CHANGES IN IDENTITY IN ALICE MUNRO'S STORIES: A SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Alice Munro's winning of the 2013 Nobel Prize for literature was a surprise only in the sense that no one who writes only short stories has ever won it before. Otherwise, among writers and literary specialists she has long been considered a leading candidate, as she is one of the masters of this complex literary genre, known especially for her probing into the small-town communities of the southern part of the province of Ontario. This is an Anglo-Celtic (English, Scottish, and Irish) society which formed through waves of immigration from the early 19th century as a farmland interspersed with small towns. These apparently dull communities are, as Munro reveals, rich in subtle class distinctions and spoken and unspoken social norms of behavior. Munro has explained how she only gradually understood the richness of the material that her home country had given her, "full of events and emotions and amazing things going on all the time"[1].

As Ailsa Cox asserts, the writer's texts present an "elusive and complex reality"[2]. In addition to economic constrictions, she depicts her characters as governed by norms that may not be explicitly mentioned by them but which structure their lives to a great degree. In her stories, acts of rebellion against norms, even what others see as a scandalous behavior, frequently occur, as characters suddenly reveal an unexpected side of themselves, creating the ironic turns in plot that are so typical of Munro's fiction. This article considers the dramatic conflicts that take place among characters nearing the end of their lives in two of Munro's stories, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" (1982) and "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (2001). In both of these narratives, the main characters have to deal with one of the most restrictive institutions of contemporary Canadian society, the nursing home for the elderly and the demented, who choose, or are placed here, when they cannot live without constant help and supervision. The aim of this article is to use the current socio-psychological concepts related to social structures, identity and agency to analyse the ways in which Munro's characters continue to assert the old concepts of their selves and try out the new ones under these difficult circumstances.

[1] Geoff Hancock, "Alice Munro: interview", *Canadian Writers at Work: Interviews with Geoff Hancock*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987, 204.

[2] Ailsa Cox, *Alice Munro*, Tavistock, UK: Northcote House, 2004, 7.

RECENT THEORY ON INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND AGENCY

One of the continuing issues for sociologists and psychologists analyzing identity is the extent to which individuals are fundamental products of social, political, economic and other institutions that govern their society, with little possibility to decide their own lives. For several decades after the Second World War, this debate on what is called "agency vs. structure" emphasized not only direct institutional controls over people, but also the conditioning that made individuals internalize the restricted roles offered to them [3]. However, among sociologists and psychologists, especially since the late 20th century, the tendency has been to find a degree of balance between the power of structure and individual decision-making. The socio-psychologists Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, Jr. connect agency with what earlier specialists, Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, define as "possible selves", "individuals' idea of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming"[4]. Sheldon Stryker, writing about the "agency vs. structure" debate, asserts: "The proper question is not whether human social behavior is constrained or constructed: it is both. The proper question is under what circumstances will that behavior be more or less heavily constrained, more or less open to creative constructions"[5].

The notion of agency has also become significant in literary studies in the recent years. The postcolonialists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define agency as "the ability to act or perform an action" and conclude that, although it is "difficult for subjects to escape the effects of those forces that 'constructed' them, it is not impossible"[6].

CLASS AND STATUS MARKERS IN MUNRO'S CHARACTERS AND THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY

The tension within the self between social norms and individual desires is the one that underlies many of Munro's short stories; these chronicle, as she herself put it, the hardly-visible areas of a person's life: "People's lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable – deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum"[7]. Munro asserts that she is fascinated by the way people tell the stories

[3] See Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, Jr., "Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency", *Sociological Theory* 25:2 (June 2007), 170, accessed 8 June 2013, www.sociology.uiowa.edu/hitlin/publications/soctheory2007/pdf; Sasha Roseneil and Julie Seymour, "Practising Identities", *Practising Identities: Power and Resistance*, ed. S. Roseneil and J. Seymour, London: Macmillan,1999.

[4] Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, "Possible Selves: the Interface Between Motivation and the Self-Concept", *Self and Identity*, ed. K. Yardley and J. Honess, Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 1987, 157; Steven Hitlin and Glen Elder, Jr.. "Time, Self and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency", 182–183.

[5] Sheldon Stryker,"Identity Theory: Developments and Extensions", *Self and Identity*, ed. K. Yardley and T. Honess, Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 1987, 93.

[6] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*,London: Routledge, 1998, 8–9.

[7] Alice Munro, "Epilogue: The Photographer", *Lives of Girls and Women*, 1971, Toronto: Penguin Books, 1990, 210.

of their lives, "what is put in at different times in your life, what is left out at different times, and how you use the stories to see yourself, or sometimes just to make life bearable for yourself"[8]. Many of the ways that her characters consider their past and present are connected to class and status.

In her fiction, Munro identifies significant class and status markers within the small Anglo-Celtic towns and rural communities of southern Ontario that she describes. Munro herself grew up in the hard times of the Great Depression; her mother fell ill with Parkinson's disease and could not work, while her father's fox farm went bankrupt and he was forced to take a job as a night guard in a factory. Still her family, though poor, was not culturally without resources and ambitions, including educational ones for their children. As a scholarship student at the elite University of Western Ontario, Munro became even more aware of subtle differences in speech, manner, dress and home customs as class markers, an experience that deepened when she married a man from a well-off family [9].

Both of the stories that are considered in this article begin by situating the protagonists within the subtleties of class frameworks in their communities; even after many decades, early class differences mark their speech, thinking and behavior. This is very explicit in "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" in which two women who grew up in the same small town find themselves many years later in the same nursing home. To the nursing staff, these women, both mentally alert in their mid-eighties but forced to use wheelchairs and avoid any form of physical strain on their hearts, are exactly the same in social status. Both can afford a private room in the nursing home. Both are widows with children and grandchildren who live in distant parts of Canada but keep in touch with their mothers. Their similarities are heightened by the fact that they have known each other for eighty years, having grown up in the same town; they first met at the beginning of the 20th century in "Kindergarten, which was not called that then, but Primary"[10]. The narrator's scrupulous linguistic correction introduces readers to a past society which still affects both women in their judgments of others and themselves.

Even though those around them believe that Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd have "everything in common" [11], in both women's minds the differences between them are still real and significant. Munro indicates this by opening her story with three pages dedicated to the social status each woman had as a child in her small community. First there are the memories they have of each other. For Mrs. Cross, Mrs. Kidd was the little girl in a "pinafore sticking up in starched wings, reciting a poem with the greatest competence" [12]. Meanwhile, for Mrs. Kidd, the woman who is now Mrs. Cross was remarkable as a child for her energy and ability to dance a Virginia reel:

[8] Cara Feinberg, "Bringing life to life: Interview with Alice Munro", *Atlantic Unbound*, 14 Dec. 2001, Accessed 17 Feb. 2014, www.the atlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/interviews/int2001-12-14.

