuals in the short story are repeatedly shown to be fleeting, of temporary value, fake, even outright dangerous: friendships cease, marital relationships quickly evolve into routine, altruistic help may lead to danger, brotherly or sisterly love requires self-sacrifice. What Millicent cannot exactly see when looking at the walnut trees and reflecting on Dorrie’s and Albert’s practice of collecting walnuts is an immutable attachment to the land compressed into Dorrie’s announcement: “I can’t leave here” (74). Millicent’s reaction at the time of announcement is rejection: “what did Dorrie mean by ‘here’? If she meant that she would be homesick, let her be! [ ... ] Millicent was not going to pay attention to that ‘here.’ Nobody had any business living a life out ‘here’ if they had been offered what Dorrie had” (76). Several years later she seems to be on the brink of changing her mind about this “here.” When she is looking at the house and puzzles over why she would not allow Dorrie to continue her “life of customs” (80) and why she has failed to knock down the useless house, she senses that there might be other definitive relationships beside marriage.

Whereas in the paradigmatic female gothic the interplay of the two plots prepare the ground for the conventional happy ending that attaches the heroine and the hero in a relationship, in Munro’s short story the events that ensue the happy ending reinvent the object of desire and thus direct the reader’s attention to a different kind of attachment that does not render the heroine passive. Munro suggests that the love of the land, a sense of belonging organically into one’s environment, both natural and social, may also serve as the base for a self-definition, which escapes the traps of an unreflected self-investment in the ideology of gender. This is what Millicent appears to have intimated with the passing of time: that there is a desire that resists not only the voluntarist-masochistic trajectory of desire directed at self-fulfillment through romance (love story) but the very discourse about it also. This recognition however does not mean that she becomes Dorrie’s equal in her love of the land; the thrust of the narrative is not to prove that a social climber may also grow into an awareness of the reality of the land, the “here.” Dorrie is in a sense a traitor: she does leave and lives a life of adventure. She never returns. Although her reasons for not returning seem reasonable—first the war, then her husband’s death—she outlives both and continues with her adventures in the

Antipodes. She finds, or creates, a satisfactorily interesting life there as well. Millicent, by contrast, never seems to have had a connection to the land; after all she has set her eyes on working her way up in small-town society. Yet, towards the end of her life she grows unsure about the value she has attached to interpersonal relationships and turns to the land, to nature in puzzlement without wholeheartedly embracing it as her new certainty. Her being unsure (the loss of her self-assurance rooted in her “conscious worth”) is her triumph. In contrast to Dorrie’s certainty in her own capacities as displayed in her feats of adventure and in contrast to Muriel’s dogmatic convictions, Millicent grows less and less sure, which also means that she grows more and more open to different perspectives. She does not discard either polite society or the land as her bases for self-definition as she is progressing towards recognizing the importance of the land, the “here” as a fundamental and definitive connection.

Thacker argues most vehemently that “for Munro *the* most urgent connection has been her rural southwestern Ontario birthplace in Huron County, Wingham—the ‘home place,’ her cultural map, her profound talisman” (“Mapping” 127; original emphasis). “Real Life” erects a monument to the love of this “talisman” through a negotiation of marriage as a constitutive convention of the female gothic which puts the female gothic heroine into the matrix of a definitive relationship that escapes the pitfalls of either a “masochistic” belief in woman’s highest bliss (Noble, *Masochistic* 5) or its total denial. The love of the land arises as a viable force of female subjectification escaping the ideological over-determination of woman as an object mediated by the double narrative structure of the female gothic plot.

#### 4. 2. *An Un/Re/Gendered Heroine— “The Albanian Virgin”*

Although Munro’s characters reputedly rarely cross the borders of Canada, and even Dorrie’s travel is recounted only as a second-hand experience, the heroine of “The Albanian Virgin,” the short story that follows “Real Life” in *Open Secrets*, really travels to a world magical, peculiar where North-American rules do not apply. But in this intricately woven story with a story-within-a-story structure other borders are also crossed since border crossing here is not restricted to the geographical sense only: the characters overstep several socially articulated boundaries (tribe, gender, propriety) as well, as if to prove the commonly held view that “traveling heroinism” (Moers, “Traveling” 122) is not only an opportunity to participate in adventures otherwise denied to the “weaker sex” but also a major convention aimed at the defamiliarization of experience encountered at home (Parkin-Gounelas 132). This view is further complicated by DeLamotte’s claim that the very essence of ‘Gothic heroinism is a violation of the female proprieties’ (*Perils* 179). Gothic heroines, in fact, travel to violate female proprieties.

Munro's "The Albanian Virgin" features a heroine who travels to deliberately stake her claim for independence from any socially, historically, or ideologically articulated norms and rules by confusing them to an extent that the very base of their articulation is revealed to be governed by practical, meaning, social and cultural, rather than any inherent, "natural" reasons. One of the normative categories she challenges is gender. She stages various performances by masquerading (in Joan Riviere's sense) and performing (in Judith Butler's sense) (fe)maleness. This way she points to the culturally sanctioned articulation of gender, which is put to the service of upholding the unequal distribution of power in a bipolar system, as the heroine's gender performances force readers to interrogate their own impulse to read gender as a discrete category.

To carry out this task while working within the female gothic mode is a mighty task, since the mode has greatly contributed to the formulation and solidification of gender categories since its birth. Yet, Munro uses the very same female gothic conventions that were invented to redraft and codify normative gender behavior so as to subvert them, such as: travel to an otherworld, the literalization of threat at the female body, hyperbolic gender caricatures (hyperbolizing gender economy and individual gendered performance), and their inversion (e.g.: turning the blameless and benevolent heroine into a domineering one and over-taming the husband).

I will argue that Munro uses the technique of interlocking narratives to foreground the double plot structure of the female gothic, where one narrative exemplifies its ambition/quest and the other its erotic plot. These two converge by the end but rather than resolve the tensions arising from their diverse ideological thrusts by a happy ending, or happy endings, (since there are two heroines with two stories), Munro resists the impulse to provide closure. At the same time, the two plots problematize two major female gothic conventions as well: the ambition/quest plot intervenes into the discourse about gender by introducing a heroine whose performances as a passive-aggressive (feminine) female, a (somewhat ineffectual but still socially sanctioned) male, as well as an aggressive (masculine) female undermine the female gothic formula's alignment with the ideological discourse about gender. The erotic plot, in turn, focuses on the topos of "taming the husband," which nonetheless does not result in the idyllic marriage the female gothic envisions as the solution to remedy the underprivileged positioning of women in the patriarchal gender economy. Eventually, as both plots work to frustrate the female gothic project, the narrative evolves into what Susan Sniader Lanser calls a "project of self-authorization" (5) which sets into its focus the difficulty of finding a voice in which to speak.

To start the discussion I will first point out the ambiguity of the happy ending resulting from the double narrative structure, then discuss how Munro's anthropological research is incorporated into the short story to problematize gender in light of theories directed at understanding gender as performance, and lastly I will address how the female gothic romance closure is rerouted from the female gothic ideal of companionate partnership by resisting the theme of the transformation of the male into an equitable spouse.

The story of "The Albanian Virgin" builds on a sharp division between separate worlds, which results in two distinct stories that meet at a crossroads. The two stories here too have two separate heroines who live out different plots, which run parallel courses throughout the narrative, but which yet converge to the same ending. One story concerns a young Canadian woman, generally thought to be an American heiress by her fellow-travelers, who goes on a world tour against the advice of her only relative, a brother—just like in "Real Life"—sometime in the nineteen-twenties. Accidentally, she is taken captive by a tribe in Albania removed from all places of western civilization, where she has to learn the ropes of a different social reality. In this strictly patriarchal world there is a sharp division between men and women. The inflexible boundary between different gender roles that appear in a heightened form for a North American or European spectator apparently cannot be overstepped: gender distinctions are rigidly followed. The young outsider, who is in a sense a trespasser because as a woman she embarks on her own adventure (this is how she is captured), learns slowly but surely and within a year she can manage at least; so much so that she entirely gives up the idea of wanting to return to her home country. However, the Albanians decide to capitalize on her and sell her as a wife to a Muslim—they are Christians—and since she does not belong to the tribe, they are free to do so. A Franciscan priest, a born Albanian educated in Italy for some time, who has come to spread the word of God, however, thwarts their plan—his reason for doing so is that the groom is not a Christian. He makes her into an Albanian (sworn) Virgin, a woman made man, who must not marry. She thus gains freedom from a marriage to an "infidel" (Munro, "Albanian" 101) and, in addition, the prerogatives of enjoying the freedoms of male existence. The price she has to pay is the renunciation of her sexuality, which entails not only her removal from the world of women on a practical level but a being of non-sexedness also.

The interlocking story focuses on a sensitive young woman, Claire, who gets tired of an emotionally unsatisfactory marriage to a conventionally minded dermatologist and finds herself entangled in an extramarital affair with a married college student who rents an apartment in their house. Although both Claire and Nekon study literature—Claire is still writing her thesis on Mary Shelley—they never talk about their shared interest; their

relationship is purely physical. When their affair comes to light, Claire's husband moves in with the receptionist of the clinic, whom he later intends to marry (another scheming nurse in Munro's fiction). Instead of continuing her relationship with Nelson, Claire flees from Ontario to the other end of the continent, British Columbia, and opens a small bookstore (a heterotopia of heterochronism, where she can exist outside time). She hides in her small shelter built of books, meets new friends—strangers who regularly visit her store but with whom no closer acquaintance seems necessary. Yet with one of her regular customers, Charlotte, she forms a closer contact, she even visits her in the hospital when sick. It is there that Charlotte tells Claire the story of Lottar captured by the Albanians, sworn into a virgin, rescued by the Franciscan priest into a far-away town, and then finally sent home to Canada.

This is one point where the two stories converge since Charlotte tells the story of Lottar as a story she developed in her head for the screen in her lonely hours in hospital. She even has suggestions for who might take the lead role. Claire listens to it as one would to a sick person's ramblings—the woman's story, living in dire poverty, will obviously never be put on screen—and goes home. When she later returns for a visit to her hospitalized friend, she does not find Charlotte there any longer. After her worst fear is proved wrong, she learns that Charlotte left the hospital in an exhilarated mood because apparently her husband has come into a large amount of money. Claire and Charlotte never meet again. Claire's fate, however, takes a similarly happy turn since one day her forsaken lover, Nelson, the student-renter-lover, appears in her bookstore, "come to claim" her; "Or at least to accost [her], and see what would happen" (127). But while the reader does not know what happens to Charlotte and her husband, who have suddenly gotten rich, what happens to Claire and Nelson after this happy ending is presented in a typographically and stylistically distinctly different section where several decades are summarized in a telegraphic manner:

*We have been very happy.  
I have often felt completely alone.  
There is always in this life something to discover.  
The days and the years have gone by in some sort of blur.  
On the whole, I am satisfied.* (128; original emphasis)

Immediately follows the continuation of Charlotte's story, which tells how Lottar has recognized her love for the Franciscan priest after her separation from him; yet a happy ending ensues, since apparently the priest also has recognized how much he has fallen in love with Lottar mistakenly captured by Albanians, almost sold to a Muslim, made into a sworn virgin, living the life of a man for some time, and then rescued and sent home to Canada by himself. So, when Lottar reaches the shores of North-America, he waits for her there, having renounced his former life, his country, and his mission—after all, he is a Franciscan priest. And they live happily ever after.

But do they? The plots of the interlocking stories are remarkably uncomplicated for a Munro narrative but what makes them intriguing is their sudden and synchronic resolution with a happy ending. All the more so, because it is not clear whether the ending of Lottar's story is told by Charlotte while still in the hospital but withheld by Claire or it is entirely of Claire's making. Both origins for the happy ending are viable alternatives, but there is little information at hand to provide evidence for the truthfulness of either. Yet, the urge to decide whose happy ending it is is not an entirely theoretical necessity dictated by the readers' preference for clues in their self-fashioning as detectives. It is the happy ending indeed, or rather, what comes after the happy ending, that acts as *the* crossroads where Claire's and Lottar's interlocking stories really meet.

As argued earlier, Munro often employs the device of interlocking narratives which then reflect upon one another providing clues for interpretation in the interplay of the narratives (as, for instance, in "Open Secrets," "Vandals," "The Love of a Good Woman," "Jakarta," but also in "Cortes Island"). The same happens here. Lottar's story is not simply an interlude, a story-within-a-story in Claire's narrative and, vice versa, Claire's story is not simply a story-within-a-story in Lottar's narrative. Neither enjoys a primacy over the other, the two narratives even run approximately to the same length—although in the first part of the short story Lottar's story dominates, the balance tilts to Claire's in the second half. The stories become parallel stories after the reader's recognition (not Claire's) that Claire's happy ending with Nelson "come[ing] to claim" her falls into the category that Charlotte dismisses as a part of Lottar's story that is of no interest (124). This recognition materializes however only after Claire's telegraphic shorthand description of her married life to Nelson is juxtaposed to Lottar's happy ending.

The relationship between Claire's happy ending with Nelson and Lottar's with the priest is further complicated by the sense that the reader (and not Claire) entertains about Lottar's and Charlotte's identity. Charlotte tells Claire that she has taken the idea for her tentative movie script from life (125); besides there is a striking similarity between the names Charlotte and Lottar, which is a name that the Ghegs made of the heroine's name mumbled in high fever in the story told by Charlotte (81). Furthermore, Charlotte's husband, with the obviously non-English name of Gjurdhi, looks completely outlandish in British Columbia:

He was wearing a coat that came down to his ankles, made of some shiny rubberized, liver-colored material, and a brown velvet cap with a tassle. The sort of cap a dodderly old scholar or a clergyman might wear in an English movie. There was, then, a similarity between them [Gjurdhi and Charlotte]—they were both wearing things that might have been discards from a costume box. But close up he looked years older than she. A long, yellowish face,

drooping tobacco-brown eyes, an unsavory, straggling mustache. Some faint remains of handsomeness, or potency. A quenched ferocity. (117)

In addition, he wears a wooden crucifix (97), which is a further sign that points to his identity as the Franciscan priest in Albania (82).

Having established their identity, Charlotte is Lottar and Gjurdhi is the priest, their story definitely cannot have finished with recognizing mutual love after their departure in Albania and their meeting in a North-American harbor. In Canada they undergo a momentous transformation: here they both look outlandish in their costume-like clothing and their tolerance for discomfort, such as the lack of electricity or furniture; but most importantly, Charlotte, the powerless alien in the land of the Ghegs, whether female or male in her gender, comes to assume the upper hand in their relationship. Gjurdhi grows soft-spoken, a good cook, a respectful attendant, and an attentive, almost servile, husband following Charlotte “at her whistle—which seemed half serious, half a joke—and stood by, mute and self-respecting as a dog or a donkey” (117). He is a henpecked husband, a man feminized, a male Albanian virgin, which would be a contradiction in terms in the far-away civilization. This is the rather ironic transformation that Charlotte dismisses by saying: “That part is not of interest” (109; 124). In Albania Gjurdhi was the priest, the mouthpiece of law (only he could force the Ghegs into obedience with threats of burial into unholy ground), a Father, the representative of the biblical Father. But how does this austere mentor miraculously transform into a feminized lover and how can Charlotte dismiss the story of his transformation as an uninteresting tale?

One answer rests in the double plot structure of the female gothic what both Charlotte’s (Lottar’s) and Claire’s story turns on is an ambition/quest plot that is directed at coping in a new environment alone by defying the unwritten rules that they, as women, should keep to, moreover, they try to cope by themselves, without external help. But whereas Charlotte-Lottar remains a questing subject who successfully escapes the closure of the erotic plot dictated by gender ideology that demands her to surrender to married life and silence by mining her power that derives from her feeling at home in Canada, Claire surrenders to it. What remains from her life is the few telegraphic lines verging on total silence. Therefore, the refusal to supply the narrative of the loss of male privilege within the dominant gender economy also underlines that what matters is what the heroine does. Although it is true that the reader is not familiarized with how Charlotte-Lottar has managed to ensure her adaptation to Canada, but perhaps that is not even the central concern of the narrative.

Here lies a second answer: it is rather conspicuous that both interlocking narratives are motivated by their protagonists’ compulsion to tell of their lives, however obliquely. As Charlotte in her socially underprivileged position cannot count on being heard (who would believe that she deserves the movie screen?), she transposes the narrative of her, maybe



imaginary, life into a different domain altogether. If she cannot be heard, her story might command attention. Claire, the adulterer, in turn, cannot count on sympathetic ears since what she did goes against not only propriety but common sense as well—she ruined her marriage, which was socially and economically advantageous, for no clear reason. Both narratives rehearse the heroine's efforts at telling what cannot be told, thus, they focus on their finding ways to talk. In this respect the dismissal of what is customarily thought to drive the plot (actions) directs attention to what constitutes a "female" plot of finding a voice in which to speak. Therefore, the short story belongs to the class of narratives that Lanser calls "the project of self-authorization" (7). Munro's short story thus fits into the tradition of women's writing that experiments with alternative plots that are able to reflect the difficulties of speaking as a female in a culture where females, contrary to males, are not automatically considered as subjects. Lanser argues that women writers have struggled with the difficulty of inserting women into the discourse about subjectivity while distancing them from the discourse that constitutes them as objects (*Fictions* esp. 5-15, 19-21, 139-219).

In this project the challenge to the dominant ideology of gender that determines who can speak, i.e., who qualifies as a subject, occupies a pivotal role. Gender differences are continually subverted in the narrative. There is a decided effort to portray them without a "natural" anchor in biology: women may transgress their allotted roles, they might be passive as is "natural" and unfemininely aggressive; in short, they may assume male or female gender roles freely, as the situation requires. Lottar's story is central in this respect.

On the level of plot, it hinges mainly on how she learns the ropes in an only seemingly totally alien environment, the unfamiliarity of which derives from its hyperbolic representation of the gender economy in patriarchal cultures—and she does well. Moreover, she proves that she is able to stand her ground both as a woman and as a man. When she is captured by the Ghegs, she finds herself in a society that sharply distinguishes between gender roles. On account of her sex, she is relegated to the women's world, however exasperatingly unskilled she is at women's jobs, for which "[s]ometimes they whacked Lottar with a stick, as they would a donkey" (88). Yet, other times she feels that she belongs to the tribe.

Ironically, she feels most fully integrated into her new world when she is about to be thrust out of it. One day she finds herself pulled onto the veranda, ceremoniously shaved, made up, and dressed

into a white blouse with gold embroidery, a red bodice with fringed epaulets, a sash of striped silk a yard wide and a dozen yards long, a black-and-red wool skirt, with chain after chain of false gold being thrown over her hair and around her neck. For beauty, they said. And they said when they had finished, "See! She is beautiful!" Those who said seemed triumphant, challenging others who must have doubted that the transformation could be made. They squeezed the

muscles in her arms, which she had got from hoeing and wood-carrying, and patted her broad, floured forehead. (91-92)

She is accepted at last as a beautiful and strong female who could be the pride of the tribe. At this point the Franciscan priest arrives and tells the unsuspecting Lottar that she was beautified to be sold to a Muslim for a wife. The priest explains that there is only one way out of her predicament of becoming a commodity in an Unchristian home, she has to become a virgin, the traditional third, or rather no-sex, in Albania.

Reports about Albanian virgins, just as about the highly differentiated social practices for men and women in the Albanian Highlands, appeared as early as the first decades of the twentieth century (Shaw and Ardener 74), such as Mary Edith Durham's reports, whose *High Albania* is specifically named in the short story. (Munro herself has accounted for the genesis of her short story and her interest in Albanian virgins by reference to the story of a woman librarian kidnapped by Albanians some time before the First World War [Beetz 78], which sent her to do further research into the theme.) These reports describe how little voice women have in traditional Albanian society: they can neither inherit nor refuse an arranged marriage, they are expected to be virgins at their engagement and to "submit to the husband's domination" because "A woman is a sack made to endure" (Gjeçov qtd. in Shaw and Ardener 77). Becoming a sworn virgin has been a way out of women's lot, since this status enables women to live independently of males, otherwise impossible for them as females (Shaw and Ardener 79). In mountainous northern Albania particularly, traditional values of patrilineal descent and inheritance persist into our days, just as the option for women to become sworn virgins.<sup>82</sup> It is evident that Munro has familiarized herself with the gender economy of the region, which becomes in her hands a tool with which to throw light on the socio-cultural determination of the gender system.

The rather detailed description of both the ritual of wedding preparations and of the transformation into a sworn virgin attests to Munro's anthropological research, as they are faithful representations of the Albanian customs. The interest of sworn virginity especially lies in its literalization of the sharp divide between sex and gender as well as of the malleability of gender, which obviously serves social needs rather than mirrors "natural," biological facts. Lottar's transformation into a capable *female* from a nonentity, and then her abrupt exit from the sphere of females catapulting her into the world of men eloquently prove the "unnaturalness" of gender.

All the more so, because to her surprise, still on the level of plot, she soon learns to appreciate life as a male as well. Her transformation into a male is not only a matter of appearances ("They brought out men's trousers, worn and with no braid, and a shirt and head scarf. Lottar put them on. One woman with an ugly pair of shears chopped off most of what

remained of Lottar's hair" [Munro, "Albanian" 93]). Although formerly she was convinced that "[w]hat the men did all day was none of women's business" (89), she learns to adapt to her new life. She learns to shoot and skin animals, she sleeps outdoors, is undisturbed by bugs, and participates at men's gatherings by the fire where they talk about guns and killings. In addition, she yet experiences another gender switch after having been informed by the Franciscan about his worries that the Ghegs will still sell her to a Muslim in times of need, i. e., with the advance of winter, because her position of namelessness would absolve them from the vow to respect a virgin. She is truly a nonentity in the community: she does not belong to any of the families; hence she has no proper name endowed by the father, and without a father to determine what gender roles she plays in the family the community might decide on what suits their communal needs. So, he steals her out of the community and takes her to the nearest city to the bishop to save her Christian soul and sends her home to Canada. That they meet again there is already known.

The events in Claire's subplot similarly describe a gender switch: separated from her familiar surroundings, tired and scared of the entanglements of her love life, she leaves her investment in love behind and creates an entirely new life for herself. And she is successful at it. She takes risks and decides to sell books that other bookstore owners think to be unsaleable, she hires a clerk wisely, and she makes a living by selling books in a small town. Her success surprises all, including herself. Her "masculine" quest to define the outlines of her own life brought to fruition. It is also quite remarkable that the only thing she fails at is matching her acquaintances into couples—she decides to acquaint two of her regular single customers, which turns out to be a misstep.

Thus both Charlotte and Claire are truly successful as questing heroines (they are perceptive spectators of their otherworlds, they adapt themselves to the situation, they take the initiative to redefine their position in the world, and they come out victoriously in the end), while they are not that successful as love's heroines in the double plot structure of the female gothic. In fact, it is their erotic history, or the history of their love life after the happy ending, that is the part that Charlotte calls as a part of her story that is of no interest. What both heroines value as their achievement is coping in a new environment alone, even if the new environment is a metaphorical gothic otherworld where darkness intrudes.<sup>83</sup> Since it is here that they can be heroic subjects and not just the body on which desires are inscribed.<sup>84</sup> It is this they prefer to tell about.

The challenge to gender appears in the short story on other levels as well, especially as it negotiates the ideological underpinnings of the female gothic. This happens in two ways. On the one hand, the short story appropriates the convention of the bifurcation of the textual

world into two to reflect on their relationship *vis a vis* each other; but, on the other hand, it also challenges the female gothic solution by magnifying it to excessive proportions. Before turning to this latter, I briefly turn to the former.

As stated earlier, one of the functions that the (textual actual) gothic otherworld as a device of recentering embodied in the gothic castle, house, or mansion fulfills is the literalization of gender relationships in the actual world. What the female gothic calls attention to is that the (textual actual) gothic otherworld is not different from the (actual) world readers inhabit in kind but only in extent (since it is the reference world). In fact, the hierarchical gender differentiation in the Albanian tribe mirrors the gender reality of western civilization in a magnified form. After all, Charlotte-Lottar decides to ride with a guide into the Albanian mountains to escape the gentleman summoned from Britain by her fellow-travelers as a possible suitor to herself (84). Both western and Albanian civilizations regard her as a marriageable commodity to capitalize on; the only difference is that the Cozzens invite Mr. Lamb in secret because they think she is rich, i.e., they see her as a consuming female displaying her status through her travels so that she could enter into the symbolic exchange of property and power on the marriage market as a marriageable object—, while the Albanians are open about their financial interest in the deal.<sup>85</sup>

But Munro's short story goes beyond reiterating the lesson of gender subordination for women in the gender economy of western civilization; and it equally cannot be evaluated as a proposal to suggest that women should opt out of the discourse of love. Eventually, love as a relationship is not discarded at all by either character but its place is redefined in typical Munroian terms: its conceptualization as the achievement of a lifetime confirming female worth is interrogated.

This is achieved through the figure of the sworn virgin, which clearly appears in Munro's story as a masquerade. She mines the South-eastern European tradition to focus on its subversive potential. Whereas the tradition answers to the perceived social necessity to maintain male power at all costs—female dissent is possible only at the cost of renouncing sexuality altogether, which thus does not threaten the gender/power matrix<sup>86</sup>—Albanian virgins become female gothic heroines incarnate in her fiction. They are male and female and neither at the same time as they masquerade in the gender roles the situation requires: passive at the start and at the end, agents of action when necessary, thus neither feminine, nor masculine, but a passive-aggressive middling character for the most part. The only difference between Albanian virgins and female gothic heroines is that they do not don the visible markers of their gender alignment—they do not dress their gender. The visible transformation of Lottar into a sworn virgin is insignificant anyway since the ritual of transformation,

however emphatically it appears in the short story, can be seen as a strategic move to divert attention from the ways her figure subverts gender ideology. To understand her figure's challenge, one should turn to theories of gender masquerade and performativity.

It is mainly eighteenth-century cultural and literary scholarship that sets the study of masquerade (specifically understood here as the wearing of clothes as culturally loaded signifiers) into its focus. Since Fielding warned of the freedoms and excesses that masquerade allowed to all, to women in particular,<sup>87</sup> and since the ground-breaking work of Bakhtin on Rabelais, the wearing of disguise as a manifestation of festive life has been interpreted as having a liberating power<sup>88</sup> since it allows for the hiding of those markers upon which mankind can be comfortably categorized into groups based on gender, class, age, etc. In fact, disguise hides exactly those markers that portion out customary social prerogatives. Thus, by assuming a disguise, one can "unlawfully," if only temporarily, gain prerogatives otherwise denied. Reading "The Albanian Virgin" against this background, we can come to a comforting understanding of the transformation into a male since it accentuates its potential for creating a dissenting opportunity. An alien woman in a totally disempowered situation in a strictly patriarchal society escapes being objectified as a commodity by transforming into a metaphorical male, a virgin, dressed in male attire, sharing in the fun of males, without the obligation to serve them, free of the numerous household chores, free to do what (s)he wants, except going to the consulate and find her way back to North-America.

However, as Bakhtin indicates in connection with the carnival and recent scholarship on the works of eighteenth-century women writers proves, various forms of festive life, such as masquerade, far from having a liberating potential, offer sophisticated forms of control. For it is true that forms of festive life have the power to temporarily suspend rules, and thus they function as a form of resistance to the standing order by showing that things could be otherwise (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 1-41, 196-277; Castle, *Masquerade* 88, 92, 125, 256; Evans and Thornton 44; Nussbaum 198-99; Russo 63), they yet do not break with the dominant power structure (Craft-Fairchild 51-74; Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 1-41, 196-277). Festive life, on the one hand, allows for exchanging the terms in a binary system temporarily; on the other hand, it leaves their foundations untouched (Russo 63; Bauer 14; Bakhtin, *Problems* 127),<sup>89</sup> moreover, it may encourage the fetishization of the body and the fragmentation of the self. Eventually, the purpose of any form of festive life is not only to provide a functional form to the cyclical conceptualization of the known order but also to provide a spectacle for the gaze, which is male in its gender (Mulvey 589-94).

Alison Shaw and Shirley Ardener come to a similar conclusion in their study of sworn virgins in Albania because they find that the practice of allowing females to become

functional males under certain circumstances does not dilute the gender dichotomy in the given society. Instead, they argue, Albanian virgins “seem to support and enhance a rigorous binarism: male and female still appear as powerfully contrasted and determining categories in Northern Albania.” And they continue: “*Virgjinesha* are always described in terms of male or female attributes: never in terms of anything altogether ‘other’ (as with multiple genders)” (82). This structural rigor is symbolically articulated in Munro’s story as the Ghegs’ turn of mind to annul Lottar’s oath: her transformation can be reversed, which would still result in an accepted form of femininity. In her reversal the governing principle of the carnival masquerade as form of festive life comes to light: not being a female is not identical with being a male.

“The Albanian Virgin” begins when a young woman rejects her possibilities as a female and sets out to satisfy two transgressive desires: (1) she wants to escape the middle-aged gentleman “summoned from England to meet her ... [a] transatlantic heiress” (Munro, “Albanian” 84) and (2) she wants to “see the bell tower where the heads of the Turks used to hang” (84). Both desires are connected to sight—she does not want to be a spectacle for the sake of male gaze, instead, she wants to situate herself into the position of the spectator. Ironically, she does see a head hanging in a sack, the head of her guide, but from a differentiated, independent, and desiring woman, after a series of transformations that starts with an ailing body suspended and existing outside time through being dressed up as a fetishized and silent bride by the end of the story she transforms (reforms?) into a virgin, alien, neither female nor male in the Gheg community, uncouth, deaf, mute, impotent, grotesquely dressed in a man’s attire, only able to say “‘Xoti! Xoti! Xoti!’, which means ‘leader’ or ‘master’ in the language of the Ghegs” (128). She is lack incarnate, an object of exchange handed over from one male to another (the priest to the bishop). All the while, she ceases to have wishes and feelings and she becomes the repository of others’ desires. Masquerading as a male for Lottar is not transgression; rather, in the patriarchal society of the short story the ritual of turning females into functional males itself guarantees the upholding of the gender status quo, since if a woman rejects her position as an object of barter, as a commodity to put men into relationship with each other for the sake of passing on an inheritance from father to son, she can opt out by becoming a fake man, by parodying male behavior. Her lack will be all the more visible, as she will always only *behave* like a man, she will never become one.<sup>90</sup>

Yet, this specific literary Albanian virgin does subvert the acutely bipolar sex-gender matrix. The key to her subversion is to be found in the conceptualization of love as the

motivator behind the miraculous transformation of Charlotte's austere mentor, Gjurdhi, into a feminized lover (the female gothic topos of taming the husband).

Gjurdhi's character compresses the history of more than two and a half centuries of women's fiction since its changes follow the pattern set by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sentimental and female gothic fiction in particular. Janet Todd, Katherine M. Rogers, and Patricia Meyer Spacks argue that women writers in the eighteenth century portrayed all males as desiring and predatory; by the end of the century male characters were divided into two groups: those who display virtues that are valued in and by women, such as passivity, consideration, mindfulness of obligations, the valuing of privacy and domestic happiness (Todd 3; Rogers, "Dreams" 10-11; "Inhibitions" 76; Spacks, *Desire* 147-74; Craft-Fairchild 12-13) and those who are to be feared because of the lack of these "feminine" values. In short, female authors displaced the focus of fear from men in general onto the lawgiver, metaphorical father. Representatives of the law (fathers, surrogate fathers, villains) came to be feared the most, while prospective husbands became feminized displaying feelings hitherto allowed only for women.

The interpretation of Gjurdhi's character is also defined by this binary logic. In Albania he is the law, in Canada he is the lover, and his inability to be both mentor/Franciscan Father and a man desiring a woman is a sign of the inescapability of the mutually exclusive terms—and the change is far from being smooth. In the short story he is *humbled* into love: his rectitude is lost, he breaks his vow of celibacy, he proves to be disloyal to his community, he loses social usefulness, his learning cannot be put to use any longer; he becomes a peddler of books happy when he comes into some money—for which, ironically, he derided his earlier community since his problem with Lottar's sale to a Muslim was rooted in their trade of religion for money.

It is here that Lottar-Charlotte, the virgin works her transgression, since she does not only tame Gjurdhi, a most improbable candidate for a companionate family, into an acceptable husband who will not domineer over her, but goes a step further, she "overtames" him. By seducing the priest, she defies the law and oversteps all patriarchal boundaries. As a priest, the Franciscan is forbidden as an object of desire, as a surrogate father, he is doubly forbidden, as the law-giver he becomes the locus of all that is taboo for woman. Yet, strangely enough, Lottar does not understand for the greater part of her captivity that he is forbidden; she feels attracted to him most of the time. She senses that he is a taboo only when she thinks that she has been separated from him for good. Ironically, it is when she is freed that she accepts the terms of the binary logic: still in male attire, she calls for a master. Thereby, she reenacts a symbolically oedipal plot but at the same time she also manages to seduce the

father, which then leads to the valorization of herself and the feminization of the father as a textbook example of what Irigaray writes: “The girl’s only way to redeem her personal value, and value in general, would be to seduce the father and persuade him to express, if not admit, some interest in her” (*Speculum* 87).

Lottar’s masquerade as an Albanian virgin, functional male, is thus transgressive because as the embodiment of the concept of woman as lack made all the more visible by the masquerade can seduce the stem and inflexible law-giver; this improbable femme fatale dissolves his power and reduces him to being “just one of a number of [ .. ] old men who belong to the city somewhat as pigeons do” (Munro, “Albanian” 117). Furthermore, his transformation calls attention to the possibility that being a man is nothing but masquerading as a man also.

Riviere has theorized femininity in terms of masquerade in her study of feminine behavior in the case of professional women in the early decades of the twentieth century. Her conclusions are straightforward:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade.’ My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (2)

Mary Ann Doane adds that masquerade as such is far from being joyful or affirmative, rather it is ridden with anxiety. It presents “a mode of being for the other—[ ... ] sheer objectification or reification” (33). Lottar’s seduction of the priest and his transformation relegates masculinity into the same relation since it suggests that what holds for women is true for men: genuine manliness and the masquerade are the same thing after all.

