“The Tremendous Pounding of My Own Blood”:

Structure, Themes, and the Historical Consciousness of Alice Munro's *The View from Castle Rock*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis takes as its main purpose the exploration of Alice Munro's short story collection *The View from Castle Rock*. In this study, my main interest is to examine the historical consciousness of *Castle Rock* through an analysis of various narrative elements of the text. This thesis will bring together an analytical reading of the structural elements of the short stories, as well as performing close readings of the narratives in the collection. Through such an examination, it is my intention to better understand the text's relationship and engagement with history and narrativity.

The examination of *Castle Rock*'s historical consciousness is at the center of this thesis' academic interests. Historical consciousness is, as I define it, a text's representation and interpretation of the historical past; the manner in which a text decides to engage with the historical past, through different narrative devices, structural methods, and thematic concerns. In other words, the historical consciousness is defined by how a text decides to engage with, represent, and perceive the historical past. The importance of understanding a text's historical consciousness is to me self-evident, as our understanding of the past often regulates how we act and shape the future.

In this thesis, the focus of my analysis will be centered on the structural elements of narration, focalization, and other aspects related to perspective. Through such an exploration of structural aspects of the stories in *Castle Rock*, I will demonstrate some key aspects of the historical consciousness of the short story collection. My close reading of the short stories in this collection will focus on examining the recurring themes in the stories and how these thematic concerns relate to the overall narrative form of *Castle Rock*. It is my argument in this thesis that through this process of investigating *Castle Rock*, one can better understand the historical consciousness of this short story collection, and that such a reading of the text is beneficial to the study of Alice Munro's fiction in general.

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I must also give thanks the University of Calgary for admitting me to their Fall 2017 semester, to Aritha Van Herk and her wonderful course on historical fiction in the Canadian novel, and to the Taylor Family Digital Library for giving me the opportunity to go through The Alice Munro fonds and read the early drafts of *The View from Castle Rock*. I am also grateful for the University of Oslo granting me a traveling stipend for my research in Canada. I am also indebted to my colleagues at the master's program at the University of Oslo and the University of Calgary.

And lastly, I am thankful for my family. For their emotional support, their financial support, and for not insisting on reading any of my earlier drafts.

CONTENT

1 Introduction

> *I put all this material together over the years, and almost without my noticing what was happening, it began to shape itself, here and there, into something like stories. Some of the characters gave themselves to me in their own words, others rose out of their situations. Their words and my words, a curious re-creation of lives, in a given setting that was as truthful as our notion of the past can ever be.*
>
> Alice Munro, "Foreword," *The View from Castle Rock*

About two years ago now, around the time when I was finishing my bachelor's thesis in history, I encountered a serious problem in my scholarly writing. I was not able to discover any definite answer to my thesis question, in other words, any notion of historical truth eluded me. Things seemed to become less clear to me the more research I undertook. The subject of my thesis, "The Influence of Arthuriana on the Reign of Edward III", lent itself nicely to this sort of uncertainty, as it concerned itself with the Arthurian myths and to what degree Edward III modeled himself on the pattern of these myths. But as I was writing, I realized that my thesis could easily be written to agree with the claim that Edward III did model himself and his reign on Arthurian romances, and, at the same time, I could agree with the dissenting voices that claimed that the influence of Arthuriana on Edward III was minimal.

This is a story, too, albeit, a very dull one about scholarly research and student anxieties. Of course, I did write my bachelor's thesis on the influence of Arthurian romance on Edward III and his reign, and I did puzzle about the plausibility of multiple "truths" to the question that I had raised in my thesis. But, my critical thoughts about all of this has happened in retrospect as a realization after the fact, and my engagement with the slippery nature of historical truth hardly worked itself out in such an orderly point of succession as my little anecdote might have made it seem.

Stories upon stories upon stories. This tenuous relationship between truth and fiction is at the heart of the Canadian short fiction writer Alice Munro's oeuvre. "Entering the landscape of Alice Munro's writing is an intense experience of the consanguinity between the fictional and the real" (10), the scholar Ulrica Skagert writes in the opening paragraph of her doctoral thesis on Munro's fiction. This quote cuts to the core, I would argue, of Munro's literary project. With this in mind, it is perhaps not difficult to understand why her fiction appealed so

much to one dazed history student, who struggled with understanding the difference between truth and fiction in history writing.

I "discovered" Alice Munro shortly after she won her Nobel Prize in Literature and her work flooded the bookstores. I quickly worked my way through all her short story collections, and out of all her works, the one I liked the least was the one that perhaps should have appealed to me the most, the historical short story collection *The View from Castle Rock*. I couldn't wrap my head around the structure of the collection. It seemed to me like two different collections, that had been put together for reasons I could not understand. Perhaps neither of them had had enough stories to make up for a book by themselves. To me, it was a flop.

A few years later, as I began to prepare for writing this master's thesis, I worked my way through Munro's collections yet again. I knew that I wanted to examine her fiction, but I had yet to figure out what approach I wanted to take towards it. As I worked my way through her stories, I found myself oddly attracted to *Castle Rock*, which I had felt so ambivalent about before. From the pages that I read, I could see that there was something interesting at work here. I could sense that Munro was engaging with history and thinking about the past in a manner and from a perspective that I had not seen earlier in her work. Suddenly, *Castle Rock* began to excite me. I decided that I would have to devote my thesis to examining this relationship between truth and fiction and the representation of the historical past in this short story collection to understand why this work suddenly interested me.

In this thesis, I will examine the historical consciousness of Munro's short story collection *The View from Castle Rock*. To do this, I find it necessary first to begin this introduction by explaining what I mean by the term historical consciousness, so that there will be no misunderstandings later in this thesis as to the intentions of my research. To better elucidate my understanding of the term historical consciousness, I shall first put forward some points raised by the scholar and historian Hayden White regarding historical discourse. He writes that historical discourse:

> does not produce new information about the past, since the possession of both old and new information about the past is a precondition of the composition of such discourse. Nor can it be said to provide new knowledge about the past insofar as knowledge is conceived to be a product of a distinctive method of inquiry. What historical discourse produces are *interpretations* of whatever

> information about and knowledge of the past the historian commands (White, *Figuralism* 2)

Historical discourse then, according to White, offers interpretations of the past through the medium of text. It is this interpretation, or rather, representation, of the historical past that constitutes a historical consciousness, as I define the term. In his examination of historical discourse, I would argue that White is not consistent in his usage of the term discourse. At some points in his work, he seems to refer to discourse in the sense that Foucault would refer to discourse; that is that a discourse that is an unconscious ideological manner of perceiving and moving through the world, and that these discourses intermingle and produces knowledge of how the world "is". At other points, though, it seems as if White is referring to a discourse that has little power, and at other times to a discourse that is something that one individual produces consciously. “Historical consciousness”, then, is a term that I believe suits better the aims of this thesis and its exploration of the representation of the historical past in the fiction of Alice Munro.

The historical consciousness is, as I define it, a text's representation and interpretation of the historical past; the manner in which a text decides to engage with the historical past, through different narrative devices, structural methods, and thematic concerns. In other words, the historical consciousness is defined by how a text decides to engage with, represent, and perceive the historical past. The importance of understanding a text's historical consciousness is to me self-evident, as our understanding of the past often regulates how we act and shape the future.

I have decided to examine the historical consciousness in *Castle Rock* instead of the historical discourse, mainly because I do not want any confusions regarding the term discourse in this thesis. Discourse, as I understand the term, is defined by its "unconscious" production of knowledge. To examine the historical discourse of *Castle Rock* would therefore require a rigorously deconstructive approach, whose scope would stretch far beyond the limitations of this thesis. Historical consciousness, on the other hand, is defined by both the conscious choices a text makes in representing the historical past through the medium of writing, and the unconscious discursive elements tied to these various narrative techniques utilized to represent the historical past. My decision to examine the historical consciousness of *Castle Rock* allows me to examine the ways that Munro represents and engages with the historical past without the need to give an in-depth deconstruction of the text. In this way, I can examine the parts of historical representation that interest me most. That said, this thesis

engages heavily with analytical readings of *Castle Rock*, and neither does it shy away from examining the historical discourse behind selected parts of the collection.

1.1 The Text and a Note on Genre

I did not only choose to examine *Castle Rock* in this thesis because it was one of Munro's collections that I struggled with the most and that it was the collection that is most engaged with the historical past. I also chose this particular collection for the interesting manner in which it engages with the past and history. In this collection, Munro uses both archival research, fictionalization, memory records, and personal autobiography to construct her text. The intermingling of all these different aspects of history-writing seems to me also to construct an interesting historical consciousness, that requires a more in-depth examination.

Castle Rock seems to me to be a significant moment in Munro's writing career; and not only because it is a departure from what has become the "traditional" Munro short story collection. It is certainly an uncommon creature, one that I believe is difficult to define as a text. This is especially true when one puts *Castle Rock* next to Munro's earlier and later works. Yet, there is also something quintessentially Munro-esque about the collection, and in some sense, it seems as if the collection was the natural continuation of her writing career. For in some ways, this collection that was at one point meant to be Munro's last, has much of her early concerns threaded throughout its stories. For example, the first short story in Munro's first collection *Dance of the Happy Shades* has a similar interest in the Ontario landscape, that we can see towards the end of *Castle Rock* in "What Do You Want to Know For?". In "Walker Brothers Cowboy", the autobiographical protagonist Del Jordan goes down to the lake with her father, where he tells her about the ancient history of the landscape. The retrospective narrator tells us in this story that: "All where Lake Huron is now, he says, used to be flat land, a wide flat plain. Then came the ice, creeping down from the north, pushing deep into the low places" (3). In *Castle Rock*, an older Munro has returned to her home province together with her second husband, and she tells us: "The landscape here is a record of ancient events. it was formed by the advancing stationary and retreating ice. the ice has staged its conquests and retreats here several times, withdrawing for the last time about fifteen thousand years ago" (318). She then goes on for a few pages and describes the soil composition in detail. If this had been Munro's final collection, as she at one point wanted it to be, the parallels between the first story in her first collection and her last story in her final

collection would have been even clearer. Nevertheless, it illustrates that Munro has worked over the same ideas throughout her writing career, but that she discovers new layers to these ideas, much like the different layers of her home and favorite setting.

Another example of how the ideas found in *Castle Rock* have always been present in Munro's fiction is in the story "Heirs of the Living Body" from her second collection *Lives of Girls and Women*. There we are introduced to the character Uncle Craig, who also writes a family history and lectures Del Jordan on town and family history. The narrator tells us that:

> When he was not working in the township's business he was engaged on two projects – a history of Wawanash County and a family history going back to 1670. . . . He did not ask for anybody in the family to have done anything more interesting than to marry a Roman Catholic (the woman's religion noted in red ink below her name); indeed, it would have thrown his whole record off balance if anybody had. It was not the individual names that were important, but the whole solid, intricate structure of lives supporting us from the past. (30-31, my ellipsis)

At the end of this same collection, in the story entitled "Epilogue: The Photographer", Del Jordan tells the reader that "It did not occur to me then that one day I would be so greedy for Jubilee. Voracious and misguided as Uncle Craig out at Jenkin's Bend, writing his history, I would want to write things down" (249). So we can then see that *Castle Rock* has been implicit in Munro's writing throughout her career. She has focused her narratives on the "ordinary" people of rural Ontario in most of her fiction, but in *Castle Rock* she is at last fulfilling the task that Del Jordan was given by her two aunts in "Heirs of the Living Body", to write the family history.

This collection of short stories has also been, I believe, woefully ignored in Munro Studies and Canadian Literature Studies despite its importance to many of Munro's key narrative preoccupations. Perhaps many others have struggled with this collection, for out of all the research on Munro and her fiction that has been produced since the publication of *Castle Rock* in 2006, very few have focused on this particular collection. Out of the scant scholarly work that has concentrated on *Castle Rock*, there are only articles that have focused on selected stories in the collection, and never on the collection as a whole, which is my intention in this thesis. Now that Munro has won the Nobel Prize in Literature, it seems even more of a neglect by Munro Studies and CanLit Studies that one of her collections should have received so little scholarly work dedicated to it. So, my decision to dedicate my thesis to

examining *Castle Rock* was in part motivated by my own interest in the relationship between history writing and fiction writing, as well as a hope that I could examine a part of Munro's fiction previously neglected despite its apparent importance to her art.

Now, I feel it is necessary to add a note on genre regarding this collection of short stories, if that is the correct definition of this text. One of the interesting facets of this particular text is its merging of forms and genres into one whole. The first part of the collection consists of five stories. This first half of the text is entitled "Part One / No Advantages", after the first short story of the collection. In earlier drafts of the text, this part of the collection was entitled "Family History" (Box 3, folder 1), and the narratives we find in this first half of the collection are family histories. These are stories in the short story form that narrate the historical past in a manner that is an unusual combination of non-fiction and narrativization of the past. The historical consciousness of this first half of the collection is therefore closely linked to the genre conventions that these narratives play with and the techniques utilized in representing the past through these forms.

The second part of the collection is entitled "Part Two / Home" and has more of an autobiographical impulse to its form. In these stories, Munro focuses on her own personal history and narrativizes these events into five short stories that move in time from her childhood to her adulthood. One of the points that interests me regarding *Castle Rock* is how these different parts of the collection work together and engage in something like a dialogue with each other. Both the first and second half of this collection are historical in nature, but the "type" of history that they are engaging with is different. The fact that Munro decided to put these two sections together to make one whole collection of short stories interests me greatly and has, I believe, great bearing on the historical consciousness of the text as a whole.

In choosing *Castle Rock* as my only primary text in this thesis, I hope that I will be able to examine in-depth one facet of Munro's oeuvre that has been previously neglected in Munro Studies and CanLit Studies. There are certainly pitfalls in choosing only one text as a reference point for a master's thesis, but it is my argument that considering the text's interesting engagements with form, style, and content demands a more thorough examination than has previously been conducted in this particular literary field of study. It is my hope that this thesis will add some valuable comments to *Castle Rock* and to the study of Munro's fiction in general.

1.2 Theory and Criticism

Scholarly work on Alice Munro's oeuvre has appeared throughout her five-decade-long writing career. There has been particularly a prolific output of academic articles that have examined her fiction with regard to various topics such as gender, class, Canadian Literature, and the short story form. After the publication of her sixth collection, *The Progress of Love*, studies of Munro's work became a more prevalent topic of study in Canada, and after she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, there has also been an increased international interest in her work.

The first comprehensive study of Munro's narrative was published in 1987 by the scholar W. R. Martin. *Alice Munro: Paradox and Parallel* picks up on some key elements of Munro's narrative art, that have been recurrent from her earliest collection, and that still have relevance for her latest collection, *Dear Life*. In this academic work, Martin draws attention to the typical protagonist that often shows up in Munro's narrative, and the manner in which Munro incorporates images of paradox and parallel in her narrative structure. The structural aspect of Munro's fiction has always been central to critical studies of her work. One key academic study that examines her narratives at a structural and analytical level is Isla Duncan's *Alice Munro's Narrative Art*, which looks at various narrative aspects of Munro's short fiction. Also significant is Ildikó de Papp Carrington's *Controlling the Uncontrollable: The Fiction of Alice Munro*. Another interesting study is James Carscallen's *The Other Country: Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro*, which is perhaps the most structuralist study of Munro's fiction to date.

Doubtlessly, some of the most common critical readings of Munro's fiction are those produced through a feminist lens. In this subfield of Munro studies, Magdalene Redekop's *Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro* is still an important academic work with regard to Munro and her engagement with feminist issues. In this book, Redekop draws attention to the figure of the mother in Munro's narratives. She also discusses the "magic" realism of Munro's art, that is, a sense of realism that is almost hallucinatory in its detail to what Martin might have called the paradoxes and parallels of everyday life. Redekop also touches on the importance of the autobiographical narrative as one of the key facets of Munro's fiction. Further feminist readings of Munro's work have been performed by scholars such as Beverly Rasporich in *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro* and Coral Ann Howell's *Alice Munro*.

Although the feminist perspective is significant to the thematic concerns of Munro's fiction, many other key thematic elements have been discussed in works such as Ajay Heble's *The Tumble of Reason: Alice Munro's Discourse of Absence*, Louis K. MacKendrick's *Some Other Reality: Alice Munro's 'Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You'*, and, of course, by various scholars in *The Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro*. These thematic concerns include class, absence, guilt, and the importance of place in Munro's fiction. These are just some of the book-length academic work that inform my examination of *Castle Rock*. On top of this, there is also a wealth of journal articles that address these same thematic concerns, as well as other significant preoccupations of this thesis, such as for example Stephen Bernstein's "Alice Munro's Scottish Birthright".

There is a great breadth of academic studies regarding Munro's fiction that have informed my thesis, but as I have mentioned earlier in this introduction, little academic attention has been given to *Castle Rock* in particular; that is, besides a few journal articles by scholars such as Isla Duncan and Corinne Bigot. I have therefore in this thesis relied on my own readings of the short stories in *Castle Rock*, though informed by the critical works that have been published before. I have also relied to some extent on reviews of *Castle Rock*, as they often have interesting points to make, though these points are not always given through a critical lens.

Apart from critical readings of Munro's fiction, I will also make use of narrative theory in my examination of *Castle Rock*. As I have mentioned, in previous studies of Munro's fiction there has always been an interest in the form and the structural components of her short story narratives. Isla Duncan's *Munro's Narrative Art* presents itself as one example of a typical "bridge" between the theoretical concepts found in narrative theory and the more thematic preoccupations found in academic works produced on Munro's fiction.