[9] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, *Alice Munro: a Double Life*, Toronto: ECW Press, 1992.

[10] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", *The Moons of* Jupiter, Toronto: Macmillan,1982, 160.

[11] *Ibid.*, 161.

[12] *Ibid.*, 160.

"Nobody whirled and stomped and sang more enthusiastically" [13]. In old age Mrs. Cross spends much of her time in a wheelchair, unable to perform this past self, but it still expresses itself in her more extroverted and energetic personality. However, Mrs. Kidd's memory also retains the signs of lower social gentility in Mrs. Cross, as she was a little girl in "a dress with a droopy hem" and with "a bellowing voice"[14].

The readers are alerted to further class differences by the narrator's generalization: "They themselves are the only ones who can recall what separated them, and to a certain extent does yet" [15]. A list of class markers follows: Mrs. Kidd belonged to the middle class of the community: her father was the town postmaster, a provincial civil service job requiring a degree of education and guaranteeing a stability of income. Mrs. Kidd remains in this class by marrying a secondary school teacher of science who eventually becomes the principal of a school and retires with a pension. Mrs. Cross, on the other hand, is clearly described as working class in origin; she grows up as the youngest in a crowded family of eight in a row-house. An allusive reference to the use of birth control is another class marker: Mrs. Cross has six children, while Mrs. Kidd has only three. Moreover, Mrs. Cross' husband "worked on the lake boats and never got to be captain" [16]; he left her in financial straits by dying young and without life insurance.

In the first half of the 20th century in Canada, different denominations of Christian faith were major class markers: Mrs. Kidd's family attended the elite though small Anglican Church, while Mrs. Cross went to the respectable but socially working-class Free Methodist church, a secessionist form of Scottish Presbyterian[17]. Despite the class differences, their early relationship was fostered by being sent to the only school in the town, just as now they come together in the only nursing home in their county.

The third-person narrator continues with later markers of class. A half-century of Canadian economic development has evened out differences between the two women's families, with Mrs. Cross's children said to be making as much money as Mrs. Kidd's, and her grandchildren rather more. Nonetheless, the two women's rooms at the home, the only spaces which they can control at this point in their lives, continue to assert different kinds of class identity. Mrs. Kidd's possessions allude to her husband's and her own intellectual pursuit of natural history through her collections of rocks, shells, butterflies, songbirds, and many books. This is the way her children want to see her, and they buttress this version of her identity by sending her expensive books on nature that she rarely looks at: "They want her fixed where she was forty or fifty years ago […] all the ways in which she differs from the average, or expected, old lady. She feels it a

[13] *Ibid.*, 161.
[14] *Ibid.*, 161.
[15] *Ibid.*, 161.
[16] *Ibid.*, 161.

[17] Bruce S. Elliott, "English", *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples,* ed. P.R. Magosci, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 482; Leo Driedger, *Multi-Ethnic Canada: Identities and Inequalities*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, 190.

duty to hide from them the many indications that she is not so different as they think" [18]. Her children live too far away to be really salient in her present existence; she is no longer functioning as a mother in any practical sense. Still, the notion of "duty" , so typical of the Anglo-Canadian small-town mentality that Munro is an expert in analyzing, prevents Mrs. Kidd from overtly rejecting the identity they establish for her. In her letters, she maintains the self-controlled, ironic tone that is associated with middle-class dignity in the world she has grown up in: in one letter, for example, she makes mild fun of what she sees as the vulgarity of one of Mrs. Cross's pictures, that of the Last Supper, about which Mrs. Kidd speculates that "she had tried to figure out what the Lord and His Disciples were eating and it appeared to be hamburgers. This is the sort of thing her children love to hear from her" [19].

In comparison, Mrs. Cross's room is full of colourful kitsch that a middle-class person would consider vulgar: "a bouquet of artificial roses in which are set tubes of light, always shooting and bubbling up like a fountain […] a life-size plaster statue of a collie dog which resembles a dog the Cross family had when the children were small: old Bonnie" [20]. Mrs. Cross presumably likes these presents but enjoys even more a form of showing off in front of other residents, explaining what each gift cost. Speaking so openly about money is also a class marker, as is Mrs. Cross' language in general. In their conversations Mrs. Cross uses slang and colourful expressions which do not appear in Mrs. Kidd's more refined English: "everything gets dumped here [the county home],""Lily is not running on all cylinders"; "Useless old crocks, arent' we?"; "You won't bash me into anything?"[21]. Occasionally Mrs. Kidd corrects her friend's expressions for more genteel ones: for example, when Mrs. Cross refers to certain residents as "out of their mind", Mrs. Kidd offers the formal medical term "senile"[22].

"The Bear Came Over the Mountain" is a longer and more complex story than "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", but class and status markers also play a major role, appearing for the first time as in the other story, at the very beginning of the text to introduce the main characters. The narrative present begins on the day that Grant drives his wife Fiona to the local nursing home; she has agreed to enter this institution as early Alzheimer's manifests itself in dangerous wanderings from her home and shops. Then the narrative continues on a daily or weekly basis through her first months in the home. However, in Munro's characteristic way of moving abruptly from present to past and back again, the text itself opens with a period several decades earlier when Fiona and Grant met and decided to get married. There is little here about romance: the focus is on Fiona's social world with all its markers of wealth and cultural status. In her southern Ontario community her father is "an important cardiologist", while her mother is well-known as an outspoken leftist of Icelandic origins: they live in "a big, bay-windowed house"

[18] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 163.
[19] *Ibid.*, 164.
[20] *Ibid.*, 164.
[21] *Ibid.*, 163, 164, 178, 180.
[22] *Ibid.*, 162.

which is presented through Grant's eyes: it "seemed to Grant both luxurious and disorderly" [23]. In this university town, Fiona stands out for her possessions, "her own little car and a pile of cashmere sweaters"[24]. Grant, on the other hand, comes from a respectable but lower class, not well off because his father died young and his mother works as a secretary in a doctor's office. Fiona does not seem especially class-conscious, but the narrator informs readers that when she first spends time with Grant, she finds his way of speaking English amusing: "She would drolly repeat some of his small-town phrases" [25]. Confident both as an individual and in her class situation, she breaks gender norms of the day by being the one who proposes to him, though her way of doing this is typically unromantic: "Do you think it would be fun if we got married?" Grant accepts immediately: "He wanted never to be away from her. She had the spark of life"[26].

