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The Uncanny, Open Secrets, and Katherine Mansfield's Modernist Legacy in Alice Munro's Everyday Gothic*

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Abstract

Alice Munro has sometimes been labeled as a realist, but her contribution to what I call the "everyday Gothic" and her acknowledged debt to the modernist narrative strategies have been largely overlooked. Drawing on John Paul Riquelme's insights into the link between the Gothic and modernism and Ben Highmore's reflection on the everyday, this essay argues that Munro is a Gothic modernist who deploys such narrative strategies as open-endedness of the plot, the splitting of the self, and temporal prolepsis to defy normative expectations about the linearity of the plot, the coherence and intelligibility of the self, and progressive temporality to produce the uncanny reading effects of her everyday Gothic. This argument is made through analysis of Munro's short stories and her comments on writing in relation to those of Katherine Mansfield. Munro and Mansfield are linked together because of their readiness to use innovative narrative strategies to expose the everyday life as possibly traumatic, thereby giving their stories a distinctive gothic undertone. Thus, the first part of this essay investigates how Munro was influenced by Mansfield in her use of modernist strategies of defamiliarization and divided self to expose the terrifying motifs hidden beneath the banality of everyday life. Those motifs

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fascinated Mansfield and include the uncanniness of social snobbery and self-estrangement. In the second part, the author examines how Munro deploys the concept of "open secrets" to disclose the closed mindset of the townspeople and subverts Mansfield's modernist emphasis on "the present moment" by installing instances of prolepsis in her later stories such as "Open Secrets" (1994) and "Jakarta" (1998). The conclusion of this essay claims that what is Gothic about Munro's stories is not so much the risk hidden in the unknown future and places as the sense of horror evoked by the mimetic uncanny in the hollowness of everyday lives.

Keywords: the everyday, the uncanny, modernist, Gothic, secrets, Katherine Mansfield, Alice Munro

Introduction

Alice Munro has sometimes been labeled as a "realist" for her tendency to document "everyday experience," as Alisa Cox points out (3). Her short stories such as "Heirs of My Living Body" (*Lives of Girls and Women*), "Friend of My Youth" (*Friend of My Youth*), and "A Wilderness Station" (*Open Secrets*) record the Scottish heritage and regional flavors of Southwestern Ontario. But Munro also has a penchant for employing Gothic elements, which can be traced back to her Scottish ancestors, James Hogg (1770-1835) and his mother Margaret Hogg, who "represent an approach to storytelling which dwells on the fantastic, and the grotesque, and which is driven by a compelling voice" (Cox 3). Consequently, her short stories, which capture the disturbance and cruelties hidden behind the everyday events and lives in the rural and small town communities of Southwestern Ontario, have been labeled as "Southern Ontario Gothic," a term which was first coined by Timothy Findley in a 1972 interview conducted by Graeme Gibson (136). In this essay, however, I have coined another term, "everyday Gothic," to classify Munro's Gothic stories for two reasons. First, Munro's stories are not always set in the region of Southern Ontario. For instance, in her collection *Open Secrets* (1994), "The Albanian Virgin" is set in Albania while "The Jack Randa Hotel" is set in Australia; "Too Much Happiness" (*Too Much Happiness*), a story about a historical mathematician, is set in Russia and Western Europe. Second, the term "Southern Ontario Gothic" fails to address the main themes of Munro's Gothic stories: "the deadening and deforming forces beneath genteel surfaces" such as "untreated disease," "excessive behavior," "family secrets," and "social oppression" (Hepburn and Hurley 1085) in the domestic sphere. For example, the only time the word "Gothic" appears in Munro's short stories is in "The Peace of Utrecht" (*Dance of the Happy Shades*), about a mother with Parkinson's Disease whose daughters refer to her as "our Gothic Mother" (195).

Munro has been most commonly associated with other notable Canadian writers who also employ Gothic elements in fiction based in and around Southern Ontario, including Timothy Findley, Margaret Atwood, Matt Cohen, Marian Engel, and Scott Symons (Hepburn and Hurley 1085). Additionally, Munro's acknowledged debt to American Southern Gothic writers such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers has received much critical attention (Lilienfeld 255). However, Munro's connection to modernist writers has largely been overlooked. Such oversights may be attributed to what Jeff Wallace and Andrew Smith call "the Gothic's appeal to a mass readership and modernism's associations with elite culture" (1). In the introduction to *Gothic and Modernism: Essaying Dark Literary Modernity*, John Paul Riquelme argues that to consider

the Gothic and modernism separately is to ignore the Gothic's compatibility with modernism, for "[t]he essentially anti-realistic character of Gothic writing from the beginning creates in advance a compatibility with modernist writing. That compatibility begins to take a visible, merged form in the 1890s in Britain" (4). The "anti-realistic character" refers to the Gothic and modernism's shared dissatisfaction with the so-called realism, as illustrated by nineteenth-century realist novelists such as George Eliot, who was committed to the idea of realism "that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality" (qtd. in Beaumont 4).[1] In other words, both Gothic and modernist writers challenge the assumptions of realism, such as the notion of "the unified self" and "history as progressive," by creating "a degree of uncertainty in the reader" (Riquelme, "Modernist Gothic" 27, 30). The Gothic and modernism's anti-realist argument, however, does not imply that they do not proclaim mimetic representations of reality. As Roman Jakobson states in his "On Realism in Art," the same intention to find the right way to represent reality can be found outside the nineteenth-century "realist school" (25). For instance, the Gothic writers attempt to explore what David Punter calls "the hidden depths" "below the apparent surface of the world" ("Introduction" 11) while the modernist writers "seek to grasp and communicate the unique, individual vison of reality" (Kokot 67). In light of this, it would be fitting for us to examine what kind of Gothic strategy Munro uses to explore the underside of reality and the modernist devices she employs to grasp the psychological vision of reality.