Butler’s work, who combines Riviere’s insight with a Foucaultian interpretation of gender as a discursive formation to arrive at a conceptualization of gender as a performance, provides further help in understanding why Munro does not stop at the female gothic theme of taming the husband and insists on “overtaming” him. Butler’s theory of gender performativity challenges various dichotomies, such as the nature/culture divide, which forms the basis for the sex/gender system of western (patriarchal) civilizations. Her theory comprises of several key points, whose importance for subsequent scholarship cannot be overemphasized, one by one and in their conjunction either. First, she claims that the need to differentiate between two exclusive sexes and genders derives from the heterosexual matrix that dominates the discourse about subjects, i.e., who can be a subject and who can only be an object. This matrix then will be understood as a disciplining discourse manifesting itself in various ways



that delineate and fix cultural practices that are deemed as productive in a given society (e.g.: barring females from the voice of authority, in which they can speak as subjects). These will then press for the establishment of the aspects of identity as “natural,” i.e., irreducible and constant, that are necessary for the upholding of the power structure underlying the social makeup (*Gender* 7-12)—females “naturally” lack the characteristics needed for authorizing them to speak in the voice of subjects. Second, identities, both gender and sexual, are produced through social performances as a series of mimetic repetitions. Even though maleness and femaleness appear as constants over time, these are “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (43-44). Individuals learn how to repeat the gender performances of the sex they are biologically aligned with.

But, as Butler points out, there is a gap between these repetitions where there is a potential for (re)claiming agency, which can be seized to transform the regulatory frame through subversive, and purely mimetic, or imitative, practices: mimicry, satire, drag, etc. (*Bodies* 121-40; *Gender* 173-77). Female gothic fiction has inserted itself into this gap by experimenting with other ways to regulate female/male gender performances. This experimentation appears in the re/en/gendering of its heroine and her suitable husband.

Yet, Munro’s narrative points out, it must not be forgotten that all this happens within the sphere of fiction—where fiction means both literary production and what Butler calls “the regulatory frame” of discourses. There is nothing natural about (fe)maleness; therefore, female characters’ insistence on love as the justifying discourse of their worth is a fiction that can easily be waved away with the sleight of the hand, like an overtamed husband. What really matters is finding a voice in which to speak, and not what *happens* before the happy ending to land one into a silent marital idyll.

Claire’s narrative also supports this reading. All the while she is separated from her husband and her lover, she keeps writing letters to both till one day she sees a man in her bookstore: “He was a short man dressed in a trenchcoat and a fedora. I had the impression of someone disguised. Jokingly disguised. He moved toward me and bumped my shoulder, and I cried out as if I had received the shock of my life, and indeed it was true that I had. For this was really Nelson, come to claim me” (Munro, “Albanian” 127). Notwithstanding the Hollywood-style meeting of the two lovers, the narrative is still not about reunion and the power of love, but more about separation. Just before the lover appears, the narrator has imagined what their life together would be like and sums it up as a series of separations and reunions, rituals, routines: “We become distant, close—distant, close—over and over again” (127). This expectation is then confirmed in the section that is typographically set apart from

the main body of the text, whose dreamy diction stands out from the whole. This is the story of capitulation. All capitulate.

Yet, there is a difference between capitulations. The priest breaks the law by an act of passion and Claire first similarly capitulates to the “resourceful and determined” Nelson with whom her affair had “no bleakness or triviality about it, only ruthlessness and clarity of desire, and sparkling deception” (111); just like the person did she is writing her thesis not very quickly on, Mary Shelley, who also capitulated to seduction. But Shelley then “learned her sad lessons and buckled down to raising her son to be a baronet” (111)—and both Claire and Gjurdhi similarly learn their sad lessons when they believe the regulatory fiction of marital bliss that must necessarily ensue the happy ending.

In Munro’s fiction the terms for love often allude to violent appropriation, to which one is lucky to surrender herself/himself. Claire asks at one point: “Wouldn’t we rather have a destiny to submit to, then something that claims us, anything, instead of such flimsy choices, arbitrary days?” (127), and physical love is compared to “some hot and skinny, slithering, yellowish, indecent old beast, some mangy but urgent old tiger ... conduct[ing] a familiar rampage” (123-4).<sup>91</sup> Surrender to passion is portrayed as a necessary component of life because of the energy it releases but its effect is only temporary. Moss has pointed out in his study of *Lives* that Munro’s conception of sexuality rests on the understanding that satisfaction through lust always demands some kind of a personal surrender. He quotes from *Lives*: “Sex seemed to me all surrender—not the woman’s to the man but the person’s to the body, an act of pure faith, freedom in humility” (Munro qtd. in Moss, *Sex* 66).<sup>92</sup> However, it must be noted, as indicated by the quote, that the surrender in Munro’s fiction does not occur *vis a vis* another person but *vis a vis* oneself (Blodgett 54; Gadpaille 78, Howells, *Alice* 45, 61-62; *Private* 82-86; Miller 66-81; Gunner 63-67). Moss elaborates this idea elsewhere and argues that Del also understands that she is the one responsible for her own life and therefore she forsakes the easier and in the long run less rewarding option of letting another person take charge of her life, however attractive it may appear at any moment. Thus, eventually, Del—as well as subsequent female protagonists—discards satisfaction rooted entirely in lust (Moss, *Canadian* 142-43). Gjurdhi fails exactly because he hands over the control over his life to another person. He gives up everything by giving in to a fantasy of love that usually female characters are prone to in Munro’s fiction (Howells, *Private* 71; 78-86). Claire’s failure can also be formulated within this framework. Their gain in exchange of their surrender is servility and/or decades of routine.

By contrast, Charlotte “would not operate from sympathies, principles [ ... ] [she] would be playful about what other people took seriously” (Munro, “Albanian” 121). She half

jokes and is half serious in all her dealings and, consequently, she manages to uphold an ironic distance between her roles and herself. She can adapt under all circumstances because she knows how to wear her masquerades and shape her performances. She thus challenges the social structures that make life comfortable by compartmentalizing social realities because she has interiorized the lesson that femininity (just as masculinity) is a performance (Butler, *Gender* 43-44; Doane, "Masquerade" 42-43). She shapes her various gender performances, all made available and sanctioned by culture and society, which ultimately leads to her becoming an excess: whether as an economically empowered or as a powerless young woman she demonstrates excessively that women are objects of exchange between men; as a virgin she calls attention to her lack (in these two roles her identity becomes fragmented and her body fetishized); as an unlikely femme fatale she seduces an excessively inappropriate man, a priest, and thus she destabilizes patriarchal order; as a wife she acts like a patriarch. In short, by her excessiveness she destabilizes dichotomies: she poses a threat to the rigid regulatory frame of the sex/gender matrix because she has learnt to inhabit her gender roles as masquerades (Riviere)/performance (Butler). They are "unnaturally" and deliberately assumed, temporary, and exchangeable.

The story of "The Albanian Virgin" has been triggered by an anecdote that sent Munro to read Durham's *High Albania*. Her reading however has provided the basis not for this story alone but immediately three: "Carried Away," "Real Life," and "The Albanian Virgin." She describes in an interview how the one original planned novel evolved into three short stories with the themes and the protagonists freely traveling in between the versions (Pleuke and Smith 227-9).<sup>93</sup> She claims that she has been most surprised by the turn that Dorrie's fate has taken and describes her figure in terms of exhilaration and liberation (229). Yet, I believe, it is not Dorrie who is her true neo-gothic heroine.

The three stories are sister texts not only because they share the same genesis but also because they circle around the same issue: how do one's circumstances define one's life, how do individuals respond to circumstance, how does one deal with missed opportunities, with what-might-have-happeneds? How can definitive male-female relationships be conceived of? Although the three heroines embody different alternatives in answer to these questions, what unites them is the author's conviction that, first, the subject will by no means be permanently closed into a world of outside forces alone. One's circumstances do define who one will become, but only to a certain extent. Although on the face of it all three heroines (Louisa, Dorrie, and Charlotte-Lottar) are deeply influenced by the few possibilities open to them in an age and society that are not favorable to independent women, all three manage to break out of them in one way or another. All three prove that they cannot be contained within cultural

stereotypes and that they by no means would correspond to the images projected upon them. For all three of them, it is their quests that define who they are and their marriages, and, especially, what comes after the happy ending as a culmination of their erotic plot, are of no interest.

In certain scenarios, Louisa, the orphaned girl fooled by love in her early years should have died in the sanatorium, if not of love of TB at least. Yet, she survives and accepts the curious position of a traveling saleswoman. In that position her fate could also have propelled her towards a downfall, but she contradicts all expectations again and sizes her situation up wisely. When good luck comes her way, she applies for a position in which she should have all the chances to grow old and sour alone, just as her predecessor, but instead she falls foolishly in love again, then gets interested “in all and sundry” (Munro, “Carried” 14), only to lose her virginity to a traveling salesman she does not particularly like. She always acts contrary to expectations: when her social position would predispose one to believing that she is licentious, she is sober; when however she is supposed to provide a good example to the community as a public servant (not exactly like a schoolteacher but yet somewhat similarly) she generates rumors in town. Most surprisingly, she then marries the local factory owner and grows respectable—all this only to lose her head and be carried away in her old age to fantasize about her long dead lover she has never even seen.

Dorrie contradicts expectations formulated on a different basis. Although born female, she does not have anything feminine about her: she is a hunter and trapper, dreaming of adventure, carefree of feminine worries, a bad cook, a sloppy housekeeper (dog dirt is left to dry “stony, dignified, stable” [54] in her house, at the head of the stairs—a most visible place), and obviously uninterested in males. Although her innocence and lack of affectation remind one of the gothic heroine’s disowning of any interest in sexuality, her marriage, which recalls the sudden appearance of the prince in Cinderella’s tale, is still a surprise; even more so because the good fairies have provided her with the wrong kind of clothes transforming her into a sexless doll rather than into an attractive woman. And the happy ending is all the more surprising because it is the wedding bells that open for her the possibility to pursue her asexual dreams of adventure. (Millicent in turn is expected to carry on her practically arranged life, but instead of that she grows less and less sure in her former convictions.)

Charlotte-Lottar unites the two characters in her malleable figure: a naive orphan, like Louisa, an adventurer like Dorrie; an inept woman in the Ghég community at first, growing into a capable one; then a man only to abandon herself to love with a male figure of authority; a domineering woman subsequently, only to reminiscence about her past to finally exit the fictional universe happily: an old couple throwing money up in the air and vanishing

from sight (Munro, "Albanian" 126). Charlotte-Lottar is the woman to have it all: a life of adventure, male social prerogatives, the seductive powers of a femme fatale, a compelling love, spiritual and physical, a caring man notwithstanding ~~his~~ sternness, a long companionship, and a second happy ending, decades after the metaphorical wedding bells. This is what Claire is persistently hankering for.

At one point in "The Albanian Virgin" Claire loses heart in her hard-won independence earned by her escape and thinks to herself:

I had not changed, with regard to his [Nelson's] skin and smell and his forbidding eyes. It seemed to be the outside of Nelson which came most readily to my mind, and in the case of Donald it was his inner quakes and sympathies [ ... ] If I could have my love of these two men together, and settle it on one man, I would be a happy woman. If I could care for everybody in the world as minutely as I did for Nelson, and as calmly, as uncarnally as I now did for Donald, I would be a saint. (114)

What Claire is yearning for is the dream that female gothicists always cherished but accomplished only in the nineteenth century. As noted earlier, in the eighteenth century women writers devised strategies that had a lasting effect on the portrayal of male characters. Whereas in early gothic works all males were depicted as of predatory sexuality representing a threat to feminine innocence, in the course of the century male characters were divided into two categories that relegated all threatening characteristics onto male figures of authority, while future husbands and, sometimes, suffering fathers, came to be portrayed with characteristics that had been reserved to female figures earlier. Williams claims that the male hero therefore participates in the female gothic transformation of unity into a poetics of "duplicity," while Spacks and Terry Eagleton regard the transformation as part of the process of the feminization of discourse (Spacks, *Desire* 7; Eagleton 95).<sup>94</sup> Although male villains since Milton's Satan have always been duplicitous, inconsistent, two-faced and insincere, female gothicists have transformed this "flaw" into the gothic hero's merit. Maybe, at the beginning he is two-faced, but only because the heroine is confused by outside forces and thus she misinterprets him, in the end however he proves that he has loved the heroine all through the events dearly. Nonetheless, sometimes, regardless of his caring and sympathetic nature, he proves to be extremely ineffective in protecting his beloved ones: wives, brides, and daughters, must thus save themselves from the maltreatment of gothic villains. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the enigmatic gothic hero is transformed into virtual doubleness in that he appears as both fallen and noble, imposingly masculine in stature and feminine in his capacity for feeling. This figure, which has come to be identified as the Byronic hero, the epitome of doubleness, most memorable in the Brontës' novels, has become a staple figure of the female gothic ever since.<sup>95</sup>

Gjurdhi's character is of such compound—it is not incidental at all that his name when pronounced is extremely evocative of Byron's first name, Georgie, all the more so because in one of the best known paintings of him, he poses as the hero of Albania in Albanian dress.<sup>96</sup> He is fierce, authoritative, unreachable in Albania, but he entertains an underground liking for Lottar as his rescue of her from marriage and his following her onto another continent evocatively prove. His feminine nature is emphasized by his housewifely efficiency and extreme attention to Charlotte, while his masculinity is accentuated by his ferocity and sexual allure (the mangy tiger [124]). He embodies the unity of power and feeling that Claire would love to see in a combination of Nelson's and Donald's characters.

Yet, Claire is not a Charlotte, notwithstanding the name symbolism that the same initial of their names suggests. Charlotte is playful about herself, she embodies change, process, as she refuses containment in any role or image, whereas Claire is looking for security in familiar scripts which constantly defy her. Claire is not an “*unwracked-up* sort of person” (113; original emphasis) but is “sabotage[d] from within” (110), because she lives the conflict that inheres in the available cultural images for men and women as propagated after the feminization of discourse. She also wants to have it all both a fiercely sexual and an affectionately caring man; she wants a quest of her own and wants to be saved by her hero; she wants to abandon herself to love and wants the abandonment to last permanently without a cost to herself. She is mistaken both because she seeks comfort in easily available images and because she takes the images and herself too seriously, like Louisa. But whereas Louisa is able to leave the familiar images behind only at the cost of entering an entirely new reality, which propels “*Carried Away*” towards a tragic note, Charlotte's protean figure pushes “*The Albanian Virgin*” towards comedy. The happy ending of her story however is signaled by banknotes showering onto Charlotte's and Gjurdhi's head instead of petals of rose or rice accompanied by the wedding bells; she is not rewarded by an adequate partner for her persevering efforts at carrying her quest to its close; instead, divine intervention—call it chance—gives her the opportunity to leave the text abruptly—only to return at the very end as her younger self again. Her figure will not be contained but remains freely circulating in its various selves: young and old, male and female, lucky and unlucky, active and passive, loving and hating, a subject-in-process, who tells her tale, however obliquely.

#### 4. 3. *Traveling on Eyre Road — “The Jack Randa Hotel”*

“The Jack Randa Hotel” in many ways is a curious short story within the Munro oeuvre and, yet, in several other ways it is vintage Munro. Its unusualness derives from the fact that, like “The Albanian Virgin,” it partly dwells in the female travel narrative genre since

it depicts a heroine who sets out on a quest and travels from the cold Canada with its familiar catalpa trees to the entirely different Australia, the “country of non-stop blooming and impudent bird life” (Munro, “Jack” 177), where it is always “the wrong time of day” (162). But what also connects it to “The Albanian Virgin” is that it continues to explore whether what women really want is the stasis of happy ending. Munro in fact rewrites, moreover, satirizes, a female gothic classic, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* to underline again that the female fantasy that seeks to change the discourse about women by suggesting that the road to the redefinition of the female gender leads through a one-to-one pedagogical project of taming the husband cannot serve as the guideline for creating a female subjectivity. In this narrative the Brontëesque fantasy about the plain governess’s success becomes the metaphorical gothic otherworld that yokes women to a gender ideology that renders them dependent.

My discussion starts by pointing out how Munro constructs Gail, the protagonist, as a mock female gothic heroine through her responses to sights and other people (the theme of “seeing differently”) and her wrongly conceived ambition/quest plot, which is directed at the fulfillment of an erotic plot. Then, I point to the intertextual connections of the short story to argue that eventually Munro’s mock heroine opts out of the female gothic fantasy, or at least, she chooses the prolongation of her love quest over a companionate idyll.

The plot focuses on Gail, who follows Will, the man she has lived with for decades but who has deserted her for a young and energetic Australian woman, to an unfamiliar continent. It is not entirely clear why Gail sets out on her journey, whether she only wants to spy on the new couple or she wants to seduce him back—this is why the short story may also be regarded to dwell in female fantasy, Howells claims (“Taking” 387), since it takes as its protagonist the jilted woman who keeps hanging on to her love up until the end, or maybe even beyond; or put another way, Gail is simply acting on the imperative of western culture in that she has made love her quest. (I will argue that it dwells in female fantasy fiction—female gothic—for a different reason.) But the short story equally turns to the epistolary mode since the nine incorporated letters convey in rather roundabout ways both Gail’s and Will’s observations about their situation.

The generic indeterminacy itself is not unique in Munro’s fiction. What is surprising is the motif of the travel itself, while even more surprising is the fact that Munro devotes a remarkably large space to the description of the setting; i. e., the travel itself is not conceptualized as a travel-within facilitated by the novelty of the place, which thus prepares the ground for the confrontation of the self. Instead, the place, the new setting, its wonders are emphatically there, unlike in “The Albanian Virgin,” where the Albanian setting is virtually missing. Here, again and again, the protagonist must look around to see where she finds

herself; she must make sense of her surrounding. Yet, it is not entirely justified to call the short story a travelogue—or if so, an inverse one at best—because the heroine is singularly blind to the backdrop of the events that transpire.

Gail, the middle-aged seamstress, who has shared her life with Will for years, is a typical perturbed Munroian heroine in the sense that she has had a checkered life, experienced life as an independent woman (like Louisa and Bea), but then met a man who conquered her heart notwithstanding his aloofness (like Gjurdhi). Although happy for some time, she has slowly lost her independence and self-assurance to settle into routine (like Claire), till the disaster of her jilting sets in. To this she reacts uncomprehendingly at first, with rage later, but when she spots Will's new address at his mother's house by accident, she decides to follow the lovers. She masks herself entirely by putting on a disguise that accentuates her situation (instead of making herself attractive to conquer his attention, she masks herself as an aging, single woman) and travels to Australia. There she spies on him, steals a letter written to him by an unknown (and, as it later turns out, then an already dead) lady, who is his namesake, and by ventriloquizing her voice she starts a correspondence with him. She literally takes the dead woman's place: in her Canadian disguise as Mrs. Massie from Oklahoma, who is "somebody who has spent most of her life in uniform, at some worthy, poorly paid job (perhaps in a hospital cafeteria?), and now has spent too much money for a dashing dress that will turn out to be inappropriate and uncomfortable, on the holiday of her life" (Munro, "Jack" 169), she rents the dead woman's apartment and transforms, again, into an Australian woman. She now looks like "the other women she sees on the street. Housewives, middle-aged, with bare but pale arms and legs [ ... ] She bought a floppy straw hat too" (174). From this position of invisibility (common, familiar) she, the woman doubly disguised (Gail disguising herself as an Oklahoman disguising herself as an Australian), invents a voice, entirely other than hers, that manages to entice Will. When, however, he is ready to meet her as Gail again, she escapes back to Canada in order to send him a note hidden in an Australian aboriginal artifact: "*Now it's up to you to follow me*" (189; original emphasis).

As noted above, the short story dwells at the intersection of three genres: the travelogue, epistolary fiction, and popular romance (love story). It is not uncommon for female gothic works to combine these three and, as it has been convincingly argued, all of them contribute to the novelty of the female gothic itself.<sup>97</sup> Although at first sight the travelogue might seem to be occupying an odd position in the female gothic, its presence there has been accounted for by pointing to a radically new conceptualization of the place of visuality in fiction. As argued earlier in the discussion of "Vandals," "Open Secrets,"



“Jakarta,” and “The Love of a Good Woman,” the ability of the gothic heroine to “see differently” (Wall 208) has become a constitutive feature of her worthiness.

Although Martin and Ober argue that the Australian vegetation and jacaranda trees in particular provide Gail with “a new experience” that leads to “a new awareness of her love for Will” (4), I will argue that visibility, the structure of descriptive passages, and the framing of Gail’s responses to natural and urban scenery juxtaposed to her insistence on love work in exactly the opposite way. These construct Gail as a mock gothic heroine who not only fails the test of seeing and thus she will not be rewarded with “the classic diapason of comedy—a happy wedding” (Martin and Ober 5) but she also voluntarily assumes this position.

First, she is a mock gothic heroine because she is so blinded by her own fantasy of love, her hanging on to Will—even though she never thinks of her emotional attachment to him as love but as a power struggle and an agony—that she is unable to see anything in terms other than to what extent the thing seen facilitates or obstructs her efforts at getting at him. Her actions are reduced to the female gothic erotic plot which results in the annihilation of her ambition/quest plot. She is so much involved with her humiliations in her love life with Will that she misses out what transpires in the world. Everything becomes either an aid or an impediment to carrying out her plan, which, although she is not conscious of it as such, is to get back at the beginning, at a starting point where they can commence their relationship anew. (This is accentuated by the frame of the short story as well: it both starts and ends at an airport with Gail.) But, contrary to Martin and Ober’s claim, Gail is not searching for an “opportunity to recognize their equal status in a renewed partnership” (4) that allows for both of them “to shelter themselves from the slings and arrows of life” (4)—the female gothic dream of companionate family. Just the opposite, she is seeking to get back where all started, where she used to have “the upper hand” (Munro, “Jack” 166) in their relationship. All she wants is to get back to the beginnings with a tamed Will, who now after his ill-fated love escapade is ready to re-enter their relationship on terms dictated by herself, which is a theme supported by intertextual references to Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Second, she is a mock heroine also because she voluntarily steps off the route trodden by major gothic heroines who tame their male companions before marriage into an adequately feminized man. Gail, however, is no Charlotte to turn Will into another Gjurdhi.

With respect to the first claim, Gail’s blindness is a theme that runs through the whole of the narrative. As her memories make it clear, she has always been blinded by her own circumscribed vision. In fact, the whole chain of events that range from the trivial to the tragic turns on her failing to see what is going on in front of her eyes. First, she does not notice that there is a conspicuous silence about Sandy, the Australian exchange student in Will’s school,

“some sort of electricity, or danger, around her name” (167), which Gail realizes later was exactly the indication of his developing attachment to her. As she recognizes in retrospect: “The fact that Gail never met Sandy was of course an ominous thing. It must have meant that Will knew something very quickly” (170). Second, she knows nothing about their developing correspondence precipitating his leaving although it continued throughout the school year leading to their falling in love “seriously” (168).

Her blindness is rooted in the fact that she is only able to see anything in terms of her own love life. She epitomizes Munro’s conviction that “[w]e rarely live beyond the one reality we define or choose for ourselves” (qtd. Smith and Boyce 227), and Gail’s choice of reality falls on her trepidations of love. When Will tells her that he is leaving, her reaction is to ask: “You mean it’s not me? [ ... ] You mean I’m not the trouble?” (168). When her questions are answered favorably, she is so relieved that she even “bewildered Will into going to bed with her” (168). It never occurs to her at the time that she should blame Will for his betrayal; she is not the least interested in his rationale for leaving unless it is connected to herself. Likewise, after Will’s desertion for some time she immerses herself in the love life of other women, but all she sees is a repetition of her own life in the humiliations suffered by other women dealt by other men in midlife crisis. Even when she tires of the repetitiveness of “‘May-December’ relationships” (177) setting in with middle-aged men followed by the jilted women’s uniformly outraged responses and decides to find relief at Will’s mother’s, she slips back to her old ways. She hangs out flippant notes on her shop’s door like the ones they used to hang out with Will at the beginning of their relationship without thinking about how her frivolity might be met by her customers. (“She heard that such flippancy was not appreciated by people who had driven some distance to buy a dress for a wedding, or girls on an expedition to buy clothes for college. She did not care” [164].) She will not, she chooses not to, step out of her world defined by her notion of love intermingled with self-pity and doggedness. She does not even want to start anew, to abandon the one world of her love of Will. Similarly, when she spots his letter to his mother at her house, Gail is convinced that “the envelope [ ... ] had surely been left where she could see it. Cleata had left it—Cleata who never spoke one word about the fugitives” (168). She is so much entranced with herself, her situation, her need to belong to Will, that she is led to interpret everything in terms of her lost love; this is why she is ready to believe that Will’s mother provides a silent support, moreover, an encouragement to her reckless decision to follow them.

The structure of scenery descriptions in *Australia* repeats this thematic motif since it works to deflect attention from the wonders of the Antipodes by zooming in on Gail’s

enclosure into a world defined by her fantasy of love. The following passage describes the moment when Gail arrives at the address she copied from the envelope:

The road that the taxi climbed was steep, up from the brown river. Eyre Road runs along a ridge. There is no sidewalk, just a dusty path. No one walking, no cars passing, no shade. Fences of boards or a kind of basketweaving—wattles?—or in some cases high hedges covered with flowers. No, the flowers are really leaves of a purplish-pink or crimson color. Trees unfamiliar to Gail are showing over the fences. They have tough-looking dusty foliage, scaly or stringy bark, a shabby ornamental air. An indifference or vague ill will about them which she associated with the tropics. Walking on the path ahead of her are a pair of guinea hens, stately and preposterous.

The house where Will and Sandy live is hidden by a board fence, painted a pale green. Gail's heart shrinks—her heart is in a cruel clutch, to see that fence, that green. (170)

This is another world, an “elsewhere,” as Howells puts it (“Taking” 388), yet, Gail does not see any of the wonders of Australia, or of Brisbane, for that matter. Hedges are simply unfamiliar and guinea hens are preposterous, the fact that leaves look like flowers is registered without any sense of wonder. In addition, she remains within the circle of her preconceptions about tropic vegetation (it is ill-willed). She is a lot more preoccupied with the fences and what they allow to see, more particularly, what Will and Sandy's fence allows to see, than with the flora and fauna of an entirely unfamiliar continent. She has come on an errand and not on holiday, the passage underlines. She wants to see Will and not the place where he stays. Notwithstanding, she spends most of her time in the rented apartment hiding from him, immersing herself in the all too familiar world of old historical romances with titles like “*The Girl of the Limberlost*. *The Blue Castle*. *Maria Chapdelaine*.” (Munro, “Jack” 175; original emphasis). When she goes out, she does so with a set goal: she either checks her mail, buys her groceries, walks for exercise, or procures her daily novel from the library.

One day she leaves for a morning walk and she looks around: “The brown water of the river spreads sluggishly among the mangrove stumps. Birds are flying over the water, lighting on the hotel roof. They are not sea gulls, as she thought at first. They are smaller than gulls, and their bright wings and breasts are touched with pink” (178). This short and rather laconic description does nothing but establish Australia's difference; it still displays Gail's lack of interest in this world of elsewhere. In sharp contrast stands to it the long passage that immediately follows vividly describing a couple of men who are staying in the same hotel as she is. The differences in the two descriptions are significant:

In the park two men are sitting—one on a bench, one in a wheelchair beside the bench. She recognizes them [ ... ] The man in the wheelchair looks quite old and ill. His face is puckered like old blistered paint. He wears dark glasses and a coal-black toupee and a black beret over that. He is all wrapped up in a blanket. The man who pushes the wheelchair and who now sits on the bench is young enough to look like an overgrown boy. He is tall and large-limbed but

not manly. A young giant, bewildered by his own extent. Strong but not athletic, with a stiffness, maybe of timidity, in his thick arms and legs and neck. Red hair not just on his head but on his bare arms and above the buttons of his shirt. (178-79)

Whereas the description of the natural scenery is short and it displays a remarkably small amount of interest, Gail pays minute attention to the two men in her lively description. In fact, she asks them about the birds that are not seagulls only to initiate a conversation with them. Indicative of her self-absorption is the fact that she understands the name of the birds—galah birds—to be her own name (Galya) as pronounced by her Russian-speaking parents.

Although she has ample time on her hands when there is a temporary break in their correspondence with Will (he returns to Canada to attend the funeral of his mother, which she is naturally not aware of at the time), she is still not able to break out of her self-enclosed world of love fantasy.

She does walk in the streets nearby. Those streets all go along ridges. In-between the ridges, which the houses cling to, there are steep-sided gullies full of birds and trees. Even as the sun grows hot, those birds are not quiet. Magpies keep up their disquieting conversation and sometimes emerge to make menacing flights at her light-colored hat. The birds with the name like her own cry out foolishly as they rise and whirl about and subside into the leaves. She walks still she is dazed and sweaty and afraid of sunstroke. She shivers in the heat—most fearful, most desirous, of seeing Will's utterly familiar figure, that one rather small and jaunty, free-striding package, of all that could pain or appease her, in the world. (180)

Although this time she pays a lot closer attention to the background, both natural and urban, scenery still seems to Gail to be nothing but distraction. The sun is too hot, the birds are too loud, menacing, and foolish because they interfere with her desire to see Will. Not even jacaranda trees in full bloom distract her attention from her fantasy of reunion ("All the trees in the park have come out in bloom. The flowers are a color that she has seen and could not have imagined on trees before—a shade of silvery blue, or silvery purple, so delicate and beautiful that you would think it would shock everything into quietness, into contemplation, but apparently it has not" [180]). In addition, she commits the same mistake as before with galah birds. She asks the young man again at an incidental meeting about the name of the tree, but she makes out the word "jacaranda" as "Jack Randa," as if all the universe turned around men. In fact, Martin and Ober also gesture at this understanding when they connect the misheard word with the basic situation of the story: adventures in the Randy Jack (Will?) Hotel. Nonetheless, they claim that the misunderstanding signals yet again Munro's comic spirit since the misheard words ring "with [some] overtones of bawdry and the disreputable" (4).

By contrast, I believe that Gail's difficulties with Strine pronunciation primarily do not function as comic relief; on the contrary, they provide evidence for Gail's resistance to the

intrusion of the outside. She registers only the surface manifestations of “Australianness” (plants are strange, leaves are like flowers, birds are rowdy, some have a name identical with hers, some trees bloom in an unlikely color; women wear floppy hats) but she resists any further engagement with the differences of this other world. She can neither see nor hear.

Blind and deaf though she might be to Australia, she is confident in her capacity to read people in spite of her misreadings in this realm as well. Just how much she is absorbed in her own universe is indicated by her blunders in making sense of the nature of the relationship between her two neighbors. First, she thinks they are father and son, from which conviction she is catapulted into believing that they are lovers. At one point she asks the young man: “Is your father sick?” [ ... ] She has decided that this must be the relationship” (183), against all the signs that she enumerates as counterevidence to her theory. ““No,’ the young man says, and though his expression stays calm, a drowning flush spreads over his face, under the delicate redhead’s skin. Lovers, Gail thinks. She is suddenly sure of it. She feels a shiver of sympathy, an odd gratification” (184). Her conclusion definitely would not stand a case in court, but her faith in her new understanding is firm because it supports her view of the world as one governed by nothing else than the joys or miseries of love. Thus, on the day when the hotel manager asks her to help lift the old man onto his bed, obviously deserted by the young one, she sits by him and impersonates love itself (“‘I’m here, I’m here,’ she says, and wonders if she is impersonating the red-haired young man, or some other young man, or a woman, or even his mother” [186].) She even escorts him in the ambulance car en route to the hospital because she feels that his hands are clutching hers. However, when he dies, noticed by her only well after the event when in fact informed about it by the paramedic, she remarks: “‘He’s still holding on to me,’ says Gail. But she realizes as she says this that it isn’t true. A moment ago he was holding on—with great force, *it seemed*, enough force to hold her back [ ... ] Now it is she who is hanging on to him” (187; emphasis mine). The indeterminacy of what the phrase “it seemed” refers to, whether to the fact of *his* holding on to her or to the *force* with which he is holding, is alleviated by a previous, barely conspicuous note, made in passing. As she is walking next to the stretcher on which the man is carried to the ambulance car “Gail has to pull her hand away, and he begins to complain, *or she thinks* he does” (186; emphasis mine). She gives him her hand again and remarks: “He has such a grip on her that *she feels as if he is pulling her* along” (187; emphasis mine). The nature of the relationship between them nevertheless remains indeterminate, even though the incident of his dying holding her hand—or Gail holding his hand, for that matter—is another reminder of her inability to see her situation clearly.

Yet, this experience represents a turn in her thinking because this second death foreshadows the breakdown of her fantasies: it is in the ambulance car that she realizes she is hanging on to a dead man, and to a dead love (Howells, "Taking" 390). Upon returning from the hospital, she finds a note by Will, which prompts her to hastily pack up her belongings and to rush to the airport while hearing his words asking for forgiveness hammering at her. Once more, although the words attributed to Will appear in the same typographic representation as his earlier letters, they are clearly produced by her imagination: he is not rushing forth to ask her to love him notwithstanding his former abandonment. (This impression is corroborated by a narratorial note towards the end of the short story: "This dream had already begun—Gail's journey and her deceits, then the words she *imagined*—*believed*—that she heard shouted through the door" [189; emphasis mine].) Yet, she experiences a sobering moment when she realizes that what she has wanted all through her escapade is not Will then and there because "Words most wished for can change. [ ... ] words can become a din, a battering, a sound of hammers in the street. And all you can do is run away, so as not to honor them out of habit" (188). For all her new recognition, though, the reader still cannot look upon Gail as a heroine who has successfully abandoned her former self defined by her fantasy of turning into a wife like the one she saw on the airplane to Brisbane who is constantly pacified by a husband "bent on a lifelong course of appeasement" (162). She is represented throughout the story as someone who is unable to learn from either her own or from others' mistakes.

The first time the reader is confronted with her inability to learn anything is during her conversation with Cleata, who expounds her theory of why people do not remember anything of the Middle Ages. She blames it on the unthinkability and immemorizability of their names, such as Egfrith or Aelfflaed (165), while Gail cannot even remember which centuries are the Middle Ages. The last scene at the airport, however, presents immediately three examples where she makes a major mistake which she cannot even blame on her imperfect schooling. First, when she spots the small aboriginal box shaped as a turtle lying helplessly on its back, she intends to buy it as a gift for the already dead Cleata—although she has learnt about her death from Will's letter to herself in Ms. Thornaby's disguise. Howells explains this slippage in her consciousness by arguing that when she arrives in Australia she crosses the border "between real life and the exotic spaces of fantasy" ("Taking" 388), therefore, whatever happens there is perceived to be partaking of a dream world. Consequently, while she is in Brisbane, Cleata could not have died to Gail's mind. Though this might be a slippage, her second major mistake can clearly not be blamed on an impermanent loss of touch with the real world. She associates the pattern painted on the turtle's back with a scene she saw with

Will when still in Canada: they witnessed thousands of yellow butterflies taking a rest before their long travel to Central America. At the time, she erroneously compared this sight of golden flakes with a biblical shower of gold (“‘Like the shower of gold in the Bible,’ Gail said” [Munro, “Jack” 189].) Thus she confuses the mythological Danae’s seduction by Zeus with a representation of God’s grace. Although Will pointed out her mistake on that occasion, she still does not seem to have learnt anything from it; she still sees the incident as only another instance when he deliberately humiliated her. She does not even notice—and she does not even care about—her free travel in-between, back and forth, different frames of reference. In addition, her confusion of God’s grace with seduction well represents her whole frame of mind bent on seeing everything in terms of her specific notion of love. Whatever she sees, she interprets it in terms of her fugitive love. This pattern is repeated in her short message to Will hidden in a turtle-shaped box—an artifact carved by aboriginals she has never seen when in Australia in the shape of an animal she has similarly shown little interest in while there. In the message she asks him to continue their game of love hide and seek, which is a clear indication of the fact that even the inherent irony of her love package—a teasing love note in a stranded creature helplessly lying on its back—escapes her.