Her casual eccentricity, a product of her assured social status, attracts Grant strongly, although it is only later in life that he understands that she has chosen to marry him and have her father use his connections to get him a university position in part because he is the unexpected choice seen by others as "another of Fiona's eccentric whims", like the pair of Russian wolfhounds that she takes care of when a friend can no longer do so[27]. Just like her mother, when her hair turns white, she breaks norms by wearing it long and down her shoulders. The text signals this as norm-breaking in its period by noting that Grant's mother is "alarmed" by Fiona's mother's hair style which, "even more than the state of the house, had told her all she needed to know about attitudes and politics"[28]. Fiona has an expensive fur coat, but forgets it in a storage, explaining this as being done "unintentionally on purpose […] like a sin she was leaving behind"[29]. All of these features, her father's profession, family money and taking for granted her material possessions mark Fiona as upper-middle class.

The class differences between husband and wife make Fiona someone that Grant is intrigued by yet feels he cannot always interpret. When she begins to lose her memory, he at first hopes that this is Fiona "playing a game that she hoped he would catch on to. They always had their games – nonsense dialects, characters they invented"[30]. Earlier, he similarly tried to persuade himself that when Fiona imitated his lovers' voices, this was purely accidental and did not mean that she knew about his affairs. Unlike Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd, who understand what social norms make them behave in certain ways, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" shows shifting relations between a woman attempting to preserve her past selves despite Alzheimer's and a man who has never felt that all her codes of behavior are accessible to him. Fiona remains cool and ironic during the period of her initial deterioration, maintaining a dignified control of her emotions, as she always has, while Grant

[23] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2001, 274.

[24] *Ibid*., 274.

[25] *Ibid.*, 275.

[26] *Ibid.,* 275.

[27] *Ibid.*, 278.

[28] *Ibid.*, 275-276.

[29] *Ibid.,* 277.

[30] *Ibid.,* 277.

argues with their doctor's initial analysis and at times breaks down.

All the major characters in Munro's two stories bring their earlier social selves and sense of status into their new way of living within nursing homes. When Mrs. Kidd comments "with a tight smile", "Well, we are the top drawer", she is being ironic about their situation but still asserting social superiority over the majority of the residents who cannot afford a single room or are so far gone mentally that they break norms, behaving very strangely in public[31]. Like Mrs. Kidd, Fiona keeps the reality of her condition at a distance by word games, calling Meadowlake "Sillylake", while Grant collaborates in this effort by referring to the nursing home as "something that need not be permanent. A kind of experimental treatment. A rest cure", the last phrase referring to the homes and spas that wealthy Europeans and North Americans visited to recover from a variety of illnesses[32]. However, Munro shows that the disciplinary reality of the nursing home as an institution forces adjustments in relations and, consequently, in the salience of the selves that can now be performed among the characters of her stories.

THE NURSING HOME AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION LIMITING INDIVIDUALITY AND AGENCY

The main characters in "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" and "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" have to deal with one of the most restrictive institutions of contemporary Canadian society, the nursing home for the elderly, the disabled and the demented. In general, old age is treated in contemporary society as a dead end in the narrative of life, a point of stasis from which nothing new, aside from further forms of illness, will appear. Yet in these stories the characters are still troubled by what the socio-psychologist George C. Rosenwald calls the "restlessness of desire", the human tendency to create new narratives for themselves as a way of rebelling against the "relatively stable and stabilizing patterns" that are laid out for themselves [33]. Munro's characters seize the opportunities even at this late stage to express features of their identity, in particular the roles of romantic lovers, which social norms treat as long past them. At the same time, they and those close to them place a strong value on the maintenance of dignity, a slippery concept that differs for each person, but which matters even when the individual is in a condition close to helplessness.

There are two ways in which social norms and institutions figure here: the social relegation of the aged to a marginal position in society, and the nursing home. In an unnerving way, the nursing home, although providing essential care, is an ideal model of society as an institution exerting power over the individual, with its explicit rules, its categorizing language, and its spoken and unspoken norms. It is what the sociologist Erving Goffman defines as a "total institution" like a prison, army re-

[31] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 162.

[32] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 279.

[33] George C. Rosenwald, "Conclusion", *Storied Lives: the Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding,* eds. G.C. Rosenwald and R.E. Ochberg, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 266.

cruit camp, convent or concentration camp in which "like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life"[34].

Specialists in the psychology of old age, such as the gerontologist Michael C. Kearl explain that since the end of the 18th century, i.e., when the Industrial Revolution began to radically alter British society, a shift took place in the ways of referring to the aged. In effect, instead of associating old age with a wide experience of life and wisdom, the elderly became the object of contempt. According to Kearl, words like "gaffer", which were originally respectful forms of address, became disrespectful, and new words such as "codger", "geezer," and "fuddy-duddy" appeared, all negative in connotation. Within the cult of youth that grew during the 20th century, even apparently neutral words like "old" or "aged" or "elderly" acquired strong negative associations, leading to the use of more and more euphemisms like "senior citizen" or, in Kearl's most extreme example, "chronologically gifted" [35].

If being old is bad in the current late 20th and 21st Western societies, having to live in a nursing home lowers one's status even more significantly. Another specialist, Ira Rosofsky, observes that anything to do with what is now commonly termed "eldercare" finds linguistic expression in a "universe of euphemism". North American nursing homes, whether state-funded or private, have rechristened themselves, using terms like 'villages', 'communities' and 'health centers' or simply a descriptive phrase, most commonly one referring to an attractive natural setting [36].

In Munro's stories, the nursing homes are "Hilltop Home" in "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" and "Meadowlake" in "The Bear Came Over the Mountain". These names only superficially gloss over the reality of the nursing home, as demonstrated by ironic discussions among the characters. Mrs. Kidd, meeting a childhood friend at Hilltop Home, remarks: "I don't notice any hilltop", to which Mrs. Cross responds: "You can see the highway […] I guess that's what they mean" [37]. In the other story, Fiona, aware that she has early Alzheimer's disease, tells her husband: "You're going to have to put me into that place. Shallowlake", and although he corrects her: "Meadowlake", she goes on half-teasingly: "Shallowlake, Sillylake […] Sillylake. Sillylake it is"[38]. She is playing on the old but still current colloquial meaning of "silly" as "feeble-minded"[39].

As Rosofsky points out, within a nursing home, a culture of euphemism applies to many of the features of the institution, including the ever-threatening fact of death: no one "dies" in these homes, and with religious terms now rarely used, the

[34] Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Status of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, London: Penguin Books, 1961, 11.

[35] Michael C. Kearl, "Social Psychology of Aging", *Social Gerontology*, n.d., accessed 24 Jan. 2014, www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/geropsy.html

[36] Ira Rosofsky, "Adventures in Old Age: Eldercare, a Universe of Euphemisms", *Psychology Today,* 10 April 2012, accessed 24 January 2014, www.psychologytoday.com/blog/adventures-in-old-age/201204

[37] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 162.