In her article "What is Real?", Munro responds to a question frequently raised by her readers, "Do you write about real people?" (223), by expressing her intention to create the effect of the "real" in her fiction. She answers:

> Yes, I use bits of what is real, in the sense of being really there and really happening, in the world, as most people see it, and I transform it into something that is really there and really happening, in my story. No, I am not concerned with using what is real to make any sort of record or prove any sort of point. (226)

Munro's response echoes Ben Highmore's reflection on everyday life: "Everyday life is not simply the name that is given to a reality readily available for scrutiny; it is also the name for aspects of life that lie hidden" ("Questioning Everyday Life" 1). Here, "what is real, in the sense of being really there and really happening, in the

[1] In a review of volume 3 of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, published in 1856, George Eliot defines "realism" as "the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality" (qtd. in Beaumont 4).

world, as most people see it" can be defined as what Highmore refers to as "a reality readily available for scrutiny," which Munro aims to transform into "something that is really there and really happening," or what Highmore calls, "aspects of life that lie hidden." To put it in another way, the statement indicates that Munro does not intend to "record" the reality as "most people see it" or to make any moral point through truth-telling as the realist of the nineteenth century does. If Munro is a realist writer, she nevertheless produces an effect less of the real than of the Gothic. Hence, I propose that the phrase "transform it into something that is really there and really happening" shows that Munro intends to utilize modernist devices to render the Gothic uncanniness in the everyday, or what she calls "the evil we can run up against in communities and families" in her short stories ("What is Real?" 226).

Drawing on John Paul Riquelme's insights into the link between the Gothic and modernism and Ben Highmore's reflection on the everyday, this essay argues that Munro is a Gothic modernist who writes to defamiliarize, or to provoke her readers to think differently about their life. To do so, she deploys such narrative strategies as open-endedness of the plot, the splitting of the self, and temporal prolepsis to defy normative expectations about the linearity of the plot, the coherence and intelligibility of the self, and progressive temporality to produce the uncanny reading effects in her everyday Gothic. This argument is made based on analysis of Munro's short stories and comments on her own writing in relation to Mansfield's short stories and writing strategies found in her letters and journals. I single out Mansfield among other modernist writers for two reasons. First, James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's influences on Munro's work have been analyzed by other critics.[2] More particularly, Mansfield is the only modernist to whom Munro has acknowledged debt. Munro once told John Metcalf in 1972, "I was very influenced by Katherine Mansfield at one time" (qtd. in Metcalf 57). Munro and Mansfield are linked together particularly because of their readiness to use innovative narrative strategies to expose everyday life as possibly traumatic, thereby giving their stories a distinctive gothic undertone. Thus, the first part of this essay aims to demonstrate that the phrase "one time" indicates that Munro was influenced by Mansfield in her use of modernist strategies of defamiliarization

[2] For similarities between Del Jordan, the heroine of Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, and Stephen Dedalus, the hero of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, see Struthers, and Atwood. Jane Lilienfeld has investigated Woolf's influence on Munro's focus on "the seemingly random happenstance of daily life, on human relationships and consciousness rather than on external events" (262). Jane Lilienfeld's speculation that Munro aligns with D. H. Lawrence due to their shared working-class background is questionable (255) since Munro once told Jeanne McCulloch and Mona Simpson in an interview that she was "terribly disturbed" when she first read D. H. Lawrence because of his view of "female sexuality."

and divided self to expose the terrifying motifs hidden beneath the banality of everyday life. Those motifs fascinated Mansfield and include the uncanniness of social snobbery and self-estrangement. They are found in Munro's earlier stories such as "The Peace of Utrecht" (1968) and "Half a Grapefruit" (1978). In the second part, I investigate how Munro progresses from modernism by developing her concept of "open" stories and "queer bright moment" as she learned them from modernist open-ended stories and epiphanies. I further examine how Munro subverts Mansfield's modernist emphasis on "the present moment [in which] . . . everything is suspended in time" (Kokot 74) by installing instances of prolepsis. That can be seen in later stories such as "Open Secrets" (1994) and "Jakarta" (1998). What is Gothic about Munro's later stories is not so much the risk hidden in the unknown future and places as the sense of horror evoked by hollowness and the repetitiveness of the everyday lives and events of small-town communities.

The Uncanny, Everyday Gothic, and "Monstrous Snobbery"

In a 1973 interview with Graeme Gibson, Munro insisted that "the part of the country I come from [Southwestern Ontario] is absolutely Gothic" (242). As Munro recalls, people in Southwestern Ontario were advised "not to aim too high," and they used to ask one another: "Who do you think you are?" (Thacker 9). This kind of stifling world in which people do not call attention to themselves is depicted in fictional towns in Southwestern Ontario such as Jubilee in "The Peace of Utrecht" and Hanratty in "Half a Grapefruit." Munro's defamiliarization of her hometown reveals what David Punter argues, namely that "Gothic has to do with the uncanny: the uncanny has now come to form one of the major sites on which reinvestigations of the mind . . . can take place" ("The Ghost of a History" 2). In other words, the uncanny is a manifestation of the Gothic. Reflecting on Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny," Nicholas Royle highlights the paradox of home and unhomeliness evoked by the term:

> The uncanny is ghostly. It is concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural. [. . .] But the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness and alienation. More specifically, it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home. (1)