On the whole, she is not freed from her world defined by the fantasy of love, or as Howells puts it, “[s]he does not move outside the closure of a traditional romance-plot, but merely tries to defer the ending in order to ensure that the story keeps going on” (“Taking” 392). Even though the protagonist sets out on a quest in an unknown territory, in a metaphoric gothic otherworld, she remains tightly closed into her own world. Her quest is a love quest that does not allow her to step outside the one definitive relationship popular love stories (her readings) disseminate. In fact, at one point in the narrative Gail ponders upon the possibility of her reconnection to her relatives. She has a sister and an aunt living in Canada and she wonders whether she “could still salvage something” from her life before Will (175); but she remarkably quickly dispenses with the idea, which is a further reminder of her unwillingness to step out of her erotic plot. She does not want to recuperate her lost connections to other female figures in her life and to redefine herself through the boon of knowledge (redemptive knowledge) that their stories hold. She is extremely resistant to the female gothic ambition/quest plot of learning and resilient in her insistence on seeing everything in terms of what she takes to be her destiny, love. Eventually, she is a grotesquely drawn version of Claire in “The Albanian Virgin,” who in the end also submits herself, if not to Nelson, her own conception of love at least, which results in decades spent together that could be summarized in telegraphic shorthand afterwards. Or, she resembles Bea in “Vandals” even

more closely, though Gail was luckier in choosing a lover who she could hang her theory of love onto.

If “The Jack Randa Hotel” still works to destabilize traditional love stories it is because it portrays love as a power struggle and not as some inevitability in a woman’s life (it is quite telling that her lover’s name is Will since she wants him to bend to her will). Love is mostly brought in connection with power (the allusion to Dame’s seduction is a most pertinent indication of this idea, but Will’s and Gail’s correspondence is similarly a struggle for power), humiliation, agony and, most significantly with a game that demands a suspension of reality. In this game then several things are allowed: masks, deceptions, ventriloquism even; what definitely has no place in the game, however, is its conflation with reality. Howells alludes to this conclusion when she suggests that the short story proves that there are other pleasures as well besides “talking about love” (“Taking” 389). Love is an otherworld from which one should, and must, emerge. Should one confuse the world with a fantasy of love, however, one could easily become a “goner” (Meyers 23), a woman lost to the world<sup>98</sup> like Bea.

This game then in the short story, ideally, does not end with a “happy wedding” as Martin and Ober suppose it does in their projection of subsequent events (5). It is not clear either whether any ideal ending exists at all, or if it still does, whether its idealness rests, contrary to Martin and Ober’s explication of the short story, in its exposure of “the constant deferrals implicit in any discourse of desire,” as Howells claims (“Taking” 388). I am inclined to believe that the short story’s thrust lies in its representation of a mock traveling gothic heroine whose gothic otherworld is the popular notion of love specifically fostered by romances (love stories) who remains for the greatest part of the narrative closed into this gothic otherworld because of her inability to “see differently” (Wall 208). Ironically, she thus does not deserve the happy ending (reunion with Will) exactly because she does not earn the boon of redemptive knowledge available through the understanding of others’ and her own situation for she puts her faith in the saving grace of men, of one specific man in this case. Till she remains closed into her gothic otherworld of romantic fantasy, she will not earn her happy-ending.

At the same time, she does experience something that could lead her to the threshold between the two worlds. After Gail realizes that Will has found out about her identity, she hurries to pack her belongings and leave because she recognizes that “[w]ords most wished for can change [ ... ] *Love—need—forgive. Love—need—forever*” (188). Consequently, she runs to the airport propelled by a desire to defer a meeting with Will. This deferral, however, is a happy ending of sorts since Gail recognizes that it is not the culmination of the female



gothic erotic plot (reunion with a tamed husband) at all that she desires but the road that leads to it.

An intertextual reading of the short story supports this reading. As noted earlier, the short story alludes to *Jane Eyre*, another female gothic narrative. Will and Sandy's house is situated in Eyre Road, which allusion is further underlined by the story's subject matter: an aging woman, literally adopting the voice of a lecturing school mistress (Gail as Jane), pits herself against a beautiful woman from the Tropics for the love of a man. Similarly, Will is first seduced by the energy of the tropical beauty (Sandy), but eventually he gets disappointed. Just like Rochester is sobered into his love of the plain Jane from his infatuation with the beautiful Bertha, so is Will sobered into his love of Gail. In addition, Gail puts on the disguise of a Ms. Catherine Thornaby, a name that is extremely reminiscent of both Rochester's house in Thornfield and of Catherine in Emily Brontë's novel, *Wuthering Heights*, while her adopted tone may well remind readers of Lady Catherine in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

The intertextual reference gains in further significance in light of Hoeveler's radically novel re-interpretation of the kind of gothic the Brontë sisters wrote, which, she claims, led into an impasse in women's reinvention of themselves (*Gothic* 187-89). She argues that the female gothic from the works of Charlotte Smith to the Brontës was the originator of "victim feminism"—a term popularized by Naomi Wdf (193)—which is based on the idea that women gain a superiority in social and moral terms because they are the "innocent victims of a corrupt tyrant and an oppressive patriarchal society" (Hoeveler, *Gothic* 2).<sup>99</sup> Hoeveler points out that gothic heroines always pose as blameless victims who have to withstand the attacks of aggressive males in patriarchal society. In response, they invented "gothic feminism," which is best approached as a posture governed by both passive-aggressive and masochistic strategies of survival. In short, female gothic works display the ideology of "female power through pretended and staged weakness" (7).

Following Foucault, Hoeveler reads the gothic as a gendered response to the way the juridical systems—"the prison, the school, the asylum, the confessional, and the bourgeois family" (xiii)—defines "woman as subject" in the eighteenth century. She contends that the female gothic was particularly successful in creating, codifying, and popularizing "woman" as a posture fit for survival in a newly emerging middle-class culture since this posture/masquerade/gender identity, which she calls "professional femininity" or "professional victimization" persists into the present days. She characterizes professional femininity as "a cultivated pose, a masquerade of docility, passivity, wise passiveness, and tightly controlled emotions" (xv), specifically middle-class in its political interest since it disposes of all figures

who display such aristocratic flaws as “adultery, passion, gossip, slander, and physical violence” (22). In a parallel move, the female gothic also lays the ground for a new script according to which the middle-class could be shaped, which thrives on two fundamental concepts: on that of “a companionate family” and on the concept of “a redeemed class—a bourgeoisie that has learned to tame its excesses and perfectly balance reason and emotions” (20).

Yet, in the long run this twofold project (the balancing of reason and emotion and the creation of a companionate family) has been self-defeating, claims Hoeveler, because, in effect, it has perpetuated female victimization. Firstly, in the eighteenth century “the bourgeois feminization of discourse” (Eagleton 95) subsisted on the ideology of separate spheres. Women in the move to reinvent themselves as the sole source of regeneration for the human race relied on an ideology that was very much to the service of the emerging bourgeois culture. They feminized the home as a safe haven away from the crude hustle and bustle of the emerging capitalist world—which guarantees women’s innocence and incorruption. This argument, which in effect was an inverted ideology of separate spheres, has been cited ever since to contain women in the home.<sup>100</sup> Secondly, capitalism dictated a compulsion to merge for both sexes, “to eliminate radical distinctions of gender” (Hoeveler, *Gothic* 31). This was not problematic for the lower classes since as workforce it was not their gender identity that defined their use value: if a woman was employed in a factory, her employment depended more on the cheapness of her labor than on how regenerating a source she was to redeem mankind. But the middle-class exists according to the logic of “neither-norism” as pointed out by Roland Barthes (qtd. in Hoeveler, *Gothic* 58), i. e., it defines itself as what it is not: neither aristocracy nor lower classes. The task was then to find some middle ground on which the middle class could stand, where individuals confirmed neither to the radically gendered culture of the aristocracy nor to the “ungendered” lower class workforce (Hoeveler, *Gothic* 57-58).

It was “gothic feminists” who found the solution: on the one hand they depicted women who continually subverted the order of things. They were active, curious, inventive, and rational. The heroines of the female gothic were manlike in several matters—as for instance their acts in their quest/ambition plot prove. On the other hand, as Hoeveler writes, gothic heroes all receive a bad beating. Male lovers also have to earn their happy ending by learning to express their emotions. Those who are not able to balance their reason and emotion—who are not feminized—do not qualify for being the husband of the gothic heroine. She explains: “men who are excessively ‘masculine’—violent, aggressive, lustful, and adulterous, that is men who refuse to be civilized and domesticated and professionally

masculanized—also suffer horrific punishment by the end of the novel. They invariably die guilt-wrecked deaths, usually by their own hands. Their sons and heirs [ ... ] are considerably tamer creatures” (31). She then adds, “[t]he daughter as culture heroine marries the wounded son figure [ ... ], and together they forge a new ideal couple, [ ... ] moderate in its lineaments” (32). The newly emerging gothic family rests on the idea, to put it crudely, that “acceptably tame gothic husbands exist on very short leashes” (20).

Naturally, the two genders were not completely identical. Hoeveler explains:

Women writers were attempting to codify in their works appropriately gendered behaviour for each of the sexes. Tears were acceptable for women when issues of love or honour were at stake; wild excessive displays of emotion—either of a sexual or a physically violent nature—were not acceptable for men, ever. The bourgeois code was, of course, considerably more complex than this, but the important issue for sentimental writers was control over one’s emotions and by extension, one’s body. (125)<sup>101</sup>

All the while, the characters—the masculanized women and feminized men—do preserve their allotted gender roles because whenever they risk exposure, they “retreat to studied postures of conformity” (6). This is how Hoeveler re-interprets Williams’s celebratory words about the “duplicity” (or doubleness, even multiplicity) of gothic subjects. While Williams welcomes the female gothic reconstitution of characters as models contesting a unitary paradigm, Hoeveler, claims that these are just postures. Gothic characters are literally duplicitous—but there is no reason to rejoice over this fact.

But the “duplicity” of the characters alone would not thrust female gothic strategists towards their demise; that came with the other script. One goal of the project having been solved (the balancing of reason and emotion), the female gothic turned to accomplishing the second: the invention of a companionate family. Hoeveler here distinguishes between two phases with the culmination of the second phase in the novels of the Brontë sisters.

Both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries saw the family as the only sure and secure reality in the rapidly changing world. Inherited from the past, the patriarchal family continued on as the institution to ensure male supremacy through inheritance rights. It is no wonder then that gothic works in general and female gothic works in particular problematized the family in an effort to reinvent it. Hoeveler argues that female gothic fiction is particularly effective in subverting the principles upon which the family as a patriarchal institution subsists. The family as “a sacred totem in society” is harshly critiqued:

Much is made, therefore, of incest, matricide, patricide, intense sibling rivalry, symbolically cannibalistic tendencies in the parents, and dreams of escape by pursued and persecuted children. The gothic family is a theater in which members enact both a mythic struggle for species survival as well as a more personal quest for individual validation. The female as author, narrative voice,

and protagonist participates in a literary fantasy formation by which she totally reshapes or annihilates human history in tracing the fate of one family. (188)

However, and this is a most significant point, the family becomes a site for critique primarily not for its privileging of the male. As we saw through the feminization of discourse women had carved out for themselves a position in the home that would guarantee, if not success, at least survival in the long run. What motivates the female gothic, and the work of the Brontës especially, is the reinvention of the family as a site that leaves space for women to exist as individuals and not as mere family members, as tyrannized daughters and victimized mothers, for example, who must continually struggle to escape the fate that their female body condemns them to. “The family is literally horrendous for female gothic authors because it graphically illustrates that each of us is replaceable by a younger, more idealized version of ourselves” (187), states Hoeveler. The problem with the family is that in it an individual is never only an individual; his or her role keeps shifting and, ultimately, every individual is replaced by someone from the next generation.

Gothic feminist response to the threat of replaceability came in the form of “[v]alorizing love—the platonic type that urged participants to believe that they were reuniting with their divided soul mates” (Hoeveler, *Gothic* 187). Yet, platonic love with a feminized—moreover, ritually wounded—man such as Rochester in *Jane Eyre* not only created a companionate family but also destroyed it with the same stroke of hand since it continued to subsist on the rejection of motherhood. The Brontë heroines are more than eager to escape the female body (188), which leads them to become teachers or governesses to their men rather than mothers to their children.

Gail’s masquerade as an elderly native of Australia and her ventriloquist lectures to Will nicely fits into Hoeveler’s conceptualization of the female gothic. Gail’s hiding and her teaching from this position of hiding display those passive-aggressive strategies that gothic feminist heroines engage in since their aim is clearly to tame Will into a representative of acceptable middle-aged masculinity without direct confrontation. The lessons provided suggest that once he has tamed his excess manifested in his desire for a young, exotic woman, he could become an adequate companion once again. All the more so because nothing stands in the way of a new companionate idyll: Gail’s only child is dead and after a hysterectomy she cannot have any more children while Will’s only relative, his mother, who he doted on, has also passed away. Thus they can live on happily ever after in their happy isolation, just like Jane and Rochester, once they are reunited.

Gail’s final escape from Will, however, throws the companionate idyll created on these terms into doubt since instead of accepting him as a tame husband, she teases him to continue their hide and seek for she does not want him on these terms any longer. For this

reason also, the short story can be evaluated as an expression of a neo-gothic impulse to re-chart the map of female desire that deflects attention from a telos-driven erotic plot by pointing beyond the ending. Munro's neo-gothic heroines are women who challenge the female gothic erotic plot and the compulsory happy ending: Dorrie completely opts out of it, while Millicent reinvents the object of female desire, Charlotte, though she wears her gender as a masquerade, "overtames" Gjurdhi into an adequate companion thus depicting the convention of the happy ending in an ironic light, and Gail extends the road that leads to it, wondering whether it is a happy ending at all that women really want.

### 5. *Beyond Gothic Mothers and Daughters*

So far the discussion focused on two constitutive female gothic conventions, on the bifurcation of the textual world into two and the double plot structure divorcing the female quest from what is customarily called the erotic plot. I argued that Munro problematizes both by mobilizing and revising other fundamental conventions underlying them. She challenges the bifurcation of the textual world, on the one hand, by bringing the gothic otherworld closer to home—positing that the gothic darkness is constitutive of the everyday—and by suggesting that the female gothic romance closure fosters a fantasy of an alternate possible world that is generated from within the gothic otherworld. With respect to the female gothic double plot structure, I suggested that Munro's fiction of the 1990s experiments with plots that go beyond the conventional romance (love story) closure by deliberately foregrounding the mutual incompatibility of the ideological thrust of each subplot if there remains an insistence on closure as a happy ending. This is achieved by “writing beyond the ending” (DuPlessis 4) of the conventional female gothic romance and thus presenting alternative female life routes that shed light on the impasse the conceptualization of the ideal female gothic family as consisting of a companionate couple has created in the discourse about ideal femininity. The recycling and revision of the topos of “taming the husband” play a pivotal role in this endeavor.

In what follows, I will turn to fundamental conventional female characters (the sexual seductress, the housekeeper, the nurse, and, most importantly, the gothic mother) arguing that Munro's fiction of the 1990s, especially her volume *The Love of a Good Woman*, seeks to intervene into female gothic discourse by rerouting the trajectory of the negotiations about the importance of female connections for the individuation of female gothic heroines. On the one hand, this volume recycles conventional topoi like the negotiation of gender in a familial setting and the portioning out of the issues surrounding proper femininity by splitting them around various female monitory figures, but, on the other hand, it also proposes a break with traditional female gothic technologies and solutions. By discussing three short stories, I will argue that the topos of female connections moves front and center in this volume, but in radically different ways than in Munro's earlier fiction. Rather than positing an inherent clash between female figures against whom the heroine must pit herself in order to break the spell of the inherited burden of gender expectations *vis a vis* females, these narratives seek to make sense of the conflicts as well as to write female characters into connections with one another.

The discussion starts by an overview of the female character types in Munro's fiction of the 1990s situating them within a larger female gothic tradition as well as within the Munro

oeuvre. I will argue that these narratives fit into a long tradition of women's fiction portraying female relationships as ridden with conflicts, yet they also break this tradition in two ways: (1) some experiment with hyperbolic representations of stock female figures, such as the scheming nurse and the dead-undead housekeeper in short stories like "Cortes Island" and "Before the Change," only to point out to what extent the terrifying image of these characters is constructed by the heroine's own conflicted position *vis a vis* gender expectations. Their terrifying power is only partially rooted in their female pathology—as opposed to earlier female gothic narratives where unacceptable forms of femininity are closely associated with individual (even if intergenerationally inherited) failings. The hold of these female characters over the heroine in the narratives can partly be attributed to her unwillingness to break out of familiar scripts of female behavior. This recognition constitutes a further challenge to "conscious worth." (2) The short stories also experiment with the topos of the gothic mother, although the ways in which this figure is portrayed are significantly different from Munro's earlier fiction. I will introduce two terms to describe her recent mother figures, the institutional and the reluctant mother, and argue that through her reluctant mother figure Munro seeks to re-imagine not only the role of the gothic mother, but the figure of the female as a reproductive agent in female gothic fiction in general also. Significantly, motherhood is disassociated from two major discourses: the patriarchal discourse that constructs it as part of nature (which means in accordance with the system of dichotomies that it is to be regulated, controlled, expelled, abjected) as well as the female gothic discourse which conceptualizes it as a trap—hence the insistence on the peaceful twosome of the female gothic companionate idyll. Munro's short stories of the nineties, instead, situate the concept of motherhood within a discourse that privileges the interconnectedness of women. "My Mother's Dream" will serve to exemplify this effort.

The discussion of the patriarchal gender ideologies governing the conceptualization of mothering finds support in the psychoanalytical theories of Klein's archaic mother, Kristeva's abjection, and Creed's monstrous womb, while I will argue that Benjamin's intersubjective theory provides a background for Munro's rerouted notion of the mother-daughter bond. When discussing monitory figures against whom the heroine rebels, I will consider Bakhtin's and Russo's theories of the grotesque.

### 5. 1. *Gothic Mothers*

The female gothic as a "daughter's plot" (Spacks, *Desire* 148) was long seen to rest on "textual matricide" (Rich 235) since it was invented to combat the newly emerging bourgeois ideology of femininity which insisted on an innate nature of women that rendered them

naturally passive and dependent on male reason. To prove the opposite without whimsically acting against female proprieties, female gothicists developed a structure that allowed heroines to actively set out to acquire independence in which the mother's death represents an important rite of passage. Mothers may at best function, as Hirsch claims, as "no more than objects supporting and underlying their daughters' process of individuation." And, Hirsch continues, "[t]he woman as *mother* remains in the position of *other*, [ ... ] the emergence of feminine-daughterly subjectivity rests and depends on that continued and repeated process of *othering* the mother" (136; original emphasis).

The ritualistic matricide is dictated by two imperatives. On the one hand, it is a thematic necessity—it is the mother's death that creates the basic situation which allows for the victimization of the motherless or entirely orphaned gothic heroine after she is separated from her familial circle; without this she would not be forced to assert herself (and renegotiate gender boundaries) contrary to female propriety. On the other hand, it is a result of the fantasy work (like Freudian dreamwork) of the female gothic spurred by ideological concerns. Since the female gothic text was conceived of as a space for working out female anxieties about the nature of the female self which found itself at the crossroads of various formulating discourses about gender in the eighteenth century—and the age was rife with conflicting conceptualizations of femaleness and femininity—it had to find ways to downplay women's supposedly "natural" attributes according to patriarchal conceptualizations of the female gender. As the concept of 'Woman' was closely associated with nature, the female gothic insisted on representing female bodies as sites in the crossfire of a struggle for power (the plot turns around who has legitimate access to the heroine's body) while distancing heroines from their bodies as a "natural" base of their subjectivities. Women's most visible connection to their bodies, their reproductive capacity, consequently, fell hostage to the discourses of gender, which relegated the maternal function into a twilight zone.

The female gothic antagonism to the maternal figure as the embodiment of women's link to their bodies is really a conflict of three major discourses: what Foucault calls the process of the "hysterization of the female body" (Foucault, *History* 104), a discourse of interiority/exteriority, and a discourse of ideal motherhood, equally arising in the eighteenth century (Hirsch 14-15; Dally 17). These constitute women's relationship to the body in conflicting ways.

First, the female gothic seeks to intervene into the historical phenomenon of the "hysterization of the female body," as Haggerty and Miles argue (Foucault, *History* 104; Miles, *Gothic* 20; Haggerty, *Unnatural* 4). Miles grounds his argument on two observations. On the one hand, he refers to Foucault, who sees a connection between the paradoxical



emergence of both an extended discussion about sexuality and the inauguration of its repression in the eighteenth century. On the other hand, he also points to Lawrence Stone's examination of the equally paradoxical phenomenon of the age: the historical weakening of patriarchy conjoined with a rather obsessive focus on the power of the father (*Gothic* 18). Miles thus concludes that the gothic does not differ from other "'technologies' of sex" (Foucault, *History* 90)—such as the mapping of the sexual body, the medicalization of desire, the hysterization of the female body; and the cult of affective marriage. All these participated in the negotiation about and the codification of properly gendered behavior in a radically changing society in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Miles also argues that it is in no way accidental that the anxieties about the fragmented subject were worked out over the female body. Following Foucault, he sees sexuality as a discourse on sex, which serves to codify men and women as different beings. In the discourse the female body emerges as a site to be disciplined, restrained, and mastered because of its intrinsic pathology (Foucault, *History* 104). Thus a two-way process starts: on the one hand, the process called the "hysterization of the female body" (104) carried out in part by referring to the cult of female sensibility (as a set of concerted forms of behavior expressing extremes of feeling, verging on or possibly leading to madness) manifested in bodily dysfunction. Accordingly, women are constructed as non-rational beings, prone to excessive emotions, lacking self-control and self-mastery; their bodily dysfunctions are both signs of their natural disposition and stepping stones to their necessary demise. In a parallel move, and in response to this woman in the natural state, the age argued, female behavior needs to be restricted in all possible manners—and discipline, temperance and self-mastery, of course, appear as pronouncedly male virtues. Therefore, the image of the proper female emerges as an ideal that no living person could ever live up to. She is the hystericized female body put under male self-control: commodified innocence with an exclusively domestic range of desires (Miles, *Gothic* 6), which hides under a perilously thin cover the potentially dangerous "natural" woman.

Second, seen from another perspective, Spacks and Hoeveler argue that the gothic novel follows a pattern of the "feminization" of the plot and thus it partakes in the same eighteenth-century novelistic development that led to the rise of the sentimental novel (Spacks, *Desire* 7). In the late 1770s several writers started to experiment with an ideology of relationships that portrays human relationships to be more than simply a form of power mediated through patrilinear descent. Thus, familial and sexual relationships start to assume a new importance as they are invested with psychological and moral weight, which is most apparent in the novels of Radcliffe and Wollstonecraft. In gothic novels, just like in

sentimental novels, familial relationships as power relationships are contested most eagerly. Instead of power and control these works privilege “the authenticity of the emotions, combined [ ... ] with tropes of interiority” (Hoeveler, “Opera” par. 4; also Howard 76). These tropes seek to conceptualize the subject as a both thinking and feeling being, or rather, as individuals “who feel and live in their bodies as much as in their psyches” (Hoeveler, “Opera” par. 4). This double coding of the subject, however, leads to confusion about the boundary between the body and the mind, registered especially in gothic and sentimental works.<sup>102</sup> The boundary between the visible and invisible, exterior and interior is constantly crossed as the capacity of feeling is invested with great significance. Regardless of the fact that characters in female gothic works regularly deplore sensibility as a readiness to experience intense emotions (in order to contest a “natural” female pathology), it is yet emotional capacity that differentiates the survivors from the victims (Spacks, *Novel* 217). Even if emotional readiness guarantees suffering, it is still the key to human superiority, or, as Spacks eloquently puts it: “Those who can live in a gothic world, a world marked by the eruption of unanticipated horrors, while still maintaining their emotional responsiveness deserve to survive and *will* survive: every Gothic plot says so” (*Novel* 217; original emphasis).

Yet, amidst these competing discourses about gender, the body and interiority/exteriority running parallel to and oftentimes opposite one another in which the female gothic text navigates on a remarkably narrow strip, there continues to be a problem that affects the construction of female characters: although the female gothic devises new models for engendering the (female) subject by appropriating a space where the role of femininity, and of gender in general, could be negotiated in their complexity, the new strategies which female gothicists devise also create sites of conflict. Whereas they reinterpret female desire as not directed at materiality (they do not set out to claim back their rightful inheritance, that is just an accidental occurrence) or physicality (they are irreproachably chaste) and thus re-route contemporary discourse about the female body and women’s innate desires, their reproductive function presents a conundrum that has haunted female gothic fiction for centuries. All unwanted values are portioned out to character types: greed, avarice, lack of frugality, and scheming as openly aggressive behavior go to villainesses (aristocratic women and later social climbers); unbridled sexuality goes to the sexual seductress or femme fatale (often aristocratic); ineffectiveness (also coded as the unwillingness to step out of propriety when the situation requires) is left to loved female relations (mothers and aunts). But the mother’s relation to the body—from which female gothicists seek to distance their heroines—cannot be denied. And the dilemma created by this undeniable fact was further

exacerbated because, as Foucault claims, it was the mother's reproductive function that the hysterization of the female body was tied to most closely (*History* 104).

This gets all the more intriguing because, third, motherhood, or rather the discourse about motherhood as a basis of affectionate bonds, also takes shape in the eighteenth century (Hirsch 14-15; Dally 17), just at the time of the rise of the gothic. (As Dally puts it: "There have always been mothers but motherhood was invented" [17]). Thus female gothicists found themselves in a double bind: on the one hand, familial relationships as power relationships have to be redefined to privilege the thinking heroine as an agent of her own fate who is not tainted by any physical bond to nature (she is surprisingly bodiless even if much of the action turns around the legitimate access to her body), on the other hand, as a feeling being, she should forge an affectionate bond with her mother—who in her reproductive function embodies 'Woman' as body.

Side by side these historical accounts, psychoanalytical findings provide a further context in which to discuss the problem of the mother figure and the convention of matricide in female gothic fiction. Kahane has described her in an important psychoanalytical study as an "archaic and all-encompassing" "spectral presence," who threatens the heroine with engulfment; therefore, the heroine must wage a "fundamentally ambivalent" battle "for a separate identity" not only against the rule of the father but against the mother as well ("Gothic Mirror" 337). Notwithstanding her several functions, she still represents a threat first and foremost, because she as "a ghost signifies the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront" ("Gothic" 336).

Klein's revision of Freudian Oedipal theories provides a different angle from which to view this battle. Klein contests the view that the rivalry of the mother and the offspring occupies the primary place in the individuation process of human beings; she posits that there exists an archaic relationship with the maternal body from infant life on that encompasses both an envy for the mother's body as the phantasy of wholeness and a destructive rage against it resulting from efforts at gaining a territorial control over it. ('Phantasy' here means in accordance with Kleinian psychoanalytical terminology the unconscious mental processes as opposed to 'fantasy' which is conscious.) What motivates individuation, claims Klein, is not rivalry *with* the mother but rivalry *for* her as soon as the infant arrives at the horrifying recognition of its full dependence on her. (Kahane's association of the gothic castle with the maternal body and the heroine's efforts to fully map it [340] creates a meaningful parallel between the two theories.) But the forming of mental life for girl infants is especially anxiety ridden; Klein observed that her girl patients' destructive drives towards the mother were always stronger than the boys,' which triggered her to posit that the relationship between

mothers and daughters is eternally fundamentally conflicted (*Envy* 122-40; see also Kristeva, *Melanie* 114-22). As Kristeva puts Klein's observations, "it is the woman's hatred toward the mother that endures" (*Melanie* 118)—which finds surprisingly few outlets in western culture, with the female gothic matricide as one of them.

Notwithstanding historical and psychoanalytical theories of an inherently conflicted attitude to mother figures, the significance of the mother-daughter topos in female gothic texts is also to be sought in its discourse of desire. The gothic heroine is mostly able to earn her happy ending via an engagement with the mother—she must first solve the mystery that surrounds her own progeny, often closely linked to her mother's absence. To formulate the proposition in another way, it is the desire for the mother that motivates the plot of female gothic narratives. Several critics argue that the wedding bells do not constitute the sole reward leading to a happy ending; in fact the marriage to the hero receives only a cursory attention as opposed to leaving the nightmare world or the fulfillment of such female-female desire as, for example, finding the mother and a real family, or understanding one's situation, or even reaching self-knowledge (e.g.: Williams, *Art* 103-04, 136-40, 149-58; DeLamotte, *Perils* 110-11; Hoeveler, *Gothic* 61-62, 191; Haggerty, *Queer* 15; A. Smith 144).

The radical novelty of Radcliffe's female gothic lies exactly in its reinvention of female desire. While the eighteenth century was intent on institutionalizing female desire as either aggressive (to be punished because male- or power-oriented) or as innocent passive (to be rewarded because domestic), Radcliffe intervenes by establishing a tradition where desire resists the categories that the bourgeois ideology acknowledged. Thus, female desire in the female gothic confirms neither to aggression nor to innocent-passive domesticity. Moreover, neither is it male-oriented. Instead, the female gothic articulates various other forms of female-female desire (Haggerty, *Unnatural* 2), such as female friendship or mother-daughter relationship. In addition, neither does the female gothic present women as governed by desire alone: they are thinking and feeling beings simultaneously.

The female gothic as a "daughters' plot" (Spacks, *Desire* 148) is thus developed in combat to the newly emerging bourgeois scripts of female life and subjectivity. It constructs its characters entirely differently in that women are portrayed to exist in a network of relationships and not simply as sexual beings or beings of patrilineal descent. By problematizing and extending kinship patterns (are the men parading as fathers really legitimate? what happened to the mother, and/or other female figures, etc.?) and by emphasizing the possibility of change (illegitimate fathers are removed, the rightful one is restored), the female gothic devises new models for constructing the subject. In a sense, it becomes a guidebook for reinventing the self. Furthermore, the quest/ambition plot focuses on

the heroine's attempt at understanding the mother in her own context, which ultimately leads to both understanding her as an individual under pressure and to reassuring the heroine that she is not like her. (Hence comes the insistence that the heroine find an appropriate male companion in life as opposed to her father, who failed to protect his wife.) Ever since the nineteen-seventies critics of female gothic fiction espouse the view that notwithstanding the inherited matrophobic convention of a ritualistic matricide, in female gothic fiction the heroine is propelled by a desire to engage with her mother's story because that is the very base from which she can embark on the search for her self.

## 5. 2. *Munro's (Gothic) Mothers*

Munro's texts have always been populated by women, relations, neighbors, and friends, through whose stories one could listen in to women's secrets, cautionary tales, silenced histories, and fantasies. Among these one can find a full array of female gothic characters: villainesses (scheming nurses), femme fatales (however unlikely they are), solitary women (mostly Scottish Presbyterian relatives) glorying in their respectability, and gothic mothers, whose perpetual influence must be disowned. But whereas her earlier texts rarely go beyond recapitulating the female gothic lesson in the ambivalence of female relationships, her fiction of the 1990s appears to deliberately address the ideological office that conventional characters types perform.

Before moving on to Munro's most fundamental challenge to female gothic figures, the re-invention of the gothic mother, one needs to see how a monolithic "gothic motherhood" is differentiated into a "good" and "bad" motherhood, where "the bad mother," is ironically the one who unquestioningly fashions herself to fit the model of the ideal mother, which became a major arbiter of "feminine normality" (Dally 10).

Munro's fiction has always been "obsessed" with mothers and mothering (Redekop, *Mothers* 3). "Her stories are peopled with stepmothers, foster mothers, adoptive mothers, child mothers, nurses, old maids mothering their parents, lovers mothering each other, husbands mothering wives, wives mothering husbands, sisters mothering each other, and numerous women and men behaving in ways" that are maternal, writes Redekop of Munro's earlier volumes (4). The roots of this focused attention may lie in Munro's well-known biography: her mother's Parkinson disease and the emotional impact of both the disease and her own sense of failure as a daughter at coping with what seemed to be an insurmountable difficulty haunting throughout her life.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the difficulties of her own married life were for a long time closely intertwined with motherhood making a change appear impossible: as a mother of two, she found it hard to embark upon a writing career. In fact,

when perusing the short stories discussed so far, in these, just like in her whole oeuvre, motherhood appears as utterly problematic.

But whereas in her early fiction she as a daughter grapples with the looming figure of her “Gothic Mother” (Munro, “Peace” 195)—modeled upon her own mother—in an effort to progressively understand how her own rejection was dictated by a personal, psychological necessity, in her recent fiction she turns to the investigation of motherhood from a position in which the protagonists themselves are mothers. These stories are informed by a hesitance about what motherhood means, how one can be a good mother, or a good enough mother, at least, by featuring mother figures who find themselves in conflict with cultural expectations surrounding motherhood as an institution. Her earlier short stories grappling with a mother figure can be called “daughter stories”—a term which is designated to refer to stories that are preoccupied with motherhood from the perspective of the daughter. By contrast, her recent stories are “mother stories” because in these motherhood is investigated from the mother’s perspective through a configuration of relationships that are equally reminiscent of Munro’s own experiences with motherhood. Nonetheless, the daughter’s perspective continues to haunt these texts because their differentiation between good and bad mothering seems to perform the same splitting Klein observed in infants (*Envy* esp. 63, 68, 181-83). Just as the child splits the mother into her good and bad aspects, so do Munro’s short stories of the nineties portion out good and bad mothering to different character types.