The foundation for this thesis's engagement with narrative theory is the scholar Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. In this thesis, I will draw from the narrative theories put forward by Genette, while also utilizing the work published later by other scholars in the field of narrative theory. In this thesis, my engagement with the field of narrative theory will for the most part be focused on the theories regarding perspective, focalization, narration, and form. Since this thesis attempts to explore the representation of the historical past in *Castle Rock* to better understand the historical consciousness behind the text, these particular narrative concerns seem the most pertinent to the concerns of this thesis.

Seymour Chatman is the scholar that, after Genette, has most informed my reading of perspective and focalization. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* and *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, as well as various articles collected in anthologies, have particularly helped to shape my own understanding of how narration, perspective, and focalization represent and create a narrative. Another scholar that is critical to my understanding of narrative theory is Dorrit Cohn, in particular her book *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. In this work, Cohn examines the various modes of rendering consciousness in a narrative. This has had an importance in my own reading of *Castle Rock*, particularly when considering the difference between a text's rendering of the consciousness of the characters and its representation of an historical consciousness as a whole.

Besides the critical readings of Munro's work and narrative theory, I will also utilize postmodern historiographic theory to develop the historical aspects of this thesis. Much like Genette serves as the foundation for my understanding of narrative theory, so does the historian Hayden White serve as the foundation for my understanding of the postmodern aspects of historiography. My usage of White's theories moves between his earliest thoughts regarding tropics in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* to his later work in *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, and *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory*.

One of White's works that I will not be using in this thesis is his so-called "Magnus Opus": *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of the Nineteenth-Century*. Although this work of scholarship serves as the foundation of White's theoretical work, I find that the ideas and concepts presented in *Metahistory* has been refined by White in his later publications to such as point that *Metahistory* with regard to postmodern historiography has not as much to offer as White's later publications. Still, that is not entirely to disregard *Metahistory* as an important work of scholarship, as it sets out the foundation for the ideas worked over by many scholars in the field of postmodern historiography, I would argue, though, that its rigid structuralism has been much improved in White's later work, where he incorporates narrativity into his theoretical framework.

In this thesis, I will also utilize the work of some scholars within the field of postmodern historiographic that have reworked or commented on the theoretical framework provided by White. On the historical side of the field, I utilize scholars such as Hans Kellner, who in his book *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked*

advocates for a historiography that is more attuned to the manner in which we tell the historical past. On the more literary side of the field, I make use of the Canadian scholar Linda Hutcheson, who in her scholarship on postmodernism often touches upon the relationship between history and literature in this field, and particularly in Canadian postmodernism.

The boundaries between the literary and the historical is uncertain and shifting in the field of postmodern historiography. Although, White stresses that he is not a poststructuralist, and that history can be studied as separately from literary studies as long as we are honest about the limitations that narrativity puts of history as a field of study. Postmodern historiography is, perhaps, because of this intermingling of disciplines, particularly suited to a thesis that explores the historical consciousness of a text. That being said, this is a study of literature and not history. In this thesis, I am examining the narrative effects that construct a historical presentation in the text, and I am not examining the historical past as an object in of itself. In a somewhat interdisciplinary study such as this, I believe that it is particularly important for the scholar in question to have a clear understanding of the differences as well as the similarities between the various disciplines they utilize.

In this thesis, I will also make use of some theory regarding autobiographical writing. The scholar Roy Pascal and his work *Design and Truth in Autobiography* will serve as the foundation for my knowledge on this topic. My final usage of theory in this thesis is, perhaps surprisingly, from the fields of anthropology and sociology. Admittedly, these are not fields that I have any great familiarity with. Nevertheless, when it comes theory surrounding the genre of family history, scholars in these fields have published a great variety of fascinating works. My excuse for utilizing this theory, despite having little to no familiarity with this field of study, is that these studies are very much related to how we perceive history and to the field of historiography. Also, these studies are concerned to some degree with literature and the discursive facets of genre. In this thesis, I have utilized the sections of these anthropological and sociological studies that are relevant to the study of literature and the effects that literature creates.

1.3 Outline of Chapters

In the following chapters, I will examine the various elements of *Castle Rock* that I believe will reveal something about the text's historical consciousness. It is my belief that the

historical consciousness of a text, as I have defined the term in this introduction, is revealed both at the structural level of a text and at the thematic level of a text. I will therefore examine *Castle Rock* analytically and through close reading.

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I will for the most part give an analytical reading of *Castle Rock*. Chapter 2 will deal primarily with various elements of narration, focalization, and the first-person perspective in the text. The chapter will be divided into two parts where the first part is concerned with these narrative elements in *Castle Rock* and how they relate to elements in conventional history writing. The second part of this chapter will focus on these same narrative elements, but in relation to how they are utilized in autobiography. The short stories and texts that will be analyzed in Chapter 2 will be "Foreword", "No Advantages", "Lying Under the Apple Tree", and "Home".

Chapter 3 will deal with similar topics as Chapter 2, that is, structural elements of *Castle Rock* with some comments on the thematic concerns of the various short stories examined in this chapter. In Chapter 3, I will examine multiple focalization, the third-person perspective, and the use of shifting forms in *Castle Rock*. This chapter is also divided into two parts, where the first part focuses on the multiple focalization in some of the third-person narrated stories. The second part of this chapter will deal with shifting perspectives and shifting form in the text. The short stories that will serve as my primary texts in Chapter 3 will be "The View from Castle Rock", "Illinois", and "The Wilds of Morris Township".

Chapter 4 will round off my examination of *Castle Rock*'s historical consciousness by examining different thematic concerns of the text and the use and bending of genre in the text. Chapter 4 will be divided into three sections, unlike the earlier two chapters. Part 1 will examine the family history aspect of the collection and the thematic concerns of the stories in the first half of the text. The second part of this chapter will examine the autobiographical aspect of the collection and the thematic concerns of the stories in the second half of the text. The third section will apply the concept of figuralism to *Castle Rock* and examine the collection as a whole. The short stories that will be my point of entry in this chapter of my thesis will be most of the stories in the collection, but especially those not yet examined earlier in the thesis, that is, "Working for a Living", "Fathers", "Hired Girl", "The Ticket", and "What Do You Want to Know For?".

The conclusion of my thesis will briefly summarize what I believe to have discovered through my examination of *Castle Rock*. That is, through my analytical and thematic reading of *Castle Rock* I will argue that I have managed to better understand the text's relationship to

and conception of history. With a better understanding of the historical consciousness of this particular work, I believe that we can better understand not only *Castle Rock*, but much more of Munro's oeuvre, as she has worked within a historical vein in her fiction has throughout her career.

2 First-person Narration in *The View from Castle Rock*: The Historian and the Autobiographer

> *Reading some of these stories gives the feeling of wearing unfamiliar bifocals, needing to angle the head awkwardly so as to bring the fields of vision into alignment.*
>
> Adam Mars-Jones, *The Guardian*

> *The past needs to be approached from a distance*
>
> Alice Munro, *The View from Castle Rock* (332)

In this chapter of my thesis, I will examine the various techniques of first-person perspective utilized by Alice Munro in rendering the consciousness of her characters in her short story collection *The View from Castle Rock*. The perspective of the narration is crucial to how historical fiction portrays the historical the past. The element of perspective within narratology as a field of study is of course broad, with multiple and sometimes contradictory approaches that define the manner in which perspective functions in a narrative. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, I will aim this thesis's theoretical focus towards those scholars and theorists that have followed and modified the work of the French scholar Gérard Genette. Genette's own theories will serve as the basis of this thesis's understanding of how the focus of narration functions. Together with the theories of narratology in fiction, I am also making use of the scholar and historian Hayden White, as well as the scholars that have followed his research and examined the relationship between history writing and narrative. These theoretical parameters will inform my historical reading of the stories in *Castle Rock*.

This chapter will be divided into two main subsections that examine different elements of first-person perspective in these stories and how these render and examine the historical past. The first section will examine the use of the first-person narrating voice that blurs the lines between author, narrator, and character. Throughout Munro's writing career, it has been rare for her to utilize a narrating voice that can be considered "authorial", that is, a narrating voice that is actively aware of the story they are telling and that comments on the narrative as it unfolds. I (the exemption being autodiegetic stories where the narrator is narrating scenes

from her own life and memory). It seems significant to me that in a work such as *Castle Rock*, a text that blends the borders between reality and fiction, this narrative device is a recurrent aspect of many of the stories in the collection.

The second subsection of this chapter will examine the use of the first-person narrator in the later stories of the collection. In these stories, we meet an autobiographical narrator, who seemingly is narrating stories from the author's own life. In this subsection of my thesis, I will examine this retrospective technique and two manners in which Munro has utilized it in *Castle Rock*. It is my argument that by better understanding the manner in which first-person perspective functions as an element to render the historical past, we can as readers receive a better understanding of the collection's historical consciousness as a whole.

2.1 The Borders Between Authors and Narrators: Constructing an Historian as Narrator

In his review of *The View from Castle Rock*, the critic Brad Hooper voiced his critical stance to Munro's collection of stories. He writes that Munro's "intrusion into the prose not as narrator but as actual author prove[s] distracting and erode[s] the veil of suspension of disbelief" (*Booklist* 8). Later on, in his book-length criticism on Alice Munro's oeuvre entitled *The Fiction of Alice Munro*, he considers *Castle Rock* to be a "slip backwards" in her writing career (151). The narrative element of the short story collection that he finds particularly problematic is the strong presence of a narrating voice in many of the early stories in the collection. He writes that the technique "can only be described as startling, Munro as author steps in *as author*" (151, emphasis in original). What is of interest to me in Hooper's review of *Castle Rock* is perhaps not so much his preconceived notion that the presence of a narrating voice in the narrative somehow always makes fiction less impactful and successful as a convincing story. Instead, I consider his review to reveal something particularly unorthodox about Munro's style in this particular collection of stories. That is, Hooper's review of *Castle Rock* makes it evident that the use of a non autodiegetic, first-person narrating voice is a technique which Munro throughout her long writing career has utilized sparingly. The question we must then ask is: why did this collection of stories demand a change from Munro's more recognizable use of first-person narrating voice?

I believe that the narrator's voice is significant for understanding this collection's relationship to representing the historical past. In this subsection of this chapter, I will

examine the figure of the author, the implied author, the narrator, and the dramatized narrator and how the borders between these narrative elements are muddled in *Castle Rock*. What is it about these stories that can make Hooper claim that Munro steps into the narrative as author? This is a claim that I do not agree with, but I find the claim itself significant to illustrate how the focus of narration seemingly dissolves and overlaps the process of communication between author and reader(s).

First of all, there are few voices in critical narratology that would argue that the flesh-and-blood author can be present in the narrative of a text. The author is singularly present in the writing of a text, not in the narrative itself, and can therefore not step into the text upon reading. Munro is therefore not present in *Castle Rock* as anything more than a trace. This trace is more fittingly termed the implied author. Now, the implied author is of course present in the text on account of the relationship that exists between implied author and reader. That is, the reader knows that there is an author of the text and therefore imagines the author from the information given to him or her, and this authorial character becomes the implied author. *Castle Rock* in particular is a collection where the implied author's presence is felt in the reading of the text. The collection's loose definition as a family history and autobiographical fiction makes this presence of an authorial figure inevitable. But, I would also make the argument that the implied author is also present, to some extent, in the narrating at the beginning of the collection, that is, in the "Foreword".

The foreword to the collection differs from the rest of the text by its position as the author's commentary on the production of the text in its entirety. The scholar Seymour Chatman argues in *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, that "reading a text, though ultimately an exchange between real human beings, entails two intermediate constructs: one is the text, which invents it upon reading (the implied author), and one outside the text, which construes it upon reading (the implied reader)" (76). I want to ask the question if the foreword to *Castle Rock* perhaps can be argued to bridge the gap between the implied author and the implied reader more than any other narrative element? If we ask the question “who narrates the ‘Foreword’?” the most logical answer seems to be that the author does. Can we then perhaps say that the implied author is also the narrator of the "Foreword"?At a first glance, I can see this statement as somewhat plausible. The narrator of the foreword is certainly "posing" as Munro's own thoughts on the collection and her experience producing it. And yet, the very purpose of the implied author is to negate the merger between the author and the text. The implied author (and the implied reader) become

elements in the "conversation" between the author and the reader mediated by the text. It is a crucial narrative element for any text to be read and interpreted in different manners. If we then imagine the implied author as a narrative element with the capacity of narrating, our understanding of narrative functions breaks down upon itself. Chatman continues to write on the implied author, that " the implied author is not the voice: that is, the immediate source of the text's transmission. 'Voice' belongs uniquely to the narrator" (769). I would argue that to conflate the narrator's voice of "Foreword" and the implied author is troubling and undermines our understanding of the transference of text during reading. And yet, the "author" and the narrating voice is clearly closer in the "Foreword" then at any other time in the collection. To explain this use of the first-person perspective to push the boundaries between authors and narrators, I want to tentatively propose that the narrator of "Foreword" can be understood as an implied authorial narrator. By this neologism, I understand the concept of a narrating voice that purports to be the voice of the (implied) author. The narrating voice of the preface is then a narrator masquerading, so to speak, as the implied author of the text.

Of course, the foreword of *Castle Rock* is not the most important part of the collection to examine if we are to understand the text's relationship to the narrating first-person voice. Yet, I would argue that it introduces the reader to the text's play with narrating voice and the position of the author in any given text. Hooper writes with regard to the "Foreword", that "The tone of the Foreword is irritating: less an introduction than a self-defence. But its muddiness in explaining what she means to do in these stories seem to indicate *she* is unsure what to call them" (152). We can see here that Hooper conflates Munro the author with the implied authorial narrator who narrates the "Foreword". This conflation of narrating voice will lead Hooper to further confusions as to how to read and interpret the collection.

Now that we have briefly had a look at the author, implied author, and the possibility of an implied authorial narrator in text, who pushes at the boundaries of narrative and reality, I want to turn this examination of the first-person perspective towards the actual stories in the collection. Particularly of interest to me in this subsection of my thesis is how the first-person narrating voice of some of the early stories in *Castle Rock* manages to navigate the line between history writing and fiction writing to further illuminate our understanding of both forms. Referring again to Hooper's critique of *Castle Rock*, we can perceive some of the ways that this collection differs from Munro's earlier work. He writes: "The first one is titled 'No Advantages,' and it in and of itself represents the problem with all five of the pieces in Part 1:

too much breathless recitation of her family's history back in Scotland and her own pursuit in learning it (standing before the reader very much the author, not simply in first-person narration)" (152). Finally, he states: "Overall, there is too much narration" (153). From a narratological standpoint, this is a puzzling statement considering that narration is a key component throughout any narrative and too much or too little of it seems hard to imagine. Nevertheless, his statement reveals certain aspects of *Castle Rock* that I would argue are at odds with earlier Munro collections: namely the strong presence of a narrating voice in a narrative that is not entirely autodiegetic.

Although it is far from uncommon for Munro to produce narratives with a first-person perspective, Hooper is right in noting that in the short story "No Advantages", as well as many other stories in the first part of the collection, the first-person perspective is not utilized in the same manner as in Munro's earlier stories. In past short stories, the first-person narrators have usually been non-autobiographical, autodiegetic narrators. That is, firstly, the narrator is also the protagonist of the narrative, and secondly, the first-person narrators have never masqueraded as the author herself to the degree we can witness in *Castle Rock* (Van Peer and Chatman 357). Although "No Advantages" in the beginning of the narrative gives us an autodiegetic narrator exploring the Ettrick Valley, the place where her ancestors originated, the narrating focus shifts and she begins to relate the stories of the men (and to some extent women) who lived in the Ettrick Valley. This is, I suppose, what Hooper would call "breathless recitation of family history". I would argue, that it is also this move from autodiegetic narrator to extradiegetic narrating voice in “No Advantages”, which produces the effect of the narrator "standing before the reader very much as the author, not simply in first-person narration" (152). We are introduced to the implied authorial narrator as a character in the narrative, only to have her fade into the background in telling us of the lives of the other characters in the story.

The presence of the narrator in the narrative itself that we witness in "No Advantages" produces a dramatized narrator, which is not necessarily uncommon in Munro stories. When the story is also implying that there is an autobiographical element in the story, this complicates the reader's understanding of the borders between author, implied author, dramatized narrator, and narrator. By returning to the definition of the loosening borders between the implied author and the autobiographical narrator in the "Foreword" as an implied authorial narrator, I think we can make the same reading in "No Advantages" and define the narrating voice in this short story as a dramatized implied authorial narrator. It is quite the

tongue twister, but it exemplifies, I would argue, the nuance of the narrating voice in stories such as "No Advantages". It also becomes clear why, for some readers, it can be difficult to understand how one is supposed to engage in the "conversation" with the author through the text when the lines between the "space" outside the narrative and the "space" within the narrative is muddled by the first-person narrating voice.

This blurring of the lines in perspective is most prominent perhaps in "No Advantages", but these "intrusions" of the implied authorial narrator are frequent throughout the first part of the *Castle Rock*. I would argue that this is significant when one considers the difference between this collection of stories and Munro's eleven earlier works of fiction. *Castle Rock* is much more concerned with the tension between fiction writing and history writing than the earlier collections. This tension between fiction and history comes out in the construction of the narrating voice in the stories. In traditional history writing, the voice of the narrator has always had a strong presence in the text, although, the presence of this narrative aspect has often been ignored as a powerful rhetorical device in these texts.