The phrase "something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home" reminds us of what Gina Wisker has labeled Katherine Mansfield's "domestic Gothic in which

disturbance and dis-ease exist in the midst of the everyday comforts of an ordinary house, family, and family meal" (26). Although Mansfield is rarely thought of as a Gothic writer, Wisker's study of Mansfield's under-recognized Gothic story "A Suburban Fairy Tale" provides a starting point to rebuild the link between Munro's narrative strategy and Mansfield's commitment to modernist defamiliarization, "a popular feature of the Gothic which moves readers through estrangement to see situations and people anew" (20). Combining two keywords from Wisker's statement on Mansfield's Gothic story, "everyday" and "Gothic," I propose that the term "everyday Gothic," which connotes both familiarity and strangeness, is perfect for describing the uncanny power evoked by the everyday settings in Munro's short stories. I choose the word "everyday" instead of "domestic" as used in Wisker's statement addressing Munro's Gothic stories since Munro reveals the horror in the areas of both domesticity and work, which cannot be fully captured by the word "domestic." As Ben Highmore remarks, "Everything can become everyday" (*Ordinary Lives* 1); Munro's everyday Gothic seems to suggest that everything in the everyday, ranging from family relations to school life and work routine, can become gothic. For example, Munro describes the fictional town of Jubilee in *Lives of Girls and Women*: "People's lives in Jubilee, as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing, unfathomable, deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum" (249). The phrase "deep caves" recalls what Highmore referred to as "fissures in a stream of constancy" by which "the everyday is . . . punctuated" (*Ordinary Lives* 1). I contend that Munro's everyday Gothic makes visible these "fissures" which are otherwise covered over by "kitchen linoleum," or the genteel surface of the everyday. Moreover, the uncanny effects in her stories are triggered by these fissures, which reveal how the characters fail to identify themselves and "things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity" (Bennett and Royle 36). These fissures will be further illustrated by an intertextual reading of Mansfield's "The Garden Party" and Munro's "Half a Grapefruit" in the following paragraphs.

I have chosen to compare these two stories because they both deploy defamiliarization to make readers rethink the issue of class distinction hidden beneath the everyday surface, revealing what Jeff Wallace and Andrew Smith call "modernism's fascination with the everyday" and "the mutual obsession of the Gothic and the modernist with the rapidly changing relationship between culture and the quotidian" (1). Furthermore, what is Gothic in these two stories is not so much the death of characters as what Munro calls "monstrous snobbery" in another domestic Gothic story "The Peace of Utrecht" (*Dance of the Happy Shades*), which shows two sisters', Maddy's and Helen's, conflictual views of the local accent:

> But she [Maddy] speaks with a twang of the local accent, which we used to make fun of, and her expression as she romped and drank was determinedly undismayed. It seemed to me that she was making every effort to belong with these people and that shortly she would succeed. It seemed to me too that she wanted me to see her repudiating that secret, exhilarating, really monstrous snobbery which we cultivated when we were children together, and promised ourselves, of course, much bigger things than Jubilee. (192)

The phrase "monstrous snobbery" exposes the presence of the uncanniness of class snobbery in the everyday setting in Jubilee. Although the class differences set Mansfield and Munro apart,[3] they are both aware of the issue of class distinction in their communities and are interested in it as a theme. In Mansfield's "The Garden Party,"[4] the heroine Laura Sheridan, who grows up in a rich family in colonial Wellington, is so surprised by a workman's care for "the smell of lavender" that she begins to question the "stupid conventions" that do not allow her to "have workmen for friends" (403). Considering class consciousness as "one of the most important characteristics of turn-of-the-century Britain," Emmanouil Aretoulakis argues that Laura, "being a child and as yet uncontaminated by the tradition of colonial distinctions between classes, provides early in the story a somewhat 'postcolonial' view of societal structures: 'It's all the fault [. . .] of these absurd class distinctions'" (53). Aretoulakis explores the New Zealand-born Mansfield as a "(post)colonial modernist whose anticipatory discourse demonstrates a consciousness about resistance that precedes the founding of the postcolonial state; that is, an already known postcolonial vision" (Wilson 1). In light of Aretoulakis' observation, the class distinctions exemplified in "the monstrous snobbery" might be more threatening in colonial Wellington and postcolonial small towns in Southwestern Ontario than real monsters in "the unknown wilderness"(ix).[5] The term "postcolonial" in Aretoulakis' statement on Mansfield's "The Garden Party" and Mansfield and Munro's shared Commonwealth background may tempt us to classify Munro's Gothic stories as "postcolonial Gothic;" however, I chose to call Munro's stories "everyday Gothic"

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[3] Unlike Mansfield, who was born into a prestigious family in colonial Wellington, New Zealand, and was sent to finish her education in London, Munro grew up in Wingham, Ontario, Canada on a fox farm run by her father Bob Laidlaw. When Munro was born Alice Ann Laidlaw in 1931, "the economic depression of those years impacted her parent's already insecure financial circumstances" (Lilienfeld 257).

[4] In this essay, I use *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, Vol. 2: *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield, 1916-1922*, edited by Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Mansfield's short stories are from this edition and only page references are given parenthetically in the main body of the text.

[5] According to Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcottee, "If early instances of the Gothic in Canadian literature, as in John Richardson's 1832 novel *Wacousta*, were concerned with terror in the face of the unknown wilderness, a more recent strain of gothic literature in Canada has been less occupied with an overtly externalized and alien sense of gothic otherness that is 'out there' and more concerned with an interiorized psychological experience of gothic 'uncanniness' and illegitimacy" (ix).

rather than "postcolonial Gothic" because the latter focuses more on political issues such as colonial oppression and Canada's settler history than what is terrifying about the everyday, which Munro has emphasized in her stories.[6] In other words, the term "everyday Gothic" opens Munro's work to broader understandings of her Gothic stories.