Munro’s earlier daughter stories are characterized by what may be called a progressively achieved filial atonement towards the failing mother whose dwelling in the realm of the abject is finally confronted and whose recognized absence is accepted as a platform upon which the protagonist may build her identity. This allows the daughter not only to recognize but also accept the indomitable reality of disease, old age, poverty, and the haunting presence of a gynecological corporeality, as well as her inadequacy in taking care of a sick mother. Most of these stories explore a daughter’s relationship with her mother and confirm the daughter’s need to explore the mother’s figure as a necessary step to coming to terms with herself; this way, the early stories metaphorically repeat the female gothic plot of the orphaned or semi-orphaned daughter’s search for her own past, the understanding of which is only possible via understanding her mother’s lot. But Munro’s protagonists are not closed into a remote castle; instead, they find themselves in their own self-created alternate possible worlds of memory, or just its opposite, of its repression, which results in stories heavily bearing the mark of a sense of guilt for having been unjust towards the maternal figure. These stories feature heroines who gradually recognize their own agendas in

misrecognizing the mother, and as such they can be placed parallel to Kleinian theories of the intrinsically ambivalent, guilt- and anxiety-ridden, forever resentful mother-daughter bond.

Munro's recent stories rewrite the mother-daughter plot from the mother's perspective and by that they go beyond traditional representations of the mother-daughter theme. But they definitely do not reappraise the maternal: mothers are not absented or rejected; but neither are they glorified. These stories explore the mother-daughter relationship with a rather astounding frankness moving beyond the traditional rhetoric of maternal love, attachment, and care resulting in lucid images of formerly unthinkable mothers, who direct a twofold blow against the conventional imagery of motherhood. On the one hand, these mothers refuse to be contained within the limits of female proprieties, as it is represented in their unwillingness to remain closed into the prison of the middle class home for instance, while, on the other hand, their bond with their daughters escapes relegation to the opposing ends of a spectrum, where the relationship appears either as an ideal or as a nightmare. At the same time, the scope of female relationships is widened by reconnecting both mother and daughter to various other female figures as well, justifying Holly Blackford's claim that the theme of female gothic narratives in the twentieth century is the disconnectedness of women (238), to which Munro neo-gothically responds.

Munro's mothers have always been "mock mothers" to use Redekop's term, which she defines in the following way:

The mock mother is constructed as a result of the impossibility of picturing the "real" mother. Often she performs as a kind of trickster [ .. ]. Unlike the spread-eagled male body made famous by Leonardo da Vinci, this body is not static. The belly expands and contracts, sometimes an arm or a leg or a breast is amputated, the iris moves in and out, the blind spot floats over various parts of the body, and the body may stand on its head or perform acrobatic stunts. (4)

Redekop asks: "What happens if you substitute this figure for the spread-eagled male with the centrally placed penis who is so often seen as an analogy for the work of art?" (4), and she answers: "The first thing that surfaces is an awareness of the danger of objectification. [ ... ] The first step to take to avoid the trap of turning the maternal body into an object, is to see that the mother is in the act of looking at *herself*, even when she is also looking after her children" (4; original emphasis).

The pivotal point about Redekop's definition of the Munrobian "mock mother" is that she does not approximate the figure of the ideal mother. Firstly, she refuses to stay in one place, or in one form, she keeps changing and transforming; therefore, she cannot be put on a pedestal for admiration as if she were a Madonna—she will not stay in place. On the contrary, she cannot be held as a scapegoat for transmitting the burden of femininity to the daughter either because she will equally not stay in place for blame. Secondly, she never lives up to

expectations. She misbehaves because she refuses to fit in; occasionally, she does not even recognize that her position is precarious in her social milieu or, if she does so, she does not care. Thirdly, mock mothers keep watching themselves, carefully measuring up their own inadequacy in or indifference to living up to the ideal of motherhood, and they keep negotiating with both the expectations and the responses of others to their own inadequacy or indifference. The result is a curious mother figure who earlier would have been called an outright bad mother, or a failing mother at least. All of Munro's mothers fail in one or another way, but, ironically, it is this failure that makes them *experience* motherhood as mothers. Their failure in fact is the result of their rejection of motherhood as an institution, and in this sense Munro's conceptualization of motherhood is akin to Adrienne Rich's differentiation between institutional and experiential models of motherhood (especially 13, 174). Munro's fiction explores exactly those dark areas that the traditional imagery of motherhood purposefully ignores.

Roughly speaking, there are three types of female figures, all representing a typified attitude to motherhood, in her fiction of the 1990s. The first type includes women who have never been mothers and who bear their childlessness as a sign of a failure of sorts (e.g.: Dorrie in "Real Life," Enid in "The Love of a Good Woman," Sonje in "Jakarta"); to the second type belong characters who may be called "institutional" mothers. They seem to be perfect mothers on the outside because they attempt to live up to ideal motherhood—Redekop refers to this type as a "madonna" (*Mothers* 12)—but they prove again and again that they are emotional icebergs (Louisa in "Carried Away," Enid's mother in "The Love of a Good Woman," Muriel in "Real Life"). The third type is the reluctant mother, who may be an outright bad mother (Gail in "The Jack Randa Hotel," Jeanette Quinn in "The Love of a Good Woman," Mrs. Gorrie in "Cortes Island") or approximates becoming one (Kath in "Jakarta," Lorna in "Save the Reaper," the mother in "Rich As Stink," Jill in "My Mother's Dream"). It is through these reluctant mothers that Munro negotiates her mother figures and experiments with what may be called a female figure of adequate mothering.

Munro's first type represents a critique of the childless female gothic companionate family. As argued earlier, Dorrie's childlessness is brought in relation with her desire for adventure—her defection of Canada for Australasia, so to say—and with her all too companionate, tame husband, who silently contemplates her sexlessness. Together, they remain stranded in an isolated and idyllic hunters' paradise without a child who could make her life "real." The same idea appears in "Open Secrets," where Maureen associates childlessness with the lack of "the necessary stake in being grown-up" (132).



In addition, having no children is repeatedly brought in relation with defenselessness against popular romance (love story) notions of love that put women at the mercy of males. Maureen is defenseless against her husband's "new appetite," Bea Doud in "Vandals" is similarly defenseless against Ladner, Gail gives herself entirely over to her love of Will in "The Jack Randa Hotel," Sonje is lost to her love of Cottar in "Jakarta," while Enid gives herself over to a narcissistic self-love earned by self-sacrifice and philanthropy in "The Love of a Good Woman." Childlessness may easily lead to intentional blindness, i. e., there is nothing and no one that forces these characters to look upon themselves from a perspective other than their chosen one. Bea Doud's not seeing of Ladner's pedophilic assaults and her gradual sinking into solitary drinking are eloquent examples to prove the point. There is no one to shock them into reality. Yet, these characters "improve"; their childlessness does not destine them to staying blind forever, they might be able to acquire the ability to "see differently" (Wall 208).

By contrast, "institutional" mothers, the second type as the embodiments of the ideal of maternal care, are ready to sacrifice themselves for their children. Enid's mother, the mother of a saint, sacrifices herself for her daughter and does "a devil of a lot of work" (Munro, "Love" 44); Muriel gives up her life, her self, for getting married and turns into a rundown housewife and the mother of four in "Real Life"; likewise, Louisa in "Carried Away" overworks herself and talks of her son's indifference to business in a reproachful voice only to the hallucinatory Jack Agnew.<sup>104</sup> Significantly, however, the children of these self-sacrificing mothers rarely turn out as expected. What happens to Bea, Louisa's step-daughter, is told in "Vandals," and how Billy Doud, Louisa's and Arthur's son, fares later in his adult life is recounted in "Spaceships Have Landed." Here Billy makes his appearance as a latent homosexual blinding himself to his sexual orientation, running the piano factory into bankruptcy, turning the Doud family home, about the decoration of which Arthur worried so much in "Carried Away," into a home for the elderly (another home that is an other place) and marrying at last the boyish Eunie Morgan, who claims to have been abducted by aliens. They make a fine match though, as the narrator notes, because "[p]eople close to the bottom, like Eunie Morgan, or right at the top, like Billy Doud, showed a similar carelessness, a blunted understanding" (Munro, "Spaceships" 239). Self-sacrificing mothers, those who give up their own aspirations and live for their children, thus fall short of the ideal exactly because they transmit a lesson to their children that leads to a similar blindness as theirs.

Among the reluctant mothers, the third type, one can find such traditional figures as the careless mother, such as Jeanette Quinn, a femme fatale of sorts, who is perceived as an extremely indifferent mother letting her daughters grow up wild; Heather Bell's, the missing

girl's, unmarried mother in "Open Secrets," who went on her own expedition with a man leaving her daughter in the care of Miss Johnstone, who, in addition, shows no sign of worry about the disappearance of her daughter; or Gail, who as a hippie let her baby die of the exhaust fume of a broken-down car and then underwent hysterectomy to avoid further complications. But here belongs the narrator of "Before the Change," who gave up her daughter born out of wedlock for adoption, as well. What unites these careless mothers with "institutional" mothers is their shared blindness to the children in their care: they are too wrapped up in their own life (love life or their efforts spent on living up to the expectations of "institutional" motherhood) to provide adequate mothering. These characters are constructed to embody maternal care, or lack thereof, in its physical sense—but because they both lack maternal attachment, in Munro's fiction they both are to fail as "bad mothers." Bad mothering is tied to the lack of attachment.

It is those mothers who consciously rebel against motherhood as an institution and who yet hang on to motherhood as an experience of maternal attachment that epitomize Munro's "good mothers." The relationship of these reluctant mothers to their daughters thrives on mutual recognition that does not relegate the mother—and the daughter—into the realm of objectification. They embody the "mock mother" par excellence since they can be described in exactly those terms that Redekop has established (4): they are shape-shifters, they fall short of the ideal, and they keep watching themselves, they constantly examine in what exact ways they fall short of it.

It hardly comes as a surprise that most memorable reluctant mothers appear in the volume *The Love of a Good Woman* since it is this collection that thematically explores what makes a good woman good and under what disguises love may appear. Motherly love appears as an exceptionally problematic phenomenon in the volume, especially in the stories that feature young, intellectual mothers who have a special affinity for the arts. These mothers all follow the same pattern: they come from a socially inferior family, are married to a young middle or upper-middle class man with whom they are in love, a child, or even children are born, sending the young mother into a suburban home, over the years the differences in the couple's backgrounds and life routes lead to misunderstandings, accusations or silent repressions, which prompts the wife to minor rebellions.<sup>105</sup> Stories that feature reluctant young mothers are: "Jakarta," "The Children Stay," "Before the Change," and "My Mother's Dream."

The reluctant mothers' rebellions may take various forms. First, they resent the regulatory discourse of female desire directed at (self)decoration. They do not dress as expected, as for example Kath does in "Jakarta": she puts on a sloppy outfit to go out to

Sonje's and Cottar's disastrous dinner party. They have the wrong kind of haircut, as is the case with Pauline's wild hair in "The Children Stay," with the protagonist of "Before the Change," and with Jill in "My Mother's Dream."<sup>106</sup> Paradigmatically, they show a disregard for home decoration: Kath prefers "the Glorified Shack" ("Jakarta" 94) to the nicely decorated summer homes, which Kent does not understand; the "little bride" of "Cortes Island" experiences the kitchen, the washer, and the china cabinet as an insult to be suffered for the reward of what she likes in marriage—independence from home and sex (123); Claire in "The Albanian Virgin" comes to imitate "the style and the untidiness" of Charlotte's and Gjurdhi's home after her divorce. "The people I knew, and I myself," she tells the reader, "would give up—for a while—on dining-room tables, matching wineglasses, to some extent on cutlery or chairs" (Munro, "Albanian" 119). Pauline shows a similar disregard for the scenic beauty of the family vacation home where they go on holiday with her husband's parents. Nicely decorated, grand houses, the signposts of middle-class couples' affluence radiate "inklings of disaster" and fill the young wives and mothers with "premonitions of escape" (Munro, "Cortes" 142). The middleclass domestic setting invariably functions as a space of imprisonment, which attempts to delimit women's desire to the domestic realm, to being housewives and mothers.

Second, the reluctant mothers' rebellion is also expressed in their willful ignoring of their own motherhood, which often leads to staged scenes of irresponsibility. Kath smokes and reads while breastfeeding "so as not to sink into a sludge of animal function" (Munro, "Jakarta" 80). Pauline wakes up early and steals out of the house with her smaller child, barely sixteen months old to walk on the beach alone because "being with Mara is still almost the same thing as being by herself" ("The Children" 183-84) so she can rehearse her part for an amateur theatre production undisturbed.<sup>107</sup>

Third, affairs similarly belong to their minor rebellions fought for the return of a sense of independence. Kath flirts and kisses with strangers at Cottar's farewell party wearing the mask of Amy, whom she takes to be the representative of American leftist commune "temple prostitution" (Munro, "Jakarta" 96), and, as the reader learns from Kent's recollections, she leaves her husband probably not long after the event. Pauline finds herself entangled in an affair with Jeffrey, the amateur theatre director, which leads to her separation not only from her husband but from her children as well, giving an opportunity to her husband to announce the words that are the short story's title, "The Children Stay."

The roots of these figures' reluctance lie in their protest against being objectified as mothers and housewives. As a rule, they resent any attempt to prescribe appropriate forms of behavior for them. Their shared dread is either becoming one of the Monicas as described in

“Jakarta”—a mother whose sole focus of attention is the management of the family, which does not cease even when the children are grown up—or transforming into a monstrous housewife. Brian’s mother—Pauline’s mother-in-law—epitomizes a Monica with a grown-up child:

Brian’s mother won’t look at the map. She says it boggles her mind. The men laugh at her, they accept that her mind is boggled. Her husband believes that this is because she is a female. Brian believes that it’s because she’s his mother. Her concern is always about whether anybody is hungry yet, or thirsty, whether the children have their sun hats on and have been rubbed with protective lotion. And what is that strange bite on Caitlin’s arm that doesn’t look like the bite of a mosquito? She makes her husband wear a floppy cotton hat and thinks that Brian should wear one too—she reminds him of how sick he got from the sun, that summer they went to the Okanagan, when he was a child. (“The Children” 181)

The Monicas, and Brian’s mother as an elderly Monica, are monitory figures of what one might turn into if the heroine does not watch herself but is carried away with being a mother and/or a housewife, just like non-mothers function as monitory figures to remind one of what may happen if one seeks to live life in pursuit of the ideal of a childless companionate family. In Munro’s fiction a single focus always leads to some kind of impoverishment in life.

Thus, in Munro’s fiction of the 1990s, the monitory figures of the earlier female gothic texts are discarded for new ones: the Brontëesque heroine wishing for a childless companionate idyll and the mother who embodies the ideal of motherly care without experiencing maternal attachment. But a third monitory figure also appears who preserves the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female gothic tradition of contesting the bourgeois ideology of femininity: the dead-undead housekeeper, and its modernized version, the perfect housewife. Significantly, this character is also associated with the feminine function of care.

### 5. 3. *Monstrous Housewives*

Munro’s reluctant mother heroines find two cultural ideals threatening them with total erasure: ideal mothers and perfect housewives. This is all the more so because it is exactly these roles that middle-class wives are expected to slip into as soon as the wedding bells’ sound has faded. Munro’s characters find the tidy middle-class salon a menace which tries to exert its power upon them; therefore, they seek to avoid it as a major embodiment of what it means to be a perfect housewife, whose range of desire is exclusively domestic. Munro’s heroines, however, find domestic desire an oxymoron.

The perfect housewife as a staple character of the female gothic appeared in the nineteenth century parallel to the culmination of bourgeois ideologies in the Victorian era,

which embodied its ideal female in the figure of the angel in the house. Her image, Becker claims, is the tool of ideological containment with which women could be controlled effectively in an era when bourgeois production practices demanded that women fulfill their role in procreation—that they produce a legitimate heir to the accumulated wealth and to the continuation of the family’s economic activities—and that they display the family’s social status in their consumption. Women thus were doubly confined to the house: in their status as mothers (see also Margolis 36-43) as well as in their status as the managers of the family’s consumption, transforming consumption itself into a display, which ultimately transformed them into displays (did they have the right clothing, hairdo, tastes, etc.?).

Becker sees a connection between the rise and popularity of the gothic and the culture’s obsession with and sanctification of the home, the family, and women. The gothic appeared when gender roles were newly negotiated, moreover, when they increasingly came to be seen as norms—and they have been articulated in idealized forms in the different historical periods with respect to women ever since. The female gothic has always sought to mediate between the cultural ideals of each era (the cult of sensibility in the eighteenth, the angel in the house in the nineteenth, and the cult of domesticity in mid-twentieth century) and a constant sense of “insufficiency of the female selfhood” (Modleski 33) to live up to the ideals. For instance, instead of glorifying the culturally idealized images, the female gothic often encodes these, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as pathological (it comes hardly as a surprise then that “ideal,” i.e., “institutional” mothers’ children as a rule prove to be a disappointment in Munro’s fiction: e.g., Enid, Bea and Billy Doud, Brian, etc.). The very setting in an old house assumes a new significance as well since it comes to appear as an edifice that literally houses the histories of women formerly enclosed among its walls. Haggerty expands Kahane’s reading of the setting as the maternal womb that represents the problematics of femininity (337) and claims that the family house as a “maternalized” setting comes to assume the same function (“Gothic Novel” 225). The building creates connections between several generations of women—besides isolating the heroine from the outside, it also transforms into the embodiment of the threat that the women who have attempted to live up to the culturally fostered ideals might “possess” the heroine.

The house threatening with possession is also embodied in a female figure that obeys the patriarchal gender ideology and fully responds to the dictate of domestic desire. She is the machine-like, undead-dead, scheming governess, housekeeper or nurse ruling over a household. It is this figure the female gothic heroine must fully disown while she may feel, just like the reader, “anger, envy and sneaking admiration” (Modleski 33) for the gothic villainess (the *femme fatale*, the sexual woman, who might also be a murderess for love [like

Jeanette Quinn]), because she acts according to her own desires and because, apparently, she is not a prisoner in her home as opposed to the self-denying mother. It should also be noted that the monstrous housewife's and the femme fatale's antithetical positioning points to their common origin. They are two faces of a Janus-like figure: one represents uncontrolled, unbridled, "natural" femininity, while the other represents a too controlled femininity. Both figures are products of gender construction: one embodying those qualities that make bad mothers, while the other those that make bad wives (Becker 87; Mussel 84).

The monstrous feminine as governess, housekeeper, or nurse appears mainly in twentieth-century gothic works which feature women of different social classes or ages. They, the monstrous feminine and the heroine, usually compete for the authority over the household, therefore, the house becomes a site of desire (like the mother in the eighteenth century) where proper femininity is renegotiated. Although the monstrous feminine feels fully justified in investing herself in the house since it is a legitimate site of desire for women—as opposed to sexual desire—exactly because it is both palatable and productive according to bourgeois ideology (Blackford 236), nonetheless, she also demonstrates that authority over the household is far from joyful, that it produces characters who are more dead than alive.

In Munro's fiction nurses and good housekeepers make excellent prison-holders of both themselves and others in the name of propriety. There is a long line of female characters in this vein from Mary McQuade in "Images" (*Dance*; 1968), the nurse whose hands Flo bites in the old-age home in "Royal Beatings" (*Who*; 1977), the one who scolds Rose and Jocelyn in "Mischief" (*Who*; 1977) accompanied in her dismay by the rest of the earnest mothers, Mary Jo in "Eskimo" (1985), Nurse Atkinson<sup>108</sup> in "Friend of My Youth" (*Friend*; 1990) to Enid in "The Love of a Good Woman," and Mrs. Barrie in "Before the Change." But here belongs Frances as well, who keeps house for Maureen and Lawyer Stevens in "Open Secrets." She is a commanding presence whereas Maureen, the supposed mistress of the house, who, although "had been living in the house for eight years, [ ... ] still felt as if she got around it on fairly narrow tracks, from one spot where she felt at home to another" (Munro, "Open" 132); in addition, Frances acts as a gatekeeper between the outside world and the house since Maureen in her capacity as Mrs. Lawyer Stephens cannot be suspected of gossiping. Therefore, all the information that Maureen receives must necessarily be filtered through Frances, who decides what Maureen should know about life in town. But Mrs. Feare with her speaking name in "Carried Away" is also an additional example.

There seems to be a simple rule in Munro's fictional small-towns: bad housekeepers are not good at fitting into small-town life. Jeanette Quinn is the paragon example of the bad housewife, who refuses to fit in; in fact, she is proud of her being an outsider, even boasts of

her French-speaking Catholic roots in an English-speaking Protestant region.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, the heroine's mother in "Rich As Stink," Karin, the intellectual living in a mobile home, who is a sloppy housewife, is contrasted with Ann, the sober-minded home-maker, who gets all at the end, the hero and the riches as well.

Yet, there is a constant awareness in the short stories that good household managers cover up a lack with their efficiency. They are not elevated onto a pedestal, as is the case in Munro's earlier stories with the grandmother in "Winter Wind" (*Lives*; 1971), with Et in "Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You" (*Something*; 1974), and Almeda in "Meneseteung" (*Friend*; 1990).<sup>110</sup> More recently, Ann of "Rich As Stink" is supposed to have sold out herself and her husband for money, the promise of an easy life, and although both Enid and her patient's sister-in-law sneer at Mrs. Quinn's otherness, both are looking forward to her death in order to get hold of what she has: a family. Enid senses the promise of a whole family—kids and husband—just like Mrs. Greene, who makes preparations to take her brother's children into her own childless marriage ("Love" 8). But truly monstrous housekeepers appear in "Cortes Island," "Before the Change," and "My Mother's Dream." What unites these short stories is that all depict excellent housewives, efficient and commanding, constantly scheming in the background. These women are ready to sacrifice anything and anyone to keep up the appearance of perfection—whatever the costs are to others or to themselves.

### 5. 3. 1. "Cortes Island"

"Cortes Island," the third story in *The Love of a Good Woman* is paradigmatic in its portrayal of a monstrous housewife; however, at the same time, it also slightly deviates from the female gothic tradition. It emphatically portrays the figure of the monstrous housekeeper not simply as a pathological character-as-obstacle that the heroine has to pit herself against—which she readily does. The monstrous housewife becomes a literalized and thus grotesque version of feminine propriety.

I will argue that the story is built around two versions of the grotesque: a Bakhtinian grotesque figure associated with the lower bodily stratum and a figure of the female grotesque as theorized by Russo. The heroine negotiates her difference from and similarity to these forms of the grotesque in an effort to rid herself of a personal history of shame over what she feels to be her personal feminine *and* authorial inadequacy. Eventually, she arrives at the recognition that the grotesqueness of the monstrous housewife is not the result of a personal—pathological—deficiency. Rather, her monstrosity is rooted in the gender roles she is locked into. She is not monstrous because of her natural disposition but because she has followed

gender norms too closely. This opens the possibility for the narrator to negotiate her own sense of shame for transgressing (she is a writer) and disrespecting (she is not properly gendered) boundaries of gender dissolving her from a long history of a sense of personal inadequacy.

Coming upon the title “Cortes Island,” one is hardly tempted to associate it with the initiation of an unsuspecting young woman into the existential project of being a middle-class wife, mother, and homemaker; however, it describes exactly that: a newly-wed young woman, an aspiring writer, moves to a sublet in a basement, where the upper level is inhabited by an elder couple, the Gorries. She learns about their history and as she changes into a modestly competent wife, Mrs. Gorrie, the perfect housewife, gets resentful, even vengeful. The young couple soon moves out of the sublet into a real rented apartment, which puts an end to their short acquaintance with the elderly couple. But since the story is told by a remembering narrator, the crux of the short story turns on the narrator recalling in what ways the anecdote of the crazy landlady inscribed itself into her early married life. She claims, on the one hand, that she never thought of Mrs. Gorrie but, on the other, that she had erotic dreams about Mr. Gorrie all the more often.<sup>111</sup> The concluding paragraphs describe the narrator’s erotic dreams.

The story is comprised of the constitutive memory of entering adulthood told from the heroine’s perspective. Now older, she talks from the vantage point of wisdom; otherwise the reader does not know much about the narrative situation: one can only guess that she looks on her former self from a historical distance as she identifies the time of the narrated period as one that saw a change of cultural paradigm in the meaning of femininity, the nineteen-fifties. In contrast, the narrated self acquires narrative solidity by finding herself in a familiar situation and in a specific location (one can trace the streets she walks on the map—another possible reason why critics tend to place Munro’s works within a realist-regionalist tradition).

Physicality acquires significance throughout the short story. The politics of embodiment always reveals a lot in Munro’s case, who has repeatedly shown that human experience can be communicated through language *and* the body. The body and communication through the body are so much present in this story that the narrated self is repeatedly shown downright incapable of communicating otherwise. The narrative is built upon two character types constituted by their different relationship to the body. For the male character the life of the body has its own authority—after his stroke, Mr. Gorrie is not able to control his physical responses any longer, he has lost his ability to speak also. His body is grotesque in the Bakhtinian sense: it is transgressive, associated with filth and the total negation of physical propriety.



Bakhtin in his study *Rabelais and His World* argues that the grotesque body as a carnivalesque body is constructed in opposition to the official high culture that values the finished, finite, and clean classical body. The grotesque body by contrast is not closed and complete, it is unfinished and it transgresses its own limits:

The grotesque body [ ... ] is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world [ ... ] This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus. [ ... ] This is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of bodily drama, take place within this sphere. Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven. (“Grotesque” 226-27)

The whole semiotic structure of Mr. Gorrie’s body is conceived in these terms. It is unclean, clouded in a scent of urine, it is a reminder of the thingness of humans, an “error” to be wiped out (Munro, “Cortes” 131), metonymically presented by heavy bones and oversized legs (just like Mr. Siddicup’s body in “Open Secrets” it reminds one of the contingency of existence).

Mrs. Gorrie keeps this transgressive—transgressive because it does not respect its own physical as well as social boundaries—body under strict surveillance. She carefully tugs her husband into clothes and covers in his wheelchair in an effort to make him presentable. By contrast, her bodily presence recalls dolls with long, limp bodies and pink-and-white faces: “Her eyebrows were pink—a variation of the pinkish red of her hair. I did not think the hair could be natural, but how could she have dyed her eyebrows? Her face was thin, rouged, vivacious, her teeth large and glistening,” recalls the narrator (Munro, “Cortes” 119). Hers is not the female body, the naturalistic phenomenon “offering the assurance of cyclic life and regeneration,” as Rasporich describes Munro’s female characters (113). Mrs. Gorrie’s body is as dry as her cookies with unnatural pink icing (Munro, “Cortes” 120), the perfect artistic representation of her self. Besides, her unnaturalness is further emphasized by her matching clothes sewn by herself. Her perfection at home decoration and the decoration of herself produces a lifeless, over-controlled ambiance and self.

Mrs. Gorrie represents another form of the grotesque. Russo has theorized forms of the female grotesque and although she warns that the term ‘female grotesque’ skirts tautology since the female represents by definition a deviation from the norm (14), she yet identifies a specifically female form that does not look back on century-long traditions. As opposed to

such forms of the female grotesque as the crone, the witch, the vampire, all associated with “cavernous” bodies through their connection to blood, tears, vomit, and excrement (1-2) in a Bakhtinian manner, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there appears the grotesque as associated with the Freudian uncanny, embodied in figures like the criminal, the hysteric, the female impersonator, individuals with prostheses or wigs often associated with the outrageous, the hilarious, and even, the comic (14). By the late twentieth century the woman as a spectacle, the woman making a spectacle of herself, becomes a figure of the grotesque also. This figure is equally transgressive since it transgresses boundaries of social acceptability: too much make-up, too shrill a voice, unbecoming clothing (e.g.: too much aging skin) all expose the female grotesque to ridicule and humiliation (53). Mrs. Gorrie is of such compound. She transgresses the boundaries of acceptable femininity because she makes a spectacle of herself.

Significantly, no one ever visits this unlikely couple, whose male member continually reminds one of man’s transgressive body and whose female member is a constant reminder of social and cultural expectations. The heroine might be the only one who ever sits in their sitting room, and she is almost literally dragged upstairs by the landlady. Even Mrs. Gorrie’s son comes to visit only when he has to do some repair on the house, and he makes haste to communicate with his mother as little as possible. The narrator expresses her admiration for the way he keeps saying no to his mother. “He didn’t even say, ‘No, Mother.’ Just no,” she remembers, as opposed to herself, who “on the seventh or eighth try would give in. It was so embarrassing to go on refusing, in the face of her wheedling and disappointment” (118).

In the system of embodiment the heroine’s position is defined by her failure to be a proper “bride.” She is constructed as one who cannot fit in because she is different from the idealized image that this semantically loaded word prescribes: by placing herself into the position of her watchers, a chorus of aging women, she herself notices the discrepancy between the expectations dictated by her status and her looks and preferences. She disregards the dominant discourse of femininity: she does not care about her looks and prefers “the heavy books” with “incantatory” titles (124). But even if her body represents social failure in a sense at first—she is clumsy, too big, too heavy, not as finely groomed as Mrs. Gorrie—it is also the source of pleasure. Her body becomes her home in three situations: the marital bed, when communicating with Mr. Gorrie, who, unable to speak, communicates with his whole body, and when reading in the marital bed—significantly none of which is related to the function of women as caregivers.

Summing it up, the characters in the story are types, and as such their main function is to dramatize conflicts and tensions within the self. Mr. Gorrie represents the unbounded body

with its physical transgression and thingness while Mrs. Gorrie represents the grotesque female making a spectacle of herself whose transgression violates compulsory discursive practices of proper femininity. Secondly, the narrated self would like to share in a kinship with Mr. Gorrie, because of his carnivalesque—here positively celebratory—construction through the body, whereas she positions herself in direct opposition to Mrs. Gorrie, whose whole being tells of the hold of gender norms. Her sole connection to the body is related to the maintenance of feminine propriety: she prepares food (though inedibly hard cookies), drinks tea in the salon, cleans (mops up the bathroom after Mr. Gorrie's failure to respect limits of cleanliness), and dresses (both Mr. Gorrie in order to hide his body from sight and herself in order to obey "the beauty myth" [Wolf, "The Beauty" 300]). It is through these two types of grotesque bodies that the narrator negotiates her own sense of shame and embarrassment over femininity.

Mrs. Gorrie, as a hyperbolically gendered female (compare her to the Brontëesque passive-aggressive heroine), also proves to be utterly manipulative and deceitful. Not interested in others' wishes, she strives towards her own goals, which she achieves. That she is insincere and deceitful, we know from the very start: the first thing she says is a lie about her age and about how overworked she is (118), later it turns out that she spies on the protagonist, she even reads the scraps of paper in her wastebasket.<sup>112</sup> In addition, two further mysteries contribute to her lack of credibility. She asks the heroine to sit with Mr. Gorrie a few times a week so that she could go to the hospital gift shop where she would do a volunteer job. She says that her doctor suggested it would be good for her health. Shortly afterwards, however, when the heroine has already moved out, she spots Mrs. Gorrie far from the vicinity of the hospital. But, what is even worse than her own deceits is that she teaches the heroine lessons in manipulation, hypocrisy, and pretension. When the heroine is "torn away from [her] book or the paragraph [she] was writing" in order to sit at the dining table with a lace cloth on it facing "an octagonal mirror reflecting a ceramic swan," she has to drink coffee out of china cups and at off matching plates, after which they "touched tiny embroidered napkins to [their] lips to wipe away the crumbs" (120). She recalls these visits:

I sat facing the china cabinet in which were ranged all the good glasses, and the cream-and-sugar sets, the salt-and-peppers too dinky or ingenious for daily use, as well as bud vases, a teapot shaped like a thatched cottage, and candle-sticks shaped like lilies. Once every month Mrs. Gorrie went through the china cabinet and washed everything. She told me so. She told me things that had to do with my future, the house and the future she assumed I would have, and the more she talked the more I felt an iron weight on my limbs, the more I wanted to yawn and yawn in the middle of the morning, to crawl away and hide and sleep. But out loud I admired everything. The contents of the china cabinet, the

housekeeping routines of Mrs. Gorrie's life, the matching outfits that she put on every morning. (120-21)

When Mrs. Gorrie decides to act as the heroine's surrogate mother and teach her the rules of housekeeping, the way she formulates her dictates also are lessons in manipulation: "Always get dressed first thing, just as if you're going out to work, and do your hair and get your makeup on [ ... ] it's good for your morale," "always have some baking on hand for when people might drop in," (121) do not wash the whites and the coloreds together because "[y]ou might think the shirts are white that way, but they won't be as white as they could be," and she even adds "with her little scandalized laugh": "It's just the way you take care of your man" (129). But she does not put her imperatives "quite so baldly. It was 'I always—' or 'I always like to—' or 'I think it's nicer to—'" (121). The heroine is so much overwhelmed by her housekeeping regime that she reacts accordingly: with pretension. For instance, as above, out loud she admires everything when in fact she wants to crawl away; or she even pretends not to be at home regardless of the discomfiting situations she finds herself in: "in order to do that [pretend not to be at home] I had to get the lights out and the door locked the instant I heard her open the door at the top of the stairs, and then I had to stay absolutely still while she tapped her fingernails against the door and trilled my name. Also I had to be very quiet for at least an hour afterward and refrain from flushing the toilet" (119)—which perfectly exemplifies what Hoeveler describes as female gothic heroines' passive aggressive survival strategies (4).

Mrs. Gorrie's secretiveness, manipulation, and eventually even her propriety however appear in a completely different light once the central mystery of the short story begins to unfold. The text mobilizes several narrative paradigms—in fact, the reader confronts at least five stories: a quasi-autobiographical narrative (it is a rewrite of one of Munro's most openly autobiographical stories, "The Office"), an anecdote, a story of initiation, and the gothic story of Cortes Island, besides the conspicuously missing artist-as-a-young-woman story—where the role of the gothic mystery is pivotal. As noted earlier, generic proliferation is exceptional in neither Munro's works nor in the gothic.

The possibility for a gothic narrative arises out of miscommunication, a misunderstanding of homophones: the Wilds' (home) and the wilds, the far-far-away land of fairy tales. At one of the sittings, Mr. Gorrie shows some newspaper cuts to the heroine that shed an interesting light onto the possible history of the couple. The reader sees the Gorries forced into the paradigm of a modern gothic story: Mrs. Wild from Cortes Island leaves her home for a few days leaving her husband and son behind. When she comes home, the house is burnt down, her husband is dead, and her son is missing and then found alive under curious circumstances. Mrs. Wild then marries the man she left the island with, Mr. Gorrie. Although

this narrative is not spelt out in detail, all points towards constructing a story of two-timing, arson, murder, rejection by the son staying alive (alluded to by the son's persistent rejection of his mother's advances), and a love between the illicit lovers that was forced to realize only to petrify into a marriage. Nothing really substantiates the suspected crimes, but the secrecy with which Mr. Gorrie seeks to communicate something using the old newspaper cuts, as well as Mrs. Gorrie's son's unaccountable behavior towards his mother added to her secret escapades under the cover of volunteer work suggest that the perfect housewife's mask hides a dark past—possibly the Gorries are really gory.