In traditional history writing, the narrating voice has generally been uninvolved in the action it narrates and non-reflective of its own narration. There seems to be a need for this authoritative voice to wrangle with all the historical events and put them in a comprehensible order that communicates to the reader(s) a narrative of the historical past. But when this same narrating voice is applied to a work that openly admits to its fictionality, the apparent rhetorical function of this narrating device becomes apparent. The dramatized implied authorial narrator who narrates "No Advantages" is not able to wrangle the historical facts into a "truthful" narrative in the manner of texts written as traditional histories. Instead, as the fictionalizing element of the short story form intrudes and undermines the authority of history writing as a form, a different perspective on producing narratives of the historical past is presented to the reader.

I now want to examine "No Advantages" with a closer attention to how the story explores the representation of the historical past through fiction. This short story exemplifies the collection's interest in showing the contradictions prone to happen in the narrativization of the historical event. In "No Advantages", Munro presents these contradictions prone to happen in the narrativization of historical events to explore and problematize traditional history writing. This happens in the narrative when the narrative moves from an autodiegetic to an extradiegetic perspective and the narrating voice of the story becomes a stronger presence for the reader in the histories she narrates. In the cemetery of the Ettrick Church, the

narrator reads the inscriptions on the gravestones of her ancestors and their contemporaries. The short story is from this point on split into sections that narrate the lives of these named individuals. Two of the lives are particularly pertinent to the text's exploration of the narrativization of the historical event.

The first subsection of Munro's short story is titled "Will O'Phaup". This life-story is introduced by the epitaph from his gravestone, which reads, "Here lyeth William Laidlaw, the far-famed Will o' Phaup, who for feats of frolic, agility and strength, had no equal in his day" (7). The epigraph of this section gestures towards the central preoccupation of the narrative. It indicates straight away to the reader that in the life-story of Will O'Phaup tropes of the mythical will play a central function in representing his life-story as the story of a folk hero.

The importance of myth-making is registered at the beginning of the life-story, where the narrator writes: "His name was William Laidlaw, *but his story name* was Will O'Phaup" (7, emphasis mine). Will O'Phaup is here constructed by the narrative as almost having a double existence. One side of this double personage is the historical agent, William Laidlaw, and the other side is the story character, the historical agent re-represented by narrative. This construction of William Laidlaw as the folk hero is continued further on in the text, where the narrator writes that "It was never worldly prosperity that he was after. / Only Glory" (8). By writing William Laidlaw's life-story utilizing this particular trope of storytelling, the narrator of "No Advantages" is placing him in a particular tropological position, tropics being "the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and objectively" (*Tropics of Discourse* 2, emphasis in original). That is, an account of historical events/agents are always contingent on the medium in which it operates, the medium being language. Hayden White proposes that any historical account will always be mediated by the various styles of telling. In the case of William Laidlaw's life-story, the narrative applies the tropes of the folktale hero, of a "world still remote and self-contained, still harboring its own mythology and local wonders" (9). In fact, the whole story of William Laidlaw's life consists of stories in which he encounters fairy folk and performs great physical feasts.

As I have mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, during his career, White reassessed his study of tropes and shifted his scope towards the examination of narratives in history writing. This was doubtlessly as a consequence of the move in academia from structuralism to poststructuralism. It is the use of narratives in historical fiction writing that concerns this thesis, but nevertheless, in this particular life-story, the use of tropes is

significant enough that it warrants pointing out its reliance on folk hero tropes in its narrativization of the historical agent. Generally speaking, the use of narrative in history writing attempts to disguise itself in "objectivity" and historical records, and so it rarely exemplifies a clear use of tropes in the manner of Will O'Phaup's life-story. Further on in this thesis, I will refer to theories of narrativization and not theories of tropics, as these latter concepts, I believe, do not sufficiently grapple with the manifold nuances of the narrative. Nevertheless, in the life-story of Will O'Phaup, tropes are manifest in the structure of the narrative, perhaps this is because tropics can be interpreted as a sort of distillation of discursive narrative.

The second life-story in "No Advantages" relates the life of Reverend Thomas Boston, a contemporary of William Laidlaw. His epigraph reads:

> As a Testament of Esteem for the
> Reverend Thomas Boston Senior
> Whose private character was highly respectable,
> Whose public labours were blessed to many and
> Whose writings have contributed much to promote
> The advancement of vital Christianity. (14)

This sober, religious epigraph distinctly contrasts with the mood created by the epigraph which introduced William Laidlaw's section of the narrative. This tonal contrast is followed through in the telling of Thomas Boston's life-story. Where the story of Will O'Phaup is filled with heroic bravado and amusement, the life of Thomas Boston is narrated with attention to his strict faith and religious reflections. The narrator writes of Boston, that "he would surely lacerate himself with thorned whips if such behaviour would not be Popish, would not constitute further sin" (15). The life-story of Thomas Boston presents a different historical "reality" of the Ettrick Valley. This is a story that puts in focus the Protestant fervor in Scotland, as opposed to the mythic tradition of this same country. Neither narrative is a more "truthful" representation of the historical events and agents at this particular time, but rather through narrative devices they include and exclude facets of historicity to further their own narrative aims.

The narrative contrast between the two life-stories is not lost on the narrator of "No Advantages". Acknowledging this strange contrast between the two contemporaries, she writes: "it seems strange to me that Thomas Boston should have been the minister whom Will O'Phaup listened to every Sunday. . . . My ancestor, a near pagan, a merry man, a brandy

drinker, one upon wagers are set, a man who believes in the fairies, is bound to have listened to, and believed in, the stricture and hard hopes of this punishing Calvinist faith" (17). The narrator begins at this point to comprehend that the histories of the past that she has collected are mediated by narrativization. The narrator, and her readers, understands that the life-stories of William Laidlaw and Thomas Boston were written from two different discursive perspectives, and only when put together by the narrator of "No Advantages" does their inherent construction by narrativization become apparent.

The narrative strategy of having the narrator of the various short stories speak directly to the implied reader about her own thoughts about the historical past that she narrates, often in a manner that reveals her own narrativization of the past, is recurrent in the first part of the collection. As White writes in his article "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact", "what the historian brings to his consideration of the historical record is a notion of the *types* of configurations of events that can be recognized as stories by the audience for which he is writing" (*Content of the Form* 85). The meanings imposed by narrative conventions onto the lives of William Laidlaw and Thomas Boston are then not necessarily historical truths, because, "historical situations are not *inherently* tragic, comic, or romantic" (86); they are instead mediated through the discursive situation of the interpreter(s) of the historical records. This revelation introduces significant dilemmas into Munro's own writing of her family history. This first short story in her collection indicates to the reader that the many stories of the past that we collect are inherently mediated through narrative and must therefore be rigorously questioned even as they are being reproduced.

The strong presence of the narrating voice which Hooper is so strongly critical towards in his review of *Castle Rock*, is, I would argue, a useful narrative device in "No Advantages," which questions the relationship between traditional history writing and fiction writing. By constructing a dramatized implied authorial narrator in the narrative of "No Advantages", Munro has produced a fictional historian who mirrors her real-life examination of the historical past. This figure of the historian as narrator and character bridges the gap between history writing and fiction writing, and by such an effect the narrative is able to reveal and re-examine the flaws and benefits of both traditional history writing and historical fiction's ability to render and represent the historical past.

It is also important to note that in "No Advantages", the strong presence of the narrator's voice in the narrative lets the reader view the historical past by "entering" different histories of the past, but also, the strong presence of the narrating voice makes sure that the

reader never steps into the consciousness of any other character than the narrator. This changes later in the collection, when the focus of perspective moves away from the first-person perspective and towards the rendering of consciousness of the historical agents/characters from a third-person perspective. The effects of such a focus of perspective on the text will be further examined in the second chapter of this thesis. In the second part of this chapter, I will continue to examine the use of the first-person narrator in this collection, but instead of examining the narrating voice of the historian, I will identify a second first-person narrating voice in this collection.

2.2 The Borders Between Narrators and Authors: Constructing an Autobiographer as Narrator

If the historian as narrator is an unfamiliar aspect of Munro's earlier short story collections, then the other type of first-person perspective found in *Castle Rock* is intimately familiar to readers of her work. These are stories grounded in what Munro at one time in an interview with J. R. Struthers described as her "real material" (*Probable Fictions* 20); that is, fictional stories that in some manner or form have their origin in her own lived experience. These stories are usually grounded in Munro's childhood. From her prize-winning debut collection *Dance of the Happy Shades* on, this narrative structure has been a hallmark of Munro's fiction, a hallmark that she has throughout her writing career re-examined and added complexities to.

In *Castle Rock*, these stories are predominantly found in the second half of the collection. This is the part of the text that moves away from narrating family history and instead begins to tell stories based on the narrator's own memory. These memories, we are to believe, are the author's own memories. We cannot take such a statement for granted, though. Indeed, Munro acknowledges in the "Foreword" to the collection, that as she wrote her memories down they become stories of their own. She writes:

> During these years I was also writing a special set of stories. These stories were not included in the books of fiction I put together, at regular intervals. Why not? I felt they didn't belong. They were not memoirs but they were closer to my own life than the other stories I had written, even in the first person. In other first-person stories I had drawn on personal material, but then I did anything I wanted with this material. Because the chief thing I was doing was

> making a story. In the stories I hadn't collected I was not doing exactly that. I was doing something closer to what a memoir does – exploring a life, my own life, but not in an austere or rigorously factual way. I put myself in the center and wrote about that self, as searchingly as I could. But the figures around this self took on their own life and color and did things they had not done in reality. They joined the Salvation Army, they revealed that they had once lived in Chicago. One of them got himself electrocuted and another fired off a gun in a barn full of horses. In fact, some of these characters have moved so far from their beginnings that I cannot remember who they were to start with. ("Foreword")

I have quoted this paragraph at length, because I believe that it is significant in understanding the first-person narrating voice in the latter half of *Castle Rock*. We cannot claim that these stories relate Munro's own experiences "as it happened", on account of the narrative effects in the reinterpretation of the events. And yet, the paragraph in the foreword also seems to state that there is a difference, at least in intention, between the confiding first-person narrator one often encounters in Munro's fiction and the first-person narrator we encounter in these stories. She seems to state that the self, or the narrator, is autobiographical in the intent of her actions and in her personality, but that all the other elements of the narratives are synthetic. In other words, Munro seems to state that the narrating voice of these stories can be interpreted as the implied authorial narrator that I identified in stories such as "No Advantages", but that this narrating voice is applied to an examination of the self as opposed to one's heritage.

The change of intent with the first-person narration in the stories of the second half of the collection naturally changes other elements of the narratives. The narrating voice shifts from the historian narrating her examination of the historical past to the autobiographical narrating voice that examines the self. The scholar Isla Duncan identifies this narrating voice found in many of Munro's first-person narratives as "confiding first-person narrator" (19). I believe that this is a good description of how Munro utilizes the first-person narrating perspective in the second half of *Castle Rock*. Instead of learning about the history of the implied author's past, the audience is told about the narrator's reflections on her own personal history. Of course, the distinction between these two "types" of histories is not as clear-cut as I have implied in this chapter, but for the moment I want to focus my analysis of *Castle Rock* on the aspect of perspective in these stories. I will return to the question of the heritage and

the self in the fourth chapter of this thesis, where this topic will be examined with greater attention.

In this section of my thesis, I will examine two of the short stories in *Castle Rock* which utilize this confiding first-person narrator. I will examine how they differ from the "historian as narrator" we as readers encountered in the prior first-person narratives in *Castle Rock*, and I will examine how they differ from each other to render different understandings of personal history and memories. "Lying Under the Apple Tree" is the first story that I will examine in this chapter, and it is a story that would fit very well into any of Munro's earlier collections. The second story is entitled "Home", which is a text Munro has reworked over thirty years, before publishing it again in *Castle Rock* in what one could call her more "mature" and understated style.

"Lying Under" was first published in the *New Yorker* in 2002, before it was included in *Castle Rock* in 2006. The plot structure follows the same points in both renditions of the story, but there are also certain significant differences between the narratives. If we return to Hooper's criticism of *Castle Rock*, we can see that "Lying Under" is one of the stories in the collection that he finds, as he says, superior. He writes that "Lying Under" is "a superior one, superior on its own terms not simply because of the troublesome nature of the collection to which it belongs. It features Munro 'basics': the first-person narrator is an adolescent female; setting of rural Ontario; and the primary theme being social image within the school environment and the narrator's sense of her outside status there" (157). I am in agreement with Hooper that the short story reads as a "classic" Munro story, that is, the sort of story which made her a literary name in Canada with her first two collections: *Dance of the Happy Shades* and *Lives of Girls and Women*. But it is also a type of narrative which Munro during the later years of her career has moved away from.

In the earlier quote, Hooper makes the claim that "Lying Under" is narrated by an adolescent female first-person narrator. I would argue that this statement is not an accurate representation of the narrating voice in "Lying Under". As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the first-person narrator in the latter stories of *Castle Rock* is told by an older narrator (the implications being that this narrator is also the author) reflecting on her youth during and after the Depression in rural Ontario. This is evident not only in the narrative use of the past tense, but also in the somewhat detached and sometimes ironic tone the narrator uses with regard to the events that transpire in the narrative. As an example, we can examine the narrator's argument for why on Sunday afternoons she often bikes into the country. The

narrator tells us that: "I liked to do this because I was secretly devoted to Nature" (198). The first-person "I" and the past tense indicates that this is an autodiegetic narrative where the narrator relates something that happened in her own past, but the narrator's ironic usage of "Nature" instead of "nature" tells the reader of the text that there is a significant temporal distance between the narrator and the story that she narrates. The narrator of "Lying Under" pokes fun at her youthful self and her romantic world view by ironically capitalizing the "N" in nature. This temporal distance is more evident in the *Castle Rock* version of the short story then the *New Yorker* version, where the narrator does not have the ironic capital "Nature" but narrates the line as follows: "I liked to do this because I was secretly devoted to nature" (Munro, *The New Yorker*). The temporal distancing between the narrator and her younger self is not as clearly evident here, as in the narrative collected in *Castle Rock*. In both narratives, though, there is still a first-person retrospective technique and not a first-person adolescent narrator as Hooper claims.

It is clear that the first-person narrator in the latter half of *Castle Rock* is looking back on her personal past, rummaging through her memories as she narrates. The element of memory in these stories plays a more significant part then it does in the other stories of the collection, as there is a temporal bond between narrator and the subject of narrating in self-narration. In the first-person narrated stories in the first part of the collection, the narrator most often shares the narrative space with a third-person narrating voice, or the first-person narrator is not primarily concerned with narrating her own life and experiences. Stories such as "Lying Under" show the temporal difference between narrator and her experiencing self by representing the memory process and reflexive thoughts of the narrator. The narrator tells us, for example, when thinking about what her mother's concerns would be if she began to date Russell Craik, that "Those considerations would have meant something to me too, if it had come to displaying him publicly as my boyfriend. . . . *But as it was, I didn't have to think about any of that*" (207, ellipsis and emphasis mine). We see in this quotation that the narrator of the story is considering her past self at a temporal distance and even considering parts of her past that were not necessarily evident to her experiencing self at the time.

This use of the retrospective technique is what the scholar Dorrit Cohn terms “dissonant self-narration”. She describes this use of narrating voice as: "A lucid narrator turning back on a past self steeped in ignorance, confusion, and delusion" (145). It is a style of narration that examines the psychology of a self at a temporal distance with the maturity to interpret the past and make judgements about the historical events rendered in the narrative.

In "Lying Under", we can witness this "seeing the present in the past events" when at the end of the story the narrator tells us that she picks up a book and that "It must have meant something, though, that at this turn of my life I grabbed up a book. Because it was in books that I would find, for the next few years, my lovers" (226). If we read the narrative as autobiographical of the author, then we can see how the narrator pointing out her experiencing self's love for books is directly referring to the importance books and writing would have for Munro as an adult.

In one of the last stories of *Castle Rock*, we meet an autodiegetic narrator who describes one of her visits back to the house where she grew up and where her father now lives with his second wife. "Home" in its first version was published in *New Canadian Stories* in 1973, but not placed in any of Munro's collections from that time. Its second version can be found in the *New Statesman*, where it was published in 2002. The most recent version, which we find in *Castle Rock*, has few alterations from the 2002 version of the text. The final version of "Home", on the other hand, has undergone some significant changes from the first 1973 version of the short story. In examining this short story, I will first examine how the first-person narrator differs from previously encountered narrators in this collection. Secondly, I will examine the changes made between the first version of the narrative and the most recent one that we find in *Castle Rock*.

After having encountered multiple stories narrated in the manner of "Lying Under", with a first-person narrator looking backwards in time and taking stock of her youth, "Home" brings a different narrating experience to the reader. The first sentence of the narrative indicates this clearly. The narrator writes: "I come home as I have done several times in the past year, travelling on three buses" (285). The first-person perspective is firmly established by the first word of the narrative, but where previous stories have established a dissonant self-narration as the narrating effect of the previous stories, "Home" does not necessarily follow this same pattern. The first clear indicator that the narrating in "Home" is not the same as the previous stories is the change from the past tense to the present tense by the narrator. "I come home as I have done several times in the past year" seemingly makes the temporal distance between the narrator and the experiencing self quite minimal, though not simultaneous.