In Munro's "Half a Grapefruit" (*The Beggar Maid*), Rose is very competitive in high school, perhaps because of the restriction of her poor environment. She relies on reading Mansfield's "The Garden Party" as part of her school work to "shut out the household noises" (50):

> It was a story by Katherine Mansfield, called "The Garden Party." There were poor people in that story. They lived along the lane at the bottom of the garden. They were viewed with compassion. All very well. But Rose was angry in a way that the story did not mean her to be. She could not really understand what she was angry about, but it had something to do with the fact that she was sure Katherine Mansfield was never obliged to look at stained underwear; her relatives might be cruel and frivolous but their accents would be agreeable; her compassion was floating on clouds of good fortune, deplored by herself, no doubt, but *despised* by Rose. Rose was getting to be a prig about poverty, and would stay that way for a long time. (50)

The phrase "floating on clouds of good fortune" shows Rose's belief that Laura's compassion for the poor people is transitory and will not, as Angela Smith observes, "alter the stultifying class structure of which she is a part, and may not in the end change her" (*Katherine Mansfield* 124). The clause "she was sure Katherine Mansfield was never obliged to look at stained underwear" points to Rose's doubts concerning Mansfield's ability to write about poverty, which might be limited by her well-to-do background. Rose's ambivalent view of Mansfield and "The Garden Party" invites us to consider Munro's "Half a Grapefruit" as an attempt to re-tell Mansfield's "The Garden Party" from a poorer character's point of view. In other words, Mansfield and Munro provide different versions of the everyday, divided by their classes.

While Mansfield uses hyperbole such as "Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were" (403) or "Laura gave a loud childish sob" (413) to depict Laura's encounter with the poor people, Munro deals with, in Roxanne Rimstead's words, "poverty and cross-class experience" with "a distanced gaze" (105). However, Mansfield's fascination with detail, in which she feels "an infinite delight and va-

[6] Munro does touch on Canada's settler history in some of her stories such as "The Stone in the Field" (*The Moons of Jupiter*) and "Wilderness Station" (*Open Secrets*), but the historical settings of these stories serve as the backdrops of the stories rather than as the main themes. For example, "Wilderness Station" deals with not so much the settler's history as a woman's difficult experience surrounding the death of her husband.

lue" (*Letters* 1: 192),[7] and what Georgeann Murphy calls Munro's "riveting attention to detail" (49) prompt both writers to represent the class distinction through the detailed portrayal of fictional characters' accents, food, and house locations: Laura in "The Garden Party" is "ashamed" of her posh accent "that sounded so fearfully affected" while talking to workers (402); out of mixed feelings of jealousy and self-depreciation, Rose, in "Half a Grapefruit," contrasts Laura's relatives' "agreeable" accents with the country accent, embodied in the word "*yez*" as pronounced by a man from her community:

> She heard Billy Pope come into the kitchen and shout out cheerfully, "Well, I guess *yez* wondered where I was."
>
> Katherine Mansfield had no relatives who said *yez*. (50)

In both stories, social class differences are foregrounded in the characters' food consumption. In "The Garden Party," the Sheridan family's wealth is indicated by their habit of having cream puffs right after breakfast; however, even "scraps from their party" would be good enough to be, in Mrs. Sheridan's word, "the greatest treat for the children" of their poor neighbors (411). In "Half a Grapefruit," after everybody said "what they had for breakfast" in the classroom, "[d]ifferences soon became evident, between town and country" (40). Rose, who can only afford to have "tea and porridge" for breakfast, lies to the class that she has "half a grapefruit" for breakfast in order to "align herself with towners, against her place of origin, to attach herself to those waffle-eating coffee-drinking aloof and knowledgeable possessors of breakfast nooks" (40-41).

In addition to accents and food, the invisible class distinction is most noticeably marked by visible geographical boundaries: in "Half a Grapefruit," Rose needs to cross the bridge from West Hanratty, the poor part of town, to attend high school in Hanratty, the rich part of town. In "The Garden Party," the poor people live in "the little cottages" "in a lane to themselves at the very bottom of a steep rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between" (408). Both Rose and Laura confront their secret selves while facing the horrible reality of class division.

As Nicholas Royle states, the uncanny elicits "a sense of ghostliness, of strangeness, given to dissolving all assurances about identity of a self" (16). This dissolution of identity resembles Mansfield's "awareness of the divided self," which is "a central concern of modernism" (Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and*

[7] In a letter dated 17 May, 1915, Mansfield tells the translator S. S. Koteliansky that she feels "an infinite delight and value in *detail*–not for the sake of detail but for the life *in* the life of it." In this essay, I use *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, edited by Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, hereafter referred to as *Letters*, followed by the volume number.