The existence of a dark, silenced past somehow intricately connected to the Gorries is suggested by the heroine's returning dreams as well, mobilizing the gothic device of a dreamworld (an alternate possible world generated in the textual actual gothic otherworld) that reflects on the events. The dreams are set in an extravagant place, described in the story's last paragraphs. The place is metaphorical in its impulse, and it is extremely reminiscent of the uncanny, "cavernous" female anatomy of the female grotesque (Russo 1-2) in its dark attraction and impenetrability that folds upon the beams of a burnt-down house hiding the husband. This last element of the image is highly ambiguous as a direct result of the lack of referentiality: it is not clear any longer whose husband's corpse is under the charred beams in the dream: Mrs. Gorrie's or the heroine's.

The gothic subtext thus concocts a comparability between the heroine and Mrs. Gorrie in a crucial way. Namely, if the landlady has a dark past characterized by not only deception but also by crime, moreover by a crime of passion, her feminine propriety as the only trait that differentiates the narrator from her vanishes. As argued, the constitutive difference between them was their relationship to the body and, most importantly, to sexuality—the narrator is comfortable with her body whereas Mrs. Gorrie seeks to self-consciously shape it in accordance with the dictates of bodiless feminine propriety. However, if Mrs. Gorrie as ex-Mrs. Wild was implicated in arson, and possibly even murder, because of her attraction to Mr. Gorrie, her propriety appears in a different light. The image of a sexual Mrs. Gorrie puts her insistence on propriety on the trail of historicity.

Furthermore, putting the short story into a quasiautobiographical mode creates another level of similarity between the narrator and the landlady. So far, the discussion focused on a constitutive memory—on how the Gorries function as a warning about proper femininity to the narrator. In autobiographical discourse constitutive memories function as a technology to both separate the narrating self from the narrated one and to authenticate the former. But the use of the device of the remembering narrator itself also creates effects which have their bearing on this story: autobiography has a clearly teleological structure in the sense

that it proceeds from the beginnings of a life towards its end, from the point of origin towards a destination occupied by the narrating self where the stations along the road are causally related. This means that the memory of an earlier period is perceived to be in close connection with the arrival of the self, with who the narrating self is at the time of narration. Furthermore, resulting from the inherited structure of the paradigm, the change from the narrated self to the narrating one is seen as a change in perspective, the correction of a misconception from the vantage point of maturity.

Looking at the characters from this perspective, however, one cannot but notice a reversal of sympathies: if Mr. Gorrie was the narrated self's double because of their attitude to the body, the narrating self's double will be Mrs. Gorrie, after all their similarity cannot be denied—both are middle-class wives, secretive and manipulative, both use language as a cover-up for their thoughts and feelings, and both are old women. As noted earlier, Mrs. Gorrie's character delights in manipulation. As regards the narrator's deceit and penchant for manipulation, it suffices to say that she proves her insincerity on many occasions, however clumsy she is at lying in her youth. Later, however, she becomes a writer, whose job is to invent stories, to manipulate figures and events. Significantly, even her husband's name is Chess, which opens up interpretation in two directions: he moves like a chess figure, never questioning the rules of the game, never asking life to fit his interest. And secondly, his figure is manipulated by the narrator in order to fit the rules of her game. Also, the story that provides the base for this one, "The Office," similarly takes issue with how people "use" other people in their inner life. This concern is spelt out in detail towards the end of "Cortes Island," where the narrating self confides: "For years and years and surely long after he was dead Mr. Gorrie operated in my nightlife this way. Until I used him up, I suppose, the way we use up the dead" (145).<sup>113</sup>

The combination of these features has serious consequences for the interpretation of the heroine's character and her trajectory of becoming a metaphorical Mrs. Gorrie because if young, adventurous, and aspiring artist-wives subordinate themselves to lessons in proper femininity and become manipulative old women, insincere and vengeful, who instrumentalize language and objectify others, delighting in the artificiality of artifice, what should be made of this story?

There is a crucial difference though between Mrs. Gorrie's good housekeeping and the narrator's submission to the threat of the china cabinet—at one point the narrator notes that she did not suspect how "all these [household] jobs that seemed incidental and almost playful, on the borders of my real life were going to move front and center" (130). As a young woman she believed that the natural progress of her life would include both marital sex and

professional development, the natural outcome of which would be a full-blown femininity without all those housekeeping chores that she finds marginal to life. In the course of time, however, she learnt that she shares a lot more in common with Mrs. Gorrie than she would like to admit. After all, what she wishes to achieve as a young woman is to pass as a competent wife:

The mornings were bright, and I walked with a sense of release and purpose. At such times my immediate past could seem vaguely disgraceful. Hours behind the alcove curtain, hours at the kitchen table filling page after page with failure [ ... ] Such times were not regretted so much as naturally discarded. And it seemed to be a part of myself—a sickly part?—that was now going into the discard. You would think marriage would have worked this transformation, but it hadn't, for a while. I had hibernated and ruminated as my old self—mulish, unfeminine, irrationally secretive. Now I picked up my feet and acknowledged my luck at being transformed into a wife and an employee. Good-looking and competent enough when I took the trouble. Not weird. I could pass. (140)

What she does not notice at the time is that probably Mrs. Gorrie also started out as a competent young wife who similarly learnt in the course of her life that marginal tasks “move front and center” in a woman's life (130). But whereas Mrs. Gorrie accepts the rules of the game of female propriety and watches carefully over keeping its semblance at least, the narrator watches herself and registers her failures in complying with the rules. Moreover, she ceases to feel shame over not “passing” as a woman because of her lack of interest in proper housewifery and because of her desire to write.

Significantly, however, her failures are not staged protests against the “feminine mystique” and “the problem that has no name” (Friedan 15). She accepts her position as a woman; she even desires to “pass” as woman. But when she fails to do so—in her sloppy housekeeping, in her lack of dexterity in the kitchen, and in her desire to write—and when she unconsciously resists doing so—as in her indecent and explosive erotic dreams—she does not despair. Rather, she watches herself, her motives and reactions. She conceives of these rules as socially articulated expectations that may change—as in fact she can already see in hindsight that they do. This is why setting the short story before the juncture of historical change with respect to women's position and gender expectations—the 1950s—is crucial.

The missing of the artist-as-a-young-woman narrative is similarly significant since it is this narrative that would spell out how the narrated self has given up her desire to pass as a woman and how she has become a writer. Instead of such a narrative, the reader registers a change in perspectives due to the narrative's dwelling in a quasi-autobiographical mode. The narrative moves from the anecdote of a crazy landlady (I met Mrs. Gorrie) through a quasi-autobiographical confession (I was becoming a Mrs. Gorrie) to the narrating self's reflection (I am a writer, now aware of the power and use value of narratives). The reader encounters

only the milestones of this third story, though, under the following headings: aspiring writer searching for her voice; fitting in and, in a parallel movement, abandoning writing; hiatus; the short story itself.

The hiatus is the space of conflict, this is the space where the two seemingly incompatible narrative identities—being a homemaker or a writer—clashed, out of which at long last the writing career came out as victorious. This story is in the affirmative, it does not tell of becoming, it does not even allude to a moment of recognition that resulted in the radical re-evaluation of earlier life, which would be a trope that the quasi-autobiographical narrative could easily make use of. The fact that the epiphanic moment is hidden in the darkness of an untold period of the narrating self's life is telling: there is no point of illumination; separate realities, just as separate selves, exist side by side each left unfinished, and the only one that was complete in itself (anecdote) is defined in retrospect by its functionality, just as the dream is referred to as operational. Thus the telling, the regular rehearsal of the anecdote in the past, comes to be associated with the art of fabricating stories as self-dramatization propelled by the desire for the illusion of totality. This is how the narrator reaches the understanding that she has not become a Mrs. Gorrie because she already knows that Mrs. Gorrie has never been the Mrs. Gorrie she made her into.

Munro thus depicts a monstrous housewife who is the conglomerate result of different conventions in various narrative modes. She is the femme fatale, akin to Jeannette Quinn, who did not die of the attempt at covering over a crime of passion and who at one point in her life decided to comply with gender expectations and become a good housewife. She unites in her one figure two conventional character types of the female gothic: the sexual woman and the monstrous housewife. But as the short story suggests these types are really only types—devices in the service of the illusion of totality against which the gothic heroine may and should redefine herself to overcome any lingering sense of shame over her failing femininity.

### 5. 3. 2. *“Before the Change”*

“Before the Change” revisits the themes of “Cortes Island”: the negotiation of proper femininity through a conflict with a figure of the monstrous feminine, a monstrous housekeeper and nurse this time, the heroine's struggle with her sense of shame over her body not fitting gender expectations, and her rejection of proper femininity as a source of shame. The story, however, is also significantly different since it frames the heroine's failure in the context of her reproductive capacity.

I will argue that the short story recycles several thematic, structural, and figural conventions of the gothic just as the topos of “conscious worth” which would render the



narrative a paradigmatic female gothic text, but for two reasons. (1) The protagonist-female gothic heroine is far from irreproachability according to the patriarchal ideology of gender since she gives birth to a child out of wedlock whom she abandons and (2) she *consciously* renounces her “conscious worth” after her recognition that it is her self-centered self-righteousness that makes her own victimization possible. She is able to do so because the experience of her own motherhood triggers her to explore connections other than heterosexual, companionate love. It is the exploration of her connection to her dead-absent mother that leads to the redefinition of herself—the road to redemptive knowledge in a female gothic fashion leads through an engagement with the mother—which eventually frees her from a sense of shame produced by a gender ideology. It is the discrepancies between gender ideology and individual practices that seek to keep up only the semblance of propriety that invest her with the courage to face the world without the security of her “conscious worth.”

Unlike Mrs. Gorrie of “Cortes Island,” whose past is tainted by the lack of restraint, the monstrous feminine of “Before the Change,” Mrs. Barrie fits more easily into the female gothic tradition of monstrous housewives; and she similarly fits nicely in the long line of Munro’s monstrous nurses (though Mrs. Gorrie also has experience in nursing). Even if the basic situation of the short story significantly differs from that of “Cortes Island,” it also features a young woman of unfashionable looks and taste, with a relish for books. In several respects, the protagonist is like the Claire of “The Albanian Virgin”: she is “sabotage[d] from within” (Munro, “Albanian” 110), she is a lot more well-versed in Romanticism than in everyday affairs, she has given up on writing her thesis on literature, has left the man in her life, who is a lot more practical in his dealings in the world, and she is similarly writing letters to the man left behind, who never gets them. There is a major difference between them though: while Claire leaves her old home because she finds herself entangled in an extramarital affair, the protagonist of “Before the Change” feels compelled to leave because her fiancé, a teacher of philosophy in a theological college, asked her to abort their child. She does not comply with his imploration because she finds his reasoning hypocritical: he prefers abortion to a hasty wedding—he is free to marry—lest someone in the faculty start counting the time passing between the ceremony and the birth of the child and lest he should be penalized in his professional advancement for the shortness of it. So, she gives birth to their child and gives it up for adoption immediately. She then goes home to her father’s place, ruled over by Mrs. Barrie, who has been both his nurse—he is a doctor—and his domestic employee for decades.

The structure of the plot repeats the paradigmatic female gothic plot: the journey home and a parallel journey to the world of memory function as the heroine’s immersion in a gothic

otherworld ruled by an autocratic gothic villain and a monstrous housewife, which is metaphorically underlined by placing the setting in a foreboding old house. The heroine meanders both in the intricate web of her memories and the suffocating rooms of the old house trying to figure out connections. By the end of the narrative she is able to find the boon of redemptive knowledge, which then helps her to establish a new sense of her self and re-establish a connection between herself and the outside world. She does so by deciphering what role her dead mother plays in the life of her father, and what place Mrs. Barrie as a surrogate mother takes in it.

The heroine is able to grasp the story of her family in a female gothic fashion, however, only at the very end, and the reader is similarly able to reconstruct the events only slowly, piece by piece as in a jigsaw puzzle. Her father is a family doctor in a small town in Ontario. When his wife gave birth to their daughter, the narrator-protagonist, complications arose, and he was not able to help her: she died of childbirth. He employed various nurses till he found Mrs. Barrie, who has acted ever since both as a nurse, a domestic help, and a nanny of sorts. The tragedy of his wife propelled him to performing illegal abortions: women from the surrounding area have visited him secretly in the evenings for decades. Mrs. Barrie has been the nurse in attendance. His daughter, however, has remained remarkably long in the dark about his father's illegal activities: first, she has always been more interested in ballads than in real life; second, the townspeople all knew about his father's dealings, and they probably ostracized her; third, when she entered school and she might have been more exposed to gossip about her father, he sent her to a boarding school far away, where she did not hear any news of home. When however she returns after giving birth to her child—which the father does not know about—she slowly realizes what is going on. One day, Mrs. Barrie has an accident, and she is unable to administer to the doctor for a few weeks, he thus asks his daughter to help with a “special” patient. Not long afterwards, the heroine tells her father about her own pregnancy and delivery, but does not notice that her father suffers a paralyzing stroke in the middle of the telling. He soon dies, never able to tell her what he thinks of her decisions.

Although the father carried out illegal abortions in secret, this is not the central mystery of the short story. The mystery develops around the father's inheritance, which as it turns out later, is in close connection to his position of power. After the doctor's death, his lawyer sizes up his daughter's inheritance, and he is most embarrassed to find that he does not leave anything onto her beside the house. He suspects, as the whole town does, that the doctor has accumulated a large wealth by his special practice, which he now sees no sign of. He even encourages the doctor's daughter to search for secret places in the house where he might have

hidden his money. She finds none. Before his death, however, on one of the rare days when Mrs. Barrie is not in the house, he gives her a check for five thousand dollars. At the time she thinks it to be a “bribe” “to get rid of me” (267), after his death she understands this is all the money he had. She is so embarrassed about her father not leaving anything onto his loyal nurse though—however much she does not like her—that she gives her four thousand dollars out of the five. It is only well after Mrs. Barrie’s leave that the heroine understands that the nurse blackmailed her father for years, that he gave her all the money he earned, and that he could salvage only those five thousand for his daughter—most of which she, ironically, gave to her.

The recognition that she gave away almost all of her inheritance to the blackmailer of her father does not dishearten her, though. On the contrary, she feels liberated because her belief in the myth of the power of his father crumbles. Ever before she always thought that it was her father who held power in the house, and she was convinced that he deferred to Mrs. Barrie’s opinions and tastes to put his daughter down. Later, already after his death, she thinks he performed abortions not for the financial rewards but for “the risk. The secrecy. The power” (285). She sees him as a figure of absolute authority both inside and outside his house. But when she divines that Mrs. Barrie holds her father a prisoner in his own house and practice, that he was behind bars—Barr(ie)s—, she is able to reinterpret his father’s position and his behavior *vis a vis* herself. She then grasps that her father did not prefer Mrs. Barrie to herself—she has always thought that she compared unfavorably with Mrs. Barrie because she was not practical. Whereas the heroine has always valued beauty in words and in outer appearances, Mrs. Barrie would “never admire anybody for being beautiful or well dressed. Good card players she admired, and fast knitters—that was all about it. Many people she had no use for” (265).

Yet, although Mrs. Barrie is revealed to hold power and authority in the doctor’s house, her power is far from joyful. She spends most of her life in the doctor’s office; she does not have a family of her own, although she has numerous relatives; she is a tiny, dried-up woman whose life is taken up by holding the doctor her prisoner. If Mrs. Gorrie holding Mr. Gorrie her prisoner in “Cortes Island” is comparable to her dry cookies with an unnatural pink icing, Mrs. Barrie holding the doctor behind bars is like her pails and brushes: her selected keepsakes from the house (289). Even the money she receives as blackmail goes to one of her nephews, who buys a new car on it.

Giving away her inheritance leads to a “feeling of seeing money thrown over a bridge or high up into the air. Money, hopes, love letters—all such things can be tossed off into the air and come down changed, come down all light and free of context” (291) concludes the

heroine. Thus, when the heroine renounces her claim for the inheritance, she experiences a sense of liberation on two accounts: on the one hand, she is freed from the myth of her father's power, and on the other hand from her sense of shame for not measuring up to Mrs. Barrie's good housekeeping. Both lift the weight of properly gendered female behavior off her shoulders: the legitimacy of paternal power is undermined and proper femininity as good housekeeping and administering care has been proved a sham. Both her father and Mrs. Barrie insist on keeping up the appearance of propriety—as a result, they lose what makes them alive. Mrs. Barrie is like a machine devoid of any apparent need for human relationships, whereas the father mechanically reenacts what could have saved his wife's life and wiped out her daughter's.

This recognition enables her at long last to re-examine her relationship to Robin, the father of her child as well. She understands that she needed the myths of male power and female victimization so that she would always “find a high horse [ ... ] The moral relish, the rising above, the being in the right” (285) in the face of the injustices she suffered at others' hands—she constructed her “conscious worth” in opposition to male power and on the base of female victimization, also corroborated by the tyrannical father's help, the uncannily all too proper monstrous housekeeper. She is cured of what was her own intentional blindness.

Yet, a complication remains. Namely, when the heroine discards the image of her powerful father and the image of herself hanging on to a dead love, she does not know what images to substitute for the empty places. As regards her father, she lists a few possibilities for why he may have carried on performing abortions without enjoying any financial rewards: since power and risk are ruled out as viable reasons, she weighs the possibility that he may have wanted to surprise, even shock, his daughter, his lawyer, and the whole town in “a grand perverse gesture” (291), and, finally, she also toys with the idea that he may have done it for love (292). With respect to herself, her dilemma crystallizes around why she has not been able to size up the situation both in her home and in her relationship, why she has abdicated to her penchant for feeling a moral relish, which she achieved by acquiescing power to others.

Eventually, she recognizes that she has built an alternate possible world for herself based on her “conscious worth.” When she says a final farewell to her love of Robin, or rather to her blindness that accorded more power to him than he had actually held, she fantasizes about what the adequate representation of the end of her love would be: “A box of chocolates with centers like the yolks of turkeys' eggs. A mud doll with hollow eye sockets. A heap of roses slightly more fragrant than rotten. A package wrapped in bloody newspaper that nobody would want to open” (292). But instead of these, she sends him a statement. The heroine and Robin first met when he substituted for a teacher in a philosophy class on logical positivism at

her college. In his lecture he then explained why the statement “The former King of France is bald” makes no sense since the subject does not exist (262) in the actual world. When however she understands that she lived in an alternate world of her own making in which her father was powerful and he respected Mrs. Barrie, whereas in another possible world he was blackmailed and held a prisoner—and, most importantly, in this possible world he might have acted out of love—, she proudly sends Robin the statement: “Remember—the present King of France is bald” (292). She has come to accept that the world she lived in is only one of the possible ones. This statement expresses the heroine’s final liberation. What she is freed from is however not so much her love of Robin and her sense of having been treated unjustly by him and by her father, but her dependence on unequivocal truths, her “conscious worth” that she entertained “before the change” closing her into one of the possible worlds.

The metaphorical gothic story thus ends with a typical Munroian neo-gothic heroine who has given up her selfassurance based on selfrighteousness. The protagonist has undertaken a gothic underground journey in her family’s and her own past in a quest to find out the truth about fathers—which she can get access to only if she first understands both her mother’s story *and* the truth about her own motherhood. With her knowledge she can start out on a new quest, the first step of which is the refusal to see herself as a victim victimized by an all-powerful father, a hypocritical lover, a monstrous housekeeper-nurse, and her own motherhood.

#### 5. 4. *Towards a Neo-Gothic Mother: “My Mother’s Dream”*

The volume closing short story of *The Love of a Good Woman* “My Mother’s Dream” shares several thematic and structural similarities with “Before the Change.” Earlier I noted that volume-closing stories represent a species in Munro’s oeuvre: they reflect on the themes of the whole collection in a condensed form. They function within the volumes as what Munro has called the “dark room” (“What” 36) of every narrative: everything leads from and to this place in the house of her fiction. While “Vandals,” the volume-closing story of *Open Secrets* investigates how willing people are to shut themselves into alternate possible worlds of their own creation in which they do not have to face unpleasant truths about themselves, this volume-closing narrative examines, as Munro puts it, what “marvellous, unlikely, acrobatic pieces of human behavior” (“Contributors” 443) people are capable of, i.e., how far they go in the name of what they find worthy of preservation—how far their self-righteous knowledge of their own “conscious worth” takes them. This is a theme that all the stories in *The Love of a Good Woman* investigate. At the same time, the story, as the ultimate

Munro's mother-story, also explores in what ways female bonds, especially motherhood, might be re-imagined in the female gothic tradition.

I will argue that Munro seeks to break with the female gothic tradition of "textual matricide" (Rich 235) by distancing the concept of motherhood from the patriarchal ideology that constructs (1) the maternal instinct for love as innate, (2) the maternal attachment to infants as unproblematic, and (3) maternal care as the natural outcome of these; should any of these not appear naturally smoothly, it signals a stigmatized female pathological condition, which must be socially penalized. She highlights how the discourse of motherhood thus conceived relegates motherhood into a mechanistic response to the physical reproductive function and the mother into a maternal machine dominated by her reproductive function which affects her emotional condition as well. Once you push the button of motherhood, she transforms physically and emotionally making any consciousness in matters that require rational decisions impossible. But rather than deny the experience of motherhood to her female gothic heroines as female gothicists tend to do, Munro foregrounds it as an opportunity to forge connections between a variety of female figures, gothic mothers, daughters, sexual seductresses, as well as monstrous nurses and housekeepers. This requires a critical attitude to the patriarchal gender ideologies regulating notions of proper femininity and ideal motherhood, though, since it is these that construct a culture of female shame which pathologizes any dissenters.

My discussion is divided into three parts: the first provides a tendentious reading of the plot that outlines what I take to be the major issues of the short story; in the second part I address the mother's subtext and by enlisting a variety of theories of mothering from Creed's monstrous womb through Jane Flax's adequate mothering I seek to shed light on how the short story frames the problematics of mothering as an inherited and uncritically reiterated ideological (social and cultural) tool of containment. In the third, I focus on the baby's subtext and will argue by leaning on Kisteva's theory of abjection that this subtext concerns subjectification which goes hand in hand with gender adjustment. At the same time, I will also argue that it is the issues of subjectification and gender adjustment that form the link between the two major subtexts of the narrative; therefore, abjection provides a meaningful context in which to discuss the mother's story as well. Finally, I propose to interpret the closure of the narrative against the backdrop of Benjamin's intersubjective theory of mother-child relationship, which argues for conceptualizing the process of subjectification as a developmental process around two equals, mother and child. I argue that Munro similarly envisions a female gothic universe in which neither the child nor the mother (nor other female

monitory figures) must abject the other in order to enter subjectivity; instead she seeks to write them into connections with one another.

The plot of “My Mother’s Dream,” in a gothic fashion, centers on a murder, a secret and a mystery. But gothic conventions permeate the narrative on all other levels as well just like in the title story of the whole collection: the story is told by a ghost, it features a young orphaned girl taken captive by a villainess, there are female monitory figures to warn the heroine of what might happen should she surrender (an incarcerated gothic mother and a helpless sister, both slightly insane, as well as a sexual seductress), a gothic hero failing to save his heroine, and, last but not least, although the list may be continued, there is a gothic dream with a dream-within-a-dream structure that acts as a foreshadowing to the events thus confusing the dreamworld as an alternative possible world with the outer reality, i.e., the textual actual world.

The narrative starts with a dream: a daughter tells a dream of her mother’s, in which she, the daughter, is left to die in infancy. When, however, the mother awakes from her nightmare and finds that what she experienced was only a dream, grateful, she covers her child with a blanket tightly—too tightly, indeed, since she pulls the blanket over the head of the baby, as a result of which she suffocates. The narrator thus is present as a ghostly voice telling the reader what led up to her mother’s dream, her awakening and drowsy carelessness, as well as to her own death. It turns out only at the very end of the narrative that the baby, contrary to all appearances, did not die eventually. Yet, at the story’s closure, she haunts her neighbors as a ghost. Thus, the reader finds a full array of gothic conventions: a gothic setting, character types, and, also, narrative conventions, which are further underlined by the presence of several narrative modes, of which, just like as in “Cortes Island,” autobiography plays a crucial role.

As always, no summary does justice to Munro’s narratives, which statement rings unquestionably true in the case of this short story. Although the title gestures at the importance of the dream for the interpretation of the narrative, its significance lies in escalating the climactic events in the textual actual world recounted in the main body of the text that finally lead to a female gothic resolution: the orphaned heroine understands her situation, and with this redemptive knowledge, she redefines her position in the (alternate possible/real) world. The story’s neo-gothicism shows in the way the narrative centers on the heroine’s gradual recognition of her position through an engagement with her own motherhood (a theme introduced in “Before the Change”) side by side with the paradigmatic female gothic engagement with the gothic mother. Also, although the resolution depicts a

fantasy alternate possible world in a female gothic fashion, this world is a universe of female bonding and not the heterosexual Eden of the paradigmatic female gothic.

The main text describes the story of a motherhood as well as a daughterhood. Its protagonist is an orphaned girl, Jill, who after a visit to the opera fell in love with the violin. With the help of a benefactor, she started her studies at the conservatory, where she trained to be a professional violinist. One day, on a visit to a friend's family, she meets George, also a visitor in the house, who falls in love with her. It is not even she he falls in love with but the idea of taking home an orphaned girl to his family as his bride since it is an affront to her family's expectations. His family consists of three women: his senile mother—she probably has Alzheimer's disease—, and his two sisters. Iona is a “nervous wreck” (Munro, “My Mother's” 299) and Ailsa is a strong, independent woman—she “should have been a sergeant major” (299), her brother notes—who runs the family. The three women have hung all their hopes on the only boy of the family, the sisters have even sacrificed their life for him: they relinquished their own education and beauty (they did not have their teeth straightened to save money [297]) so that they could send George to law school. Instead, George signs up for the military and is shot dead weeks before the end of the Second World War. But before, he marries Jill and sends home a few “poker-faced wedding pictures” (299) taken in a photo booth to “fix them” (299). After the news of his death, Ailsa comes to town and takes Jill “home” because as she tells her, “[e]verybody wonders why you didn't come up when George went overseas. It's time you came now” (299).

Jill has never intended to live in a family. Ever since she fell in love with the violin, she has gone through life as in a haze. She does not even know why she marries George: whenever she has imagined a lover in her operatic dreams, he was unlike the joking, prancing, rude, and infantile George. “Dazed at the speed of things was more like it,” explains the narrator, and the promise of a different kind of reality: “Lighted rooms showing up full of a bewildering sort of splendor” (306). With George dead, however, and with his baby still inside her body, she is taken to where she is supposed to belong.

Her situation in George's family is precarious on two accounts: first, she is the one to receive the widow's pension, which is thought to be unjust by all in town since the family has invested so much in George and they receive nothing in return. Second, the Kirkhams, a good Scottish Presbyterian family, suspect indecency wherever they meet the arts, thus, they cannot tolerate Jill's artistic ambitions. Her violin is banished entirely from the house. She can never practice although she is still looking forward to her graduation recital; on the other hand, before the delivery of her child she is not in the best physical condition to play because of the deformity of her puffed-up fingers.



The plot starts at this point after George's memorial service when the family invite a few guests over to their house, with the still pregnant Jill barely having arrived in her new home. Ailsa administers to their guests' well-being, Iona watches over their mother so that she does not say or do outrageous things, George's friends keep to themselves, Dr. Schantz, the doctor and a neighbor, deals out professional advice, Mrs. Schantz has her customary sip from her flask always on herself, and in general everyone is satisfied and everything is going well up until the moment Jill finds herself locked into a bathroom holding on to the rim of the bathtub. She goes into labor in the middle of the banquet but not with "a single mild pain, or any harbingers or orchestrated first stage of labor; it's all to be an unsparing onslaught and ripping headlong delivery" (309).

If the baby's arrival is unexpected, its behavior is even more so: it will not take its mother's milk; moreover, it will not even stand the touch of its mother's. By contrast, it is soothed in Iona's arms, accepts formula from her only and no one else, and cannot be fooled by any imposition to accept "Iona-desertion-times" (315). When Iona is not there, the baby screams its punishing baby cries. Consequently, a lot of things change abruptly in the family: the always commanding Ailsa is nonplussed—she does not know what to do with the baby—all she can do is call Iona if it is crying, and Iona, the nervous wreck, always "clamoring for reassurance" (313) goes through a wonderful transformation. "Iona was pale but her skin glowed, as if she had finally passed out of adolescence. She could look anybody in the eye. And there was no more trembling, hardly any giggling, no sly cringing in her voice, which had grown as bossy as Ailsa's and more joyful" (315). Thus the positions change in the hierarchy of the family: Iona, the always scolded Iona proceeds to the front, Ailsa is pushed to the second place, followed by their mother, and, lastly, by the new mother, Jill.

Jill cannot but accept her baby's rejection. Honestly, she does not even entertain any maternal feelings towards her child. When she was still expecting the baby, Jill thought that the only thing changing in her life with its birth would be the question of where to leave it while she is in the conservatory. After the delivery, learning that there is no real need for her since the baby refuses any attempt at breastfeeding, any attempt at embrace even, she willingly renounces the role of the caregiver and gives it over to Iona, "whose heart jumped into double time, who felt like dancing" when the baby starts her wail (316). As soon as Jill feels her fingers to be capable again, she returns to what she feels to be her destiny: she takes the violin into her hands and starts playing the scales. The baby's reaction to her playing is annihilating, though. Its cries go beyond anything human, creating a true havoc in the family: the always controlled Ailsa lets a boy glimpse her underwear through the window when she is

rushing to close it, Iona is shouting from her room upstairs roused from her sleep, and Mrs. Kirkham is loitering in the kitchen in her stockings.

The family's shock is not the result of the baby's unaccountable behavior, though, since they subscribe whole-heartedly to the patriarchal ideology of gender. To them, the child's reaction is natural because it acts a punitive measure and an act of warning for the future since Jill does something utterly unfeminine and unmotherly: she does not focus her attention solely on her child. She does not sacrifice her music for it. She is visibly devoid of maternal love, attachment, and an interest in the care of her child.

Creed points out that there is a long tradition which portrays women's aberrance through the visibility of their children's monstrosity before and their abnormality after the nineteenth century (45-46). In this sense, the abnormal repulsion the child displays towards its mother acts as a sign of the mother's abnormality, her deviation from the norm which singles her out for just, socially sanctioned punishment, as well as it serves to punish her—for what could be greater punishment according to the patriarchal ideology of motherhood than the rejection of the mother by the child? (See the sexual murderess, Mrs. Gorrie's rejection by her son in "Cortes Island.") The shock is thus created by the monstrosity of Jill—since she is the one who, because of her "unnatural," unfeminine behavior and aspirations, transformed her child into a monster. It only exteriorizes her inner corruption.

Correspondingly, the individual family members' shocked responses also are structured along the line of the inner/outer dichotomy while at the same time framing them within the discourse of feminine propriety: Ailsa is standing at the window, a locus of liminality between the inside and the outside, while showing her underwear to a boy, who is on the other side of the child/adult divide; Iona is at the boundary of sleep and being awake and unlike anyone in the family she shouts in the house of restrained behavior; Mrs. Kirkham is wandering in and out of her inner worlds while she is improperly dressed. So, finally, all of them together force Jill to relinquish her playing for the sake of the family's peace because, as Iona jokingly notes to Mrs. Shantz, "Baby isn't a fan of the fiddle apparently" (319). But whereas Jill's feeling towards her child are less than affectionate—she is really not interested in it—playing the violin is an essential part of herself. This complication is addressed in the discussion later.

The plot continues with the Kirkhams' two-day visit to some far-away relatives where they cannot take either Jill or the baby, so Jill has to stay at home with her child alone. Ailsa is happy to leave because at least for those two days she can "have Iona back in her proper place" (320) while she is restored to her position of power. The day of the visit for Jill, however, is the longest and the worst in her life: as soon as Iona leaves, the baby awakes and

cries relentlessly the whole day. By the afternoon Jill gives up any attempts at soothing it and makes “a stupid or just desperate decision” (323): she starts to play the violin since she cannot fill the baby with more wrath anyway. Yet, contrary to her expectations, playing does not protect her; just the opposite, it defeats her entirely, “[i]t has shown her to herself as somebody emptied out, vandalized. Robbed overnight” (322). It is in this state of mind that she decides to take a painkiller for her headache and that she puts a few shaves of the pill into her baby’s formula to make it sleep at long last. Jill also falls asleep, has a dream—recounted at the beginning of the narrative—, and when she awakens from her nightmare just for a few moments to check the reality of her dream, she pulls the cover over the baby’s head, and goes back to sleep.

The Kirkhams return unexpectedly early because Iona is too worried about what might be happening in the house. Upon return, they find that her worst suspicions are confirmed: the baby is lying limp in its crib, and Jill is particularly *dopey*. But more interesting than what they find is the way they behave: Iona gets hysterical shouting out loud the murder of *her* baby and hides the baby’s limp body in a secret place so that it could not be torn away from her, Mrs. Kirkham is lost in her world of memory thinking that her daughters are quibbling over a trifle again, and Ailsa becomes as practical as ever. She airs the rooms, calls the doctor, and makes plans as to how to keep the murder a secret: she needs to persuade the doctor to diagnose sudden infant death syndrome and get Iona into an insane asylum.

For all this—which has gone through her mind in an instant—Ailsa will have to count on Dr. Schantz. Some obliging lack of curiosity on his part and a willingness to see things her way. But that should not be hard for anybody who knows what she has been through. The investment she has made in this family’s respectability and the blows she’s had to take, from her father’s shabby career and her mother’s mixed-up wits to Iona’s collapse at nursing school and George’s going off to get killed. Does Ailsa deserve a public scandal on top of this—a story in the papers, a trial, maybe even a sister-in-law in jail? (331)

Her plans are feasible, but fortunately there is no need for them because Jill finds the baby hid by Iona under the sofa and it is yet, contrary to all appearances, alive.