If we continue to use Cohn's examination of narrative modes for rendering consciousness in fiction, we can put forward the theory that "Home", if not a dissonant self-narration, could be a consonant self-narration instead. Cohn defines the consonant self-narration in fiction as an "unobtrusive narrator who identifies with his earlier incarnation,

renouncing all manner of cognitive privilege" (155). The consonant self-narrating technique is then a retrospective technique which attempts to dissolve the temporal distance between narrator and experiencing self in the first-person narrative. Indicators of this technique is the present tense utilized in a manner that hides any temporal distance between narrating and experience. "Home" does seem in many ways to follow this type of retrospective narrating mode, but at one point in the narrative Munro's fidelity to this technique is questioned. The narrator writes: "'Idiots,' I say shortly. It's not just that I have no sympathy with the gravel-runners, the blind drunks. It's that I think this conversation, my stepmother's expansion and relish, may be embarrassing my father. *Later I'll understand that this probably isn't so*" (287, emphasis mine). Although the narrative has several instances of analepsis, where the narrator reflects on her youth through remembering the house as it was when she grew up, this is a rare instance of *prolepsis* in the narrative. Introduced by the adverb "later", the sentence clearly indicates that the narrator has knowledge of a time ahead of the narrative and the experiencing self. It is more closely linked to the technique of the dissonant self-narrator, who looks back at the past experiencing self with the knowledge and wisdom of a future self.

"Home" is, then, I would argue, cast in the retrospective technique of dissonant self-narration, where the narrator examines her own past from a distance, but narrates her memories in the present tense. The difference in this story is that there is a double examination of the past. On the one hand, we have the experiencing self in the narrative, who visits her father and stepmother as an adult woman. She looks back at a past iteration of herself, the childhood self, a "self which I have finished with, and none too soon" (290). Then there is the autodiegetic narrator looking back at this moment, the visit to her childhood home. The temporal distance between the narrator and the central character of the text is uncertain. But as I have shown in this examination, there exists a distance between the narrator and the central character. This retrospective mode within a retrospective mode is hidden and only obliquely referenced in the text. The voice of the narrator and her experiencing self in the narrative overlaps and moves together by the use of the present tense and the sparse use of prolepsis, creating an effect that the story is being narrated as it happens and not by a narrator remembering a visit home.

This element of an almost hidden narrator is interesting with respect to the history behind this short story. When reading the first version of the short story as it was published in *New Canadian Stories*, it becomes apparent that in editing the story Munro made significant changes to the narrative voice of the story. Whereas, for example, the plot and most of the

characters remain close to the first iteration of the story, the narrator changes dramatically from a very self-conscious narrator to the subdued and almost hidden narrator in the final version. In the *New Canadian Stories* version of the narrative, the technique is metafictional and reminiscent of Munro's work in the 1970s in such stories as "The Ottawa Valley" and "Material", both collected in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*. The final version of the story in *Castle Rock*, on the other hand, has these metafictional elements carefully edited out of the narrative. Munro has stated regarding "Home" that she would "like to rewrite it deleting the self-reflexive commentary, which was a great relief at the time but now strikes her as a tired device" (Hoy). In *Castle Rock*, we find this edited version of "Home", which excludes any clear sign of metafiction, but instead introduces an almost hidden narrating voice that overlaps and intertwines with the voice of the central character of the narrative.

In the first version of "Home" published in *New Canadian Stories*, there are four metafictional sections where the author of the narrative comments on what she has written and admits to the effects and artifices she has produced. These sections are clearly seen as metafictional, as they are produced in the narrative in italics. The self-reflexive comments on the narrative points out and berates the narrator for her attempts to produce a realistic representation of her childhood home. She notes the way she attempts to recreate the "*voices, the way people talk*" (142, emphasis in original), and she worries that her representation of her stepmother will appear to be "*vengeful reporting*" and therefore begins to remark on all the positive qualities of her stepmother (149). At the end of the story, the narrator is not certain how to end the narrative, which she admits to (151). The end is different from the version of "Home" that we find in *Castle Rock*. In the first version, Marge (renamed Connie in the *Castle Rock* version) arrives at the house and arouses guilt in the writer-narrator for pursuing a life that to Marge seems "*incomprehensible*" (152). In the *Castel Rock* version, on the other hand, Connie arrives with good news from the hospital and reaffirms the narrator's right to follow her vocation.

Some of the metafictional segments remain in the final version of "Home" with little or no change; particularly the scene where the narrator encounters her mother in a dream. The narrator's admission later in the narrative that she put her stepmother down for her behaviour also remains in the final version of the story with not too many changes. The most significant change in these cases is that the italics is removed from these scenes. Also, much of the overt metafictionality is removed from these sections, but some remains and gives the narrator a moment of self-reflection. The exclusion of the metafictional elements to "Home" certainly

takes away some of the narrative's thematic concern with the representation of reality, which in *Castle Rock* is a central preoccupation of the collection's historical consciousness. But the removal of the metafictional elements also gives more nuance to the characters, while still gesturing towards the difficulty in representing reality through narrative, whether this reality is the distant historical past or a childhood home.

In this chapter of my thesis, I have examined the use of the first-person perspective in *Castle Rock.* In my examination, I have presented types of first-person narrators and how they are utilized in the narratives. In the beginning of the collection, we were introduced to a type of first-person perspective where a narrator plays the part of a historian. The presence of this narrator in the text plays with the borders between authors and narrators, between what is in a narrative and what is outside the narrative. By fictionalizing the author and giving this character the narrating voice, Munro constructs an implied authorial narrator whose presence in the text reveals the uncertain borders between fact and fiction in narratives. In this way, Munro also subverts the history-writing project as a whole and introduces the theme of historical ambiguity into her text.

In the later stories of this collection, the first-person perspective shifts, as the content of the narratives becomes less concerned with family history and more preoccupied with personal history. In these narratives, the first-person narrating voice shifts from the historian-voice to an autobiographer-voice; that is, the retrospective technique in these stories follow the dissonant self-narrating mode of a narrator looking backwards in time and examining the past from the vantage point of her future knowledge. As I have shown in this chapter, the use of this dissonant self-narrating voice is not always constant in the collection. In *Castle Rock*, Munro plays with tense and the temporal distance of her narrators to render her narrators interaction with the historical past in different manners.

Based on my examination of the use of the first-person perspective and narration in *Castle Rock,* I would argue that some key elements to the collection's engagement with history are revealed. Firstly, we can see from these stories that the collection understands time as linear and the examination of events in time, that is history, as a retroactive occupation. All the first-person narratives in *Castle Rock* are looking backwards at events in the past, whether these events are from the narrator's personal past or in the past she gleans from sources and her own imagination. Even in stories that utilize the present tense, such as "Home", there is a frequent use of analepsis, such as when the narrator in "Home" muses on her childhood home as it once was. And the use of prolepsis by the narrator in this same story also reveals that the

present tense in that narrative is not an indicative of the narrating time, but serves a different purpose, such as producing immediacy and contrast between the experiencing self and her memories of childhood.

Secondly, these narratives in the first-person reveal to us about the collection's historical consciousness that history is personal and to some degree subjective. By inserting the historian and autobiographer as first-person narrating voices in these narratives, the distance between the historical event and the narrating is minimized, but the contradictions in the source material and the fallibility of historians and autobiographers are also revealed. For example, moments such as the narrator's realization that Will O'Phaup and Thomas Boston lived simultaneously and must have interacted with each other reveal the inherent narrative nature of history writing and the presence of narration in all historical texts.

In the next chapter of my thesis, I will examine the use of the third-person perspective and the use of focalization in *Castle Rock* to better understand how these types of "perspective" in narrative enriches the historical consciousness of the text. In this chapter, I will also examine the shifts in the form of some of the narratives in the collection. More specifically, I will examine how the shifts between historical documents and fiction add to the historical complexities of the collection and of its use of point of view.

3 Third-person Narration in *The View from Castle Rock:* Changing Perspectives and Multiple Focalization

> *Her occasional attempts to encounter the past directly, usually by finding a grave of some kind, rarely yield many epiphanies. But her ability to travel into the minds and feelings of people long dead, whose deaths were barely even recorded, is uncanny.*
> A.O. Scott, *The New York Times*

> *I am surely one of the liars.*
> Alice Munro, *The View from Castle Rock* (84)

In this chapter of my thesis, I will examine the use of the third-person narrating voice in *Castle Rock* to better understand how the use of that style of narration renders the historical past and construct this collection's historical consciousness. In my examination, I will put forward a reading of three of the stories in the first half of *Castle Rock*. First, I will examine the eponymous short story "The View from Castle Rock" to better understand how the use of shifting focalization in this narrative enriches our understanding of the historical past. In the same subsection, I will examine "Illinois" with attention to how it complements the narrative preoccupations of "Castle Rock", while also questioning them. I will then in the next subsection further examine "Castle Rock", but with attention to how it utilizes multiple focus of perspective with multiple types of texts and historical documents. In the same subsection, I will examine "The Wilds of Morris Township" with this same attention to the multiplicity of form and perspective.

It will not come as a surprise to the reader, that the question of perspective and focus of perspective is of great importance to the collection's engagement with the representation of the historical past. The preoccupation is already referenced in the title of the collection. The concept of different points of view becomes central to the collection's historical consciousness, and particularly so in these stories that play with the focalization of narrative. The stories I will examine in this chapter move between a third-person narrating and first-person narrating voice; they move between temporal spaces, between focalizers; they

introduce new key characters in the middle of the narrative, and they blend genres and forms to produce complex "views" of looking at history and reality.

By the end of this chapter, I intend to have put forward an examination of the use of the third-person perspective in *Castle Rock*. Together with my examination of the first-person perspective in the previous chapter, this chapter will further inform this analysis of the collection's engagement with the historical past and its construction of a historical consciousness. With this added understanding of the utilization of perspective in *Castle Rock*'s narratives, we can then move on to other aspects of the narratives that inform the historical consciousness of the short story collection.

3.1 Multiple Focalization in "The View from Castle Rock" and "Illinois"

In the emigration story "The View from Castle Rock", we follow Munro's great-great-great grandfather and his family's passage across the Atlantic Ocean. Munro's own great-great grandfather is not part of this journey. He stays behind in Scotland, only to move to the United States a few years later. In the next story of the collection, "Illinois", we follow the journey of Munro's great-great grandmother and her family from Illinois to Ottawa after her husband has died. The journey of Munro's great-great grandfather from Scotland to Illinois is never described. Both of these stories are therefore emigration stories, stories about families traversing dangerous terrain to find a new home. They are also stories which concern themselves with a larger number of characters then the stories previously examined in this thesis. And in opposition to the other stories I have examined, these two narratives have a shifting focus of perspective that renders the experience of several of these different characters.

In "The View from Castle Rock", the first section of the narrative relates how Old James Laidlaw, Munro's great-great-great grandfather, brings his young son, Andrew Laidlaw, to Castle Rock in Edinburgh. This short story introduces some of the central concerns of the short story and the collection as a whole. For it is, of course, from this scene that the collection draws its title. In addition to his son, James brings several men from a local tavern up to the castle. It is revealed to the reader, that they are going to get a look across the ocean at America. When they spot the land "across the ocean", Old James says: "'America. It is only a little bit of it, though, only the shore. There is where every man is sitting in the midst

of his own properties, and even the beggars is riding around in carriages'" (30). But despite what his father tells him, the young Andrew already knows that "he was not looking at America, though it was some years before he was well enough acquainted with maps to know that he had been looking at Fife. / Still, he did not know if those men met in the tavern had been mocking his father, or if it was his father playing one of his tricks on them" (31). In this excerpt, we can see how narrative interacts with the characters of the short story. It exemplifies how a narrative can shape perceptions of spatial geography and create stories. In this case, it is stories of life in America and the prospects that are promised in this land across the ocean. By reinterpreting, or perhaps misinterpreting, Fife Island as the American continent, James Laidlaw manages to visualize his desires. Of course, the young Andrew does not know if his father is playing a trick on him and the men from the tavern, consciously reinterpreting the geographical space, or if he is misinterpreting the distance between Scotland and America. Regardless, this the effect, I would argue, of emphasizing the role of perspective in narrativity; that is, that the point of view that an event is narrativized through will have significant influence on the meaning(s) that the text will communicate to the reader. This is a central concern of "The View from Castle Rock": how the aspect of perspective in narrative imbues the historical event with significance. In this chapter's examination of the use of the third-person perspective in "Castle Rock", I want to ask the question: can a fictionalized exploration of the historical event that attempts to open up the perspectives represented communicate to the reader a different kind of meaning than traditional history writing about the same historical event?

In the previous chapter of this thesis, I wrote about the first-person perspective and how it has been utilized in *Castle Rock*, but I did not adequately define the use of focalization in narrative. This was because in the stories that I examined in that chapter, the use of focalization was limited and therefore, I would argue, not necessary to define for the purpose of my examination. In this chapter, on the other hand, the function of narrative focus is critical to understanding how perspective functions in these stories. This is, of course, because the third-person point of view lends itself more readily to shifts in focalization than does the first-person point of view.

In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Gérard Genette notes that previously in structuralist theory there had been a conflation of terms when it came to perspective. Perspective came to mean both who was the narrating voice of the narrative and whose perspective the narrative was told through, what Genette terms *who sees?* and *who speaks?*

(186). When we talk about third-person narratives, this distinction between narrator and the focus of narration becomes even more apparent. In stories such as "Castle Rock", we have a narrator that *speaks* the narrative that we are reading; she even at one point announces her own opinions towards the end of the story, when she switches to the first-person perspective. But the narrative is also clearly focused through the various Laidlaw family members who experience the events that the narrator records.

To further define how we examine perspective in narrative, Genette introduced a more rigorous theory of focalization into narratology. Focalization, then, then the term that describes the focus of the narrative, who the reader witnesses the narrative through and who the reader looks towards in the narrative. We have then, beside the narrator, a focalizer and a focalized that regulates perspective in a narrative. The focalizer is "the agent whose perception orients the presentation" (Rimmon-Kenan 75). The focalizer is the character in the narrative who *sees* what happens. When in "Castle Rock", we read that "The cadences of his father's voice, in the talk that succeeded that word, were so familiar, and Andrew's eyes so bleary with the smoke, that in no time he had fallen asleep on his feet" (29), we can see that the experiences of the story is focused through the viewpoint of Andrew, as it is his experience we as readers are privy to. The focalized object, "what the focalized perceives" (Rimmon-Kenan 75), is in the quotation from "Castle Rock" Andrew's father and the other men talking around Andrew, whom he perceives. We can also see from the quote that the perspective of the narrative is also mediated by the use of a narrator, for without the narrator standing outside the experiencing agent in the story, the reader would not know that Andrew had "fallen asleep on his feet", as this information cannot be given by a focalizer that is sleeping.

Genette points out that focalization in a narrative is not static, but can be shifting and volatile. He writes that "the commitment as to focalization is not necessarily steady over the whole length of a narrative. . . . Any single formula of focalization does not, therefore, always bear on an entire work, but rather on a definite narrative section, which can be very short" (191, my ellipsis). This is certainly the case with short stories such as "Castle Rock", where the focus of narration shifts between various characters on the transatlantic voyage, so as to give different experiences of what the voyage could have felt like. By shifting focalization and playing with perspective in these stories, Munro is able to explore parts of the historical past that previously were left partly or entirely unexamined by traditional history writing.

The literary scholar Corinne Bigot has commented in an article on "Castle Rock", that the short story repeatedly draws attention to the body and bodily functions (2). She points out that Walter carries the ink he uses to write his journal in a vial close to his chest to keep it warm, a trick he learned from his relative James Hogg. Bigot writes that "The comparison brings together the ink and the blood, the text and the body, showing that for Munro, the body is 'a source and a locus of meanings a prime vehicle of narrative'" (8). I agree with Bigot that the body is a central preoccupation of this short story, as it has been throughout Munro's writing career. In Munro's narrativization of Walter's journal and the historical events it records, we can see how she repeatedly describes to her reader the intimate moments of bodily functions and desires that would not be included in any traditional writing of history.

In the short story, we have descriptions of how, when animals are lifted on board the ship by crane; a pig, for example, is "shitting wildly in midair, so that howls of both outrage and delight rise below, depending on whether they come from those who are hit or those who see others hit" (38). Munro is not afraid to include those events that would be edited out of most historical records. That includes not only the filth and grime, but also secret desires and lust. We can see this in the passage where, after Walter has made a note in his journal that "this day our sister Agnes was taken into the cabin" (45), the narrator tells us, "*Sister*, he has written, as if she were all the same to him as poor Mary, but that is hardly the case" (45, emphasis in original). We are then told of Walter's troubling feelings of desire for his sister-in-law, centered around her birthmark. We are told that he "longs to touch it, to stroke it with the tips of his fingers" (45). It is perhaps not hard to puzzle out what Agnes's birthmark symbolizes.

The female body as a neglected space in traditional history writing is particularly crucial to the text's attempt to disclose the withheld aspects of historical events. By narrativizing the events that she has gleaned from Walter's journal, Munro is able to open up a space in the past for women's lives and experiences. This is exemplified in the event where Agnes gives birth. In his journal, Walter writes: "She was not better till the 18th when she delivered of a daughter. We having a surgeon on board nothing happened. Nothing occurred till the 22nd" (47). To Walter, Agnes giving birth is an event significant enough to record, but not significant enough to consider as a "happening". By imagining and narrativizing the historical event of giving birth on a transatlantic voyage, Munro gives the female body a place in our historical consciousness. Because most men were not allowed to witness a birth, and possibly because of the perceived vulgarity of recording such events in any great detail, the

event of giving birth on a transatlantic voyage in the nineteenth century was omitted from most historical recording of this historical event, and therefore also elided by the traditional history writers who utilized these records to represent the past. The third-person narrating voice, then, with its multiple focalization of the Laidlaw family, manages to give the reader of the narrative a different, perhaps fuller, understanding of the experience of a transatlantic journey during this period in time.