Virginia Woolf 19). As she writes to S. S. Koteliansky in a letter dated 19 Oct., 1922: "I am a divided being with a bias towards what I want to be, but no more. [. . .] So I am always conscious of this secret disruption in me" (*Selected Letters* 272). It is noteworthy that both heroines in the two stories have experienced this "secret disruption" in themselves while crossing the in-between space, the geographical boundaries that separate the classes. In "Half a Grapefruit," Rose heard someone calling "Half-a-grapefruit!" while walking home across the bridge a few days after she told the class that she had "half a grapefruit" for breakfast:

> "Half-a-grapefruit!" She would hear that called, now and again, for years, called out from an alley or a dark window. She would never let on she heard, but would soon have to touch her face, wipe the moisture away from her upper lip. We sweat for our pretensions. (41)

The passage reveals that Rose is haunted by a ghostly voice, which keeps reminding her of her divided self. She is secretly pleased with herself for coming up with the idea of having grapefruit for breakfast and yet ashamed of her pretension. In "The Garden Party," Laura wants to postpone the garden party because she learns that a poor neighbor, Mr. Scott, who lives in a cottage near their house, has been killed in an accident, but neither her sister nor her mother agrees. Laura's mother Mrs. Sheridan even tries to put down Laura's rebellion by popping a luxurious black hat on her daughter's head. Laura could not recognize herself in the mirror: "The first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with golden daisies, and a long black velvet ribbon. Never had she imagined she could look like that" (409). Standing in front of the mirror, Laura experiences a sense of self-estrangement or dis-identification.

They go on with the party, but later Mrs. Sheridan decides it would be a brilliant idea for Laura to send a basket of leftovers from the party to Mr. Scott's house. Finally, Laura pays a visit to the dead man's house, "seeing a corpse for the first time and surprised by its apparent tranquility" (Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf* 144):

> There lay a young man, fast asleep–sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dream. What did garden parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far away from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. Happy . . . happy . . . . All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content. (413)

Laura uses words like "dreaming," "peaceful," "happy," and "sleeping face" to construct an illusion of a sound sleeper for the dead worker, but she ends her visit by

sobbing and saying: "Forgive my hat" (413). Laura's apology for wearing a lavish hat indicates the fissure in the everyday that shows the lack of correspondence between "this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat" (409), who sees the image of the dead's suffering family as "a picture in the newspaper" (409) and her "secret self,"[8] who is so horrified by the material surface of death and poverty shown by the corpse in the wretched cottage that she feels sorry for being wealthy.

This section has illustrated how modernist strategies are deployed to depict the uncanny moments in Mansfield and Munro's everyday Gothic, in which "the secret disruption" in the characters tends to be triggered by the banality of everyday details including accents, food, and space. The next section will investigate how Munro develops her concept of "open secrets" and "queer bright moments" by drawing on Mansfield's modernist emphasis on open-endedness and "the present moment," and how Munro subverts these modernist strategies by her use of prolepsis in her later stories.

Open Secrets, "Queer bright moments," and Prolepsis

"Secrets" feature prominently in Munro's work. Secrets such as gossip about love affairs and scandals circulating in small towns are the central themes that occupy most of her short stories. "Secrets" are also the focus of her critical reflections on her own work. Particularly, in a 1995 interview, Munro described her experiments with the short story form as a kind of risk-taking, as embodied in her collection of stories, *Open Secrets* (1994):

> 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 would. As I stated earlier, I want 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. (qtd. in Boyce and Smith n. pag.)

The phrases "want to know," "expect to know," and "anticipate knowing" are indications of what most readers expect while reading fiction. As Frank Kermode writes in an essay entitled "Secrets and Narrative Sequence," "To read a novel expecting the satisfaction of closure and the receipt of a message is what most people find enough to do; they are easier with this method because it resembles

[8] In a letter dated 12 September, 1921, Mansfield tells the painter Dorothy Brett that she tries to find a form for her short fiction that would "speak to the secret self we all have–to acknowledge that" (*Letters* 4: 278).

the one that works for ordinary acts of communication" (138). "The *ordinary reader*" (138) reads novels or short stories in the hope of reading something which has a strong sense of what Kermode calls "narrative sequence" (135), or more clearly, "events sequentially related" (133-34). This is how "a traditional mystery or romance" satisfies the readers with a clear closure—the mystery is resolved or the lovers are able to consummate their love. Munro, however, wants her stories "to be open," thereby leaving readers in doubt or uncertainty by employing what Kermode calls secrets: "secrets," he argues, "are at odds with sequence" (138). What Kermode calls "secrets" here, as Nicholas Royle and Andrew Bennett interpret, are "textual details, specific aspects of the language of a text, particular patterns of images or rhetorical figures" "which can provoke a sense of mystery. Thus Kermode focuses on the enigmatic, repeated but apparently superfluous references to black and white in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911)" (270-71). If Conrad's use of color "clogs" sequence as Kermode suggests (150),[9] what kind of narrative secrets does Munro use to resist narrative closure? Drawing on Kermode's essay entitled "Secrets and Narrative Sequence," this section explores how Munro makes her stories open-ended and how her concept of "open secrets" is similar to and differs from Kermode's "secrets." By examining Munro's "Open Secrets," the title story of her collection of stories, I will discuss other stories by Munro where appropriate.