[38] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 278–279.

[39] "Silly", *Collin's English Dictionary*, 7th ed., Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1501.

vague terms "gone" and "passed" are preferred [40]. The language issues within nursing homes are part of a larger problem in contemporary Western society – the widespread fear of old age because of its close association with death.

Alice Munro introduces her readers to such issues through her characters' dialogues and thoughts in the first pages of her stories. Mrs. Cross, who has started living at Hilltop Home a few months before her friend, explains the nursing home to Mrs. Kidd as a social institution with a distinct class structure. At first it may seem that residents are mixed together in a chaotic way since, as Mrs. Cross states, "this is the only place in the county, everything gets dumped here" [41]. The metaphor is that of a garbage dump, and the home's residents dehumanized as "everything" instead of "everybody". However, she goes on to explain how the building's spatial layout defines the resident's condition and status. First she checks whether her friend's bedroom is a single one and where exactly it is: "Is it the other side of the dining-room or this? […] That's good. That's the best part. Everybody's in fairly good shape down there" [42]. Their rooms are more expensive and also refer to their mental condition, as another part of the same floor is given to those who are less coherent. Being moved to the second floor signifies an acute deterioration in physical capacity and / or mental condition. However, there are further spaces for more extreme cases: "Then the crazies is another story. Locked up in the back wing", while there is a semi-mythical space for the lowest order of residents: "I think there is some place they have the ones that walk around but soil all the time" [43].

Mrs. Kidd's response to this tour of her new and almost certainly last home is, as has been shown, ironic: "'Well, we are the top drawer'," [44]. Again, as in Fiona's puns on the name of her nursing home, irony is used as a genteel, distancing form of coping with the humiliation of the extreme loss of privacy and decision-making. Mrs. Kidd is troubled by the spectacle of a "Mongoloid man of about fifty, who was trying to play the mouth organ" and "doing a step-dance in front of the mirror": "I knew there would be plenty of senile ones, but I wasn't prepared for the others" [45]. Mrs. Cross offers a kind of comfort: "After a while it doesn't bother you", to which her friend retorts sharply, "It doesn't *bother* me", again emotionally distancing herself [46]. Later, however, when she goes with her friend to the second floor to visit Mrs. Cross's cousin Lily, though warned that "Lily is not running on all cylinders" and "it doesn't smell like Sweet Violets", Mrs. Kidd is unable to deal with the pervasive smell of "heated urine" and the complete collapse of social decorum among these residents, people shouting the same words over and over again, exhibiting parts of their bodies that are normally clothed, eating sloppily or obsessively "tearing apart a little embroidered cushion"[47]. Mrs. Cross argues that she should not get

[40] Ira Rosofsky, "Adventures in Old Age".
[41] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 163.
[42] *Ibid.*, 162.
[43] *Ibid.,* 162.
[44] *Ibid.*, 162.
[45] *Ibid.,* 162.
[46] *Ibid.*, 162; italics in original.
[47] *Ibid.,* 165–166.

upset: "They're all off in their own little worlds. They're as happy as clams", but Mrs. Kidd retorts, "They may be, but I'm not"[48]. From now on, she remains on the first floor, a space that her sense of self can still cope with.

In "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" Fiona, who has always been used to a life of casual wealth, is said to have been deeply repelled by the old Meadowlake building, "the smell of urine and bleach that hung about […], the perfunctory bouquets of plastic flowers in niches in the dim, low-ceilinged corridors", responses on her part that are both physical and aesthetic [49]. The newly built nursing home is described as an "airy, vaulted building whose air was faintly pleasantly pine-scented. Profuse and genuine greenery sprouted out of giant crocks" [50]. The central sitting room is large and attractive; at one end of the building there is a television room and at the other a conservatory with real plants and a pool with a fountain. Characteristically, on going there, Fiona protects herself from her loss of freedom through the use of mitigating language: "I guess I'll be dressed up all the time […] or semi-dressed. It'll be sort of like in a hotel." [51]. At the very end of the story, when she emerges for a time from the confusion of dementia and recognizes Grant as her husband, she also interprets the nursing home as a hotel, an acceptable residence in the previous years of her life: "'You've been gone a long time. Are we all checked out now?'"[52].

Just as in Hilltop Home and most real nursing homes, Meadowlake is divided spatially according to the degree of problems residents have and the consequent need for greater control over them. The supervisor explains to Grant that once his wife becomes accustomed to thinking of Meadowvale as her home, she can even take trips to town or her old home – though this rule does not apply to residents on the second floor. Grant is puzzled: "My wife isn't going to be on the second floor", to which the supervisor answers "thoughtfully", "I just like to make everything clear at the outset"[53]. Even if they do not already know much about Alzheimer's, many readers will pick up the suggestion that Fiona's disease is a progressive one that will probably lead her to an inability to perform the simplest tasks and send her upstairs for total supervision.

Grant sees the improved version of Meadowlake as a theatrical setting, its more attractive features being unreal because they mean very little to the vast majority of the residents; these seem to be intended to impress their visiting relatives and friends. Since the story is narrated very frequently through his eyes, and not through Fiona's, it is his sensitivity to the way in which the nursing home is a thinly-disguised prison that readers identify with. As Heliane Ventura remarks, although Grant continues to live a healthy and independent life outside the nursing home, he remains so deeply attached to Fiona, constantly speculating about what she is feeling, that he goes with her 'through the meanders of degeneration" and passes "into

[48] *Ibid.,* 165.

[49] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 280.

[50] *Ibid.*, 280–281.

[51] *Ibid.*, 275.

[52] *Ibid.*, 321.

[53] *Ibid.*, 280.

the other side of the looking-glass, a descent into the world of senile dementia"[54].

It is through his eyes that Meadowvale is analysed as an institution of remarkable power over its residents. It forbids any visits or phone calls to his wife for the first thirty days, explaining that before this rule was applied "there had been pleas and tears and tantrums, even from those who had come in willingly" [55]. The language used, especially the word 'tantrums', reduces adult fear and resistance to that of small children. In the same way, Grant is troubled by the way that Fiona's door is identified by "a nameplate decorated with bluebirds", "Disney birds" , a sentimental image completely out of place with Fiona's life-long tastes that he comes to view with "an intense, a truly malignant dislike"[56]. The nursing home has categorized his wife, taken away her refined style and reduced her agency radically.

In this way, becoming residents in a nursing home is presented in these narratives as a challenge to the protagonists' sense of self. Nevertheless, as recent psychological studies show, despite a degree of trauma, residents in nursing homes retain a "remarkable stability of self image", even though this is "often achieved by changing the basis on which the self was constructed"[57]. Munro's texts support this theory; in the earlier story, she indicates that one of the coping mechanisms used by her protagonists is the revival of old social rituals: "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd used to play cards in the Recreation Room every afternoon. They put on earrings, stockings, afternoon dresses. They took turns treating for tea"[58]. This practice is that of an earlier epoch: probably none of the younger post-war generation would understand the subtle distinction of an "afternoon" dress. By resurrecting an older identity, the two women create an island of social space within Hilltop Home and so feel superior to the residents with greater problems who press around them.