Since "Illinois" is the second emigration story in the collection, and because it follows "The View from Castle Rock", I am interested in examining this short story in relation to the preceding short story and how they might be complementary to some of each other's narrative preoccupations. The central event that occupies the text of both short stories is the journey towards Canada. In "Castle Rock", it is the transatlantic voyage that is fictionalized, while in "Illinois" the journey is taken across land from Illinois to Ottawa. I would argue that the two stories differ in approach to narrative representation, for whereas "Castle Rock" attempts to exhaust the historical event of the transatlantic journey by focalizing through multiple characters, including the narrator herself; "Illinois", I would argue, applies its focalization of several characters to question people's ability to understand a single event. Through this line of inquiry, the text also questions our own ability to understand the historical event.

Munro has long been celebrated for her use and examination of female characters in her fiction. It is perhaps strange, then, that the character in "Illinois" whom one might expect to be the focalizer of the narrative is not Mary Laidlaw, the mother who uproots her family from their homestead in Illinois to emigrate to Canada, where her late husband's family reside. She seems like the expected heroine, if one considers Munro's oeuvre as a whole. She is indeed the focalizer in the opening of narrative, setting up an expectation that she will be the character on which the narrative will focus. Nevertheless, it is her son James Laidlaw that the narrative as a whole puts at the center of its focalization and narrative movement. That is not to say that Mary is not the focalizer multiple times during the story, but her focalization is often performed in short sequences, and most often in relation to her perspective on the actions of her son, James.

It is through James, that the narrative introduces its central conflict. When the narrative first shifts its focalizing subject from Mary to James, as we are told that Mary has all her children say goodbye to the grave of their father, we learn through the shift in focalization that:

> Jamie had a good idea of what his father would have thought of that. That business of trotting them all up there to say goodbye to a stone. . . . His mother was a liar. Or if she didn't lie outright, she at least covered things up. She had said his uncle was coming but she had not said – he was sure she had not said – that they were going back with him. (92)

The consciousness presented through the focalization of Jamie is a noticeable shift from the elegiac one that we encountered through Mary at the opening of the narrative. Whereas Mary is anxious about leaving Illinois and worries about the long journey, Jamie is spiteful and distrustful of his mother and his uncle Andrew. He is deeply hurt that they are leaving Illinois and the life his father built for them there. The shifts in focalizer from Mary to James is also clearly defined in this passage, since Mary shifts from being the focalizer of the narrative to becoming the focalized object of James focalization.

I find it significant that the character the narrative centers its action around is a child. In the writing of history, children are often a neglected voice, since they rarely write down their own accounts. This emphasis on the perspective on historical experiences of children is recurrent in "Illinois"; halfway through the narrative, for example, we are introduced to two new characters, the best friends Susie and Meggie. It has become a common element of Munro's "mature" short fiction that one story is begun only to be interrupted by a seemingly unrelated, or rather, parallel, story. Just after Mary's baby has been stolen at the inn, there is an ellipsis in the text and the narrative continues: "The man who had set up the sawmill in this community owned a cow, which he let wander round the settlement, sending his daughter Susie out in the evening to find her and milk her. Susie was almost always accompanied by her friend Meggie, the daughter of the local schoolteacher" (101). There is a strong narrative shift here, as we leave behind the emigrating family and the story becomes occupied in detailing the two girls' friendship. We are told about the their, "intense relationship loaded with secret rituals and special jokes and fanatical loyalty" (101), and we are introduced to some of these jokes and rituals, such as calling people by the wrong name and writing fake love letters from the innkeeper's daughter to Fergie the stable boy. Neither of the two girls know that the stable boy is illiterate, and their trick leads to the innkeeper's daughter being sent away when Fergie goes to the inn and asks someone to read the letter for him. After this, Fergie demands to be taught to read. The narrative tells us that neither Susie or Meggie was suspected of pulling the prank (102).

In "Illinois", Munro draws attention to the position of children in history writing. By focalizing children in the narrative, Munro illustrates how the perspectives of children are neglected as agents participating in historical events. It is because the story is mainly focalized through children, that the reader is privileged to receive the information that it was Jamie who stole the baby in a desperate ploy to make the adults turn around and return to Illinois. And it was Susie and Meggie, in turn, who stole the baby from the shed where Jamie had hidden it, for the sake of pulling another trick on the stable boy Fergie. Without our knowledge of these actions perpetrated by children, the strange events at the inn would have been left unexplained. The only character who suspects anything close to the actual events as they happened is Jamie's uncle Andrew, who finds the baby in the barn and who at the end of the story the narrative turns to as focalizer: "Andrew thought it just as well not to interfere with the story of the Indian woman, and gave it as his opinion that she had got scared and left the baby in the stable boy's bed. He did not believe that the stable boy was in any way involved, and he did believe that James was, but he left the matter uninvestigated" (109).

I would argue that Munro has constructed the plot of her narrative not to follow a traditional beginning-middle-end structure, but rather has two different stories overlapping each other as the story's narrative structure to illustrate how historical events do not have the structure of the narrative that we often ascribe to them, but that they have incredibly, incomprehensibly layered structures. One of the plots involves the Laidlaw family's journey to Canada and how a child is stolen from them for half a day, and the other plot is about two young girls playing a trick on a stable boy. The two plots cross paths, but they never directly intermingle, as no character(s) in the narrative learns about all the circumstances around the stolen child. Only the narrator and the reader are privy to this information. This understanding of narrative structures in history is mirrored in White's writing on the subject. He writes:

> Every narrative, however seemingly "full", is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out; this is as true of imaginary narratives as it is of realistic ones. And this consideration permits us to ask *what kind of notion of reality authorizes construction of a narrative account of reality in which continuity rather than discontinuity governs the articulation of the discourse*. (*Content of the Form* 10, emphasis mine)

When the stable boy Fergie returns to his bed in the stables and finds the note left by Susie and Meggie, the chaotic nature of events is brought to the forefront, "A PRESENT from one of your SWEETHEARTS. But no present, not even a joke of a present, that he could see,

anywhere around" (108). Roland Barthes has drawn attention to this discontinuity between events and narrative. He writes: "The historian is not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series" (121). Because the baby is no longer in his bed, the trick cannot be comprehended by Fergie, illustrating that although he is now able to read he is not necessarily privileged to understand. And this is also, I would argue, the case when looking back on the chaotic nature of historical events.

By attempting to show continuity and discontinuity in her historical writing through the narrative element of perspective and focalization, Munro is questioning the way historical events are told and what voices are privileged in the telling of these events. It is, I would argue, a conscious choice not to use the character Becky, the Native American blamed for stealing the baby, as a focalizer. Her presence as the trope of the child-stealing Indian haunts the narrative. Because her story is never told, we only know her as the stereotypical scapegoat for the kidnapping. It brings to the attention of the reader, that even though Munro attempts to painstakingly give voice to her ancestors in this collection, particularly to those that did not write down their own historical accounts, there are many "voices" or perspectives that she omits in her own narrative. The element of omission, an unavoidable facet of narrativity, mirrors the position of peoples omitted in historical accounts because of their distance to the privileged position of power which produces historical knowledge through history writing.

In these two short stories, Munro has examined the representation of historical events and agents through a conscious use of narrative perspective. I have particularly brought attention to her use of the focalization through the characters in the two stories, as an attempt to bring a fuller picture of the events and agents that they narrativize, yet also show the discontinuity in any attempt to present a complete representation of the historical past. I have also mentioned the manner in which the stories experiment with traditional expectations of short story narratives, as a way of inquiry into the presumed plot-based nature of historical events. In the next section of this chapter, I intend to examine the historical records Munro has utilized in crafting her narratives. I will again focus on "The View from Castle Rock" in my analysis, but will also examine "The Wilds of Morris Township" together with the eponymous short story. The next chapter will examine the relationship between the historical documents in the narratives and the narratives set beside these documents by Munro. In the

same manner, the next chapter will not focus solely on the third-person perspective, but on the shifts between the third and first-person perspective that are recurrent in these narrative when historical documents and historical fiction is put next to each other in the texts. My intention in such an investigation is to get a fuller understanding of how Munro utilizes the historical record in her narrativizing of historical events and in this manner to better understand the historical consciousness of *Castle Rock*.

3.2 Shifting Perspectives and Form in "The View from Castle Rock" and "The Wilds of Morris Township"

The two short stories "The View from Castle Rock" and "The Wilds of Morris Township" are more concerned than any other narratives in Munro's collection with the relationship between historical documents and narrativity. In "Castle Rock", as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the transatlantic journey which Munro fictionalizes and narrates is enriched by the added excerpts from Walter Laidlaw's journal of the voyage, from which Munro draws the inspiration for her own narrative. Also, in "Castle Rock", we are treated to excerpts from two letters written by the patriarch of the family, which the narrator utilizes to explain what awaited the Laidlaw family in Canada, but also to question her own narrativization of the historical events.

Earlier in this thesis, I have commented on the use of a shifting focalization in "Castle Rock" and how the narrative shifts between the various members of the Laidlaw family to provide the reader with a fuller experience of the transatlantic voyage. The shifts between historical documents of fictional narrative in these short stories, I would argue functions in a similar manner. That is, in stories such as "Castle Rock" we are given the actual historical document that inspired Munro's narrativization worked into the narrative. This is in a manner of speaking a shift of perspective. Not perspective defined by focus of narration and who is "seen" and being "seen" in a narrative, but perspective in the sense that the inclusion of historical documents in fiction adds layers and dimensions through the intradiegetic nature of the narrative, making the reader question how we view the authenticity of a fictional work.

In "Castle Rock", Munro pays particular attention to question of authenticity in her narrativization of the historical events. Munro knows that by fictionalizing historical events and given them the shape of a story, she is meddling with our conceived notions of historical truth and how we should engage with the historical past. So much is clear from the foreword

of the collection, where she says: "the part of this book that might be called family history has expanded into fiction" (“Foreword”). In an earlier draft of *Castle Rock*, "non-fiction" was written instead of "family history", which I believe even further shows the author’s knowledge of the fact that she in this collection is mixing two manners of producing writing that are often conceived of as opposites (Box 3, Folder 2).

A historian might complain that such a representation of the transatlantic journey that Munro proposes to give her reader is not authentic, because at best it is gleaned from historical records, and at worst it is pure imagination. To such conceptions of historical "reality", White comments:

> What is involved, then, in that finding of the "true story," that discovery of the "real story" within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of "historical records"? What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story? In the enigma of this wish, this desire, we catch a glimpse of the cultural function of narrativizing discourse in general, an intimation of the psychological impulse behind the apparently universal need not only to narrate but to give events an aspect of narrativity. (*Content of the Form* 4)

This critique of historical "reality" is central to the work of postmodern historiography. In her short story, Munro attempts to balance this distance between traditional methods and the desire to move beyond the limits of traditional history writing. We can see evidence of this in her use of historical records in the text. The excerpts from the journal are in many ways matter-of-fact recordings, that attempt to describe the journey through realistic details and a lack of pathos to emphasize their authority as a truthful document. Munro has included snippets of this record to lend authority to her own fictionalization of the historical event, but she has also attempted to use her short story as an expansion of what is revealed in the document.

We can see this expansion of the historical record at the moment where it is first included in Munro's narrative. In the journal, Walter writes: "Their was a child had died, the name of Ormiston and its body was thrown overboard sewed up in a piece of canvas with a large lump of coal at its feet. . ." (40, ellipsis in original). Whereas the historical record relates this tragedy in a passive and nonreflective voice, concerned with the event rather than the

effects of the event, Munro shifts the narrative focus from the record to focalize Walter has he is writing the journal entry:

> He paused in his writing to think of the weighted sack falling down through the water. . . . Would the piece of coal do its job, would the sack fall straight down to the very bottom of the sea? . . . Or some ferocious fish might come along and rip the sack and make a meal before it had even left the upper waters. . . . These thoughts do not distress him. . . . [but] there is the matter of a soul. The soul leaves the boy at the moment of death. But from which part of the body does it leave, what has been its particular bodily location? The best guess seems to be that it emerges with the last breath, having been hidden somewhere in the chest around the place of the heart and lungs. Though Walter has heard a joke they used to tell about an old fellow in the Ettrick, to the effect that he was so dirty that when he died his soul came out his arsehole, and was heard to do so, with a mighty explosion. (40-41, ellipsis mine)

Munro deepens our understanding of the historical record by fictionalizing the act of writing the journal. We perceive Walter now not as someone jotting down different events on the voyage, but as someone who is engaged reflectively with the events that he documents and the current discussions and preoccupations of his time. The death of a child makes him contemplate a common theological discussion in eighteen-century Scotland: the relation between the soul and the body, and this again furthers the reader's comprehension of the historical event by making him imagine possible facets of the transatlantic journey that traditional history writing would have ignored, based on the speculative nature of the historical representation.

In the article "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory", White argues that "to change the form of the discourse might not be to change the information about its explicit referent, but it would certainly change the meaning produced by it" (19). What I would argue that Munro manages to carry out in "Castle Rock", and in all her reinterpretations of historical documents, is to change the meaning produced from the initial referent, that is, the historical event of the transatlantic journey. Munro's text utilizes the same referent as Walter's journal, but by changing the form of interpretation of this referent she also changes the meaning(s) communicated to the reader about the historical event.

If the historical event is the primary referent of both Munro and Walter's records, then we must look to the secondary referent to understand how Munro communicates a different

meaning in relation to the event than Walter, or that of a traditional history. I feel it is necessary to stress that when I use the term "meaning", I am not referring to any actual historical truth (if such a thing is possible), but rather the discursive production of meaning mediated by a written text. With regard to referents, White proposes that by narrativizing historical event(s), a text is not only referring to the event(s), but introduces also a secondary referent that mediates the meaning production. He writes: "the historical discourse directs the reader's attention to a secondary referent, different in kind from the events that make up the primary referent, namely, the plot structures of the various story types cultivated in a given culture" (43). These "plot structures" are the devices that comprise a narrative and, one could argue, imbues it with its narrativity.

The dilemma that most often arises when one begins to "fictionalize" the past is the question of responsible representation of historical events and how to authentically represent the historical past through narrative. The argument goes that if we allow fictional representations of the past to occupy a position of historical authority, the natural conclusion to such a historical consciousness is that all possible historical writing is imbued with authority. The example that is most often cited as a dangerous element if we reconsider the authority of historical writing is the perspective of the Holocaust deniers, who clearly cannot substantiate their arguments with historical documentation, but nevertheless produce counter-historical narratives. Although this is an extreme example, it is an argument that must be taken seriously, and it is an argument that has often distressed writers of historical fiction.

Munro is troubled by the ethical implications of her fictionalization as well. We read in the preface to her collection, that "These are stories" and she continues: "You could say that such stories pay more attention to the truth of life than fiction usually does. But not enough to swear on. And the part of this book that might be called family history has expanded into fiction, but always with the outline of a true narrative" (“Foreword”). The words seem ambivalent to me; both wanting to claim an authority for her historical writing, while also wishing to acknowledge that the narrativization of her text challenges the belief in such an authority. She argues that her stories have a "true narrative", that is, they have a primary referent in historical events, but despite this fact, she still acknowledges their narrativity. The concept of a true narrative becomes, then, a term that problematizes its proclamation of truthfulness.

In "Castle Rock", I would argue that Munro attempts to engage with the ethical implications of conscious narrativization of historical events, when she includes some letters written by James Laidlaw while in Canada,

> Now sir I could tell you bit of Stories but I am afraid you will put me in your Calonial Advocate I do not Like to be put in prent. I once wrote a bit of a letter to my Son Robert in Scotland and my friend James Hogg the Poet put it in Blackwood Magazine and had me all through North America before I knew my letter was gone Home . . . Hogg poor man has spent most of his life in conning Lies. (84, ellipsis in original)

After including this letter, Munro acknowledges to her reader that "I am surely one of the liars the old man talks about, in what I have written about the voyage. Except for Walter's journal, and the letters, the story is full of my invention" (84). This is perhaps a surprising confession to include within the short story itself, and after most of the narrative has played itself out. For Hooper, it certainly came as a surprise, as he writes in his criticism on Munro, that "within four pages of the story's end, Munro ruins it . . . by stepping in, once again, as author" (153, my ellipsis). But by admitting that she has invented characters, such as Nettie, Walter's dying friend on the ship, and people's actions, such as for example old James Laidlaw's constant reminisces of the Ettrick Valley and his shanghaiing of passengers to make them listen to his fairy tales, Munro admits that the only part of her narrative that is in conventional terms "truthful" is the historical events themselves. Agnes, for example, did give birth on the ship, but her desire for the doctor, her birthmark, the relations to her family members, are all part of Munro's fictionalization.

I would argue that by admitting to the artifice of her narrative, Munro manages to navigate the dilemma of the ethical representation of the historical past. In his article "'Never Again' is Now", Hans Kellner writes that self-reflexive narratives that place the historian in the moment as well as in the writing of the text, engage with a middle-voice stance that more ethically approaches historical events (400-402). Kellner's concept of the middle voice is a development of White's understanding of this concept (which again is a development of Roland Barthes' musings on the middle voice in classical Greek grammar). Although I find it somewhat problematic to use the term "middle voice" in narrative theory, as it metaphorizes the grammatical middle voice for the sake of a theoretical concept of a historical double consciousness, I still find that the concept has value when discussing the ethics of representing the historical past. A better way to address this self-reflexive narrative device has

been formulated by the Canadian theorist Linda Hutcheon in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, where she develops the concept of historiographic metafiction. She writes, "Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction" (93), and continues: "Historiographic metafiction . . . can often enact the problematic nature of the relation of writing history to narrativizing and, thus, to fictionalization, thereby raising the same questions about the cognitive status of historical knowledge with which current philosophers of history are also grappling with" (92-93, ellipsis mine). Historiographic metafiction, then, is this self-referential narrative device so prevalent in postmodern fiction, which simultaneously attempts to examine the construction of knowledge, as it questions the foundation on which the text bases its assumptions.