The shock created by the experience transforms the nature of Jill’s relationships. When she finds the baby first “her breath stops and horror crowds in at her mouth, then a flash of joy sets her life going again, when just as in the dream she comes upon a live baby, not a little desiccated nutmeg-headed corpse” (333). She proceeds from indifference through horror to joy and gratitude. But the experience also releases her from the nightmare world of the respectable middle-class house since she returns to the city to finish her studies at the conservatory and raise her child alone till she remarries. The child does not protest her artistic ambitions any longer, so much so that Jill makes her living by being a concert violinist. In the

summers, though, mother and child return to the house of the father for a visit to his family: Ailsa, the not so bossy postmistress, Iona, who bakes cakes at night in the local bakery, and the grandmother, who wants things explained to her but who never gets satisfactory answers.

The short story investigates the rather complicated relationship between mothers and daughters from two perspectives—the mother’s and the daughter’s—replicating the typical Munroian technique of intertwining two narratives that reflect upon each other. But here the two narratives are not as clearly separated from each other as in other short stories; rather, the two stories are contained within the distinctiveness of the two perspectives in the story notwithstanding the use of an omniscient narrator suggesting a unified sensibility. However, it must not be forgotten, that the omniscient narrator’s voice is the ghostly voice of the now adolescent daughter, whose birth and first six weeks of life are recounted, telling of her mother’s life. Thus the voice unites in itself two distinct voices and perspectives, which is an apt representation of the mother-daughter dyad in the first weeks of a newborn baby’s life—in this respect, limiting the time span of the narrative’s plot to six weeks acquires a special significance since it is the first weeks of an infant’s life when it forms its attachments by eliciting affection in possible caregivers (Marvin and Britner 50).

The two distinct perspectives suggest two distinct stories: the story of a mother’s surrender to motherhood and of a daughter’s surrender to daughterhood. Neither motherhood nor daughterhood come naturally to the protagonists; they both have to fight their battles to accept that they are not alone, that they exist in their relation to each other as well, and that their formulating relationship should be based on a mutual recognition of the other, on the principle of reciprocity as opposed to that of hierarchy.

“My Mother’s Dream” is thus both a daughter-story and a mother-story, with a full array of gothic mothers and daughters. The typical gothic mother is Jill’s missing mother, of course, whose absence puts the gothic heroine into the typical gothic situation: she fails to teach her daughter the caution with which to fend for herself against men’s advances. Thus, Jill falls prey to an insensitive male whose sole goal is to turn her into a monstrous object with which to punish his family. (“He had liked the idea of Jill’s being a musician—not because of the music but because it made her an odd choice, as did her clothes and her wild hair. Choosing her, he showed people what he thought of them. Showed those girls who had hoped to get their hooks in him. Showed Ailsa” [317].) In addition, the missing mother similarly fails to teach her the rules of being a female, which she then has to learn the hard way, by experience, closed into a suffocating, middle-class house. (In fact, the house has two attributes: it is lifeless like a sepulcher stuffed full with reminders of the dead hope of the family, George and it is hot like hell.) Mrs. Kirkham embodies another variant of the gothic

mother who acts as a figure of warning to what may happen to daughters should they injudiciously follow her path—while at the same time she is also one of Munro’s “institutional” mothers. Closed into a small-town and clamoring for respectability she raises three children, one of whom leads the family with dictatorial measures in the name of propriety, another loses all self-respect in her failure to live up to the rules of that same propriety, and the third flouts all that she has sought to impart to him; in addition, all her children believe that her opinions are of no import. She thus slowly expires in the prison of her house, where her own children have closed her. Mrs. Schantz, by contrast, embodies another failing mother, one who has given up her family having given in to her sexual appetite. Not much is known of her history, what is evident though is that she is a middle-aged woman of some wealth with a husband who is twenty-five years younger than herself. The town rumors that her husband used to be her son’s friend but after a mutual seduction, she now has to live in “luxurious, closemouthed exile” (308) away from family and friends. The price she, as an unrestrained sexual seductress, pays for her escapade is ostracism, alcoholism, and a husband who is now in love with another woman, Ailsa. It is not to be wondered then that not long after the climactic showdown between the host of mothers and surrogate mothers over the baby in the Kirkhams’ house, which leads to an open display of affection between Dr. Schantz and Ailsa, the Schantzes leave and move to Florida. Mrs. Schantz is punished with a life-long course of vigilance, escape, and self-destruction for she embodies the lack of feminine restraint: on her first appearance she cannot wait to sip at her flask in the privacy of the bathroom, so she drinks from it in the hall (309) and she says things that respectable women do not (308).

Jill has to pit herself and define her own motherhood against these mother figures, whose lives are repeated in the story’s daughters’ lives as well. Jill’s mother failed to be her mother, so does Jill fail as well towards her own child. Both Ailsa and Iona have sacrificed themselves in the name of filial duty for the only male member of the family and in the name of propriety in vain just like their mother. Ailsa is both a warden to her mother and sister and a prisoner herself to her notions of respectability. Always restrained and proper, she acts mechanically throughout the story. At the memorial reception she smiles mechanically “all wound up” (303). Also, she displays the same mechanic compulsion for frantic housecleaning as Jack Agnew’s widowed wife does in “Carried Away”: before the funeral she cleans everything in the house at night after work—“Not that the house wasn’t decently clean before” (302). As a monitory figure, Ailsa represents the dead-undead housekeeper, isolated, disconnected, and unable to show affections, while Iona, always over-sensitive, is her opposite in that she is ruled by hers.

The idea that failing femininity is inherited finds support in various theoretical explanations which are able to shed light on the issues surrounding motherhood in the short story. The first theory to be enlisted to help understand Munro's challenge to female gothic motherhood is Creed's concept of the monstrous womb. At the outset, it must be noted though that the universe of "My Mother's Dream" is a female universe—men are remarkably absent: they are heard and talked about but they are never present, except for Dr. Schantz, who is far from being the representative of patriarchal power. He is tossed around by his wife who could be his mother and by the asserive Ailsa. As such, this universe is like an all-female parthenogenetic world where women's rule is unbridled, where women give birth, raise, form, shape, regulate, and punish one another for not living up to an ideal femininity. Creed discusses horror films that put female parthenogenesis into their thematic center and argues that these depict the universe thus engendered as one that is able to produce only deformed manifestations of the same, passing on the monstrous "disease of being female" (47). The female universe of the short story can be understood in the same terms: as a metaphoric parthenogenetic world where femininity is the primal mother engendering her offspring (individual women) to replicate the monstrosity of herself.

Second, the short story abounds in mothers but all pass on a model of inadequate mothering. Flax differentiates between two forms of inadequate mothering, both of which are detrimental to the development of a girl child's autonomy ("Mother-Daughter" 34-35). The first type is when the mother smotheres the child by hanging on to her too much, which leads to an inadequate acquisition of autonomy for the girl child; and second, when the daughter feels that she has not been nurtured enough, thus she hangs on to the mother, which represents a similar threat to her autonomy ("Mother-Daughter" 34-35). The antithetical positioning of the two sisters Ailsa, as a woman who shows no emotion towards the child, and Iona, who abandons herself to her usurpation of maternal feelings corresponds to Flax's definition. Flax also seeks to introduce the concept of good mothering, which she defines as an "adequate" mothering. She characterizes the adequate mother as one who is "concerned about the child without smothering it" ("Conflict" 174) because she is able to preserve a sense of separateness. In the textual universe this figure emerges only at the very end and at a cost.

Jill's mothering is further complicated by the fact that it is impossible to think of her subjectivity as fully formed and her gendering complete (contrary to Ailsa's and Iona's). Whereas all theorists of mothering suppose the figure of the mother to have run the course of subjectification and gender adjustment, however (in)completely, Jill resembles a tabula rasa to be written on for the clean white space of which various discourses compete. But as she has not been "properly" gendered since her life was taken up by playing the violin and there was

no one to transmit her the rules of proper femininity, she is not initiated into the culture of female shame. Therefore, she thinks she can escape her own femininity and motherhood entirely by defining herself by what she does: playing the violin.

There is a crucial scene in the short story which takes place after Jill's first disastrous attempt to play the violin again after the birth of her child, which the baby's crying puts a rush end to, worth quoting at length. Jill is sitting on the steps of the house, contemplating:

Jill went out and sat down on the back step. She looked across at the glaring, sunlit back wall of the Schantzes' white house. All around were other hot backyards and hot walls of other houses. Inside them people well known to each other by sight and by name and by history. And if you walked three blocks east from here or five blocks west, six blocks south or ten blocks north, you would come to walls of summer crops already sprung high out of the earth, fenced fields of hay and wheat and corn. The fullness of the country. Nowhere to breathe for the reek of the thrusting crops and barnyards and jostling munching animals. Woodlots at a distance beckoning like pools of shade, of peace and shelter, but in reality they were boiling up with bugs.

How can I describe what music is to Jill? Forget about landscapes and visions and dialogues. It is more of a problem, I would say, that she has to work out strictly and daringly, and that she has taken on as her responsibility in life. Suppose then that the tools that serve her for working on this problem are taken away. The problem is still there in its grandeur and other people sustain it, but is removed from her. For her, just the back step and the glaring wall and my crying. My crying is a knife to cut out of her life all that isn't useful. To me. (318-19)

The section is a typical Munroian self-reflexive statement on art that epitomizes how Munro conceives of her writing, but its significance lies also in the fact that it utilizes the Radcliffean technique of zooming in on the heroine's experience from a wide-angled vision of the scenery to her inner thoughts and feelings. The section depicts Jill as a typical Radcliffean heroine who can see beyond the surface sensing the existence of separate, parallel realities. People are known only from the outside, by sight, name, and history but there is an unknown dimension to them secret to all, the country is both full and sickeningly ripe at the same time, woodlots beckon the viewer but they lure one into a realm of danger, the baby's cry is both the expression of a rightful demand and a knife that cuts out an essential part of herself. All other characters see only one of these realities, Jill is alone to see both. The section describes the moment which prepares her for her final triumph—since how could one become a different kind of mother (an adequate mother) without apprehending that there are other realities beside the single one most people perceive. All the more so because she proved even before that she can see parallel realities, i.e., she can “see differently” (Wall 208).

At the very beginning of the short story, in a scene that takes place at her husband's funeral banquet:

My mother—Jill—is standing beside the dining-room table in the bright late afternoon. The house is full [ ... ]. They are drinking tea or coffee and managing to hold in their fingers the dinky sandwiches, or slices of banana bread, nut loaf, pound cake. The custard tarts or raisin tarts with their crumbly pastry are supposed to be eaten with a dessert fork off one of the small china plates that were painted by Jill's mother-in-law when she was a bride. Jill picks everything up with her fingers. Pastry crumbs have fallen, a raisin has fallen, and been smeared into the green velvet of her dress. [ ... ] What is this eating about? People can't help but notice. [ ... ]

Jill has been queasy all day, until suddenly in the church, when she was thinking of how bad the organ was, she realized that she was, all of a sudden hungry as a wolf. All through "O Valiant Hearts" she was thinking of a fat hamburger dripping with meat juice and melted in mayonnaise, and now she is trying to find what concoction of walnuts and raisins and brown sugar, what tooth-jabbing sweetness of coconut icing or soothing mouthful of banana bread or dollop of custard, will do as a substitute. Nothing will, of course, but she keeps going. (296-97)

Her insatiable craving is triggered by what she sees: the hand-painted plates, the velvet dress, the colors of the sweets, the raisins, the nosegays on Ailsa's head, the barberry hedge outside the window, "all these things seem particularly horrid and oppressive to her though she knows they are quite ordinary. They seem to carry some message about her new and unexpected life" (297). In her looking around the house she intimates that the house and the kind of life the house offers closes her in, so she reacts by "eating" it all. She is craving for control, and thus she reiterates the bulimic's insatiable hunger—she finds herself in a bulimic scenario that represents "rebellion against and compliance with patriarchal requirements" (Zucker 128).

The scene of her contemplation on the back steps of the house represents a turning point in the narrative because Jill's faculty to see parallel realities leads her to an awareness of her situation: she must choose between being a mother (modeled upon familiar mother figures) or being a violinist. Her reaction this time, however, repeats the bulimic's purging cycle: "she broke out in a sullen sweat. In a fairy tale she would have risen off the bed with the strength of a young giantess and gone through the house breaking furniture and necks" (319). The child's initial rejection of his mother is thus now replicated in the mother's rejection of the child as she seeks to escape motherhood entirely. It is with this recognition that both mother and child become truly monstrous to each other: the mother feels the rage of a giantess and the daughter has demonic powers—"We were monsters to each other. Jill and I," states the narrator (321) after having been left alone in the house. The two monsters then, one desperate and one determined to totally annihilate the other, come to a final showdown in the hell of the house metaphorically displaced into the gothic mansion of the dreamworld.<sup>114</sup>

In addition, the dream leads to a total loss of orientation with its dream-within-a-dream structure (the mother in the dream wakes from her dream still within her dream), which rehearses what Sedgwick finds the embodiment of the typical gothic horror: dreaming and



waking to find the dream come true (*Coherence* 31). This is what happens here as well: Jill dreams that she has abandoned her daughter to die, waking in her dream, but still dreaming, she finds her baby alive and covers her both in her dream and in the textual actual world. Dream and reality lose their boundaries and allow for a free trespassing from one into the other. In the context of the narrative the dream prepares for the moment of gothic horror, when no boundaries are fixed, when anything is possible, when several realities exist side by side. When the Kirkhams return the baby is both dead (“the death blanket” is twisted around her [328]) and undead, as it turns out later; Jill is metaphorically dead to the world—she is too groggy from the pills (“She isn’t sure where she is or what day it is” [Munro, “My Mother’s” 328])—and awake; Iona after finding the baby lying limply in its crib is intent on reversing the baby’s birth by “trying to squeeze the bundle [ ... ] into a new terrifying hole in the middle of her body” (328) thereby transforming into a real mother; Mrs. Kirkham is wondering in and out of her world of memory and the real world, noticing the sisters’ quarrel in the real world but thinking it to be an adolescent squabble; Iona could still be sent to the insane asylum or be convinced that there was no murder indeed; Ailsa can still count on her secret love, Dr. Schantz, and wonder whether he will act in her favor.

In this moment of time, when anything is possible, on a gothic threshold between parallel realities, both the baby and the violin find themselves shoved under the sofa for hiding (Jill has shoved her violin there after having been unable to play with the baby crying in order to protect it from her own rage, and Iona has hidden the baby there so that its body not be taken away from her) as a yet further symbolic expression of the existence of parallel realities: the baby and the violin are lying side by side. But when the baby whimpers, it is only Jill who hears it and takes it into her arms, never letting go of it for the longest stretch of time she has ever held it in her arms. She has become a mother, “[s]obered and grateful, not even able to risk thinking about what she’d just escaped, she took on loving me,” explains the narrator, “because the alternative to loving was disaster” (337). But significantly, she takes care not only of her child now (she prepares formula for it) but of the violin as well (she packs it carefully): she administers to both. The question that she has to find an answer for is no longer formulated as “the baby or the violin?”—as Naomi Morgenstern rhetorically puts it—, i. e., the parallel realities are not present as an either-or choice as between the two models of inadequate mothering; the issue is whether she can form an attachment to both at the same time.

But as argued earlier, the story is just as much a daughter’s story as a mother’s story. Its theme does not solely focus on the emotional vicissitudes one must go through till one becomes—as one becomes and is not born (Dally 17)—a mother but also on how one

becomes a daughter. Daughters are formed and not born, suggests the narrator. Earlier I argued, that Jill is akin to female gothic heroines who have to understand their situation and pit themselves against a missing mother, surrogate mother figures and/or other female monitory figures. They then have to save themselves with the redemptive knowledge that they are different from them so that they be able to re-enter the “real” (alternate possible) world of the gothic. In fact, Jill negotiates with all available female figures and in the end comes out victoriously by redefining herself and scraping out a mode of existence that does not relegate her to the destiny of any of the women around her: she becomes a successful artist, mother, wife, and friend, as well. I also argued that the typical Munroian parallel structure is partly hidden in the narrative voice and its perspective. The parallel text that reflects on the narrative of the mother is that of the daughter’s, which tells another gothic story with another female gothic heroine.

This is the story of the baby as a gothic heroine, who is on a similar quest of finding its true self by pitting itself against its own mother. Its inborn grotesque aversion to its mother, I argued earlier, is a punishment for its mother’s deviance from the norm of femininity. But this is so only in the subplot of the mother; in the baby’s subplot, its rage is the hyperbolic expression of the female gothic heroine’s emotional trajectory *vis a vis* the two-faced mother who she must engage with on her quest directed at gaining an independent subjectivity. (This subplot hypothesizes that Jill’s motherhood is unproblematic enough to act as a background to the baby’s subjectification.) The baby’s quest runs the same trajectory as female gothic heroines’ *vis a vis* the mother. It is motivated both by a desire for the mother as the source of maternal plenitude which can grant a sense of wholeness and by a loathing to the person that threatens one with undifferentiation as theorized by Klein and by critics of the female gothic (Kahane 336-37, Modleski 70-71).

Kristeva’s theory of abjection provides a theoretical framework that does not require such a clear separation between the two subplots. It is all the more pressing to find ways to account for the two subplots in tandem because, as argued earlier, in Munro’s narratives the sum of subplots creates a textual web where each reflects on the rest. As seen in the discussion earlier, a number of theoretical tools have been enlisted so far to illuminate various phenomena in the text. Yet, none provides an overarching framework in which to understand the whole of it—neither will abjection fulfill this office, but it yet enables one to see parallels between the mother’s and the child’s subtexts.

Abjection is generally considered to provide a framework in which to conceive of the two-faced mother. In line with Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, Kristeva contends that motherhood obliterates the opposition between inside/outside, me/other, subject/object and as

such it is a site of resistance to patriarchal order because western thought is grounded on the distinction and juxtaposition of these binary opposites. At the same time, she also notes that this opposition will always remain in the realm that she calls abjection since the mother is the abject figure par excellence. The abject is a term for all those things which a subject must disavow in order to secure “the self’s clean and proper body” (*Powers* 71), to differentiate itself from objects; or, as Creed puts it, it is the other side “always there, beckoning the self” (“Kristeva” 66). For Kristeva the abject can also take the form of food, waste, excrement, at its simplest, or may take the form of death as its ultimate form, since the abject is what “disturbs identity, system, order” (*Powers* 4). What is constitutive of it is that it invokes disgust and anxiety, but at the same time it both repels and attracts one also. One of its literal embodiments is the maternal body itself; which in Kristeva’s rendering is formulated in the proposition that individuals “do not cease looking [ ... ] for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body” (*Powers* 54). With “those sticky, viscous, or amorphous things” (Shildrick 81) the maternal body provokes a highly ambiguous response with which all individuals are forced to engage in an effort to distinguish between what is inside and outside that body, as well as between one body and another, ultimately, to differentiate oneself from the other. The maternal represents the abject par excellence since it is something that one must repudiate to enter the process of individuation but which yet will for ever haunt the individual since it cannot be entirely eliminated. Thus daughters must forever struggle with a necessary matricide to enter culture just like their desire to return to and merge with her.

Seen in this light, it is as if the short story had been written as a literary rendition of Kristeva’s theory of abjection. The newborn baby expresses its aversion towards the mother’s milk hyperbolically—she screams “blue murder” (Munro, “My Mother’s” 314) and stiffens whenever its mother touches it, thus displaying two of the most archaic forms of abjection, the loathing of food and of the mother’s body; on the other hand, it desires a total surrender of the other (which she does not receive from Jill so it turns to Iona, the self-sacrificing surrogate mother) that results in an undifferentiated symbiotic relationship between them (Iona’s efforts at squeezing the baby into her abdomen is the literalized representation of this symbiotic relationship). Thus, on the one hand, it loathes the mother’s body, and, on the other, it desires a return to the space before subjectification as it is right now situated in an ambiguous, liminal space.

However, it is not the child alone who abjects the mother in the attempt to gain an independent subjectivity because the mother must similarly abject the baby since it stands both as a sign of her undifferentiation as a result of her surrender to conventional

constructions of femininity and a hurdle in her way to break out of them. It is a constant reminder of her being trapped; therefore whatever she does teaches the child to hate her for being a mother. She passes on a tradition of shame and self-hatred. Or, on the contrary, mothers could push their children out of the way and fail to be mothers. This act relegates them into the realm of persons while their children into the realm of the abject, and they must be forever on their guard to keep themselves uncontaminated from the child. Mothers and daughters must permanently exist in a relationship ridden with conflicts, in the liminal space of abjection. Jill's terror after her disastrous effort at mothering and playing the violin arises when she finds that she can neither commit herself to motherhood nor return to her self-definition as a violinist; she cannot abject her child since she herself has come to embody the abject.

On the one hand, the liminal realm of abjection is a locus of struggle for self-differentiation; on the other, it is the realm of possibility, of undifferentiated parallel selves and realities, metaphorically embodied in the most liminal of beings, the ghostly voice of the child remembering its mother's dream in Munro's narrative. The figure of the ghost narrator (the grown baby) is the perfect artistic representation of the ongoing and two-sided process of abjection as a constitutive element of subjectification. It is a figure that embodies ultimate border dissolution between objects and persons; it is the abject that is neither object nor subject; it is ambiguity itself—because abjection is ambiguity (Kristeva, *Powers* 9-10)—not person yet, but not an object either; the figure of struggle and opportunity.

The ambivalent relationship with the mother theorized earlier by Klein thus finds another support in Kristeva's abjection. Klein argues that the onset of subjectification starts with the early forming of the infant's mental life and in this process the maternal breast occupies a central position since it is in relation to the breast that the child experiences gratification as well as total helplessness and dependence once the breast is withdrawn. This archaic relationship to the mother's body is structured by the infant's desire to destroy it in a fiercely acquisitive move—it wants to possess it all to itself. To this end, the infant can line up a whole arsenal of destructive behavior: whimpering, crying, biting, scratching, stiffening the body, etc. To resolve the ambivalence of the “good” gratifying mother and the “bad,” frustrating one who withholds gratification, it splits the mother into two. The ambivalence of the mother will however forever haunt the individual since it is the very basis of the forming of mental life.

Although it is possible to argue that the baby's irrational loathing of her mother, Jill should be understood as a Kleinian phantasy attack on the mother's body, the figure of the ghost as a figure of possibility propels the reading in a different direction. For it is true that

the baby's preference for Iona might be explained to result from its splitting the mother figure into two, one representing all the good (Iona, the "good" mother) and one all the bad (Jill, the "bad" mother), where punishment is especially deserved because Jill does not experience reverie—the state of the mother's mind characterized by serene receptiveness to the infant's sensations (Likierman xxii)—, this provides no explanation for the infant's reversal of sympathies and the story's closure as a happy ending, of sorts. Kristeva's theory abjection, however, provides an adequate framework to do so.

After the climactic events when the baby finds itself shoved under the sofa and lying beside the violin, still dead to the world notwithstanding the frantic scene expiring in the Kirkhams' house, it "settles" for Jill. The way the remembering narrator phrases the return to her speaks volumes:

I don't believe that I was dead, or that I came back from the dead, but I do think that I was at a distance, from which I might or might not have come back. [ ... ] And Iona's love, which was certainly the most wholehearted love I will ever receive, didn't decide me. [ ... ] It was Jill. I had to settle for Jill and for what I could get from her, even if it might look like half a loaf. (336-37)

Furthermore, this return initiates the individuation of the undifferentiated baby (it) into a female as she accepts the engendering role that her mother plays in her subjectification. She does not seek to sever the ties between it/herself and the mother, the marked body, who represents nature in the nature/culture divide. The ensuing section underlines the baby's recognition of the mother as a subject with her own desires (as opposed to conceiving of her as the abject, a beckoning dark space threatening with undifferentiation):

To me it seems that it was only then that I became a female. I know that the matter was decided long before I was born and was plain to everybody else since the beginning of my life, but I believe that it was only at the moment when I decided to come back, when I gave up the fight against my mother (which must have been a fight for something like her total surrender) and when in fact I chose survival over victory (death would have been victory), that I took on my female nature.

And to some extent Jill took on hers. (337)

The significance of the paragraph is twofold: (1) it describes Munro's evolving conceptualization of the mother-daughter bond as based on relationality and reciprocity, which do not transform the relationship into a power struggle for the status of subjects within the antagonizing patriarchal ideology of gender. Both mother and daughter have stopped to subsist on seeing the other as an aggressor to themselves and have entered a phase in which they are ready to see the other without othering. This is a story of reparation between a mother and a child, both desiring a recognition of themselves as separate beings. (2) The child acknowledges her own femaleness, which is closely tied to the reproductive function of the female body. This is pivotal since the acceptance of the female position when it is connected

to the reproductive capacity distances her from monstrosity. As pointed out earlier, women's (not immediately visible) monstrosity was thought to be signaled by the visible monstrosity of their offspring, who were also imagined to be sterile (Creed 46). The baby's recognition of her femaleness, however, clearly absolves her mother from the claim of monstrosity. Jill's aspirations and lack of motherly devotion do not deserve punishment.

Yet, their new relationship does not appear as an idealized mode of existence while it does approximate the guilt- and anxiety-laden ambivalence that Klein observed, although the element of a life-long struggle for the territorial control of the other is missing from it. Notwithstanding, it is ridden with conflicts, which the parties involved must continually negotiate.

It is Benjamin's conceptualization of motherhood that best describes the fantasy ideal that Munro envisions for her female universe. The value of Benjamin's theory for the discussion lies in her challenge to an unproblematic pre-Oedipal maternal space that develops into a space of conflict only later when entering the process of subjectification. That is, it does not presuppose an innate harmonious connectedness in women with their children that makes them superior to men. In addition, neither does it posit a stage of indifferentiation between mother and child or an erasure of differences between individuals. Her theory conceives of a symbolic space of tensions in which "we recognise, feel, and symbolically represent the subjectivity of real others" (*Like* 86), where the sex or gender of the "real other" in the maternal position is not determinative.

She argues that interaction between mother and child starts at the very moment of birth as an interaction between two independent subjectivities. This relationship however is precarious because both mother and child perceive themselves as distinct from the other; yet, in a certain sense they also depend on each other because both have to recognize the other so that they could also be recognized. "Recognition is that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self," writes Benjamin. "It allows the self to realise its agency and authorship in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from an other whom we, in turn, recognise as a person in his or her own right" (*Bonds* 12). In her intersubjective theory of the mother-child relationship Benjamin claims that the differentiation of the self from (m)other is the result of a balancing act between self-assertion and the mutual recognition of two equals (19-20). As such, however, it is not free of conflicts, breakdowns, aggression even. However, all these are counteracted by a process of reparation (*Like* 47). Benjamin's theory thus attempts to conceptualize the mother not as an object/subject against which the daughter's individuation runs its course, but as an independent subject with her own separate subjectivity—which in the context of the narrative means that the child is

equally not perceived as an object/abject against which the mother must reassert her subjectivity.

Benjamin's model of intersubjective recognition, born with the child and carried over into adult life, is capable of mirroring the changes in the social and cultural position of women (Giorgio 27) since it does not rely on timeless categories. As seen earlier, gothic criticism finds itself in a double bind since it seeks to elucidate texts whose conventions are both timeless and historically contingent at the same time. Correspondingly, mother figures also display features that are constant and historically specific also.

What is constant is that the female gothic frames the figure of the mother extremely ambivalently since, on the one hand it emphatically removes the mother from the textual world implying that subjectification is only possible via a "disidentification" (Hirsch 10) from her and from the fate of other women (also, Kahane 336-37, Modleski 71)—she is the "dreaded other, of objects to the daughters' emerging subjectivity" (Hirsch 136)—while on the other hand it is the desire for her that motivates the whole plot.

But her figure has also been largely affected by changing times. Broadly speaking, in the texts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female gothicists mothers as a rule subjected themselves to the rules of femininity and succumbed to conventions, voluntarily or not. Thus they became the primary negative models of femininity, the abject, in the process of the gothic heroine's gaining a self. In modernist writings, however, a new type of mother figure appeared who exists in the web of her own multiple desires also not just as the mouthpiece of proper femininity or of its discontent. Hirsch especially has examined modernist and post-modernist texts by women writers, and she claims that the daughters in these texts—who often have artistic ambitions—differentiate themselves from their mothers in a more multiple relational way than the daughters of earlier texts because they weigh their relationship with a mother who also has desires.

Munro's narratives in *The Love of a Good Woman* fit neatly into what Hirsch calls the postmodern plot of the mother/daughter narrative since they feature mothers who are "entangled in relations which define and circumscribe all further desire" (10); their lives and choices are put into a specific historical context, their subjectivities are both contextualized and historicized (139). However, "My Mother's Dream" steps even further since not only is its mother figure a mother—who thus by definition succumbed to social and cultural expectations—but also an artist who, to top it all, only initially fails in complying with models of femininity. Moreover, whereas Hirsch identifies a group of postmodern narratives where female protagonists refuse participation in the conventional heterosexual romance plot as well as in its fulfillment, the marriage plot, and generally disavow conventional constructions of

femininity, having learned from their mothers' negative example, Munro's mother figure becomes a positive example exactly because she has learnt to balance between conventional constructions, her own artistic desires, and what Hirsch calls "other possible subjective economies based in women's relationships" (11). In the end, Jill becomes a mother (not just in a biological sense), a wife again (since she remarries), a mother for the second time, *and* an artist, *as well as* a friend to her first husband's older sister, whom she dreaded earlier.

What Munro's narrative advances is imagining the mother in multiple relational ways—not excluding conventional constructions of femininity, moreover, also including ambition, a desire for mastery and a striving for autonomy (generally thought to be incompatible with the romanticized notion of femininity). Munro's mother in "My Mother's Dream" *learns* to be a different kind of female subject through experience: an autonomous subject without denying her connectedness and embeddedness.

However, there is a price for this new autonomy indicated by the infant's/daughter's passage. She has to accept that she has to pay for this feat by being a different kind of mother: one who can in no way be identified as an idealized mother because she is both getting and giving only "half a loaf" (Munro, "My Mother's" 337). That is, although it is true that her newly conceived self embraces an autonomous self (forbidden for women in western culture for long) and a sexual self (similarly expected to be repressed in women though not exactly forbidden) while not denying what Flax calls her "social" self, "the conforming, nurturant, feminine self" ("Re-membering" 98) seeking connections<sup>115</sup>—the three selves together that Flax conceives to be an ideal combination that women should strive for—, yet this ideal is still a compromise formation: "half a loaf" (Munro, "My Mother's" 337). All, including daughters, and future gothic heroines as well, will have to accommodate to this fact.

At the beginning of the discussion it was noted that this story has an autobiographical relevance, just like "Cortes Island." It was said that "Cortes Island" is a rewrite of an earlier, openly autobiographical narrative, "The Office," which recounts the vicissitudes of a female writer to find a space of her own where she can work undisturbed. In both "The Office" and in "Cortes Island" Munro reflects on the anxieties of female authorship by portraying a clash between traditional expectations *vis a vis* women and the call to write. In "My Mother's Dream" she reflects on anxieties of authorship from another perspective that is yet similarly structured along the polar opposition between an inner call and an outer obstacle. But while in the former two stories the protagonist, a freshly married aspiring artist, must pit herself against social expectations, in the latter, what she must confront is not an abstract injunction delivered by an ambiguous representative of female propriety but a human entity that is equally clamoring for recognition on its own terms. This entity is a child who struggles to be



acknowledged and experienced as a real person and not as the second successfully passed exam in a “series of further examinations” (Munro, “Jakarta” 82) down the road after getting married in the life of women.

A reference to Munro’s biography supports this reading. In an early biographical portrait, which was intended as a kind of introductory volume to the freshly discovered Canadian artist, Munro recounted an episode from her early married life to Catherine Sheldrick Ross, her first biographer. She told Ross that in the nineteen-fifties she gave birth to three daughters within four years but the second baby died within two days. According to the custom of the time, with parents who “were both scornful of sentimentality” (Ross 53), she was put in a “shoe box slipped without ceremony into an available open grave” (53). But Munro told Ross in an unpublished interview that she was “haunted by recurring dreams: ‘I was doing something and had the feeling I was forgetting something very, very important. It was a baby. I had left it outside and forgotten about it, and it was out in the rain. By the time I remembered what it was, the baby was dead. This dream stopped when Jenny was born’” (Munro qtd. in Ross 53). Yet, there still must have remained a sense of something lacking since much later, in 1990, Munro arranged for a tombstone for her second child in Vancouver. This “dark child,” who “went without comfort / Without a word to make you human” returned in Munro’s unpublished poems (qtd. in Ross 53) and, more recently, in her 1998 volume of short stories again to recount Munro’s own dream. In “My Mother’s Dream” she speaks out in a ghostly voice full of pride for her mother’s courage to see face to face with traditional expectations towards women and choose a life where she answers the call to follow her artistic aspirations.

Yet, the story does not finish with a comforting sense of achievement—understood to refer to both the mother’s artistic achievement and the mother’s and child’s achievement to acknowledge, recognize, and appreciate each other as a real other at last. It ends with the now adolescent ghost-daughter excluded from the grown women’s—her mother’s and Ailsa’s—nightlong chats, looking over the fence to the place where the neighbors’ teenage daughters and their friends regularly pass their time, wishing that they would be afraid of her ghostly presence. What this last image, the adolescent girl experiencing exclusion from both adult and teenage companies and wishing that she could scare others, underlines is the same desire for acknowledgement that she struggled for as a baby.

Munro’s neo-gothic ghost-tale thus ends on a rather ambivalent note, all the more so because many of the stock gothic characters’ fate does not follow the conventions of the mode. The two-faced mother is neither punished, blamed, nor justified. The sexual seductress (Mrs. Schantz) is given a second chance to live happily with a husband who could be her son;

Iona is saved from a complete nervous breakdown by her talent, even artistry, in the bakery; and Ailsa continues to be efficient in both her work and her home without appearing to be as domineering as before, while Jill, the mother and Ailsa have “become, unaccountably, good friends” (339). What happens is that these women are ready to recognize others because they have learnt to see them in their contexts; in exchange, they also are seen in their own contexts and in their connections to others. This is how Munro writes beyond the ending of the female gothic plot: she writes her female characters into connections with one another.

## 6. Conclusion

I set out with the hypothesis that Munro's fiction of the 1990s belongs to the tertiary phase of the female gothic tradition both in its aesthetic practices and its ideological alignment. I have offered a close reading of several short stories from *Open Secrets* and *The Love of Good Woman* with a view to proving that (1) her narratives utilize fundamental female gothic conventions though in a revised form and that (2) they continue the female gothic project of negotiating the gender ideology of patriarchal western societies while pointing to the impasse the female gothic ran into by formulating its claims in the moral language of right and justice (Gilligan esp. 73, 174).