The situation is more complex in "The Bear Came Over the Mountain". It would seem that by this point in their lives Fiona and Grant are social equals, given his career as a university teacher. However, he repeatedly emphasizes that much about Fiona and her way of seeing the world are a mystery to him. Even as she says absurd things, he has a vague hope that this is only a game in which he has not yet learned his role. When he is finally allowed to visit her again after the first month, she is polite but not much interested; in shock, he asks Kristy, the nurse: "Does she even know who I am?"[59]. Kristy tries to explain the progressive nature of Alzheimer's to Grant: "She might not. Not today. Then tomorrow – you never know, do you? Things change back and forth all the time and there's nothing you can do about it." [60]. Like Mrs. Cross initiating her

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[54] Heliane Ventura, "The Skald and the Goddess: Reading 'The Bear Came Over the Mountain' by Alice Munro", *Journal of the Short Story in English* 55 (autumn 2010), accessed 10 Jan. 2014, http:/jsse.revues.org/1121

[55] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 279.

[56] *Ibid.*, 287, 297.

[57] Alfons Marcoens et al., "Psychological Ageing", *Ageing in Society*, ed. John Bond et al., London: Sage, 2007, 63.

[58] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 165.

[59] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 290.

[60] *Ibid.*, 291.

friend into the strangeness of many of the residents, Kristy offers advice on how this new world works:"You'll see the way it is once you've been coming here for a while. You'll learn not to take it all so seriously. Learn to take it day by day"[61] . Yet Grant cannot bring himself to see his wife simply as a passive being governed by waves of dementia.

RESISTANCE AND REBELLION BY MUNRO'S CHARACTERS

Those who study the elderly in nursing homes agree that their sense of self does not radically change with ageing and relocation, but that their need for personal relations, if anything, becomes stronger as it provides them with an essential sense of security[62]. Marcoens and his colleagues have found that, in order to maintain an acceptable self-image, a person might be "prepared to forego present reality altogether and use evidence based on wishes and distortions"[63]. In each of Munro's stories, one of the protagonists develops a strongly emotional relationship to another resident, which allows them to still feel loved and important, able to resist categorization according to aging, dementia, and the approach of death. In both cases, too, this new relationship threatens ones they already have – Mrs. Cross with her friend Mrs. Kidd, and Fiona with her husband Grant.

In "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", the more extroverted Mrs. Cross begins by feeling sorry for a much younger resident who has been partially paralysed by a major stroke. Jack can wheel himself in a chair to some extent, but his only form of speech is a guttural sound. When he fails to speak or make movements with his paralyzed hand, he weeps. At first it seems that Mrs. Cross' interest in Jack is maternal: she "felt something stretching in her. It was her old managing, watching power, her capacity for strategy, which if properly exercised could never be detected by those it was used on"[64]. Mrs. Kidd, however, does recognize what is really going on, and is not sympathetic.

This new role in Mrs. Cross's life can be understood through what socio-psychologists refer to as "possible selves": "Individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming". This is related to the notion of "self-schemas" which "define a past and present self, but even more importantly they define a future *possible* self"[65]. Elderly or very ill people who enter nursing homes are not seen as having any more possible selves in their future, except unpleasant ones related to the further physical and mental deterioration. Nonetheless, as has been asserted, gerontologists do not accept the notion that the aged cannot put up resistance against a state of helplessness.

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[61] *Ibid.,* 291.

[62] Alfons Marcoens et al., "Psychological Ageing", 63; Janet Askham et al., "Personal Relationships in Later Life", *Ageing in Society*, ed. John Bond et al., London: Sage, 2007, 194, 196.

[63] Alfons Marcoens et al. "Psychological Ageing", 63.

[64] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 168.

[65] Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, "Possible Selves", *Self and Identity*, ed. K. Yardley and T. Honess, Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 1987, 157, 159; emphasis in original.

At first, Mrs. Cross is intrigued by Jack as a kind of child with specific problems. He responds to her introductions with the only sound he can make and starts crying. Mrs. Cross resumes the maternal self that was her role for many decades, recalling "what you do when children cry; how to josh them out of it", saying jokingly, "Boo-hoo-hoo. You'll have Mrs. Kidd and me crying next" [66]. The narrator comments: "That was the beginning of Mrs. Cross's takeover of Jack" [67]. She proves patient at finding ways to let him communicate, asking questions that require only a yes or no answer, and so helping him re-establish his former self as a journalist. He is delighted when, by pointing at a picture on the wall, he manages to explain to her that he worked in a town called Red Deer. Mrs. Cross convinces herself that the health system has let him down by not sending him for intensive rehabilitation, while Mrs. Kidd feels that his paralysis is probably irreversible. Mrs. Cross then confronts the institution's doctor who holds the same opinion of Jack's condition as Mrs. Kidd. His manner with Mrs. Cross is very much that of an adult addressing a child, asking her how many children she had raised and telling her she need not continue in a maternal role. Specialists in the treatment of the aged like Westerhof and Tulle have noted the use of "over-accomodative communication", a form of baby talk that is now called "elderspeak" with its simple repetitive sentences[68], which is how the doctor dismisses Mrs. Cross' concern: "I'm here to take care of people […] That's what I'm here for, that's what the nurses are here for. So you can leave all the worrying to us"[69]. Patronizing as he is, he probably recognizes the danger signals just as readily as Mrs. Kidd does.

For Mrs. Cross, an emotional woman, has fallen in love, taking on a possible self she has not performed for many years. Gradually, the relationship takes on a romantic aura in her mind; they find a quiet corner in which to sit together. Now she dares to use her yes / no method to ask him questions about his previous love relations and confides about an early boy-friend. Every night she reviews the time she has spent with him: "Lying in the dark at night, before she went to sleep, Mrs. Cross would go over everything that had happened with Jack that day […] whether he had said good-night to her sullenly or gratefully"[70].