By textualizing a self-reflexivity in her short story, I would argue that the Munro-narrator manages to position herself within her narrative, as well as stressing her own production of the text. This undercutting of her own historical authority is in fact a move that strengthens her text's authority as a critical record of historical events. Instead of claiming that her text holds any essential authority over the historical events, the Munro-narrator attempts to relinquishes this power and to place it in the hands of her reader. By acknowledging the narrativization of historical events, the narrator places the responsibility for making an ethical judgement and interpretation of the past not only on herself, but also on her reader. The reader is now invited to approach the events with a critical mind and make their own judgements on the basis of the representation of historical events in the text.

I would argue that such a move of self-reflectivity is not something that one finds in counter-historical writing, such as that of Holocaust deniers. Whereas postmodern writers of history utilize historiographic metafiction as a device to question the base of their own presupposed knowledge of historical events, counter-historical writing does not. Instead, they follow the historiographic method of traditional history writing. This means that they do not attempt to share the power of ethical judgement with the reader, but instead attempt to gain control of the narrative and the production of meaning derived from historical events.

Munro continuously undermines narrative expectations in "Castle Rock". Through this construction of her narrative, she questions our impulse to narrativize the historical event. When her characters have finally landed in Canada, she writes, "Young James stands in the midst of them – bright-eyed, fair, and straight. Slightly preening, somewhat wary, unnaturally solemn, as if he has indeed felt descend on him the burden of the future" (81). The toddler is

here represented as a symbol of the future the Laidlaw family will have in Canada and it is a typical white-settler narrative that signals the future of the Canadian nation. He stands at the center with all of the adults looking at him, young, healthy, and embodying the promise of the new world. But a few pages later, in the last paragraph of the narrative, Munro writes, "Young James was dead within a month of the family's landing at Quebec" (87). The historical event is here undercutting the narrative expectations that Munro has signaled through her use of the tropes of Canadian settler-narratives. The text, then, illustrates here at the end a conflict between its primary and secondary referents, between the historical event and the narrativization of said event. Much like in "No Advantages", Munro acknowledges that despite her efforts at looking into the past, and despite the historical records available to her, the historical event cannot truly be grasped by narrative, only put in the context of the discursive elements of its form.

With respect to the focus of narration, the postmodern self-reflexive shifts between the forms of historical documents and historical fiction are interesting. There is always a shift of focalization when these shifts happen, but also, there is sometimes a shift between first and third-person perspectives. The example of Old James's letters exemplifies how these shifts in form also lead to shifts in perspective. In the narrative, we move from a rapid shift in focalization between the Laidlaw family members, as we learn about their prospects and hopes for their new life in Canada, and into the first of Old James's letters that are naturally, considering the genre conventions of letter writing, in the first-person perspective and solely focalized by the real-life narrating voice of Old James. This shift in focus of narration is again altered, as the first-person perspective remains, but the narrator takes over as the focalizer of the narrative. These rapid shifts in focalization and perspective happen more frequently around places in the narrative where there also is a shift between historical documents and fictionalization of historical events. In "The Wilds of Morris Township", we are told by the narrator that the children who we encountered in "Illinois", once grown up, set out for "another wilderness" (111), that is, they moved further into Canada in the hope of finding land for themselves. Joining them on this journey is Robert “Big Rob” Laidlaw, their cousin. It is the historical agent "Big Rob" who writes the account of their journey which Munro makes use of in crafting this story. What Munro changes in her construction of this narrative, as opposed to the earlier stories, in the collection, is that she is not only using the historical record as the reference point of her short story, and neither is she just including snippets as she did in "Castle Rock". Instead she is including a large chunk of the historical record at the

beginning of her short story. Nearly half the story is just this document handed over to the reader as Munro supposedly found it herself.

In the document, Big Rob relates the hardships of building a life for oneself in the "wilderness". He relates their triumphs and defeats in building their shanty and harvesting wood. Among the stories that are related in the text is the death of James Laidlaw, the young Jamie from "Illinois", who dies when the branch of a falling tree hits him. This is a story that Munro has fictionalized earlier in her short story "A Wilderness Station", which can be found in the collection *Open Secrets*. The inclusion of this historical document raises, I would argue, interesting narrative questions. On the one hand, how does the intertextuality between Robert Laidlaw's text and Munro's text function in the narrative, and to what extent can the narrator trust the records she utilizes to compile her family history?

The short story is divided into four sections. First, there is the historical document provided by Robert Laidlaw. The second part of the narrative is a short section where the narrator relates the life of Robert, the children he had, and the kind of austere lifestyle they led on their farm. In the third section, we encounter a more recognizably "narrative" form. That is, the narrator begins now to fictionalize the historical events and tell a story about the siblings living on the farm. In doing this, the narrator utilizes a conventional third-person narrating voice, where the characters in the narrative are the focalizers and the focalized objects. The two earlier sections read as something more akin to traditional history writing and the tone in those sections is more detached from the narrative it puts forward, as if they are just relating simple, hard facts instead of constructing a narrative. The third section of the short story, on the other hand, begins: "On a Sunday afternoon in the fall Susan looked out a window and saw Forrest walking back and forth in the big front field, where there was now only wheat stubble. He tramped hard. He stopped and judged what he was doing" (118). We see here immediately that Susan is the focalizer of the narrative and that Forrester is the focalized, as opposed to the earlier in the narrative, when the narrator and the focus of the narrative were closer together.

Earlier in the narrative, the two narrators, Robert, and the presumed Munro-narrator, were engaged in a telling that attempted to relate and record the historical past. The shift in the third section of the short story utilizes the records put forward earlier in the short story to narrativize the historical past "authentically" by constructing this more conventionally literary narrative on the foundation of the historical records put forward earlier in the story. Although, I would argue that by constructing her narrative in this manner, Munro is not only relying on

the records to give her story a sense of historical authority, she is also questioning the same records which she utilizes.

Although I have refrained from drawing connections between the stories *Castle Rock* and the rest of Munro's oeuvre, I feel that the intertextual nature of "Township" gives me an excuse to briefly draw another of Munro's earlier stories into my examination of "Township". As I have mentioned, the historical record left by Robert Laidlaw served as the inspiration of one of Munro's other short story, titled "A Wilderness Station". It is the events surrounding the men going out into the "wilderness" and the subsequent death of one of them by a falling tree, that served as an inspiration for her earlier narrative. Apart from this, Munro's short story bears little resemblance to Robert's record. In "Wilderness", Munro focuses on the ambiguity of the death in the wilds, and the position of women during pioneer times by introducing a female character into the narrative. The short story shows the same interest in documents as "Township"; more so, perhaps, as the entire story is narrated in epistolary form based on documents "retrieved" and collected by an implied, unknown historian.

I would argue that if we consider the scepticism towards Robert Laidlaw's historical record in "Wilderness", then it is not unwarranted for us to consider the use of this same historical document in "Township" to be somehow not taken entirely at its face value. Of course, this is a purely intertextual approach, and if one is to approach "Township" without the prior knowledge of the plot in "Wilderness" and its scepticism towards the ambiguity of historical records, one might not read Munro's use of Robert Laidlaw's account as one that also questions the record, while utilizing it in producing a representation of the past. But, I would argue that a close reading of the text will in fact reveal this same scepticism towards historical documents in the narrative, even without the prior knowledge of "Wilderness".

The difference between an intertextual approach and the close reading approach is that if one has read "Wilderness" before "Township", the scepticism towards historical documents is imbedded from the beginning of the narrative, as the reader will recognize the record which Munro has questioned and played with earlier in her career. In a close reading approach towards the text, on the other hand, this same scepticism only becomes apparent towards the end of the narrative, serving as a sort of subdued epiphany to the short story. By epiphany, I do not mean the traditional and well-known moment of epiphany found at the end of a short story, which was popularized in short fiction during the twentieth century. Although, Munro utilized this literary device in the beginning of her career, particularly in her first collection

The Dance of the Happy Shades, but by the time *Castle Rock* was published, she had begun to end her narratives with ambiguous rather than epiphanic endings.

This story is one of the shortest in *Castle Rock*, but I would argue is crucial for our understanding of the collection's historical consciousness, as it is in this story that the shift between a reliance on historical documentation is exchanged for memory-records. After the narrator tells us the story of the children of Robert Laidlaw, and how one of them built a house for himself in a field, and how one of his sisters moved in with him, the narrative switches to the end of the short story. The ending is only three paragraphs and it is presented as a snippet of a discussion between the narrator's parents. It is the narrator's mother who says, "'They were devoted to each other,' said my mother, who had never actually met them, but was generally in favor of brotherly-sisterly relationship, unsullied by sex" (126). This view is contrasted with the narrativization of the two siblings and their life, where our narrator tells a story (if it is based on a historical source is not revealed) and where someone leaves a baby made of straw on the sibling's doorstep, and the narrative tells us, "Less innocent than Lizzie, Forrest caught the implication" (126). The implication is that their household is incestuous.

It is, of course, not relevant if Forrester and Lizzie's relationship was incestuous – it is hardly the point. Instead, I would argue that it is more important to note the manner in which the narrative produces an ambiguity around their relationship, and I would argue that this ambiguity also points at a scepticism towards the records, which the narrator utilizes to construct her narrative. That we can only approach the siblings' relationship through narrativization emphasizes that the stories told about the two siblings, and the memories that these stories use as primary referent, are fallible. This again, I would argue, also throws suspicions on the historical record supplied in the short story. At the end of the story, the narrator's father wonders, "To think what their ancestors did,' he said. 'The nerve it took, to pick up and cross the ocean. What was it squashed their spirits? So soon"' (216). There is a discrepancy between Robert's record and the memories people have of his children. I would argue that by including this awe at their differences, the narrator of "Township" is casting doubt about the validity of both the records and the memories as authoritative sources of meaning. There is no causality between the pioneering spirit of the historical record and the memories of the meek and austere siblings living on the farm.

In this chapter of my thesis, I have examined how in *Castle Rock* the stories that are told mostly in the third-person are stories that examine the multiple viewpoint of characters in

the historical past. This is managed by a frequent shift in focalization between the various characters, including the narrator, who speaks at times on behalf of herself as the historian who uncovers and narrativizes the historical events. The frequent shifts in form in these stories also adds layers to the stories' historical consciousness and how we as readers engage with the historical authenticity of texts. By including non-fiction, or actual historical documents, beside her fictitious narrativization, Munro makes the reader question the boundaries between fiction and non-fictitious representations of the historical past.

In the next and final chapter of my thesis I plan to examine the manner in which *Castle Rock* engages with "looking into the past"; that is, I will examine more in-depth the two historical genre forms that are utilized in this collection and how Munro's usage of these genres informs the historical consciousness of the text. The next chapter will also examine how the different thematic concerns in *Castle Rock* are rendered and how these thematic concerns construct to a great extent the text's historical consciousness.

4 Viewing the Past, Reflecting on the Present: Family History, Autobiography and Figuralism in *The View from Castle Rock*

> *A rare and fascinating work, in which the past makes sense of the present and the present makes sense of the past.*
>
> Karl Miller, *The Guardian*

> *The past is full of contradictions and complications, perhaps equal to those of the present, though we do not usually think so.*
>
> Alice Munro, *The View from Castle Rock* (17)

In this chapter of my thesis, I will examine the form of *Castle Rock* and how the genre conventions of this short story collection have informed the content. In other words, this chapter will focus on the examination of Munro's use of family history and autobiography in the collection and argue for how the elements of these historical genres have bearing on the thematic concerns of the collection. By such an examination, I intend to further understand the historical consciousness of the text as it is presented to the reader. This chapter will therefore move between an analysis of historical form and the interpretation of the text.

Unlike the previous two chapters, this chapter will be divided into three subsections. The first section of this chapter will focus on family history writing as a form and genre, and how the thematic concerns of the conventional discourse behind this genre are reflected in Munro's collection and in the different narratives, both in the first half and the second half of the collection. The second section of this chapter will, on the other hand, focus on the aspects of autobiographical writing in the text and how the genre conventions of this form are reflected in *Castle Rock*'s thematic concerns. My intention in this chapter is also better to understand the unconventional structure of *Castle Rock*. Thus in the third section of this chapter, I will examine the relationship between family history and autobiography in *Castle*

Rock and present an argument for what I perceive as the purpose behind this unconventional structure.

4.1 Family History in *The View from Castle Rock*

Family history as a form of history writing is interesting in itself, because in most cases it is a type of history writing that is produced by "laymen historians". The archival research and interview process required to produce an extensive family history that details a genealogical branch for over hundreds of years is quite extensive even for those with a background in historical research. Nevertheless, compiling one's family history remains a popular past time. One questions that comes up in the study of family historiography is: why do so many people write down their family histories? Many answers have been given to this question, and the most likely answer is that the impetus to write a family history is a mixture of them all. Social change is brought to the forefront by some critics (Huyssen), others have emphasized the "rootlessness" of modern families in a post-colonial age of globalism and migration (Basu, Erben, and Tyler). Another approach takes the focus away from the social and political aspects of modern society and instead sees the popularity of family histories as a popular interest that attempts to see the resemblance between the past and present; that is, particularly the likeness between our ancestors' lives and our own, so that we can learn something about our own future from the lived pasts of our forefathers and foremothers (Mason, Kramer).

What these different arguments for the impulse behind writing family histories have in common is that they all comprehend the family history as a form of identity-work. That is, by writing a family history something about one's own identity is consolidated. Of course, identity is a very broad and diffuse term to begin with. By invoking it as the impulse behind history writing, we are perhaps not saying that much about history writing, considering the fact that "identity" is a significant part of most narrative forms and acts. Nevertheless, it is a starting point, I believe, for a better understanding of the family history writing Alice Munro produces in *Castle Rock*. I would make the claim that her family history is preoccupied with the social and political aspects of family histories, but the collection is also engaged in exploring the likeness and resemblance in the life of Munro and her ancestors. In the end, *Castle Rock* is very much an "identity work", which attempts to produce something concrete about the author's own identity.

One of the main thematic concerns of the collection is social class. By this I do not only mean the differences between working-class and upper-class people, but rather the various aspects of economy, survival, as well as the lived experiences of working-class men and women. This is a thematic concern that is threaded through the collection from the beginning to the end. In fact, all the stories have in some shape or form an investment in showing the reader some facet of either Munro's or her ancestors' economic and social standing.

This thematic concern is broadcasted to the reader from the outset with the first story being entitled "No Advantages". In the opening excerpt of this story, we learn that the Ettrick Valley, where Munro's Laidlaw ancestors lived, was considered an area with no advantages. In the various life stories that are narrated in this short story, the narrator often refers to the economic or social position of her ancestors. For example, when considering why Will O'Phaup moved to the Ettrick Valley, she speculates: "He must have walked over the hills, a lad in his teens, looking for work" (8). The idea of survival and work is central to the Canadian conception of their own literary heritage. Margaret Atwood's critical work *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* is evidence of this. Although many of the ideas in this work are considered to not be nuanced enough by modern critics (Atwood among them), it still holds clout as a work of Canadian criticism that revealed one of the key themes in Canadian literature.

The theme of survival and an attention to what sort of work one does is present in all the stories in the family history part of the collection. In "Castle Rock", "Illinois", and "Township", we can argue that the great movements made in these short stories (the transatlantic voyage, the migration from Illinois to Ontario, and the movement into the Canadian bush) were all motivated by the need to survive, find work, and the need for economic gain by a very poverty-stricken family. The historical agents attest to this themselves, as exemplified in Munro's excerpt from Big Rob's journal where he writes: "[we] started from the county of Halton *to try our fortunes* in the wilds of Morris Township" (111, emphasis mine).

This thematic concern with class, economy, and survival accumulates in the family history's last story "Working for a Living", where the narrator muses on her parents' lives by focusing the narrative on the work that they conducted and the hardships they went through to survive. The entire "biography" of her parents in this narrative is essentially a catalogue of their working lives, and their personal lives seem to come secondary to this essential part of

their lives. This of course creates an anxiety in the narrator, and one of her concerns is that her parents did not truly love each other. She writes:

> they must have been nervous already – my mother must certainly have been anxious about being in her late twenties and unmarried. They must have known failure already, they may have turned to each other with reservations rather than the luxuriant optimism that I imagine. But I do imagine it, as we must all like to do, so we won't think that we were born out of affection that was always stingy, or an undertaking that was always half-hearted. (139)

I would argue that in this passage, we can witness one of the anxieties that is brought along with this collection's preoccupation with the themes of survival and economy. When examining the social history of her family, Munro, or rather, Munro's narrators, also notice how the social realities of the historical past affected the lives of her ancestors. And one of the anxieties that this brings to the narrator is, of course, that the marriages that were made, particularly her parent's marriage, was out of necessity and not love.

This anxiety we can see mirrored in Munro's (or at least her narrator's) own thoughts in relation to her first marriage in "The Ticket". As she writes there regarding her first husband:

> And I thought I loved him. Love and marriage. That was a lighted and agreeable room you went into, where you were safe. The lovers I had imagined, the bold-plumbed predators, had not appeared, perhaps did not exist. I could hardly think myself a match for them anyway.
>
> He deserved better than me, Michael did. He deserved a whole heart. (281)

Her first husband's economic situation is something that is commented on multiple times in the narrative, for example when the narrator says: "in his family something like a trunk was what you went out and bought, when you needed it. No passing it off as a present" (256). The motivation to marry for the Munro-character is then to some degree economic, and she goes through with the marriage because of this despite her uncertainty. When surveying her family history, the narrator realizes to some degree that her ancestors were also affected by their social and economic position.