Before delving into my discussion of Munro's "Open Secrets," it would be helpful to look at the meaning of the word "secret." In "Secrets and Narrative Sequence," Kermode writes:

> Secrets, in short, are at odds with sequence, which is considered as an aspect of propriety; and a passion for sequence may result in the suppression of the secret. But it is there, and one way we can find the secret is to look out for evidence of suppression, which will sometimes tell us where the suppressed secret is located. (138)

The phrase "the suppression of the secret" refers to the author's attempt to suppress a detail or piece of knowledge. In other words, if the reader senses some suppression, a secret may be created. In addition, the phrase "we can find the secret" implies that a secret is what is discoverable. That is, each narrative can be defined as a process of revealing and unfolding the secrets. On the other hand, however, there is the question of "open secrets" which is used by Munro to refer to those secrets that are known by some or many people but not acknowledged or explicitly talked about in her story "Open Secrets" (*Open Secrets*). It is a small-town Gothic story

[9] In Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, as Kermode observes, "Black on white occurs twenty-four times expressly and many more less directly–in references to snow and darkness, light in dark rooms, and, as I have said, ink on paper. All this adds up to a quantitatively quite large body of text which on the face of it contributes nothing to sequence–clogs it, indeed" (150).

about the disappearance of a teenage girl called Heather Bell during "the annual hike of the C.G.I.T.—which stood for Canadian Girls in Training—out to the Falls on the Peregrine River" (131). The secret—the identity of the man involved in Heather Bell's disappearance—is not concealed: Mr. Siddicup's odd behavior of hanging women's clothes on the furniture in his house makes the townspeople suspect he might be Heather Bell's murderer:

> *Pervert*. Maybe they [the townspeople] were right. Maybe he would lead them to where he'd strangled or beat Heather to death in a sexual fit, or they would find something of hers in his house. And people would say in horrid, hushed voices that no, they weren't surprised. *I wasn't surprised, were you?* (152)

The repetition of the phrase "maybe," however, anticipates that the girl is never found, and the identity of the murderer is neither confirmed nor revealed at the end of the story:

> Heather Bell will not be found. No body, no trace. She has blown away like ashes. Her displayed photograph will fade in public places. [. . .]
>
> Mr. Siddicup will not be any help. He will alternate between bewilderment and tantrums. They will not find anything when they search his house, unless you count those old underclothes of his wife's, and when they dig up his garden the only bones they will find will be old bones that dogs have buried. Many people will continue to believe that he did something or saw something. *He had something to do with it*. (159-60)

The open ending indicates that the word "open" in the title has two connotations. First, the story is open-ended, as Munro comments on the publication of *Open Secrets*: "These stories don't close in the way people expect or want them to" (qtd. in Boyce and Smith n. pag.). Second, the townspeople's secrets are open: they suspect that Mr. Siddicup "*had something to do with*" the murder case of Heather Bell simply because they consider him a grotesque pervert. The horror of the public opinion that is shaped less by the act itself than by the suspect's identity is further emphasized by Munro's use of a matter-of-fact tone and prolepsis, marked by the repetition of "will" in this passage. Munro's concept of "open secrets" discloses the rigid imagination and the closed mindset of the townspeople.

Dubbed as Canada's Anton Chekhov (Naughton), Munro is not the first writer who is attracted to narrative open-endedness and incompletion, a strategy which can be traced back to Chekhov. One of Chekhov's followers is the modernist short story writer, Katherine Mansfield, whose work had a profound effect on Munro. Mansfield's critical observations are reminiscent of Chekhov's interrogative style in the formation of her own style. Reflecting on a Chekhov letter translated by S. S. Koteliansky, Mansfield wrote to Virginia Woolf in a letter dated c. 27 May, 1919: "[. . .] what the writer does is not so much to solve the question but to

put the question. There must be the question put" (*Letters* 2: 320). The following month she told Koteliansky that Chekhov's refusal to "solve" was "one of the most valuable things I have ever read. It opens—it discovers rather, a new world" (*Letters* 2: 324). In the same vein, Munro also refuses to bring the story to a satisfactory end:

> When I started to write I wrote about things that puzzled me–death, love, all the obvious concerns that tend to confuse us throughout our lives. Describing life made life bearable for me. While I'm still puzzled, I realize the questions we ask are far more intriguing than the answers we give or sometimes think we've discovered. This is why *Open Secrets* is not a good introduction to my work. These stories don't close in the way people expect or want them to. (qtd. in Boyce and Smith n. pag.)

The phrase "these stories don't close in the way people expect or want them to" is perfect for describing how Mansfield's "The Garden Party" ends. The reader may expect that Laura would explain what she has learned about life and death from this visit when she meets her brother Laurie, but she simply cries and stammers without finishing her question:

> "It was simply marvelous. But, Laurie–" She stopped, she looked at her brother.
> "Isn't life," she stammered, "isn't life–" But what life was she couldn't explain.
> No matter. He quite understood.
> "*Isn't* it, darling?" said Laurie. (413)

The reader is left to infer what kind of life secret has been revealed to Laura, and cannot be certain that Laurie fully understands what Laura fails to articulate. Mansfield adopts an open-ended narrative that would, as she expresses in a letter in 1921, "speak to the secret self we all have" (*Letters* 4: 278), which echoes Munro's view of writing about secrets, as she conveys through the narrator of "The Stone in the Field," a short story in *The Moons of Jupiter* (1986): "Now I no longer believe that people's secrets are defined and communicable, or their feelings full-blown and easy to recognize" (35). The incompletion of Laura's questions and the obliqueness of Laurie's reply imply how self-constraint exposes their unwillingness to confront the bleak reality of poverty.