Since I did not seek to frame the gothicism of Munro's fiction solely in its regional roots, as is customary in Munro criticism, and neither did I conceive of the gothic as a genre of formula literature which presents a textual world that is dark, mysterious, and dangerous to female physical integrity, I felt the need to elucidate my understanding of the gothic by problematizing it *vis a vis* realism, the literary tradition Munro's fiction is customarily linked with.

By leaning on Moglen's revision of the history of the rise of the novel as the history of gender, Miles's reconceptualization of the gothic as a carnivalesque site for the representation of the weight the disparate ideologies of the eighteenth century put on the individual, and Hoeveler's re-interpretation of the female gothic as a fictional space in which the discourse of ideal femininity came to be solidified as one that does not challenge the underpinnings of patriarchal gender ideology but carves out a mode of existence within it that allows for the expression of women's desire for subjectivity, I argued that Munro's fiction of the 1990s is thoroughly located in the gothic, and within that, in the female gothic tradition both in its aesthetic practices and its ideological concerns.

I also argued that this kinship is not immediately visible because, (1) as befits writers working in the tertiary phase of a mode or a genre, several conventions have been consciously reformulated, and (2) the revised conventions problematize the female gothic remedy to gender inequities. Moreover, (3) the critical history of the gothic as well as (4) the canonizing discourse of Canadian literature in the 1970s and 1980s have directed attention away from considering Munro's fiction within the critical framework of the gothic. In this respect, it cannot be incidental that the three critics who have pointed to the gothic vision of her work come from an international academic community: Howells is an Australian working in Great Britain, Becker lives in Germany, and Szalay in Hungary. At the same time, discussing her work as part of the female gothic tradition accounts for its thematic and technical (narrative

techniques, figuration, generic indeterminacy, intertextuality, etc.) peculiarities registered in Munro criticism as “Munrovian.”

In Chapter 2 I pointed to the critical tradition of Munro’s fiction and argued that rather than question its ideological base critics have resolved the tension arising between their efforts to create a tradition of Canadian writing within a mode of high prestige and the peculiarities of Munro’s work by resorting to the model of supplementation. That is, *her* realist aesthetic practice supplements a canonical realist representational repertoire thematically (women’s lives), generically (including gossip, daydream, fantasy, autobiography, etc.), and in terms of narrative technique (a sophisticated use point of view, parallel structures, embedding, fragmentation, etc.) that results in a heightened form of realist aesthetic practice. I also pointed out some of the reasons behind the critics’ insistence by examining the critical discourse within which the prestige of realist aesthetic practices came to be established.

Next, I turned to the gothic and the female gothic and interpreted them as self-conscious carnivalesque sites that do not naturalize gender inequities but put into relief the social and psychic costs their cultural articulation entails. They do so by re-contextualizing patriarchal gender inequities, which leads to an inevitable challenge to the legitimacy of known narratives of origin provided characters want to survive. Female gothic texts in the Radcliffean tradition, in addition, create an alternative possible world that, on the one hand, does not discard the bipolar gender system of bourgeois ideology but that, on the other hand, narrows the distance between the two genders.

I inserted Munro’s fiction of the 1990s into this tradition arguing that it tells the female gothic paradigmatic story over and over again in which characters’ experience is the parabolic experience of gender but for one fundamental difference: her characters are led not only to challenging narratives of origin (geographical location, the small-town home, family history as family destiny, religion, one’s sex as gendered destiny) but to interrogating the female gothic solution also.

In Chapters 3 to 5 I examined Munro’s revision of major female gothic conventions that problematize the language of the female gothic that formulates its project as a matter of right and justice, i.e., it has developed structures that prove the heroine has a right to a reconfigured heterosexual relationship because she deserves it. In chapter 3 by investigating Munro’s revision of the female gothic convention of the bifurcation of the textual universe into two separate worlds, I pointed to the discourse of female heroic worth, which Munro systematically undermines propelled by the conviction that creating a safe (heterosexual, un-/bi-gendered) haven for worthy heroines as suggested by the happy ending formula robs them

of other, meaningful connections. In the discussion I highlighted the topoi of “seeing differently” (Wall 208), conscious worth, and redemptive knowledge, which Munro interrogates through the topoi of intentional blindness and complicitous knowledge, all challenging the heroines’ irreproachability that guarantees the female gothic happy ending. Munro’s neo-gothic happy ending is one that makes it possible for heroines to address the complexities of their lives rather than escape into the stasis that the alternate possible fantasy world of a heterosexual idyll represents.

In Chapter 4 I turned to the erotic plot of the female gothic double plot structure, arguing that Munro “writ[es] beyond the ending” (DuPlessis 4) of the paradigmatic female gothic narrative to experiment with alternative female life routes that come after the happy ending. I claimed that she directs attention to the happy ending as a device confirming female heroic worth, which only proves to what extent it is impossible to conceive of female subjectivity as independent of males. I highlighted the topoi of taming the husband and the pattern of behavior Hoeveler calls “professional femininity” by discussing short stories in which the performativity of gender is emphatically underlined. I claimed that Munro’s neo-gothic heroines opt out of the female gothic romance closure.

In Chapter 5 my focus fell on the mother-daughter bond that came to replace the fundamental female gothic topos of the Gothic Mother, a constitutive element of the female gothic quest/ambition plot. I argued that Munro’s fiction decidedly seeks to break with the inherited ambivalence towards the concept of motherhood as mediated by the figure of the Gothic Mother as well as with the female gothic technology of portioning out unwanted aspects of the patriarchal ideal femininity among other female monitory figures. I claimed that in Munro’s fiction the importance of female connections as constitutive relationships that escape the pitfalls of the discourse of female worth moves front and center. I also argued that Munro seeks to divorce the failure to live up to the dictates of the late-twentieth-century concept of ideal motherhood from the discourse of female pathology. Instead, she envisions an alternate possible world—in a female gothic fashion—where female characters live the female (neo-)gothic fantasy: heroines are autonomous and active agents of their lives as well as they exist in a network of complex relationships, both heterosexual and intergenerational-homosocial, which all foster female agency and subjectivity since their relationships are based on the ethic of care and responsibility (Gilligan esp. 171-74).

The results based on the close reading of individual narratives by enlisting a multifaceted theoretical arsenal corroborate my initial hypothesis that Munro’s fiction of the 1990s belongs to the female gothic tradition, though it is not uncritical of it, since I have established parallels between Munro’s fiction and the female gothic not only in matters formal

but ideological as well. At the same time, I have also made a mention of several further points of entry into the gothicism of Munro's fiction that are in need of elaboration but that could not be addressed in the present dissertation (generic indeterminacy, narrative techniques, dialogicity, self-reflexivity, intertextuality, the construction of the home and home place—Sowesto—as heterotopias, techniques of characterization, models of subjectification, etc.).

Besides repositioning Munro's fiction of the 1990s among the literary traditions, my research has brought the additional result of contributing a methodology that could be successfully applied not only to Munro's earlier and later works but to a vast body of fiction that negotiates expectations originating within the patriarchal ideology of gender vis à vis the demands of everyday life from women arising ever since the beginning of the twentieth century via popular art forms. It may be especially usefully applied to the study of women's literature in an English-speaking post-colonial setting that consciously positions itself in opposition to the "high" canonical tradition of English realist writing.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The word 'Munrovian' has become a catchword that refers not simply to the identity of the author but to the "mysterious" quality of her fiction also, although critics account for it in disparate ways. See W. R. Martin's *Alice Munro: Paradox and Parallel* (8, 36, 43), Ildikó de Papp Carrington's *Controlling the Uncontrollable: The Fiction of Alice Munro* (1989; 39-40); Magdalene Redekop's *Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro* (1992), Robert Thacker's "Mapping Munro: Reading the 'Clues'" (1999; 127); and Reingard Nischik's "(Un-)Doing Gender: Alice Munro, 'Boys and Girls' (1964)" (2007; 209).

<sup>2</sup> She comments on this volume: "It's pointless to go on if you don't take risks. While the stories in *Open Secrets* have elements of mystery and romance for example, themes which have always attracted readers, they do not satisfy in the same way as a traditional mystery or romance could. As I stated earlier, I wanted these stories to be open. I wanted to challenge what people want to know. Or expect to know. Or anticipate knowing. And as profoundly, what I think I know" (Munro qtd. in Howells, *Alice* 120).

<sup>3</sup> Whereas *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001) represents a return to Munro's familiar themes and methods, with only the outstanding closing story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" treading on new ground again, *Runaway* (2004) is daring in its themes and methods again. Between 2003 and 2006 three volumes collecting stories from Munro's early career were published in quick succession capitalizing on the critical and popular exposure her work of the 1990s received around the turn of the century. Her most recent volume *Too Much Happiness* (2009) was not considered for discussion as it did not appear in print during the research period.

<sup>4</sup> Carol L. Beran also notes that editorial alterations affect Munro's stories considerably. She discusses at length how significantly the fact that a story is published in a magazine changes the reading and the interpretative process on account of the text's embeddedness in editorial and advertising policies as reflected in alterations and in the marginalia ("Luxury" 225).

<sup>5</sup> The critics' choice of her instant classics are "Vandals," "A Wilderness Station," "Real Life," and "Carried Away" in *Open Secrets* and "The Love of a Good Woman," "The Children Stay," and "My Mother's Dream" in *The Love of a Good Woman*. Of these I will not discuss "A Wilderness Station" and "The Children Stay" presently because, although they also are written in a gothic mode, their discussion necessitates a different approach. For a discussion of "A Wilderness Station" read my "Scottish Protestant Religion and the Open Text: Muriel Spark's and Alice Munro's Two Narratives," which argues that the short story enters into a dialogue with James Hogg's gothic classic, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). However, its basic situation is highly reminiscent of one of Munro's early favorite readings, Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). Intertextual readings may also help readers to a better understanding of Munro's gothicism in the case of "The Children Stay," which reflects on Jean Anouilh's *Eurydice* (see Carrington's "Recasting" 191-203). I will not discuss "Save the Reaper" (1998), which rewrites Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find" while also referring to Lord Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shallott." John Bierhorst claims that "Before the Change," in turn, reflects on William Butler Yeats's "The Song of Wandering Aengus," while "My Mother's Dream" is a variant on the cruel mother theme found in Scottish ballads (646). For the ballads themselves read Frances James Child's *English and Scottish Ballads* (265-71).

<sup>6</sup> Especially discussions by Beverley J. Rasporich (104), Smaro Kamboureli (31-38), Helen Hoy ("Alice" 5-21), Barbara Godard ("Heirs" 43-71), Lorna Irvine (99-111), Redekop (2-35), and Coral Ann Howells (*Alice* 4-5, 105).

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Gittings called attention to the importance of origins in Munro's fiction in his essay "Constructing a Scots-Canadian Ground" (1997); ever since there have appeared allusions to Munro's Scottishness in critical writings. Especially her collection *The View From Castle Rock* (2006) encourages such investigations. Half of the stories address the region in Scotland where her ancestors emigrated from, and all accord great significance to the imaginative history of her family. This interest in her family's Scottish origins coupled with Canada's postcolonial legacy have secured a place for Munro in reference volumes on Scottish fiction (e.g.: Mack 232-33; Waterston 249-65; Dunn xxviii; Brown et al., 316; Gifford and McMillan 309-13).

<sup>8</sup> Thacker refers to Munro's gothicism, but he does not explain what he means by that ("Alice Munro's" 103); otherwise, he considers Munro first and foremost a regional writer working within the Canadian realist tradition. Duffy and Judith McCombs discuss a recent short story as gothic, though both conceive of its gothicism in different terms (Duffy 169-90; McCombs 327-48). Canadian writer Katherine Govier calls Munro "the Queen of Gothic" in her review of *The Love of a Good Woman*, but she does not explain her understanding of that epithet (86). Rasporich, Redekop, and Howells discuss Munro's earlier works. Howells's reading of *Open Secrets*, then published only recently, suggests that she does not reserve a gothic reading for the early stories exclusively though she has not addressed the gothicism of Munro's later works directly (Rasporich 134; Redekop 53-67; Howells, *Alice* 120-36). Carrington's reading of "A Wilderness Station" as a gothic story, by contrast, has opened up an entirely new approach to Munro's gothicism ("Double-Talking" 71-92).

<sup>9</sup> Howells outright calls Munro's gothic an Ontario gothic (*Private* 76; *Alice* 13, "Canadian" 105), just like Rasporich (139), and Becker (139). Margaret Atwood similarly identifies Sowesto as a gothic place whose regional history is registered in Munro's work ("Close" par. 5-7, 11). All refer to Munro's own comment about her birthplace: "The part of the country I come from is absolutely Gothic. You can't get it all down" (qtd. in Gibson 248).

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly enough, Howells has also pointed out in a recent study of Munro's *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001) that the stories in the volume "plot identity not as single and fixed but as a series of alternative histories hidden within individual subjects' life stories." Howells then continues to add, "These are identities always in process [ ... ] her stories suggest a radical ambiguity as to where this core of self might be located when its figurings are always partial and changing" (*Contemporary* 55). Thus, even though Munro works within the conventions of realism—since she maps the characters' identities through the coordinates of age, gender, class, and social relationships—her realism becomes "ambiguous" as she revises these coordinates in multiple ways (56). Yet, in this study, Howells does not point to the gothic as a "structure" to challenge Munro's realism.

<sup>11</sup> Critics often refer to the gothic with the rather indefinite terms: mode or form. Mode is defined by the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* as: "Sometimes approximately synonymous with kind and form, and related to genre. It is associated with method, manner and style. Some incline to describe science fiction as a mode rather than a genre. Perhaps, too, the horror story may be regarded as a mode rather than a genre" (515). Form is defined in juxtaposition to substance and the dictionary adds: "A secondary meaning of form is the *kind* of work—the genre to which it belongs" (Cuddon 327). Definitions of the gothic are even vaguer: David Mikics defines it as "a literary genre trading in terror and fantasy" (137); John Anthony Cuddon and Claire Preston define the gothic as "a type of romance very popular from the 1760s onwards until the 1820s" (355); Lewis Turco associates the gothic with the literature of sensibility establishing their difference by claiming that the gothic "refers to literature that took a morbid if elegant interest in the decaying, the macabre,



and the grotesque” (25-26), while *The Sterling Dictionary of Literary Terms* explains it as “any story characterised by gloomy settings, violent action, themes of terror and suspense and a pervading sense of death, decay and degeneration” (Sharma 62). It is *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* and *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* only that explain the gothic in its wider context as a mode invented in response to the rise of the novel (C. W. E. Bigsby in Childs and Fowler 99-101; R. Fowler 105-06).

<sup>12</sup> Howells summarizes the Canadian gothic as follows: “Residual phenomena haunt every nation’s literature, though as this brief sampling has shown, there are distinctive features of Canadian Gothic which emerge out of its colonial history, its traditions of regional difference, and its ethnically and racially diverse postcolonial present. Canada has always been a borderline case (like so many Gothic protagonists), colonized by two European nations, now officially bilingual and for a long time strategically deaf to the other voices (non-English or French) inside its borders, and overshadowed by its powerful neighbour to the south. The Canadian trope of unhomeliness [ ... ] resonates through its Gothic fictions. Sublime landscapes are refigured differently here [ ... ]. Though there are no feudal castles and ruined monasteries nor decadent Southern mansions, nevertheless those traditionally Gothic spaces are transformed into humbler forms of entrapment in unhomely towns and claustrophobic small town, while city streets become psychological labyrinths inhabited by dissident and alienated outsiders. Wilderness Gothic may be *the* Canadian mode but even that is being constantly refigured, for the Gothic is a shapeshifting genre and peculiarly appropriate to Canada’s constant revisioning of its national narrative and its own (or disowned) history. And it is Atwood the Canadian literary icon who gives perhaps the best definition of Gothic as ‘the lure of the unmentionable—the mysterious, the buried, the forgotten, the discarded, the taboo’ [Atwood 2005: 218]” (“Canadian” 112-13).

<sup>13</sup> The first Canadian bestseller was Maria Monk’s *Awful Disclosures* (1836), set in Catholic Montreal. It was this volume, a “nun’s tale” inspired by Matthew Gregory Lewis’s monk’s tale, that “in some ways instated—literary popular culture in Canada and the United States in the early part of the nineteenth century” (Blair 173).

<sup>14</sup> For an extended discussion see Margot Northey’s *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction*.

<sup>15</sup> Kate Higginson explains: “Rape has long been used allegorically to figure threats to the national body; during the late nineteenth century the condition of the new Canadian Dominion was frequently represented in visual and print media by a young, besieged woman” (35).

<sup>16</sup> Among them Robertson Davies commented as follows: “I am a Canadian, and in this country, which is thought to be so dull, the grotesque and the strange are very present, and Gothic goings-on are to be found in every part of Canada” (Davies 254). Munro’s comment on her Canada has already been quoted (see note 9). In turn, Atwood’s whole oeuvre attests to a fascination with the gothic (Cooke 11).

<sup>17</sup> Atwood writes that Canada has always been “unknown territory for the people who live in it, and I’m not talking about the fact that you may not have taken a trip to the Arctic or to Newfoundland. ... I’m talking about Canada as a state of mind, as a space you inhabit not just in your body but in your head. It’s the kind of space in which we find ourselves lost” (*Survival* 18). Justin D. Edwards formulates Canadian identity in similar terms: “the externalized *unheimlich* space that cannot be settled becomes internalized as part of the geography of the self. This means that Canadian conceptions of identity take place on the ground of indecipherability, a place in which the subject is rarely in control of the boundaries between inside and outside, self and other, which would secure a stable sense of identity” (xx-xxi).

<sup>18</sup> Belsey defines knowingness as “the sense of possessing the truth, that holds the subject so precariously in place” (“Subject” 80). The concept is closely linked to classic realism, the emergence of which coincides with industrial capitalism. Classic realism constructs the reader in such a way that the reader and the narrator share certain “obvious” truths. As if the reader were watching through a window what real people do without the narrator (the author’s mask) intruding upon the scene. Of course, the reader too is free to make his or her judgments about the author-narrator’s interpretations, yet the position of identification as based on shared assumptions forestalls such an act. Classic realism achieves this in three ways: by “illusionism” (the creation of an impression that reality is reproduced, which is not mimicry), by closure and the resulting “hierarchy of discourses” (“the truth”); and distance (the reader assumes that he or she is the source of understanding). Belsey writes: “The reader is invited to perceive and judge the ‘truth’ of the text, the coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation. This model of intersubjective communication, of shared understanding of a text which represents the world, is the guarantee not only of the truth of the text but of the reader’s existence as an autonomous and knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects. In this way classic realism constitutes an ideological practice in addressing itself to readers as subjects, interpellating them in order that they freely accept their subjectivity and their subjection. [ ... ] By these means classic realism offers the position of knowingness which is also a position of identification with the narrative voice. To the extent that the story first constructs, and then depends for its intelligibility, on a set of assumptions shared between narrator and reader, it confirms both the transcendent knowingness of the reader-as-subject and the ‘obviousness’ of the shared truths in question” (“Constructing” 52-53).

<sup>19</sup> This usage is in conformity with Ann Williams’s terminology (*Art* 11).

<sup>20</sup> These stories are: “Bardon Bus” (1977), “Eskimo” (1985), “Friend of My Youth” (1990), and “Hold Me Fast, Don’t Let Me Pass” (1990).

<sup>21</sup> Giorgio is led to this conclusion by reading contemporary European narratives by women, which offers her a broad picture of the mother-daughter theme in literature (esp. “Mothers” 32-33).

<sup>22</sup> Munro herself commented upon the story of “The Peace of Utrecht” as “her first really painful autobiographical story [ ... ] the first time [she] wrote a story that tore [her] up” (Munro qtd. in Metcalf 58) because of its engagement with her mother’s memory. The figure of Munro’s mother kept lingering in several other stories as well, such as “The Ottawa Valley” (1974), “Home” (1974), “The Progress of Love” (1985), and “Friend of My Youth” (1990).

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Franzen has written aptly about the impossibility of summarizing a Munro story. He writes: “I want to keep quoting, and not just little bits but whole passages, because it turns out that what my capsule summary requires, at a minimum, in order to do justice to the story—the ‘things within things,’ [ ... ]—is exactly what Munro herself has already written on the page. The only adequate summary of the text is the text itself” (4).

<sup>24</sup> W.R. Martin unequivocally claims that “Alice Munro is thought of as a realist” (*Alice* 60) and argues that she is part of the “great central tradition of English literature” (206). Morris Dickstein similarly cites Munro as one of the old masters of scrupulous realism (199). Canitz and Seamon argue that “[w]hile Munro is certainly a realist, she is not naive” (68). See also histories of Canadian literature and reference volumes cited earlier (e.g.: Klinck 49; Keith 155, 161; Moss, “Introduction” 8; Woodcock, *Northern* 132; Stouck 269; Arkin and Schollar 832; Andrew Gurr qtd. in Holland 116; Magill 3395; Pryke and Soderlund 294; J. E. Miller 228; ; Huggan 221; New, *History* 238; Creelman 175; Kruk 93; Fiamengo 251; Lawn 576; Wishart).

<sup>25</sup> Ernst Bloch and Bertold Brecht insist in their debate with Georg Lukács about realism that in the era of capitalism it needs new techniques to represent reality; the mere recycling of nineteenth-century realist methods to mediate reality is not enough since experience became fragmentary as individuals grew alienated owing to the reconfiguration of social relation under the capitalist regime. Thus, to their mind, the experimentation in modernist techniques, like the fragmentation of form, its subjectivism as it is shown in stream-consciousness, for instance, constitutes a modernist-realist venture (Bloch 16 *passim*; Brecht 68 *passim*; Lukács 28 *passim*; see also Leslie 125 *passim*, esp. 125-27). Martin implies that Munro's modernism dwells in this modernist-realist impulse.

<sup>26</sup> In fact, Garson concludes that the figure is exceptionally useful for epic, realist, modernist, and postmodernist projects as well (62-63).

<sup>27</sup> Several critics' argument that Munro is a realist writer because she records female experience in a neglected corner of the world follows this line of argumentation. Rasporich refers to the inclusion of gossip, i.e., women's unheard stories, as part of Munro's realist enterprise for the same reason (89-120).

<sup>28</sup> Although a study of what Watt's "formal realism" signifies is beyond the scope of this study, I note that the concept as his pivotal statement about what constitutes realism is hotly debated since it is not clear what it refers to. It can be interpreted as (1) a "process of mimesis," (2) "a goal of mimesis," (3) or a "result" (Schwarz 105) also. Watt defines "formal realism" as follows: it is formal "because the term realism does not here refer to any special literary doctrine or purpose, but only to a set of narrative procedures [ ... ] Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that [ ... ] the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its readers with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms" (32). Watt also states that it is "the lowest common denominator of the novel genre as a whole" (34). I use it in reference to the individualization of character, the particularization of time and place, portraying "life by time" (Forster), and a referential use of language.

<sup>29</sup> Mc Keon argues that in the second half of the eighteenth century more and more people suspected that the novel is no more than "a new way of romancing." He adds, that "[b]y the latter part of the eighteenth century, readers were already finding that the new genre had become *too* conventional" ("Prose" 244; original emphasis).

<sup>30</sup> McKeon writes: "The new genre in search of its own rules had quickly become so rule-bound as to appear utterly formulaic. One method contemporaries used to register this predictability was the trope of the 'recipe' to make a novel. In one of these recipes, the prospective author is charged to 'go to Middle Row, Holborn [ ... ] buy any old forgotten novel, the older the better; give new names to the personages and places, reform the dates, modernize such circumstances as may happen to be antiquated [ ... ] All this may be done with a pen, in the margin of the printed book, without the trouble of transcribing the whole' (*Monthly Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 5 (July 1791), Williams, p. 374; for other recipes see Williams, p. 368, Taylor, pp. 45-8). The recipe trope underscores the interdependence of writing and its 'consumption' in the contemporary literary scene; it also suggests that the crisis was seen to extend beyond this particular genre. In 1728, Alexander Pope had used the recipe trope to reflect upon the modern epic poem and its entanglement in the economy of supply and demand that was seen to control the emergent literary marketplace" ("Prose" 244-45).

<sup>31</sup> McKeon singles out Daniel Defoe's *A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal* (1705) as an example. Here Defoe provides circumstantial evidence and private testimonies to prove that the extra-sensory has a reality ("Generic" 387).

<sup>32</sup> This is also underlined by the writer's insistence on his or her being a mere scribbler and not the originator of the stories. The writer is liable to attribute lesser significance to his or her role by emphasizing that he or she simply transcribes the events.

<sup>33</sup> Naïve empiricists, like Defoe, early in the century struggled with the concept of truth, which is also shown by the "true relations" narratives and their approach of self-conscious circumstantial evidence (McKeon, *Origins* 120-21). With *Moll Flanders* (1722) Defoe wrestled mightily, McKeon states, because of his claim that she was a real person, which she obviously was not (*Origins* 454). He could accommodate his doubts about writing a fictional life only by attributing a moral purpose to the novel.

<sup>34</sup> McKeon comments on virtue in the realistic novel as follows: "This basic plot has its pattern in the Christian, and especially the protestant, notion of an 'aristocracy of grace' whose members are most likely to differ markedly from those of the worldly aristocracy. But in the novel, the pattern tends to be secularized—not only in the obvious way of that internal 'grace' becomes 'virtue,' and its external reward is found on earth rather than in heaven, but also in that ultimate responsibility for the reward of virtue subtly shifts from the goodness of God to the virtuous self" ("Prose" 19).

<sup>35</sup> Preceding the eighteenth century, metaphysical forces also played a crucial role in the constitution of the subject beside social and historical forces. The disengagement from these followed the pattern described by McKeon above.

<sup>36</sup> Arnold E. Davidson has advanced this argument, who refers to Robert Lecker maintaining that the Canadian "canon is the conservative product of the conservative [academic] institution that brought it to life." Therefore, it is concerned with nationalism and with naming, which exhibits to what extent "the canonizers" are preoccupied "with history and historical placement; an interest in topicality, mimesis, verisimilitude, and documentary presentation; a bias in favor of the native over the cosmopolitan; a concern with traditional over innovative forms; a pursuit of the created before the uncreated." Thus, Lecker concludes, those who canonized Canadian literature prefer "texts that are ordered, orderable, safe" (Lecker qtd. in A. Davidson 578).

<sup>37</sup> Michael Taylor detects anti-Americanism even in Munro's language use, and calls it "peculiarly Canadian" because it is "repelled by the crassness of modern-day North-American commercial culture" (131). Surveying critical writings on Munro, Thacker points out that Canadianness is a crucial element in her criticism. He also calls attention to what extent Canadian critics seem to have purposefully neglected influence studies on Munro's fiction because she made it clear early in her career that her influences are mainly American ("Anxiety" 133-34). For a discussion of the anti-Americanism of criticism see Cynthia Sugars's "Noble Canadians, Ugly Americans: Anti-Americanism and the Canadian Ideal in British Readings of Canadian Literature."

<sup>38</sup> Molly Hite argues that the result of feminist critics' effort at reading fiction by women as autobiographical enforces the view that women's writing is closer to experience and invites discussion not in terms of artistry but the author's biography. This view is rooted in an exaggerated theory of mimesis, which in the end works to downplay conscious intent on the part of women writers (14).

<sup>39</sup> Rasporich, Howells, and Godard insist that Munro is not an autobiographical writer lest her writing seem less conscious, and hence less artistic. Realism is not to be confused with authenticity to the writer's personal experience; it is not born with an engagement with the real, as several early commentators suggested. They

suggest that Munro uses personal experience and transforms it into realist art. In addition, Munro also critiques realism for not doing what she does: she provides a portrait of women's "real life."

<sup>40</sup> See Watt's reference to the misrepresentation of realism as a form of art that deals with "low subjects" (10).

<sup>41</sup> This crisis in values is what Heble designates as Munro's "paradigmatic discourse" (14) and Nunes as her "meta-stable ontologies" (11).

<sup>42</sup> Godard calls attention to a scene in *Lives*, where Del sounds out words and stretches them to the point of unrecognizability ("Heirs" 43-45). She then claims that "Munro's concern about the emptiness is language" (45) shows most poignantly in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, where the protagonist, Rose, a version of Munro's self-portrait, "wondered what the words were like, when she held them in her mind" (Munro qtd. in Godard, "Heirs" 45). She also notes that Munro plays a lot with words having a double meaning (45-46). This fascination with semantics is, in fact, characteristic of her recent fiction as well.

<sup>43</sup> All these are words with which critics have described the non-realism of Munro's fiction: "mysterious" (Martin 10) and "strange" (Martin 141); "ambiguous" (Irvine, *Sub/Version* 95); "uncontrollable" (Carrington, *Controlling*); "unfathomable" (Hoy, "'Dull'" 1); "[f]antastic" (Howells, *Alice* 15; Godard, "Heirs" 45).

<sup>44</sup> Carter's comment relates to how she accounts for the phenomenon that once marginal genres and modes have come to dominate over canonical ones, which reflects on the disappearance of normative boundaries. Their disappearance, she suggests, has led to the refiguring of social transgression as one form of permitted social activity. See also Beate Neumeier's (141-51) and Fred Botting's studies ("Aftergothic" 285-86).

<sup>45</sup> Although David Punter and Glennis Byron's characterization of the gothic sounds deprecating at first, they definitely do not share in the contempt of several early critics, who declared that the gothic represents "a schizoid phenomenon" (Kiely qtd. in Miles, "What" 181).

<sup>46</sup> Discussing the gothic in relation to the realist novel is not without precedence. The gothic has invited many critics to study it as a narrative structure and connect it to the development of the realist novel. J. M. S. Tompkins, for example, claims that it was the well-sustained gothic plot with its multiple agents, motives, and plots that taught novelists to write a complicated, though compact, story. This practically means that Tompkins sees the gothic as a crucial step in the development of the novel from "shapeless" sentimental fiction into what the novel was before its supposed death in the twentieth century (qtd. in Howard 21). Although the connection between the sentimental, the gothic and the realist novel is a lot more complex and a lot less straightforward than that, the gothic has long been seen as a set of generic conventions kept curiously tight.

<sup>47</sup> Walpole claims in the preface to the second edition with full awareness that he intended to create something novel and in that he followed Shakespeare and not the French classicists: "The result of all I have said, is, to shelter my own daring under the canon of the brightest genius this country, at least, has produced. I might have pleaded that, having created a new species of romance, I was at liberty to lay down what rules I thought fit for the conduct of it: but I should be more proud of having imitated, however faintly, weakly, and at a distance, so masterly a pattern, than to enjoy the entire merit of invention, unless I could have marked my work with genius, as well as with originality. Such as it is, the public have honoured it sufficiently, whatever rank their suffrages allot to it" (xii).

<sup>48</sup> Walpole calls them romances because the French *roman* was used to refer then to virtually any long fiction written in prose (Hogle, "Gothic" 216).

<sup>49</sup> The "Introduction" to an 1811 edition of *The Castle of Otranto* explains: "it was his object to unite the marvelous turn of incident, and imposing tone of chivalry, exhibited in the ancient romance, with the accurate

exhibition of human character, and contrast of feelings and passions, which is, or ought to be, delineated in the modern novel” (xiii). It also adds: “It was, therefore, the author’s object, not merely to excite surprise and terror, by the introduction of supernatural agency, but to wind up the feelings of his reader till they became for a moment *identified with those of ruder age*, [ ... ] the difficulty of attaining this nice *accuracy* may be best estimated by comparing the Castle of Otranto with the less successful efforts of later writers; where amid all their attempts to assume the tone of antique chivalry, something occurs in every chapter so decidedly incongruous, as at once reminds us of an ill-sustained masquerade, in which ghosts, knight-errant, magicians, and damsels gent, are all equipped in hired dresses from the same warehouse in Tavistock-street” (xxi-xxii; emphasis mine). Thus Walpole’s intention was to create a verisimilitude to the beliefs, and ultimately the human character, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Hogle explains: “Given the mainly aristocratic romance of quests, long separated lovers, recovered nobility, and occasionally divine intervention has by now given way for the increasingly literate middle class to fictions of domestic life and individual development more suited to the growing ideology of ‘self-made men’ (see Watt 2001), Walpole proposed to ‘blend the two kinds or romance’” (Hogle, “Gothic” 216).

<sup>50</sup> Walpole claims in his preface: “The very impatience which a reader feels, while delayed, by the coarse pleasantries of vulgar actors, from arriving at the knowledge of the important catastrophe he expects, perhaps heightens, certainly proves that he has been artfully interested in, the depending event. But I had higher authority than my opinion for this conduct. That great master of nature, SHAKESPEARE, was the model I copied. [ ... ] Is not the eloquence of Antony, the nobler and affectedly-unaffected oration of Brutus, artificially exalted by the rude bursts of nature from the mouths of their auditors? These touches remind one of the Grecian sculptor, who, to convey the idea of a Colossus, within a dimension of a seal, inserted a little boy measuring his thumb” (“Preface” viii).

<sup>51</sup> Till 1800 it was published in 21 editions (W. S. Lewis 158).

<sup>52</sup> Aspiring writers could rightly hope for great rewards if their work resonated with their readers. Kyla Ward comments on Radcliffe’s success: “Let’s face it. In the 1790s, Anne Radcliffe was Stephen King. For publication in 1794 of her fourth and best known novel, Anne Radcliffe received five hundred pounds; for the fifth, *The Italian*, six hundred. As an indication, for *Northanger Abbey* Jane Austen received ten. Not ten hundred, just ten” (par. 15-16).

<sup>53</sup> Even Scott was accused of selling his talent to the devil by a contemporary reviewer, who claimed that Scott intended to appeal to female readers by employing “the machinery of a bad German novel ... images from the novels of Mrs. Ratcliffe [sic] and her imitators” (qtd. in Gamer 34). Similar arguments, such as the recipe trope, were used to condemn the novel tradition as well. See note 30.