This is particularly the case regarding the women of the family, who had to either marry or end up spinsters and burdens to their family. Throughout the collection, we encounter these two "types" of women: the married woman and the spinster. But what is also interesting is that many of the women in these stories attempt to find a third option, to have

the freedom of spinsterhood and the economic stability of a married life. In "Castle Rock", we have the character Mary, who, when arriving by ship in Canada, imagines that "she could snatch up Young James and run away into some part of the strange city of Quebec and find work as a sewing-woman . . . and bring him up all by herself as if she were his mother" (81). This same struggle between married life and spinsterhood is seen in the story "Illinois" where Lizzie moves into her brother's house and rules the house "like any married woman" (125). I would argue that in this family history, Munro focuses on the position of many different women in an attempt to imagine different pasts for women than just the two types often presented in historical writing. What Munro attempts to represent, I would argue, is the different shades of economic and social position that were possible for her ancestors. In other words, Munro is attempting to find in her own genealogy predecessors to her own struggle between becoming a housewife and an independent and self-sufficient writer.

As we have begun to see, the thematic concern with survival, class, and economy, is not just central to the family history part of the collection, but bleeds into Munro's narrativization of her own life, as in "The Ticket", where we can see how these social realities affected her first marriage. Another story that shows Munro's preoccupation with these themes in her own life is "Hired Girl", which narrativizes Munro's experience with working as a maid in Rosedale, Toronto (Thacker 82). The affluent family she worked for also owned a summer house on an island in Georgian Bay, and it is her experience of working there that Munro has narrativized in "Hired Girl". In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Munro says regarding that experience that: "It was probably a very important experience that way, because I saw all sorts of class things Being a servant in a household you see things about you and them – the barrier – which totally surprised me" (Duncan 134). This class barrier that Munro alludes to in this interview is an important theme in "Hired Girl".

In her article on the parallels between the early Munro story "Sunday Afternoons" and "Hired Girl", Isla Duncan makes the interesting point that in "Hired Girl" the approach towards class difference is slightly different from Munro's earlier work regarding class and social position. She writes: "In its depiction of the narrator's fierce resentment of her status, and her calculated antagonism towards her employer, the narrative differs from Munro's earlier treatment of the 'social embarrassment' that coming from a poor family causes characters such as Del, Rose, Janet and the unnamed narrator of 'Family Furnishings'". Although I agree somewhat with Duncan's statement, I would argue that there is also a definite presence of the social embarrassment inherent in the interaction between different

social classes that Munro has explored throughout her writing career. From the first page of the short story, this is evident when the narrator's experiencing self tells her employer Mrs. Montjoy that:

> "We called our maids hired girls," I added. "That was what we called them, at home."
>
> "Did you?" She said. A moment of silence passed. "And the colander on that hook there."
>
> Why did I have to say what I had said? Why was it necessary to mention that we had hired girls at home?
>
> Anybody could see why. To put myself somewhere near her level. As if that was possible. As if anything I had to say about myself or the house I came from could interest or impress her. (227)

Many Munro stories begin with a short anecdotal incident followed by an ellipsis in the narrative, much like the beginning of "Hired Girl". These little stories within the short story usually hint towards some of the main thematic concerns of the narrative. In "Hired Girl", we can see that the conversation between Mrs. Montjoy and the narrator's experiencing self illustrates the "awkward" social relations between the employer and her maid, when the maid attempts to assert herself on the same social/economic position as the employer. When the narrator questions her own motives the reader can see that the embarrassment of social hierarchy is still key to this story. It is an aspect of the economic, class, and survival themes that up to this point have not been fully engaged with in the earlier stories of the collection. Where the stories in the family history part of *Castle Rock* were more concerned with survival and poverty as a historical condition, the autobiographical part becomes more interested in the aspect of class difference inherent in these themes. When writing about her own life, Munro is more aware of the economic and social "barrier", as she calls it, between people.

This focus on the poverty of one's ancestors as opposed to the class differences in the historical past is a common element of family histories. In Wendy Bottero's anthropological study "Who Do You Think They Were? How Family Historians Make Sense of Social Position and Inequality in the Past", a selection of family historians were questioned on their comprehension of social hierarchies in their history writing. What Bottero discovered in her study was that: "the most clear-cut and unambiguous comparison to make was not laterally (between ancestors or their contemporaries) but temporally – between then and now. It was temporal social comparisons which were most readily drawn upon". Munro's family history

functions in a similar manner to what Bottero discovered. Her family history's interest in social position is determined by Munro's investment in conceptualizing them as "poor". She can imagine her ancestors in relation to her own life and the economic and social position of her own life time, but she cannot imagine their poverty in relation to other people living in the historical past in the same manner that she can view class and social position laterally in her own life.

When Munro does attempt to view economy and social position laterally in the historical past, it still has the sense of a temporal viewpoint. I would argue that, for example, the end of "No Advantages", where the narrator writes, on behalf of her ancestor William Laidlaw, who moved from the Ettrick Valley to live in the Highlands (before moving to Illinois), that: "The poverty and the ignorance distress him, apparently. The poverty which seem to him willful, and the ignorance which he judges to be ignorant even of its own existence. He is a modern man" (26). Is Munro here truly speaking about William Laidlaw and his life, or is she superimposing her own experience onto the life of her ancestor in an attempt to see her own life reflected in that of her ancestors? This distress over poor and ignorant relatives by a "modern woman" is recognizable terrain in Munro's fiction. *Who Do You Think you Are? s*trikes me as a collection devoted to this particular theme, but also in the latter half of *Castle Rock* we can see the Munro-narrator struggle between her rural upbringing and her upward social mobility.

Also, we can see that in the previous quote from "No Advantages" Munro easily identifies poverty in her ancestors, but she does not identify this poverty in relation to anyone else living in this time. We can therefore not accurately determine the level of poverty that her ancestors truly experienced. This is opposite in the autobiographical part of the collection, where class and social position is very much defined by the comparing and contrasting different households, particularly in "Hired Girl", but also in the other stories of this part of the collection. In "Fathers", the narrator's experiencing self enters two different households and compares them to her own. In "Lying Under", the narrator compares Russell Craik's household to her own, and similarly this is done in "The Ticked", only that in this latter case it is the narrator who feels inferior to her fiancé, as opposed to her feeling of superiority in "Lying Under". In "Home", the narrator's experiencing self follows her father to Joe Thoms' trailer, where the narrative clearly sets up a contrast between the two households in their speech manner, their marital approaches, and their living conditions. Only "What Do You Want to Know For?" is not preoccupied with class in this same manner, but it is interesting to

note that this story was originally intended by Munro to serve as the epilogue of the collection and not be part of the second half of the collection (Box 3, folder 2).

In her anthropological study, Bottero writes that "'Then and now' comparisons are part of a readily available and widely used narrative of social change as material progress, and are perhaps the most obvious conclusion to draw about life in the past, particularly in tracking back family trees whose point of departure is *ego*" (emphasis in original). Although I have argued that Munro's family history functions in this kind of "then and now" paradigm that Bottero puts forward, this is not always the case. In some of the short stories, there is an interest in viewing history laterally. Particularly in the stories that have shifting focalization, such as "No Advantages" and "Illinois", we can witness this lateral view of Munro's ancestors. In "Illinois", the story is split into two narrative strands, that intersect but never reveals themselves to each other. At the one hand is the story of Munro's ancestors traveling from Illinois to Ontario, and on the other hand is the story of the two young girls who take the stolen baby to play a prank on the stable boy. This lateral view of the historical past shows that Munro's family history is interested in looking at history laterally when it is to emphasize how her ancestors did not live in a vacuum, but were affected in ways that no archival research would ever be able to show. So, despite the story of the abduction being an invention, it illustrates one of the problems of writing a family history. In "No Advantages", this lateral view of the historical past is used in a similar manner. In showing the different people that lived in the Ettrick Valley simultaneously with her ancestors, Munro shows in this story that "The past is full of contradictions and complications" (17). And yet, as I have mentioned earlier, when Munro does give a lateral historical view of her ancestors it is rarely to show the reader the Laidlaw family's different social class and economic position, but to emphasize the contradictions one encounters when "looking back" into the past.

Another interesting point to be made regarding the structure of *Castle Rock* is the order in which the various short stories have been assembled. This collection has been thirty years in the making and is not arranged by publication date. Instead, the collection is structured in accordance with chronological time of the historical periods the short stories narrativize. The furthest point back in historical time is situated in the first short story, and the most recent point in historical time is situated in the last story. Initially this fact does not seem that interesting, ordering a family history in accordance with historical chronology is after all the accepted convention of the form. But this aspect of *Castle Rock* certainly has a bearing on the historical consciousness of the collection. For example, another Canadian novel that, as

with *Castle Rock*, examines the genealogy of one family historian is Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*. Although this novel concerns itself with a fictional family and not an actual historical family, it is still interesting to consider as a family history, because it exemplifies why Munro's collection's adherence to chronological time is important to understanding the historical consciousness of the work.

In *Disappearing Moon Café*, we follow one Chinese Canadian family in Vancouver from the arrival of the family's patriarch to the most recent family historian of the clan, who attempts to discover the truth about her family's past. The novel is structured through multiple jumps in time, so that at one point the reader is following the story of the family historian only to jump back in time to her great-grandmother, then forward to her mother, then back to her grandmother, etc. The constant refocusing of time and undermining of chronological telling in this novel is entirely in line with its thematic concerns. *Disappearing Moon Café* is told primarily through the focalization of the clan's women and tells of their struggles and battles with each other and the patriarchal society they lived in. The novel also critiques concepts of racial purity with the Wong family's attempt to keep their Chinese heritage "pure", despite the already existing First Nation of French-Canadian dilutions. The novel also shows a heavy interest in illegitimate children and their place in the writing of family histories, and how past incidents repeat themselves when unaddressed. The novel is very much a critique of traditional conceptions of genealogy and family history writing. The non-chronological structure of the novel then functions to emphasize different aspects of these various themes.

The chronological structure of the short stories in *Castle Rock* is important to understanding the historical consciousness behind the collection. Munro's collection is not engaging in the same strand of critique of the traditions of family history writing as Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*, and is therefore invested in keeping a temporal conceptualization of family history that is chronological and that enforces the idea of history as moving forward through generations. Such a conceptualization of the temporal dimensions of family history writing often enforces ideas of progress and social mobility, as we have seen in *Castle Rock*'s preoccupation with the Laidlaw family and their social position and slow "progression" into the middle class. The fact that the white middle class contains the most avid family historians (Basu 39) might also say something about the relationship between family histories in modern times and the ethos of middle-class progress and stability, though this thesis is not the place to examine such an argument.

We have now seen how the traditional form of the family history is prevalent in Munro's collection of fiction. It follows a chronological structure that details the "progress" of the Laidlaw family from the parish of Ettrick Valley with no advantages, to Munro herself, one of the foremost Canadian authors at the time of *Castle Rock*'s publication, and Nobel laureate in the making. The thematic concerns of the collections are in many ways invested in upholding a white Canadian middle-class ideology, that foregrounds economic mobility, a distaste for strong class differences (particularly between white people) and a focus on the family unit as a nucleus of identity making.

One can almost forget that it is the family unit that is the center of modern family history writing. In *Castle Rock*, though, this family unit is not always taken for granted, and in some ways the different stories in the collection attempt to question how we conceptualize family and how other kinds of kinship are often excluded from family histories. In an article on kinship and genealogy, the scholar Anne-Marie Kramer notes that the identity-work of kinship: "involves locating the self and related others within a kin system on the basis of notions of inheritance" (381). This notion of kinship through inheritance is necessarily not just through direct blood lineage. Kramer, in the same article, writes that "kinship through blood is not a natural relationship, but a social relationship" (381). Kinship can then be argued to be a major discourse embedded in the form of family history writing. The identity-work involved in writing a family history is to create a kinship network that spans a broad temporal space that further emphasize the singular identity in relation to a larger community.

To what extent can we witness an engagement with kinship in the stories in *Castle Rock*? I would argue that there is to a large degree an engagement with the themes of family, with the narrators of these stories often comparing and contrasting different social relationships. One story in the family history part of the collection seems to me particularly interested in family dynamics, or rather the deviation from accepted social relationships. In "Township", we encounter one branch of the Laidlaw family that the Munro-narrator is related to, though not directly. In this story, we meet the siblings Simon, John, Duncan, Forrest, Sandy, Susan, Maggie, Annie, and Lizzie, who, apart from Duncan, live together in the house their father built. There is certainly a strain of the puritanical Scottishness to this family, as the narrator relates: "They turned their backs on the world. The women wore their hair parted in the middle and slicked tight to their heads, though the style of the day ran to bangs and rolls. They wore dark homemade dresses with skinny skirts. And their hands were red because they scrubbed the pine floor of their kitchen with lye everyday" (118). This

family must have made a serious impact on Munro, as these same qualities are used to describe the family in the earlier *The Moons of Jupiter* story "A Stone in the Field".

The conflict in "Township" happens when one of the brothers, Forrest, decides to build a house for himself out in the field. Forrest moves out of the house, starts taking his meals at the hotel and takes up the "fancy habit of drinking tea instead of just hot water" (124). This act of rebellion against the family and their identity as a social group bound by a sense of kinship causes a sense of anxiety in the other siblings, who fear that Forrest is setting himself up to be the laughingstock of the community. The narrator relates that: "there was some uneasiness in the family about how people would judge them if they quarrelled and quibbled about things. . . . they did not want him passing around stories of their meanness" (120, my ellipsis). I would argue that we can see that the siblings identify themselves through their family relations to a large degree. When one of the brothers distances himself from their social group, it causes a conflict in their sense of identity.

When one of the sisters, Lizzie, joins her brother in his new house, the concept of family and kinship is further complicated. The narrator tells us that: "Lizzie reigned in her own house as any married woman" (125). We can see that the narrative here shows a family dynamic that resembles that of a heteronormative marriage, but that this social relationship is one between siblings. For the characters in the narrative, it becomes necessary to rationalize this kinship in terms that makes sense to them. The most obvious implication is one of incest, which is clearly indicated by the Halloween pranksters when they leave a straw baby on the doorstep of the two siblings, an act which "Less innocent than Lizzie, Forrest caught the implication" (126). The narrator's mother, on the other hand, imagines it in these terms: "'They were devoted to each other,' said my mother, who had never actually met them, but was generally in favor of brotherly-sisterly relationships, unsullied by sex" (126). These seem to me like to polar opposite rationalizations of the kinship between Forrest and Lizzie. What is interesting is that they both attempt to conceptualize their relationship through sex, either by accusation or brushing it away. It seems to me that in this collection of stories the concept of sex and unions is key to how the work conceptualizes family kinship. But, it also seems to me that the collection does not ignore that this is not the only form of family-kinship that exists. The relationship between Lizzie and Forrest would have been ignored in most family histories, because it does not "bear fruit" and the two of them are therefore not direct ancestors of the narrator as family historian. Yet, Munro includes their story as part of her own family history, which I would argue indicates that Munro holds similar views to those

expressed by Lawler in *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*: "Blood *symbolizes* connection: it is not itself connection . . . . [it] enables Americans (and Europeans) to build cultural relations of kin. Kin relations are, by definition, cultural. Kin are quite simply those persons we recognize as kin" (38-39, ellipsis mine, emphasis in original). It also shows Munro's continued interest in imagining different possibilities for women in the historical past and in the present, something which she has examined throughout her writing career.

In this first section of the chapter, I have examined some of the traits of the family history as a form. By looking into the common conventions of this type of history writing, I have argued that we can better understand Munro's short stories in *Castle Rock* and how they both enforce and challenge these genre conventions. Through this examination, I have delineated some of the key thematic concerns of the collection as a whole. I have particularly highlighted the themes regarding class, economy, and survival and argued that they run throughout the collection in one way or another. We can then see that *Castle Rock* is one of Munro's most class-conscious collections, perhaps only second to *Who Do You Think You Are?* I have also noted the importance of spatial mobility in the collection. Both Munro and the various characters in her short stories have moved across continents and this is reflected in that the various stories often focus on the act of moving itself. The uprooting of families is more interesting to Munro in this collection than the act of putting down roots. Finally, the collection shows an interest in examining what families actually are and how different forms of kinships often are excluded from the narratives produced in traditional family histories.

In the second part of this chapter, I intend to examine the other form of history writing that Munro has utilized in this collection: autobiography. My intention is to examine the autobiographical element in these stories by itself and how Munro utilizes this form to emphasize the thematic concerns of the narratives and the collection as a whole.

4.2 Autobiography in *The View from Castle Rock*

Autobiography is a form of historical writing that both shares aspects with traditional history writing and works against other aspects of history writing. At the base level, an autobiography concerns itself with the representation of the past, like all historical writing, but where traditional history writing, or family histories, are concerned with facts and the "accurate" representation of the historical past, autobiography does not necessarily require a strict adherence to these norms. The scholar Roy Pascal writes that "Autobiographies offer an

unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of other men. Even if what they tell us is not factually true, or only partly true, it always is true evidence of their personality" (1). Therefore, the representation of experience and the feeling of the historical past is more significant than the representation of the event in autobiographical writing.