Deprived of her friend's companionship, Mrs. Kidd also experiments with a new possible self. She accepts the overtures of friendship offered by a young woman in her forties, Charlotte, whose almost life-long multiple sclerosis and child-like personality have made her happy to be safe in a nursing home. However, Mrs. Kidd, who is more self-analytical than Mrs. Cross, reflects on her motives for bonding with Charlotte: "Was she turning into one of those old ladies that loves to be waited on? […] it was so easy to boss Charlotte, to make her play Scrabble and tell her when her manners were bad. Charlotte was itch-

[66] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 167.
[67] *Ibid.*, 168.
[68] Gerben J. Westerhof and Emmanuelle Tulle, "Meanings of Ageing", *Ageing in Society*, ed. John Bond et al., London: Sage, 2007, 246.
[69] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 171.
[70] *Ibid.*, 173.

ing to be somebody's slave"[71]. This is not the kind of possible self that Mrs. Kidd desires: "In the end, people's devotion hung like rocks around your neck. Expectations. She wanted to float herself clear"[72]. She has another fantasy that she does not confide in anyone: "She imagined a house on the edge of some dark woods or bog, bright fields in front of it running down to the sea. She imagined she lived there alone, like an old woman in a story"[73]. This fairy-tale narrative is a secret possible self, completely in contrast to Mrs. Kidd's life-long rational, self-controlled self, and so all the more tempting.

The stories that Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd are telling themselves are what socio-pyschologists call "self-narratives". Jeroen Jansz refers to a self-narrative as "the telling of an autobiographical story" which includes events and relationships in some kind of chronological sequence and which provides the individual with a "sense of continuity", of "distinctiveness", of "consistency" and "a relatively stable conception of oneself as a person"[74]. Like George C. Rosenwald and Richard I. Ochberg, Jansz indicates that the issue is not so much the absolute truth of the whole narrative as its function in giving a person a sense of order and direction[75]. As such, self-narratives are deeply emotional; the individual is now committed to a certain version of his or her past, present and future so that radically changing a self-narrative "is almost impossible"[76].

What happens further in Munro's story is unexpected but can be seen an outgrowth of the self-narratives of both Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd. Mrs. Cross's energetic nature cannot accept leaving Jack in his present state; she tells herself that he needs to re-learn his social manners and takes him to Mrs. Kidd's room where the latter is playing Scrabble with Charlotte. Jack seems comfortable with Charlotte; they interact on a childish level, both giggling. However, when Mrs. Cross makes a remark about not interfering in the Scrabble game, Jack becomes as violent as his physical disabilities allow him, giving her "his ugly look, worse than she had ever seen it before", knocking the game to the floor and letting Charlotte wheel him out [77]. Seeing Mrs. Cross in tears makes Jack glare "as if the feeling he had against her were boiling higher every moment"[78]. The self-narrative that Mrs. Cross has created of her special relationship with Jack ends cruelly with his revealing in front of others that he has come to deeply resent her attempts to regulate him. Mrs. Cross's romance narrative ends with another woman taking Jack from her.

In this crisis, Mrs. Kidd falls back on the norms of social behavior that she has absorbed from childhood, first speaking of other matters to give Mrs. Cross a chance to regain her self-control and not to cry in

[71] *Ibid.*, 175.

[72] *Ibid.,* 175.

[73] *Ibid.*, 175.

[74] Jeroen Jansz, "Self-Narratives as Personal Structures of Meaning", *The Self in European and North American Culture,* Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer, 1995, 66–67.

[75] Jeroen Jansz, "Self-Narratives", 66; George C. Rosenwald and Richard E. Ochberg, "Introduction", *Storied Lives: the Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding,* ed. G. Rosenwald and R. Ochberg, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 6.

[76] Jeroen Jansz, "Self-Narratives", 70.

[77] Alice Munro, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", 177.

[78] *Ibid.*, 177.

front of another person. This is part of their norms of decorum, but also of the friendship that played a major role in their lives in the nursing home before Mrs. Cross' infatuation with Jack. Mrs. Kidd reads her friend's body language, seeing that she is clutching her chest as her heartbeat becomes erratic. She fills in time by retelling the story of how she had fainted in her apartment and told off the psychiatrist who had asked her who the current prime minister of Canada was: "So I said, 'Who cares?'" [79]. The story is one of resistance against shame and helplessness, the efforts that Mrs. Kidd made to retain her dignity in the humiliating process of having to enter a nursing home. Both women laugh, Mrs. Cross "with relief. Mrs. Kidd's firm voice had spread a numbing ointment over her misery"[80]. Then Mrs. Kidd asks about her health, and her friend responds that she just needs to lie down.

In a further effort to save her friend's face, Mrs. Kidd suggests that Mrs. Cross sit in her own wheelchair (Charlotte has taken Jack away in Mrs. Cross's) and that she will push her back to her room. This is exactly the kind of stressful effort that endangers Mrs. Kidd's heart, but she manages to carry it out and even hide how dangerously exhausted she feels until her friend has disappeared into her room. The final paragraph of the story shows Mrs. Kidd breaking norms by sitting down on the floor: "She prayed no nosy person would come along until she could recover her strength and get started on the trip back"[81]. Hers has been a heroic act; both women have saved face by not calling on the staff for help. Within the very tight margins of agency available to them, they have retained their independence and dignity.

In the second story, "The Bear Comes Over the Mountain", dignity is not so easily maintained. Fiona, as a victim of Alzheimer's disease, is experiencing increasing memory loss. When she agrees to move to Meadowvale, she is making a radical break with her entire self-narrative up to this point: she has always belonged to the upper middle class with a great deal of financial independence and control over her daily life. Now she becomes a resident in an institution which dictates her daily schedule, limits her personal movements, removes most of her possessions and separates her entirely from her husband and friends for the first month. Not surprisingly, her already fragile memory breaks down as all the elements of her familiar environment disappear. Yet, as the director and staff have assured her husband Grant, she adjusts after some weeks: for those suffering from progressive dementia, the set schedule, rules, and limited number of staff in a nursing home do provide a sense of security. What is more important, however, is that she succeeds in finding a way to link her old self-narrative to a newer version that makes sense within the nursing home.

In Meadowvale she meets Aubrey, who was in love with her when they were both teenagers; now they fall in love again, giving Fiona a sense of coherence, since although her husband is gone, she has Aubrey instead. It is probably not merely the effect of Alzheimer's that she no longer re-

[79] *Ibid.*, 179.
[80] *Ibid.,* 179.
[81] *Ibid.,* 180.

calls Grant as her husband of many years. Just as Mrs. Cross finds new happiness in her maternal / romantic relationship with Jack, so Fiona is completely happy, experiencing the romance of falling in love again: she blushes when she looks at Aubrey, speaks into his ear and "tapped her fingers across the back of his hand"[82]. In addition, at this stage of her self-narrative, she regains agency very much as Mrs. Cross does: the nurses are surprised at her success in coaxing Aubrey out of his wheelchair into walking the halls holding onto her.