The concluding paragraph of Munro's "Open Secrets" also illustrates the "intriguing" quality that characterizes an open-ended Gothic story:

> Maureen is a young woman yet, though she doesn't think so, and she has life ahead of her. First a death–that will come soon–then another marriage, new places and houses. In kitchens hundreds and thousands of miles away, she'll watch the soft skin form on the back of a wooden spoon and her memory will twitch, but it will not quite reveal to her this moment when she seems to be looking into an open secret, something not startling until you think of trying to tell it. (160)

Rather than solving the mystery of the identity of the murderer of the disappearing Heather Bell, the final paragraph of the story is devoted to the open secret about the future life of Maureen Stephens, "the subject of the focalization in this third-person narrative" (Duncan 75): Maureen will stay in "her lucky marriage" (134) until her husband's death. What is "startling" about this open secret is the fact that whether Maureen can embark on a new life is deeply determined by her relationship with men. While Maureen still indulges in a fantasy of autonomy and independence, the reader knows that her happiness is not fully under her control. Such knowledge remains unknown to her. The impossibility of controlling one's happiness echoes David Punter's proposed distinction between realist fiction's and Gothic fiction's approaches to the reality of the human condition:

> In the world of the realist novel, one may feel as a reader that the characters–and therefore also oneself–have the freedom to make moral choices and to follow them through; Gothic comes to remind us that there may be limits on that apparent freedom, that we may in fact be moving along predestined tracks, and that our fear, our horror, is about the difficulty of moving away from these confines, creaking out of the cellar, the prison, the coffin where we have been prematurely buried. ("Introduction" 12-13)

Punter's insight into Gothic fiction and its depiction of the characters' limited freedom of making life choices reconfirms what I have argued, namely that Munro is a Gothic modernist rather than a realist because she retains the mysteries of seemingly ordinary lives, making reality more terrifying.

In addition to open-endedness and "the secret self," the phrase "this moment" in the final paragraph recalls the "epiphanies" introduced by another modernist, James Joyce. James Joyce's brother Stanislaus Joyce describes James's "epiphanies" as "manifestations or revelations that came in slips . . . by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal" (qtd. in Johnson xxviii). The last sentence of "Open Secrets," however, shows that "an open secret" "will not reveal to her this moment." As Timothy Clark proposes, Maureen's "moment" is "pseudo-epiphanic," which "is not the revelation of some hidden depth, nor is it some sudden illumination that will allow a shape to come clear in its moral significance, but a moment of enigmatic condensation" (23). In keeping with Clark's insights, Maureen's "moment of enigmatic condensation" at the end of the story would be more aptly referred to as what Mansfield terms a "moment of suspension," an impression of her experience of writing in her journal entry of February, 1920. When Mansfield is carried away by the power of writing, she feels that "my [her] selves" are contained in "that moment of suspension," which resembles the movement of "the waves": "One is flung up–out of life–one is 'held'–and then, down, bright, broken, glittering on to the rocks, tossed back–part of the ebb and flow"

(*KM Notebooks* 2: 209).[10] The words "held," "bright," and "broken" intimate that the "moment of suspension" sheds some light (indicated by the word "bright") on "my selves" when one is no longer in control, like the waves "held" in the air before they are "broken" by the rocks.

The secret of "my selves," the term that bespeaks Mansfield's modernist awareness of multiple selves, is "bright" yet "suspended," which anticipates what Munro calls the "queer bright moment" in her introduction to *The Moons of Jupiter*, where she writes about a scene near the end of "The Turkey Season": "When I think about the story, I think of the moment when Marjorie and Lily and the girl come out of the turkey barn, and the snow is falling, and they link arms, and sing. I think there should be a queer bright moment like that in every story" (xv). The adjective "bright" means that Munro's narrative, as Isla Duncan states, "will often throw some light on a mystery, although it will not entirely unravel or resolve it"; yet "queer" also "suggests the strangeness and obliqueness of the insight, or illumination" (74).

In "Jarkarta" (*The Love of a Good Woman*), another Gothic story about the unconfirmed death of Sonje's husband Cottar in Jarkarta, Munro deploys a "queer bright moment" to enact another "open secret" revealed by the omniscient narrator to the reader, but not to Sonje and Cottar's friend, Kent:

> When they drove, he [Kent] waited and waited, just for Deborah to get to the next town. 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 up the wrong idea, surely the wrong idea. That somebody dead might be alive and in Jarkarta. (115)

The phrase "a moment when everything seemed to have something to say to you" recalls the same Gothic strategy of talking animals used by Mansfield in "At the Bay," the story read by Kath and Sonje at the beginning of "Jarkarta," to enhance the gothic uncanniness beneath the genteel surface of the everyday trivialities. "The wrong idea" "[t]hat someone dead might be alive and in Jarkarta" confirms negatively the death of Sonje's husband in Jarkarta.

Although Munro renews the concept of open-endedness, "the secret self," and "moment of suspension" from Mansfield, she also transcends Mansfield's "moment of suspension" by her extensive use of prolepsis, or "flashforward" (Ireland 591) marked by the repetition of "will" or "would" in her later stories. The instances of prolepsis can be found in the above-quoted concluding paragraph of "Open Secrets," which reveals "another marriage" of Maureen's in her "life ahead of her" to the

[10] In this article I use *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, Vol. 2, edited by Margaret Scott, hereafter referred to as *KM Notebooks*, followed by the volume number.

reader, or in another open-ended short story, "Jarkarta," in which a young woman's life pattern in Vancouver is prefigured: "It seemed to her [Kath] that life went on, after you finished school, as a series of further examinations to be passed. The first one was getting married. If you hadn't done that by the time you were twenty-five, that examination had to all intents and purposes been failed" (82). The phrase "a series of further examinations" implies that femininity is what Judith Butler calls "a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33). Femininity is the accumulation of the everyday practices that both require banal perseverance and introduce nuanced difference. In light of Butler's idea of performativity, Munro's narrative open-endedness can be seen as an indicator of the hollowness and boredom of women's domestic routines that will be infinitely repeated and never end. More particularly, "a set of repeated acts" will eventually produce a sense of verisimilitude and even excess, evoking the mimetic uncanny of femininity.