<sup>54</sup> It is still debated whether the gothic is conservative or progressive/radical (not identical with McKeon’s progressivism). Punter claims that it is impossible to decide which, because in fact it is both. He attributes the rise of the gothic in his *The Literature of Terror* to the rise of the middle-classes as consumers, who titillated between the past and the contemporary (15). Cannon Schmitt argues similarly in his *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality* (23-24). On the one hand, the feudal past with its rigid hierarchies was unwanted, but capitalist society alike came soon to be seen in a negative light: consumerist society had similarly undesirable features. This resulted in the creation of conflicted novels that simultaneously attacked and promoted both aristocratic and bourgeois values. A case to the point is Radcliffe’s fiction, which has been called both progressive and conservative, feminist and anti-feminist, and supportive of aristocratic and

bourgeois ideologies (Schmitt, "Techniques" 855) at the same time. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Radcliffe's gothic bestseller, Madame Cheron's, the villainess's home, for example, displays the worst of both: it is both aristocratically and peremptorily lavish while it also displays contemporary consumerist obsession with fashion, luxury, and material wealth. But Emily, the heroine, also displays conflicting values: on the one hand her aspirations are familial as expected, on the other, her deeds bespeak a tendency towards initiative—which is not a modest "feminine" value.

<sup>55</sup> He quotes Robert Kiely, who in his seminal study *The Romantic Novel in England* (1972) claims that Walpole's, Radcliffe's, Clara Reeve's and Lewis's gothic novels, "the romantic novels," are "a schizoid phenomenon" (Kiely qtd. in Miles, "What" 181). Miles implies that Kiely calls them "schizoid" because he tries to make sense of them within the framework of the (realist) novel tradition. He comments on Kiely's evaluation: "Kiely's monstrous metaphor was indeed apt, for the salient feature of the Romantic novel appears to be its failure to conform to and remain within accustomed boundaries. The generic boundaries—the seam lines—remain, just badly stitched together. A gender inversion and displacement is also, obviously, at work. The main point about the monster's monstrosity, and this is something its popular representations accentuate, is that it bears the marks of Dr. Frankenstein's poor sewing skills. If the monster is monstrous because a male has transgressed onto female territory, with sewing as a metonym for birth, then the novel is "schizoid" because women have trespassed onto male terrain, the realist novel of Richardson and Fielding. Just as Frankenstein makes a botch of the birthing skills he has unnaturally encroached upon, so women novelists make a similar mess of bringing novels into the world" ("What" 181).

<sup>56</sup> Miles explains the change, or rather changes, in various ways. First, he refers to Jürgen Habermas's thesis about the birth of the public sphere as an ideal space to deliberate matters pertaining to the public in the eighteenth century which decayed by the end of the century largely owing to the rise of the commercial media. The decay, which Habermas paints as corruption, led to the sharp division between the public and the private sphere. Miles also cites the historical changes in production practices, as well as the move from a public visual culture to a private verbal culture. All this is reflected in the invention of the free indirect discourse (championed by Austen), which Miles reads in John Bender's rendering as "a discursive event duplicating the carceral principle of Bentham's panopticon" ("What" 190). Miles explains what he means by reflecting on Bender's and Dorrit Cohn's insights: "Bender argues that the development of free indirect discourse in the early Romantic novel is a discursive event duplicating the carceral principle of Bentham's panopticon, that is to say, in Foucault's phrase, of 'power through transparency' (154). Just as the prisoner in Bentham's imaginary structure enjoys an illusory privacy but is secretly watched, so the character constructed out of free indirect speech acts as if he, or she, were independent, but is actually governed by a hidden narrator. Elizabeth Bennet may appear to the reader as an autonomous character but is really controlled by the narrative voice that observes and represents her. For Bender, there is a structural homology between the novelist's new way of imagining character and Bentham's way of conceiving penal servitude, an homology determined by the discursive realities of the late Enlightenment" (190).

<sup>57</sup> The connection between psychic disorder and the gothic looks back on a long critical history. It started with the Marquis de Sade's comments, who refers to the gothic novel as an adequate form to represent the spiritual imbalance created by the French Revolution. Kiely's attitude to the gothic quoted by Miles above (note 39) is similarly based on thinking of the gothic as a psychological mode. From the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-eighties the dominant critical view held that the gothic is coexistent with the traumatization of the human psyche.

Psychological and psychoanalytical gothic criticism claims that the breakdown of traditional social systems, whether caused by social or historical changes, led to psychological instabilities within the individual. These instabilities demanded a safety valve through which individuals could negotiate their anxieties—the irrational and the institutionally unsanctioned, the gothic world of nightmare and the extreme states of mind, which make a frequent appearance in the gothic, thus are manifestations of the psyche in turbulent times (Heilman 131). This view led to the perception that the gothic is in fact a predecessor to the Freudian account of the unconscious (MacAndrew 1). William Patrick Day for instance concludes that the gothic is the manifestation of fear and anxiety, and as such, it responds to problems of selfhood and identity (5-6, 14, 20).

More recently, however, Robert Young argued in his “Freud’s Secret: *The Interpretation of Dreams* Was a Gothic Novel” that Freud’s work itself is a gothic novel. The uncanny, for example, functions as a mystery tale within Freud’s gothic narrative; but Freud, in addition to gothic elements, makes use of the conventions of detective fiction as well (215; see also Day 177-90; Castle, *Female* 140-67). Also, some see the gothic to intrude into the very discourse of literary theory itself (Edmundson 40-41).

<sup>58</sup> DeLamotte also explains what she means by tragic gothic: “Tragic Gothic romance, on the other hand, tells the story of hero-journeys that fail to work. In these plots, the threshold is crossed initially for the wrong reasons, and the knowledge discovered in the dark alien world is such that it renders a return to daylight world meaningless or impossible” (*Perils* 54). Hoeveler also distinguishes between comic and tragic patterns but she sees their difference to dwell in how they respond to the inescapability of “the capitalist body politic” (*Gothic* 16). Whereas the comic pattern responds by repression, by fantasizing about a bucolic family in a static paradise, which endorses the ideals of white, middle-class femininity, the tragic one responds by death. Central to the comic pattern is the valorization of a heterosexual ideal in which the sexes complement each other; while, in contrast, the tragic pattern “denies the viability of heterosexuality, rejects the reproductive female body, and explodes the work through the imagery of gender warfare” (17). If “the novelist employs repression, then we know ourselves to be reading a work in the realm of the ‘melodramatically comic’ female gothic; if she imagines death as the only escape, then we know ourselves to be reading a work situated in the ‘melodramatically tragic’ female gothic tradition” (*Gothic* 16), she concludes.

<sup>59</sup> Howells argues that Del’s recognition in *Lives* that her reality looks entirely different from another perspective is emblematic of Munro’s “double vision.” She writes: “There is ‘our world,’ the solid familiar world which Del knows in her parents’ house, and there is Uncle Benny’s world where ordinariness seems to be refracted through a distorting mirror, yet both seem to be the representations of the same place. Like overlapping maps of the same territory, their doubleness undermines any singular interpretation of place or event. Told from Del’s point of view, the stories make connections between different perceptions of reality, slipping from everyday ordinariness into imagined worlds and the hidden topography of fantasy” (*Alice* 31).

<sup>60</sup> Becker argues that Del learns through her dreams, nightmares, and others’ stories told by themselves or others, that there is an other world “alongside our world [ ... ] in that world people could go down in quicksand, be vanquished by ghosts or terrible ordinary cities; luck and wickedness were gigantic and unpredictable; nothing was deserved, anything might happen” (Munro qtd. in Becker 133-34). Becker concludes that people’s languages, her younger brother’s world, religion, and love as well, are similar worlds alongside (134).

<sup>61</sup> The Byronic, two-faced gothic hero appeared in nineteenth-century gothic fiction and has become a staple figure since. Williams claims that male villains since Milton’s Satan have always been duplicitous: inconsistent, two-faced and insincere, but female gothicists have transformed this “flaw” into his merit. At the beginning he is



two-faced only as a result of the heroine's confusion and misinterpretation (or her imagination). By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, he is transformed into virtual doubleness in that he is both fallen and noble, imposingly masculine in stature and feminine in his capacity for feeling. In Williams's rendering: "The details of this character's appearance are consistent from one example to the next. He seems 'fallen,' though of apparently noble origins. He is tall and imposingly masculine [ ... ] His eye is always piercing, penetrating. [ ... ] Most insistent, however, is this figure's duality—the perceived incongruity of inner and outer, present and past, his paradoxical, deceptively mixed nature. His masculine strength, even harshness, masks a conventionally 'feminine' capacity for intense feeling. [ ... ] Indeed, a capacity for feeling in this conventional man of action is this character's most potent source of mystery" (*Art* 143-44).

<sup>62</sup> This is another reminder that Munro consciously associates this figure with Byron, who has given his name to the Byronic gothic hero. As a side note, Byron and the English Romanticists in general, especially the Shelleys, are favorite figures in Munro's fiction often appearing in hardly disguised ways (e.g., in "The Albanian Virgin" and in "Before the Change").

<sup>63</sup> The gothic otherworld of Ladner's land is described as follows: "But when you crossed the road—as Liza is doing now, trotting on the gravel—when you cross into Ladner's territory, it's like coming into a world of different and distinct countries. There is the marsh country, which is deep and jungly, full of botflies and jewelweed and skunk cabbage. A sense there of tropical threats and complications. Then the pine plantation, solemn as a church, with its boughs and needled carper, including whispering. And the dark rooms under the downswept branches of cedars—entirely shaded and secret rooms with a bare earth floor. In different places the sun falls differently and in some places not at all. In some places the air is thick and private, and in other places you feel an energetic breeze. Certain walks impose decorum and certain stones are set a jump apart so that they call out for craziness. Here are the scenes of serious instruction where Ladner taught them how to tell a hickory tree from a butternut and a star from a planet, and places where they have run and hollered and hung from branches and performed all sort of rash stunts. And places where Liza thinks there is a bruise on the ground, a tickling and shame in the grass.

*P. D. P.*

*Squeegey-boy.*

*Rub-a-dub-dub.*" (Munro, "Vandals" 291-92).

<sup>64</sup> Note the similarity of Peter Parr and Peter Pan, and their refusal to grow up.

<sup>65</sup> "Well, I am not an educator," said Ladner. "I do not give a fuck about your teenagers, and the last thing I want is a bunch of louts shambling around my property smoking cigarettes and leering like half-wits. I don't know where you got the impression that what I've done here I've done as a public service, because that is something in which I have zero interest. Sometimes I let people go through but they're the people I decide on'" (Munro, "Vandals" 267-68).

<sup>66</sup> The cue to focus on Munro's visuality and compare her fiction with photography was provided by Munro's own narratorial and authorial comments. Mary Conde has collected several stories in which photography provides a framework of reference, e.g.: "The Ottawa Valley," "Winter Wind," "The Flats Road," "Memorial," "Providence," "Pictures of the Ice," "Lichen" (Conde 98-106).

<sup>67</sup> As Wall succinctly puts it: "From the start, Radcliffe was considered a pioneer in the art (or excess) of description" (208). For an unsympathetic critique see for instance David S. Durant's evaluation: "Mrs. Radcliffe [ ... ] had almost no capacity to invent plots. [ ... ] She lacked, too, any great skill at making her characters

deep or real" (12), which point is explained by her love of scenery description. Durant explains: "A heroine on the brink of grave danger will pause to share with us some pages—or at least long paragraphs—of word painting [ ... ] As we are shown these settings, we come to writhe in expectation which almost overwhelms suspense. These scenes are not merely adjuncts of horror; [ ... ] The reader knows that these prose pictures are artistic, but he may still be bothered [ ... ] At their worst, Mrs. Radcliffe's novels seem almost as much tour guides as Gothic thrillers" (5-6). Even the first generation of female gothic critics interpreted the primacy of visuality as "a feminine substitute for the picaresque" (Rasporich 139; see also Moers's "traveling heroinism," *Literary* 126), which provided female readers closed into their home the opportunity to travel in their imagination as armchair travelers without offending propriety. Radcliffe, so to say, included long passages about mountains and shores in her novels to give some breathing space for women shut into their homes. As it has been recovered, Radcliffe in fact used contemporary travel writing to compose much of her scenic writing. As a side note, she has also been severely criticized for relying rather too heavily on other travelers' descriptions, only slightly modified, in both her novels and her own travel writing (Wall 208).

<sup>68</sup> I do not argue that Munro inherited the tendency to the visual from Radcliffe. Rather, Radcliffe influenced subsequent female writers in their daring to look at background not simply as authenticating devices of verisimilitude. Munro acknowledged several times the immense influence that Montgomery's novels made on her, many of which also feature female protagonists who insist on infusing reality with imagination, as for instance Anne in *Anne of Green Gables*.

<sup>69</sup> Radcliffe constructs the scene when Emily first sees Udolpho: "Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle [ ... ] it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls [ ... ] Silent, lonely, sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene [ ... ] and Emily continued to gaze [ ... ] The extent and darkness of these tall woods *awakened* terrific images *in her mind* [ ... ] *she saw, she judged* [ ... ] Beyond these all was lost in the obscurity of the evening [ ... ] Emily gazed with awe" (Radcliffe, *The Mysteries* 226-27; see also Wall 213; emphasis mine). Emily does not only gaze but *sees* also as she is awakened to judgement.

<sup>70</sup> See Rich's *Of Woman Born*, Hirsch's *The Mother-Daughter Plot*, Barbara Johnson's "My Monster/Myself" (241), and Modleski (33). A more detailed discussion follows in chapter 5.

<sup>71</sup> Two excerpts from the short story are indicative of how both heroines have participated in Ladner's abuse: "She [Bea] had many jobs to learn [ ... ] Other things she had to learn concerned what he would say and wouldn't say. It seemed that she had to be cured of all her froth and vanity and all her old notions of love.

*One night I got into his bed and he did not take his eyes from his book or move or speak a word to me even when I crawled out and returned to my own bed, where I fell asleep almost at once because I think I could not bear the shame of being awake.*

*In the morning he got into my bed and all went as usual.*

*I come up against blocks of solid darkness.*

She learned, she changed. Age was a help to her. Drink also" (Munro, "Vandals" 274; original emphasis). Also: "Liza herself couldn't have described to anybody what he was like. In the secret life she had with him, what was terrible was always funny, badness was mixed up with silliness, you always had to join in with dopey faces and voices pretending he was a cartoon monster. You couldn't get out of it, or even want to, any more than you could stop an invasion of pins and needles" (289-90).

<sup>72</sup> As a side note, in one of Munro's early and unpublished stories there already appeared a Mr. Willens, who was a Sunday School superintendent. Thacker claims that the story itself, "Story for Sunday" is interesting only for the way it commingles the present and the past ("Clear" 37-38).

<sup>73</sup> Although Duffy also believes that the plot focusing on Enid and the subplot of the boys' finding of the body cohere around thematic and symbolic concerns, in his rendering, the story focuses on the corruption of the body. The story, he notes, "reeks of semiwashed bodies, with the dead and the dying, of soiled stockings, of greasy frying pans, of sour milk and stale food, of dried semen and feverish sweat. The body here is," he continues by referring to St. Paul, "sown in corruption" (182). The three boys and their families all serve to illustrate the ailing and corrupt body: Cece must defend himself from both his miserable mother's pain and his father's alcoholic assaults; the misfortunes of Jimmy's family are rooted in his father's having been crippled by polio; Bud is physically marked by his sisters' feminine warfare style—he has claw scratches on his face—and he knows how to humiliate his sisters: exposing the fact of their menstruation (180). All in all, the section displays a Pauline revulsion to the body (184), making it a preeminent work in the tradition of a Pauline gothic, Duffy states. All the more so, because bodies are not only vile and corrupt but they make one vulnerable also: physically, economically, and psychologically.

<sup>74</sup> To Carrington's mind, Part I problematizes why certain stories are told and why others are postponed or silenced, which theme is repeated in the story proper. In fact, the reason for including Part I, she states, lies in its dramatization of the hierarchy between narrators and narratees. In the text every character is either a narrator or a narree, or both. But through a triple irony in the story that Carrington compares to Austen's ironic use of the gothic tradition in *Northanger Abbey*, in which the heroine constructs her own delusions about murder ("Don't" 163), Munro problematizes not only telling but the process of interpretation also. The section then has a place in the short story; moreover, it occupies a central position exactly because it dramatizes the power structure hidden at the root of telling and of interpretation.

<sup>75</sup> Sonje and Kath have an argument over a short story, "The Fox," by Lawrence. At its end a woman is portrayed who is struggling to keep herself separate from her lover, although she knows that without a total surrender of her female nature to his, they can never experience true happiness. Sonje finds the ideal of love thus described by Lawrence wonderful, whereas Kath finds it ridiculous. Nonetheless, because she feels that she herself might have sacrificed some of herself in her marriage and in her motherhood, she pushes their argumentation from a theoretical level to a practical one, which harshly distorts the issue. "Kath knows that something has gone wrong. Something is wrong with her own argument. Why is she so angry and excited? And why did she shift over to talking about babies, about children? Because she has a baby and Sonje doesn't? Did she say that about Lawrence and Frieda because she suspects that it is partly the same story with Cottar and Sonje? When you make the argument on the basis of the children, about the woman having to look after the children, you're in the clear. You can't be blamed. But when Kath does that she is covering up. [ ... ] So it is herself, she is thinking of, not of any children. She herself is the very woman that Lawrence is railing about. And she can't reveal that straight out because it might make Sonje suspect—it might make Kath herself suspect—an impoverishment in Kath's life" (85). This reading is supported by a comment Munro made in one of her recent interviews where she calls Lawrence's female characters "sacrificial lambs" (Reynolds 2).

<sup>76</sup> Hoeveler identifies the motif of "retreat to studied postures of conformity" (*Gothic* 6) as one of the passive-aggressive strategies female gothic heroines use in subverting patriarchal order while appearing to be conforming to it. See a similar scene in the discussion of "The Jack Randa Hotel."

<sup>77</sup> In the scene where she first meets Amy, Cottar's lover, she sees her in the following way: "This woman's eyes were lined with black pencil, extended at the corners, and her eyelids were painted a purplish blue right up to her sleek black brows. The rest of her face was very pale, or made up to look so, and here lips were so pale a pink that they seemed almost white. [ ... ] She was a person Kath suddenly wanted to know, to be friends with, just as she had once longed to be friends with Sonje" (98-99).

<sup>78</sup> To some extent "The Love of a Good Woman" also can be read as a narrative in which the characters' life is determined by changes in the world. Enid has sacrificed her opportunities for doing good but her decision is becoming irrelevant with the spread of better health care provided by hospitals affordable to the vast majority of the population. The patients who remain in her care are thus either the poorest, who cannot afford hospitalization in spite of its availability, or those "who had bizarre and hopeless afflictions, or were so irredeemably cranky that hospitals had thrown them out" (Munro, "Love" 44).

<sup>79</sup> As an interesting side note, this is what Munro also said about herself in an interview: "I prefer inhospitable *Wuthering Heights* climates, essential gloom. As I get older, I get less poetic and more real" (qtd. in Reynolds 3).

<sup>80</sup> Beran refers to the recognition of Jim Burden specifically, who sees Antonia both as she was in her younger years and as he finds her twenty years later: a contended wife, mother and grandmother. But Antonia similarly sees a double reality. The conflicting claims that she never reminiscences about the past and her grandson's statement that she always talks a lot about Jim may be both right at the same time. So Beran argues that in the hallucination scene Munro's story breaks out of "narrowly conceived realism and then leaps [ . . . ] to echo the ending of Cather's story; for Cather and Antonia, as for Munro and Louisa [ . . . ], multiple and conflicting stories are part of human experience." She also adds that "[i]n a nation where the construction of a national identity is an ongoing conscious process and where Canada's story is presented in terms of multiple stories, Munro's approach to storytelling as a way of managing life and a way of asserting individual vision in the context of alternative irreconcilable ones diverges from Hardy's 'art of disproportioning' in a distinctively Canadian manner" (13).

<sup>81</sup> It must be noted though that the happy ending is not solely rooted in the heroine's marriage but also in the fact that by reestablishing a relationship to other female figures, most eminently to her mother, she redefines the female's position in patriarchal order. She re-inscribes the importance of female-female relationships, devalued in a society conceived on the basis of patrilineal descent, into women's life while at the same time through her marriage the heroine also establishes her difference from other, possibly, failing female figures. For further discussion see Chapter 5.

<sup>82</sup> Alison Shaw and Shirley Ardener explain: "women can still elect to become honorary males and, declining marriage altogether, inherit and act as heads of households—as 'sworn virgins' (*vajzë e betuar* or *virginescha*: Durham 1909, Grémaux 1994)" (78).

<sup>83</sup> The darkness that intrudes into Claire's life can also be conceived of in the terms as outlined in "Open Secrets," that is, there are "worlds alongside," secret or not in people's lives. One day, Claire learns that one of her regular customers, the Notary Public was beaten up in his office and he might be blinded for good. Claire ponders: "Robbery? Or an act of revenge, outrage, connected with a layer of his life that I hadn't guessed at? Melodrama and confusion made this place seem more ordinary to me, but less within my grasp" (124). This last statement by Claire may also be seen to replicate Munro's belief that the darknesses in a community's life—"the deep caves under the kitchen linoleum" (Munro, *Lives* 253)—belong to its reality.

<sup>84</sup> For the difficulties with which female authors represent female heroic subjects see Lanser's "Romantic Voice: The Hero's Text" in *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. 155-75.

<sup>85</sup> For theories on the role of women as capital see Claude Levi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1962) and Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975) Levi-Strauss argues that there is a long history of women being traded between tribes, thus women are the first property even before capitalist society emerged. They are objects of exchange whose value is defined by how they enhance men's symbolic capital. By continuing as well as following up on the implications of Levi-Strauss's work Rubin examines the gender economy in western societies and concludes that these societies equally conceive of and produce women as objects of exchange and that the rise of capitalism was made possible and is upheld by women's unpaid labor, which is facilitated by the power structure within the family. See also: Elizabeth Cowie's "Woman As Sign," Rosalind Coward's *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations*, and Lon Fleming's "Lévi-Strauss, Feminism and the Politics of Representation."

<sup>86</sup> Shaw and Ardener explain: "'Sworn virgins' generally attain their status in one of three circumstances. The only way an adolescent girl can avoid her arranged marriage is by swearing perpetual virginity (formerly before a group of twelve elders in the church or mosque. A father without a son to whom to leave his property (who in turn would become [ ... ] 'master of the house' or household head) may proclaim a daughter to be a man. Thirdly, if a family loses one or more of its young male members, a girl may be selected to take his place. 'Virgins' now dress as men, with short hair, trousers, wristwatch and gun. They assume male gestures and body language" (78). That is, women may renounce their femaleness either to save the father from the shame of his incapability to fully participate in the male economy of power or because there is no male to take over his responsibilities in the family (virgins can act as the heads of the household). In these cases sworn virginity is a social necessity since otherwise the ideological grounding of the power structure privileging the male within the society would be questioned. At the same time, it is an opportunity as well because this is the only way women can signal their objection to arranged marriages in which they are objects of exchange.

<sup>87</sup> Catherine Craft-Fairchild quotes a poem by Fielding and provides an enlightening explanation: "His poem [*The Masquerade, A Poem. Inscribed to C—T H—D—G—R* (1728)] illustrates how the adoption of disguises allows those in attendance freedoms and excesses of behavior that they would not customarily enjoy. For example, costumes hide anatomical distinctions [ ... ] masquerade disguise obliterates the marks of dress that separate virgin from whore. The consequences to be feared from such promiscuous blending, Fielding insists, are dire" (1). Catherine Spooner discusses eighteenth-century masquerades similarly, and adds that Walpole frequented them with great pleasure (17), which might have influenced his conception of the gothic mode.

<sup>88</sup> Especially Castle's work, *Masquerade and Civilization: the Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (1986).

<sup>89</sup> Bakhtin's argument also points into this direction since he emphasizes that the carnival is a cycle that after a temporary subversion of the known order returns to its starting point with the promise of rejuvenation (*Problems* 127). Bauer highlights the ambivalence of the carnival as follows: "Carnival suspends discipline—the terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette which contribute to the maintenance of social order. The carnival participants overthrow the hierarchical conventions which exclude them and work out a new mode of relation, one dialogic in nature. [ ... ] As Bakhtin explains, the carnival, however, cannot last. It is functional, a means of resisting conventions and revising them, without destroying them completely" (14). Notwithstanding, Russo insists on the

subversive nature of carnival and its images of the grotesque because they are “*at least exuberant*” (63; emphasis mine).

<sup>90</sup> Shaw and Ardener underline that although the Albanian virgins observed by them have adopted male gestures, they never show any signs of lesbian sexual interest (82), which is a sign of the fact that their maleness is limited to expressing their wish not to function as females in the given society.

<sup>91</sup> Gjurdhi, the tiger contrasts to Mr. Lamb, from whom Charlotte escapes into her adventure that turns into her misadventure with the Ghegs. The opposition between the tiger and the lamb as the two extremes along a continuum recalls William Blake, the preromantic poet's, poetry which association is further supported by the allusion to several other English romanticists, such as Mary Shelley, as well as her sister Claire Clairmont, and George Byron. This association is further supported by the name of Nelson, Claire's lover, who is Lord Horatio Nelson's, the great Admiral's namesake, fighting during the Napoleonic wars. As a note of interest, Admiral Nelson's mother was Horace Walpole's niece.

<sup>92</sup> This is a favorite theme in Munro's fiction. In “Bardon Bus” she writes: “There I come back again and again to the center of my fantasy, to the moment when you give yourself up, give yourself over to the assault which is guaranteed to finish off everything you've been before. A stubborn virgin's belief, this belief in perfect mastery; any broken-down wife could tell you there is no such thing” (111).

<sup>93</sup> She says: “For example, three stories in *Open Secrets*, which started as a novel, come from a single source: ‘The Albanian Virgin’, ‘Carried Away’ and ‘Real Life’. A book by Edith Durham [ ... ] ‘Real Life’ became its own story. Next, the protagonist in the first version of ‘The Albanian Virgin’ was a librarian, but I soon found myself doing research on librarians and popular titles of the day. The next thing I knew I had kidnapped my librarian from ‘The Albanian Virgin’ and brought her to ‘Carried Away’” (Munro qtd. in Pleuke and Smith 229).

<sup>94</sup> Eagleton writes: “The ‘feminization of discourse’ witnessed by the eighteenth century was not a sexual revolution. It was imperative to mollify ruling-class barbarism with the milk of middle-class kindness, but not, naturally, to the point of where virility itself came under threat. Male hegemony was to be sweetened but not undermined; women were to be exalted but not emancipated” (95). In short, the feminization of discourse served to evade class and gender conflicts. The female gothic as one move in what Spacks calls “the feminization of plot” also participates in the feminization of discourse (*Desire* 7, 183-84).

<sup>95</sup> In Williams's rendering: “The details of this character's appearance are consistent from one example to the next. He seems ‘fallen,’ though of apparently noble origins. He is tall and imposingly masculine [ ... ] His eye is always piercing, penetrating. [ ... ] Most insistent, however, is this figure's duality—the perceived incongruity of inner and outer, present and past, his paradoxical, deceptively mixed nature. His masculine strength, even harshness, masks a conventionally ‘feminine’ capacity for intense feeling. [ ... ] Indeed, a capacity for feeling in this conventional man of action is this character's most potent source of mystery” (*Art* 143-44).

<sup>96</sup> This association is not in conflict with other Munro's references to English Romanticism because the narrator of the parallel story is Claire, the namesake of Byron's lover, the mother of his daughter, Mary Shelley's sister.

<sup>97</sup> Howard, relying upon Bakhtin's approach to genres, argues that the gothic is “an indeterminate genre” that evolved in opposition to the dominant literary canon, therefore, its “impurities” are constitutive of its formation (2). Maggie Kilgour, by contrast, evaluates the gothic's “piecemeal [ ... ] corporate identity” not as an impurity but as its triumph. She writes: “At times the gothic seems hardly a unified narrative at all, but a series of framed conventions, static moments of extreme emotions [ ... ] which do not form a coherent and continuous whole [ ... ]

Like the carnivalesque, the gothic appears to be a transgressive rebellion against norms which yet ends up reinstating them, an eruption of unlicensed desire that is fully controlled by governing systems of limitation” (*Rise* 8).

<sup>98</sup> Helene Meyers argues that female gothic narratives sustain a critique of the heterosexual romance in which the passive woman waits for a hero to save her by showing that such a woman is most likely, as she puts it, a “goner,” whose only function is to be a monitory figure to show the alternative (23). Should the heroine not take the initiative, should she not search for the redefinition of her position, she would also share in such a fate. She continues: “In these texts, Mr. Right is always a disappointment and sometimes the cause of death. However, the protagonists of these femicidal plots are endangered not only by an abundance of villains but also their own belief in male saviors. These texts consistently demonstrate that romantic ideology—the belief that heterosexual romance constitutes the key to female identity and security—constructs women as victims” (23).

<sup>99</sup> Wolf uses the term to distinguish between victim feminism and power feminism, where the former continues to emphasize women’s disadvantages in patriarchal society by blaming men and masculinity whereas the latter targets misogyny and male bias instead. Power feminism fosters women’s self-confidence equal to men’s (193). She argues that women need to dispense with their good girl image and take responsibility for aggression and violence that they are just as capable of as men. Wolf’s arguments did not receive a positive response because her critics noted that she has built on her own privileged position to give a generalized account of women, sexuality, and motherhood (Ramsay 324).

<sup>100</sup> For an extended discussion see Eva Figs’s *Sex and Subterfuge*, especially, 152.

<sup>101</sup> Hoeveler sees the gothic, sentimental fiction and melodrama all related because, and here she refers to Brooks, they share “the tendency toward depicting intense, excessive representations of life that tend to strip away the façade of manners to reveal the essential conflicts at work, leading to moments of intense and highly stylized confrontations” (*Gothic* 9).

<sup>102</sup> The fact that both the gothic and sentimental fiction took as their subject matter the dysfunctional patriarchal family and experimented with interiority and exteriority the led many critics up to the nineteen-seventies to conflate the gothic with sentimental fiction. Robert F. Geary summarizes criticism in this vein epitomized by R. F. Brissenden’s *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (1974) as follows: “The sensitive maiden—helplessly trapped in castle, dungeon, or vault and beset by some depraved and energetic tormentor—represents an exaggerated, sensationalized version of the sentimental novel’s tearful protagonists whose very goodness renders them powerless” (4). Geary, however, refutes the view that the gothic is simply an extravagant form of sentimentalism with great vehemence (5).

<sup>103</sup> In an interview she said: “the whole mother-daughter relationship interests me a great deal. It probably obsesses me [ ... ] I had a very intense relationship with my own mother [ ... ] The first real story I ever wrote was about her. The first story I think of as a real story was ‘Peace of Utrecht’” (Munro qtd. in Hancock 215).

<sup>104</sup> “‘Work is work,’ she said. ‘I still work. My stepdaughter Bea is divorced, she keeps house for me after a fashion. My son has finally finished university—he is supposed to be learning about the business, but he has some excuse to go off in the middle of the afternoon. When I come home at suppertime, I am so tired I could drop, and I hear the ice tinkling in their glasses and them laughing behind the hedge. Oh, Mud, they say when they see me, oh, poor Mud, sit down here, get her a drink!’” (Munro, “Carried” 47).

<sup>105</sup> This recurring story is extremely reminiscent of the Munros’ marriage, which keeps returning in Munro’s narratives. Joyce Wayne describes the young Munros as follows: “Those who knew the Munros in the West say

they never met two people as opposite as Jim and Alice: he all prim and proper, the son of an established Oakville family; Alice exactly the opposite, from a dirt-poor fox farm in Huron County” (qtd. in Blodgett 3-4).

<sup>106</sup> The long, wild hair as a symbol of a lack of restraint (often sexual) in women naturally looks back on a long tradition in cultural imagery as well, which Munro puts to use.

<sup>107</sup> An interesting note on the name ‘Mara’ provides an additional reason to see the female protagonist as a reluctant mother. Markman Ellis explains the etymology of the word ‘nightmare’: “In his *Dictionary* of 1755, Dr Johnson established that the etymology of ‘nightmare’ was a conjunction between *night* and *mara*, ‘a spirit that, in northern mythology, was said to torment or suffocate sleepers’” (6) Thus Pauline’s child, Mara, is metaphorically brought in relation with a tormenting spirit.

<sup>108</sup> Thacker thinks that the figure of Nurse Atkinson anticipates Enid in “The Love of a Good Woman” (*Rest* 17). The comparison holds also with respect to their excellence at holding others prisoners in their home.

<sup>109</sup> The link between anti-Catholicism and excess in gothic fiction has long been established (see Punter, “Scottish” 115; Ellis 84, 93; Castle *Boss* 84-86; A. L. Smith, 25-27; Graham 34-55; Haggerty, *Queer* 63-83; ). Catholicism is regularly brought in connection with excesses, idolatry, falsity, etc.

<sup>110</sup> Almeda, who keeps house for her widowed father at the beginning is contrasted unfavorably with herself at the end of the short story, when she decomposes.

<sup>111</sup> Note that stories with titles that refer to geographical locations always turn upon constitutive memories in the protagonist’s life. E.g.: “Ottawa Valley,” “Miles City, Montana,” “Jakarta.”

<sup>112</sup> The narrator recalls. “We gave our notice to Ray, without telling Mrs. Gorrie. That raised her to a new level of hostility. In fact, she went a little crazy. ‘Oh, she thinks she’s so clever. She can’t even keep two rooms clean. When she sweeps the floor all she does is sweep the dirt into the corner.’ When I had bought my first broom I had forgotten to buy a dustpan, and for a time I had done that. But she could have known about it only if she let herself into our rooms with a key of her own while I was out. Which it became apparent she had done. ‘She’s a sneak, you know. I knew the first I saw of her what a sneak she was. And a liar. She isn’t right in the head. She’d sit down there and say she’s writing letters and she writes the same thing over and over again—it’s not letters, it’s the same thing over and over. She’s not right in the head.’ Now I knew that she must have uncrumpled the pages in my wastebasket. I often tried to start the same story with the same words. As she said, over and over again” (Munro, “Cortes” 142).

<sup>113</sup> This idea is later repeated in Munro’s *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, especially in the stories “What Is Remembered” and “Nettles” as well.

<sup>114</sup> The house in the dream has big arched windows “such as you find in a mansion or an old-fashioned public building” (Munro, “My Mother’s” 293), it is located on a large estate with “formal trees and gardens” (294), which is a further gesture at associating the mansion with gothicism since too well-tended gardens with geometric design suggest bought nobility in eighteenth-century gothic fiction as opposed to natural, birth-right nobility which engenders a preference for “natural” gardens with a vegetation that is not fit for pruning (e.g.: oaks vs. shrubs).

<sup>115</sup> Flax argues that women under patriarchy have developed a “social self” that hides two repressed selves, an autonomous and a sexual one, which must be re-membered so that women be aware of their repressed will to mastery and sexuality. The result of this re-membrance will be a “core” self that women have been denied in the history of the west so far (“Re-membering” 98-103).



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