"The Bear Came Over the Mountain" is almost two and a half times as long as "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", in large part because the text gives Grant, who is the major focalizer, a much larger and more complex part in the narrative. Although Grant does not live in the nursing home, he now occupies a very awkward position between husband and widower: he has and has not 'lost' his wife. Heliane Ventura suggests that Grant finds in the nursing home "an inversion of values that is characteristic of nonsense" [83]. This may be going a little too far, but it is true that Grant feels he is performing the role of a man courting a woman that he had believed his own for so long. When he first visits after the obligatory month of separation, he falls back on a stereotype of courtship, buying her flowers, although this was never something he had done for Fiona or any woman before: " He entered the building feeling like a hopeless lover or a guilty husband in a cartoon" [84].

Long flashbacks fill in Grant's own long history of infidelity to his wife. For years Fiona was the faithful spouse, ignoring his affairs with his students. These affairs were not merely a physical pleasure for Grant: he remembers the sudden availability of younger women in the 1970s as "a whirlwind", which gave him "a gigantic increase in well-being" and the opportunity to try out new selves; he loses weight, becomes full of energy and for the first time is sensitive to the beauty of nature [85]. These affairs, which he did try to keep secret, ended only when social norms changed once more: female students suddenly began to interpret his advances as sexual harassment, and he took early retirement.

Once Fiona has moved to the nursing home, Grant adjusts his current self-narrative through new kinds of acts of fidelity. During the first month when he is not allowed to visit, he phones one of the nurses every day. He keeps denying the changes that Alzheimer's is making in his wife, even asking whether her apparent non-recognition of him might not be part of her characteristically ironic style of being. Grant has been unfaithful to Fiona during much of their married life, but in the last years he has chosen the faithful self that he is convinced was always primary. Their enforced separation when she develops Alzheimer's and enters a nursing home does not diminish this way of seeing himself; indeed, it becomes almost obsessive.

[82] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 290.

[83] Heliane Ventura, "The Skald and the Goddess", 295.

[84] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 287.

[85] *Ibid.*, 301, 303–304.

In the meantime, Fiona herself has been dealing with the shock of a radical change in her life – change of residence, change of those around her, change of status and power. As specialists on old age and nursing homes argue about similar cases, she feels a strong need for a personal relationship around which she can construct her self-image and have a feeling of security[86]. In order to assure herself this, she creates a new self-narrative which begins with a true fact – she and Aubrey did meet many years ago, and he was then in love with her. To continue this self-narrative, however, it is necessary to delete the years of her marriage to Grant. She remains a loving partner, but not to the same man.

Along with a new self-narrative, Fiona tries out a new social self to fit in better with a man from a lower class. It is not simply that she openly exhibits her love for Aubrey, something that would have seemed vulgar to her before: she whispers in his ear, touches his hand repeatedly and is so obsessed with him that she becomes a figure of fun for much of the staff: "That Aubrey and that Fiona? They've really got it bad, haven't they?"[87]. Fiona first met Aubrey when he worked in a store that her grandfather went to; even his success at his work as the sales agent for a fertilizer company does not put him in the same class as Fiona's father, a surgeon, or her husband, a university professor. When Aubrey is taken out of Meadowvale by his wife, she does not, as the nurses predict, get over his loss quickly, but continues her narrative of being in love with him with real mourning, not eating and visibly declining. Only elements of her former social manners remain: "She was still polite – she apologized for her tears […] But she wept. […] Her cardigan – if it was hers – would be buttoned crookedly. She had not got to the stage of leaving her hair unbrushed or her nails unclean, but that might come soon"[88]. In terms of identity, these are not trivial changes: the status habits of a life time are being abandoned. The director of the home explains to Grant that if she cannot take care of herself, she will have to be moved to the dreaded second floor. For the staff, this is a familiar stage in the narrative that began when Fiona first entered the nursing home as an Alzheimer's patient; it will end with advanced dementia and death.

The final episodes of the text move to Grant's efforts to persuade Aubrey's wife to return her husband to the nursing home – to give him back to Fiona, in other words. Now a new character – Aubrey's wife Marian – is introduced into the action of the story. This kind of expansion of the main narrative line into extended narratives of characters who first appear minor is typical of Munro's later stories. Ailsa Cox remarks that "for Munro, story telling is not a linear process" [89]. As Munro herself has noted, after writing more conventionally tightly-knit stories for many years, she began to let the narrative take its own direction: "What I want now in a story is an admission of chaos […] I want

[86] Alfons Marcoen et al., "Psychological Ageing", 63; Janet Askham et al., "Personal Relationships", 194, 196.

[87] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 292.

[88] *Ibid.*, 306–307.

[89] Ailsa Cox, *Alice Munro*, 71.

things to come in as many layers as possible" [90]. This sub-plot begins, as the introduction to Fiona did, with Grant's analysis of Marian's social status when he visits her and Aubrey's home. Their house is in a suburban development that has lost its original prestige, though Marian's house is still well-maintained. Nonetheless, Grant assumes that his superior status and practiced manner with women will make it easy to manipulate someone that he imagines as "a flustered homebody, pleased by an unexpected visit and flattered by a confidential tone"[91]. His initial assessment of her as a woman is not flattering: a small waist but "she bulged out considerably above and below" and has "a good many wrinkles"[92]. He criticizes her home from a superior class position, imagining Fiona being amused by the multiplicity of curtains and "astonished to see so much fancy stuff crowded into such a small space", the kitchen counters full of "all sorts of contrivances and appliances", the coffee mug hanging on "the amputated branches of a ceramic tree trunk" [93]. His judgment is arrogant and snobbish, but outwardly he tries to soften Marian by admiring her possessions.

Yet when he suggests that Aubrey could visit Fiona in the nursing home once a week, Grant comes up against the realities of a lower middle-class life. Marian not only points out that such visits would probably affect Aubrey's mental state but also tells him in cruder language that "I don't know if he's still so stuck on seeing your – on seeing Fiona" [94]; if her husband becomes upset again, she will have to deal with this herself. He responds that it might be easier for her to place Aubrey permanently in Meadowlake, provoking her to explain bluntly that this is financially impossible: "I get the pension next year, and I'll have his pension and my pension, but even so I could not afford to keep him there and hang on to the house. And it means a lot to me, my house does" [95].

Marian's line of argument takes Grant back to the realities and norms in which he grew up. He recalls his own relatives speaking in very similar ways to her, with the same acceptance of hard economic realities, and the contemptuous dismissal of those of higher class as "too airy-fairy, or stupid, on account of their easy and protected lives or education. They had lost touch with reality"[96] (316). Grant has to admit that, in comparison to Fiona, "Marian would probably be good in a crisis. Good at survival, able to scrounge for food and able to take the shoes off a dead body in the street"[97]. He imagines an alternative self-narrative in which he never rose out of the lower middle class and married someone like Marian, "if he'd stayed back where he belonged"[98]. This is the first time in the narrative that Grant admits to himself that the social world he has entered through Fiona is not really his world, and his wife is a constant problem in interpretation: "Trying to figure out Fiona had

[90] Cited in Catherine Sheldrick Ross, *Alice Munro: A Double Life,* 88.