According to Duncan, Munro's use of prolepsis conveys "panchronic authority of the narrator, moving freely along the axes of character's lives" (113). As Munro herself states in a 1982 interview, she likes "looking at people's lives over a number of years, without continuity. Like catching them in snapshots" (Hancock 200) in her fiction. Munro once remarked in another interview she gave in 2001, "You're the same person at nineteen that you're at thirty that you're at sixty that you go on being." She went on to contend that "there is some root in your nature that doesn't change" (qtd. in McGill 143). For Munro, the future "you" is the repetition of the same "you." Reflecting on Munro's comment on the unchangeability of one's nature over time, Robert McGill argues that Munro "resisted the idea of personal development when it comes to describing adult life" (143). I would like to take McGill's argument further by suggesting that Munro also captures the non-progressivity of time in her Gothic stories instead of the linearity of time shown in "events sequentially related" (Kermode 133-34). In her work, to borrow Gilles Deleuze's comment on Robbe-Grillet's work, "there is never a succession of passing presents, but a simultaneity of a present of past, a present of present and a present of future, which make time frightening and inexplicable" (101). The word "frightening" here indicates that the co-existence of the past and the future in the present is one of the horrifying elements that enhance the Gothic effects in Munro's fiction. While the folding nature of time is the norm in Munro's Gothic, in Mansfield's modernist fiction, as Joanna Kokot points out, "there is only the present moment and the stimuli influencing the character. The moment is neither rooted in the past nor does it affect the future" (74).

Munro uses prolepsis to mimetically lay bare the terrifying closedness of everyday life, as Kent ponders in "Jarkarta": "The surprise was that these lives, the lives

his sons and daughter were living, seemed closed in now, somewhat predictable. Even the changes in them that he could foresee or was told were coming" (110). The phrase "closed" can also be applied to describe the lives of Lorna and Brendan in "Post and Beam," which seem to be locked in the prison of time, in which "days and years and feelings [are] much the same" (218).

Conclusion

Munro does develop her concept of "open secrets" and "queer bright moments" by adapting Mansfield's modernist skills such as open-ending, "secret self," and "moment of suspension" to generate a sense of the uncanniness and secrecy that characterize the Gothic genre. However, she also subverts Mansfield's "moment of suspension" by uniquely blending the "queer bright moment" with prolepsis, foreshadowing her characters' future life circumstances.

At the end of "Open Secrets," Munro writes: " . . . an open secret [is] . . . something not startling until you think of trying to tell it" (160). This could be taken as a metafictional comment on Munro's narrative secret: "[D]eath, love, all the obvious concerns that tend to confuse us throughout our lives" (qtd. in Boyce and Smith n. pag.) are open secrets, which will become startling only when a writer has found ways to tell them. There is nothing underneath these open secrets revealed in Munro's "queer bright moment," which contains no psychological depth as modernist epiphanies have. More specifically, the "queer bright moment" in Munro's Gothic produces a sense of shock in the characters and the readers, who are simply alarmed by the closedness of the everyday life, with neither moral judgement nor the intention to change it.

To conclude, I once again reaffirm my position that Munro is a Gothic modernist who adapts and subverts the modernist strategies learned from Mansfield to generate the uncanny reading effects in her everyday Gothic. What is Gothic about Munro's Gothic fiction is not so much the monsters that one may encounter, as expected, in the unknown wilderness as "the predestined tracks" people are moving along, and "the difficulty of moving away from these confines" in the modern world (Punter, "Introduction" 12-13). Her everyday Gothic exposes the "fissures" in "a set of repeated acts" of the everyday routine and continuum, producing the effect of the mimetic uncanny that both extends and challenges the politics of representation in nineteenth-century realist fiction.

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艾莉絲・孟若日常志異中的
陌異感、公開的祕密及
凱瑟琳・曼斯菲爾德的現代主義遺緒

摘　要

艾莉絲・孟若常被定位爲寫實主義者，然而她對筆者稱之爲「日常志異」此一文類的貢獻卻時被忽略。援引約翰・保羅・瑞克爾姆對志異文類與現代主義之間關係的洞見及班・海莫對日常的思考，本文主張孟若是一位志異現代主義者，她運用敘事策略如情節的開放、自我的分裂和預期描寫法，挑戰讀者對情節的線性、自我的一致性與漸進時間的慣常期待，進而營造其「日常志異」的陌異閱讀效果。此論點的形成是透過分析比較孟若與凱瑟琳・曼斯菲爾德的短篇小說及兩者對寫作的看法。孟若與曼斯菲爾德作品的連結在於兩者皆採用創新的敘事策略揭發日常生活中的恐怖，從而賦予她們短篇小說一種獨特的志異況味。本文第一部分探究孟若如何受到曼斯菲爾德的影響，運用現代主義陌生化與分裂自我的策略揭露隱藏在日常生活平庸下的恐怖主題。曼斯菲爾德的短篇小說亦處理這些主題，包括社會勢利與自我疏離所引發的陌異感。本文第二部分探討孟若如何採用其「公開的祕密」概念，透露小鎮居民封閉的思維模式。此外，孟若亦在其後期短篇故事，例如〈公開的祕密〉（1994）和〈雅加達〉(1998) 中採用預期描寫法，改寫了曼斯菲爾德現代主義式對「當下時刻」的重視。本文結論主張孟若短篇小說的志異性與其說是來自隱藏在未知未來與地方中的危機，不如說是源自空洞日常生活中的陌異感所引發的恐怖。

關鍵字： 日常、陌異感、現代主義、志異、祕密、凱瑟琳・曼斯菲爾德、艾莉絲・孟若