[91] Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", 309.

[92] *Ibid.*, 308–309.

[93] *Ibid.,* 310–311.

[94] *Ibid.*, 313.

[95] *Ibid.,* 314.

[96] *Ibid.*, 316.

[97] *Ibid.,* 317.

[98] *Ibid.*, 317.

always been frustrating […] like living in a mirage"[99]. Marian, on the other hand, seems easier to understand.

Grant has considered Marian sexually from his very first glimpse of her when she came to collect her husband from Meadowlake: "a trim waist and wide buttocks"[100]. When he meets her, he notes that her face is wrinkled and her hair "artificially reddened", though with "youthfully full and up-tilted breasts"; he cruelly remarks that she has "what was left of the more or less innocent vulgarity of a small-town flirt"[101]. Still, Grant has enough imagination to admit, when he decides that Marian lacks the real beauty that Fiona has kept, "though shadowy", that he may be seeing Fiona through his memory of what she was like many years ago; it may be, he reflects, that Aubrey still sees Marian as "a high-school girl full of scorn and sass, with an intriguing tilt to her robin's-egg blue eyes, pursing her fruity lips around a forbidden cigarette"[102]. What begins as a conflict over Aubrey and Fiona's relations becomes a personal struggle for dominance: "What a jerk, she would be thinking now"[103] (Bear 316). He has judged her as socially and sexually undesirable, and she has done the same about him.

Yet Grant discovers, as he gets several voice messages from Marian on his answering machine at home that, on the contrary, his performance as a charmer of women is not a failure. Marian suggests going together to a dance, and his ego is immediately flattered. His more recent dominant self, that of a devoted husband ready to do anything to make his sick wife happy, now merges with an older and apparently discarded self-narrative, Grant the seducer of other women. He understands that to manipulate Marian into returning Aubrey to Fiona, he cannot offer mere flirtation: when he returns her calls, he deliberately arouses himself by imagining her breasts, "the practical sensuality of her cat's tongue. Her gemstone eyes"[104] (Bear 321).

A space between this and the final passage in the story indicates the passage of time. Grant's seduction of Marian has succeeded; he has brought Aubrey to the home for a visit, but Fiona is not crying over Aubrey any longer. For the first time since entering Meadowvale, her thinking seems almost normal. She is reading the book on Iceland he had brought her but in which she had shown no interest; now she even comments that the dress she is wearing is not her colour or style. Yet she confuses the nursing home with a hotel, and wavers between understanding that she is ill and believing that they can leave together. When he announces that he has brought her Aubrey, she is briefly disturbed, denies remembering anyone of that name, and embraces her husband. She is not exactly the Fiona before entering Meadowvale; he notices a smell from her breath or skin "like the stems of cut flowers left too long in their water"[105], but she is the wife who loves him and whom he still loves. In one sense Grant is finally punished for his

[99] *Ibid.*, 317.
[100] *Ibid.*, 308.
[101] *Ibid.,* 309, 313, 317.
[102] *Ibid.*, 313.
[103] *Ibid.*, 316.
[104] *Ibid.*, 321.
[105] *Ibid.*, 322.

years of philandering and manipulating women, including his wife: what is he now to do with Aubrey, waiting to see Fiona? How will he manage to end the affair with Marian? Still, the last lines of the text are happy ones, confirming that the self-narrative in which Fiona is the central fact in his life is recognized by her and vital to him:

> "You could have just driven away," she said. "Just driven away without a care in the world and forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken."
> He kept his face against her white hair, her pink scalp, her sweetly shaped skull. He said, Not a chance.[106]

Alice Munro concludes her text, as she often does, with a final scene that reverses expectations for both Grant and readers. Both of these understand that Fiona's partial mental recovery is a short-lived phase as the illness deepens. Munro frequently ends her stories with what may be called a temporary truce, a moment of peace and understanding between characters, part of the fragility of happiness within the harsh force of time to change and destroy her characters' lives.

Alice Munro's short stories repay a close reading of what initially seem like casually narrated realistic accounts of people whose characters and lives are not especially exciting or different. The choice for this analysis of two stories set in nursing homes and the use of sociological concepts like self-narratives and possible selves reveal the real complexity of Munro's probing into the human situation, in this case that of the elderly, who are often regarded as having reached the final page of their experiences. "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" and "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" are love stories that test the readers' understanding of love; they present examples of people maintaining their dignity even when they are fragile and apparently totally regulated by others. In the second story, the nurse Kristy, though sympathetic, does not see Fiona's decline into dementia as tragic: "To her, Grant and Fiona and Aubrey too must seem lucky. They had got through life without too much going wrong. What they had to suffer now that they were old hardly counted"[107]. Sociologists, however, attest that the elderly still retain desire and hope, and require love, which Munro demonstrates in her narratives. Mrs. Kidd does not forsake her friend Mrs. Cross, while Grant does not forsake his wife Fiona. Alice Munro uses her literary art to focus on acts of fidelity, friendship and love that are hardly noticed by other people around her protagonists, but which are still meaningful dramas that provoke the readers' interest and reflection.

[106] *Ibid.,* 322.

[107] *Ibid.*, 305.

TAPATYBĖS POKYČIAI ALICE MUNRO APSAKYMUOSE: SOCIOPSICHOLOGINĖ ANALIZĖ

Milda Danytė

S a n t r a u k a

2013 m. Nobelio literatūros premija skirta Kanados rašytojai Alice Munro (g. 1931). Tai pirmas atvejis, kai premijuotas vien apsakymus kuriantis rašytojas. Iš pirmo žvilgsnio Munro apsakymų personažai yra paprasti mažų anglosaksų provincijos miestelių gyventojai, kurie netikėtai ima priešintis ir laužyti nusistovėjusias gyvenimo normas. Šiame straipsnyje taikant sociopsichologinius metodus analizuojami apsakymai „Mrs. Cross ir Mrs. Kidd“ ir „The Bear Came Over the Mountain“, kuriuose moterų personažai dėl fizinės ar psichikos ligos nebegali gyventi savarankiškai. Slaugos namuose, vienoje iš griežčiausiai reglamentuojančių Vakarų visuomenės institucijų, apsakymų protagonistės sugeba tęsti tai, ką sociologai vadina „gyvenimų naratyvais“, ir susikurti „galimas tapatybes“. Rašytoja jų pastangas traktuoja ironiškai, bet ne pašaipiai, ir atskleidžia netikėtus būdus, padedančius apsakymų veikėjoms išlaikyti savo orumą.

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