In *Castle Rock*, the second part of the collection is devoted to Munro's autobiographical writings. As I have discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the short stories in this section of the collection are narrated in the first-person by an autodiegetic narrator looking back and reflecting on her own life. This narrative presentation is very much what one expects from an autobiography. In this section of my thesis, I will focus on the autobiographical element in *Castle Rock* and the thematic preoccupations the collection explores through this genre. I will also examine and propose a possible explanation for why Munro's autobiographical writings were paired with her family history in this collection.

Pascal argues that writing an autobiography means "discrimination and selection in face of the endless complexity of life, selection of facts, distribution of emphases, choice of expression. Everything depends on the standpoint chosen" (10). This does not perhaps strike one as surprising, considering autobiographical writing, just like any other form of writing, is a symbolic representation and can therefore not contain every aspect of a lived experience. What is interesting about this element of autobiographical writing is that in this process of choosing what "scenes" to include in one's autobiography, which scenes to emphasize, and what order to include these "scenes" in, the narrative reveals a lot about the sort of image the writer attempts to represent of herself to her reader. For example, an omission in Munro's autobiographical writing is the place of her own children in her life. She raised three children, but her experience and life with them is not included in *Castle Rock*. Munro has spoken in interviews about raising children, and that her life as a housewife might have shaped her art not only in content, but also in form, as short stories were easier to sit down and produce in the frantic days of a mother with three young children. Yet, in *Castle Rock* the influence her children had on her as a person and artist is not mentioned. One can suspect that this elision from her autobiographical writing was made because she did not want to put her own children into her stories, as has been an opinion voiced by Munro at an earlier stage in her career.

Biographical truth is then a central preoccupation of the autobiography. How truthful is one autobiography as opposed to another, and in the case of *Castle Rock*, does the elision of the children in Munro's autobiographical text make her reflections on her life less truthful? Pascal considers this one of the most complicated problems relating to the autobiographical

form. He writes: "the autobiographer is not relating facts, but experiences - i.e. the inter-action of a man and facts or events. By experience we mean something with meaning, and there can be many variations and shades of meaning" (16). Autobiographical writing differs then from traditional forms of history writing by its focus of the personal experience as opposed to the historical event. The elision of her children from her autobiographical writing does not necessarily make Munro's autobiographical writing less truthful. Instead, it produces a different kind of meaning than an autobiography that had included her three children. Whether one type of autobiographical writing is more truthful then the other is determined by what is signified by "truth", historical facts, emotions, experience, or purpose for producing a text. As Pascal writes: "So it is that the autobiography is not a portrait, and its motivation is quite other than that of the biography …. he presents an inner core, a self beneath the personality that appears to the world, that is his most precious reality since it gives meaning to his life" (193). This "inner core" is then the subject of Munro's autobiographical writing, and she says as much herself in the "Foreword" of the collection where she writes: "I put myself in the center and wrote about that self, as searchingly as I could".

In the story "Fathers", we can see that Munro focuses on the self, despite the fact that most of the narrative concerns other people. In this short story, the narrator tells about two girls she knew when she was younger and of their relationship to their fathers. First, she tells of Dahlia Newcombe, who lives close to the protagonist of the story but is not a close friend, because of the difference in age and social position in town. Dahlia, we learn, explicitly hates her father, who has abused her and everyone else in the family. After her father "tried to brain me with the shovel" (178), as she says, Dahlia moved to town, where her sister lives. In the first half of the story, the narrator tells of the time when Dahlia brought her along to spy on her father and to "have a look at what's going on" (177). When she is brought along to the Newcombe farm, the young "Munro" character is both intrigued and disturbed by Dahlia's hatred towards her father and of Bunt Newcombe's cruelty towards his family.

As with many of Munro's stories, the first half of the narrative is then put beside a second half that relates a different story. In this case, the second story in the narrative happens before the narrator ever met Dahlia, and it tells about the narrator’s relationship with another girl from outside of town. Frances has moved to the neighborhood from Chicago, and the young "Munro" is coerced into walking Frances to school every morning and back home again afterwards. The narrator's experiencing self does not particularly like this arrangement, as Frances is not popular at school and she is desperately afraid of humiliation. She says:

"Living out at the end of that road as I did, and being easily embarrassed, yet a show-off, as I improbably was, I could never stand up for anybody who was being humiliated. I could never rise above a feeling of relief that it was not me" (184). As with Dahlia, the main character is invited to the home of Frances, and here she is also disturbed, indeed even more so than by the violence at Dahlia's home.

In the narrative, the two different stories about young girls and their relationship to their fathers is connected by the character of the young "Munro". In the final pages of the story, we learn about how the narrator, when she was young, was not able to tell about what she had witnessed at the Wainwrights' home, but that she made what she had witnessed at the Newcombes' home into a humorous story to entertain her family. What strikes the narrator when she retrospectively thinks about her own childhood is that they could "conduct this conversation so easily, without its seeming ever to enter our heads that my father had beaten me, at times, and that I had screamed out not that I wanted to kill him, but that I wanted to die" (195). By comparing and contrasting the two home lives that the young "Munro" experienced, the more mature narrator that is telling the narrative is able to reflect on her own life and her own self. The self is therefore very much at the center of Munro's autobiographical writing. Even when most of the narrative is engaged with the stories of other people, Munro's narrators manage to perceptively take the "action" of the narrative and put it in reference to her own life and identity.

Like "Working for a Living", "Fathers" bridges the gap between family history and autobiographical writing. ""Working for a Living" is set for the most part during Munro's own life, and so the narrating voice of this story has the autobiographical tone that we find in the second half of the collection, but this story is also concerned with the lives of her parents more so than her own. In "Fathers", this is to some extent reversed. Here, the narrator is interested in exploring the figure of the father and his influence of herself. We therefore never learn much about Munro's parents in this story; they are instead an uncontrollable force that exerts control over the young protagonist's life.

I find this aspect of the forces that control the young protagonist's life interesting, particularly if we also consider the time period that the narrative is set in. In the opening paragraph of the story, we are told that: "All over the countryside, in spring, there was a sound that was soon to disappear. Perhaps it would have disappeared already if it were not for the war" (173). World War II is then the backdrop of this story, but apart from this reference and another one, the war is never explicitly talked about in the narrative. Nevertheless, I would

argue, that the idea of warfare is very much embedded in the story and the memories of the narrator. This can particularly be seen, I would argue, in the language that the narrator uses in telling the story. For example, towards the end of the story, when the narrator describes the unsettling but comparable feeling that getting beaten and Mr. Wainwright put in her younger self, she explains it as follows:

> Shame. The shame of being beaten and the shame of cringing from the beating. Perpetual shame. Exposure. And something connects this, as I feel it now, with the shame, the queasiness, that crept up on me when I heard the padding of Mr. Wainwright's slippered feet, and his breathing. There were demands that seemed indecent, there were horrid invasions, both sneaky and straightforward. Some that I could tighten my skin against, others that left it raw. All in the hazards of life as a child. (195-196)

In this quote, we can see how the narrator, looking back on her life in retrospect, conceptualizes the senses and feelings of her younger self through wording like "horrid invasions, both sneaky and straightforward".

"Fathers" is a story that is particularly interested in the idea of violence and that of betrayal. Because of this there are not only parallels made between the two families and the "Munro" character's family, there are also thematic parallels between the father-daughter relationship and the process of warfare. For example, when Dahlia reveals her plans to kill her father, the narrator says that "She couldn't mean what she was saying. If she had any such intentions wouldn't it be crazy of her to tell me about them? I could betray her. I would not intend to, but somebody might get it out of me" (181). Then the narrative turns to thinking about the raging war: "Because of the war I often thought of what it would be like to be tortured. How much could I stand? At the dentist's, when he hit a nerve, I had thought, if a pain like that went on and on unless I betrayed where my father was hiding with the Resistance, what would I do?" (181). We see how warfare is always on the mind of the narrator's younger self, even at the dentist office, and we see how her conception of filial betrayal is also linked to the current era's wartime situation.

The relationships between young girls is also a kind of warfare in this story. When the young Munro character and the girl Wanda Louise Palmer become something like friends, it is out of a common wish to avoid Frances. They eat together, hidden in the basement, "behind a barricade of broken old desks" (184). The language here again, I would argue, hints towards the language of warfare, with the underground setting and the idea of a barricade separating

the two girls from the new girl in school. The interactions between Frances and the other girls also has the tone of warfare, as when Frances tells the narrator's younger self that her parents sang in the Light Opera Society, and she thinks that "I filed those words away but would not ask what they meant. If she had said them at school, in front of the others, they would have been irresistible ammunition" (186). After they have eaten their lunch, the two girls sneak out of school to avoid Frances, and we can see how the sneaking also features in this part of the narrative, as it did with Dahlia sneaking close to home to spy on her father. As Dahlia says: "I used to come out here in the winter …. And I used to think, he'll see the boot marks in the snow and know there was somebody had been spying on him and that'll drive him crazy" (179).

In "Fathers", Munro draws parallels, not only between different households and the relationship between fathers and their children in these homes, but she also between the greater political events of this particular time period and the most significant relationship of the young girl at the center of the narrative's world, that is, with her father. In this manner, Munro manages to write autobiographical material that explores the self, as Pascal has argued is the genre's principal purpose. Yet, she also manages to link this exploration of the self to larger political and social movements of the different eras that she has lived through. The autobiographical stories in the second half of *Castle Rock* are, then, not merely narcissistic solipsism, or simply reminiscences. They are thoughtful pieces, not only on the development of one woman's sense of self, but narratives that put this self in relation to the world at large and the historical times portrayed in the various narratives.

Perhaps the most significant social and political movement that is reflected in Munro's autobiographical fiction is the sexual revolution in the second half of the twentieth century. In the different stories in the second half of the collection, Munro is continuously interested in how her own past has been shaped by her gender and the expectations that her community has towards her because of it. This feminist interest in *Castle Rock* is narrated by an older, intelligent woman that has the capacity to view the social norms of where she has lived and make critical comments on these social norms. The narratives in the second half of the collection do not only interrogate the expectations of society from the point of view of a mature woman, but also from the point of view of a female artist.

In "Lying Under", for example, the narrator continuously stresses the importance of the gender norms in the community and how in subtle ways these norms regulate the life of the young protagonist and limits her possibilities. We see this in the beginning of the

narrative, when the young protagonist gets her hands on a bicycle, and her younger sister says:

> "You're not going to ride that to school, are you?". . . . My sister was younger than I was, but she sometimes suffered anxiety on my behalf, understanding, perhaps before I did the various ways in which I could risk making a fool of myself. She was thinking not just of the look of the bike but of the fact that I was thirteen and in my first year at high school, and that this was a watershed year as far as girls riding bukes to school was concerned. All girls who wanted to establish their femininity had to quit riding them. (198)

In this passage, we can see how the expectations as to Munro's gender identity have limited her ability to move freely through town. In fact, she is only able to ride the bike when she is heading away from the town, deeper into the country. The town, then, becomes a physical embodiment of the social order. When the Munro-character rides into the country, devoting herself to "Nature", she enters a space where she is able to express herself and her artistic sensitivity more freely.

It is when going away from the town and into the country, that the young Munro-character meets up with the boy Russell Craik. The narrator says: "We rode bicycles, for one thing. Russell did not own a car and did not have access to one, though he could drive – he drove the horse-barn truck. He never called for me at my house and I never suggested it. We rode out of town separately on Sunday afternoons and met always at the same place" (207). It is only moving away from the town and the social order it represents, that the young protagonist and Russell are able to meet without being judged by the others in the community. As much is clear from Miriam McAlpine's comment when she finds the young Munro-character under one of her apple trees and comments with judgement: "'You're starting early, aren't you?'" (201). Little comments such as these are frequent throughout the second half of *Castle Rock*; that is, comments that explain some restriction that the social order of her community puts on Munro as a young woman, and to some degree and older woman, because of her gender.

Similar concerns about the movements of women and the limitations put upon them in society are taken up in the story "The Ticket". The title of the story itself indicates the importance that movement has to the narrative, and the importance of having the ability to move, that is, being able to purchase a ticket. In the dream sequence that opens the story, a similar introduction to other Munro stories such as "Friend of My Youth", the aspect of

movement and traveling is introduced. In her dream, the narrator says "to think that I have not visited them, have not gone near them in all this time". When she first does visit her grandmother and her great-aunt in her dream, she thinks: "even now I'm in a hurry, I can't stay. I tell them that I have so much to do, but I'll be back soon" (255-256). I would argue that in this dream, the narrator is struggling with anxiety over pursuing a life of her own, different from the life expected of her. By pursuing this life, she has had to leave many of the people representing the old way of life behind her.

The central event in "The Ticket" is the preparations for the Munro character's marriage to her fiancé Michael. The motif of travel and movement is well established in the story. The narrator says that "I was to be married, and after that I was going to live in Vancouver" (256) and the Munro-character's wedding present is a trunk. Marriage is seen as something like journey in the narrative, a crossing from one state of femininity to another. In the trunks that the protagonist is given is all the essential baggage for her travels: "Dishes, glasses, pitchers, vases, wrapped in newspaper and further protected by towels, bath towels, crocheted doilies and afghans, embroidered table mats. . . . bed sheets, tablecloths (one of them, too, was crochet), quilts, pillowcases" (256-257). The importance of the journey that comes with marriage is emphasized by the narrator remembering her thoughts as a young woman: "Something else, clear as a warning bell, scattered the possible boyfriends and potential husbands out of my path. I did have faith though, that whatever it was would die down once I got away from home, and from this town" (258).

Marriage in "The Ticket" is seen, as I have argued, as a journey. It is a journey that opens new spaces for the protagonist of the story, but it is also a journey that puts many limitations on her future. Housekeeping and childbearing are foregrounded in the story as tasks that the narrator's experiencing self must perform with and for her future husband. Towards the end of the narrative, Aunt Charlie puts two hundred dollars in the protagonist's hands: "'If you change your mind,' she said, still in a shaky urgent whisper. 'If you don't want to get married, you'll need some money to get away' … 'It might not be just the right ticket for you'" (283). The possibility for a different journey is thus introduced into the narrative. This is a transition from girlhood into adulthood that does not hinge on marriage, but it is a journey that depends on economic self-sufficiency, which of course is not necessarily easy to obtain for a woman during the historical period in which the narrative is set. Nevertheless, economic self-sufficiency is an important crossroads for Munro's thematic concerns for gender

expectations and feminist liberation, and her thematic interest in art and the production of literature.

Key to Munro's feminist sensibilities is the struggle for women of her particular ethnicity and social-economic background to claim an economic sufficiency for themselves. In *Dance of The Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro*, Beverly J. Rasporich writes: "A central concept of Munro's work is that personal memory allows one to become one's own savior" (33). In *Castle Rock*'s autobiographical writing, we can see that this statement is true in more than just one sense. Not only does the exploration of personal memory allow the narrators of these stories to take stock of their own life and put them into a satisfying narrative, and in this manner become their own "savior". The narrators also manage to save themselves from choosing either marriage or spinsterhood through achieving economic self-sufficiency by writing, primarily stories autobiographical in nature. By documenting a woman's attempt to find economic stability, Munro is also emphasizing the artist's journey to finding stability, freedom, and satisfaction. In this manner, Munro manages to illustrate that gender and the production of art is tightly linked in a society where gender norms are heavily enforced and hard to escape. She also manages to make her autobiographical short stories not only reflect her personal journey, but also the social and political movements of the time period of their setting.

In the third and final section of this chapter, I will bring together both my examination of the family history aspect of *Castle Rock* and the autobiographical writing in the collection. In this manner, I intend further to explore the historical consciousness of the text and better to understand the short story collection as a whole.

4.3 Figuralism in *The View from Castle Rock*

If we now look back at the overall structure of *Castle Rock*, we encounter a puzzling question. For what purpose did Munro decide to put together her family history and her autobiographical material to make one collection? One must assume that there was a definite reasoning behind such a structuring of the collection and that to put the two parts together as one was not just because there were too few stories for one autobiographical work and one work of family history. Munro's own publishing history attests to the unlikelihood of this, as she is quite particular about each collection and what belongs and does not belong in her collections. Her fourth collection *Who Do You Think You Are?*, entitled *The Beggar Maid* in

the United Sates, was pulled from the presses to make alterations right before publication, with Munro paying out of her own pocket for the new printing (Hoy).

In an attempt to offer up a possible reasoning behind for Castle Rock's uncommon structure, I want to introduce a new term at the end of this thesis, popularized by the German scholar and critic Erich Auerbach in his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. That is the concept of *figuralism*. I want to particularly use Hayden White's interpretation of this term. Figuralism, in a historical context, is the epistemological concept of the relation between one event to a later event. White writes:

> for example, that a given historical event is a fulfillment of an earlier one is not to say that the prior event caused or determined the later event or that the later event is the actualization or effect of the prior. It is to say that historical events can be related to one another in the way that a figure is related to its fulfillment in a narrative or a poem. The fulfillment of a figure over the course of a given period of time or narrative diachrony is not predictable on the basis of whatever might be known about the figure itself apart from its fulfilled form. No more could one predict that a promise will necessarily be fulfilled on the basis of whatever might be known about the person who made the promise. For while it is true that a promise could not be fulfilled unless it had first been made, the making of a promise itself is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for the fulfillment thereof. This is why the making of a promise can be deduced retrospectively from a fulfillment, but a fulfillment cannot be inferred prospectively from the making of a promise. (*Figural Realism* 89)

Figuralism as a theoretical term is then related to how the historical past is only perceptible from the point of view of the present or recent past, and that through a retrospective viewpoint, humankind is able to create patterns between the events at different temporal moments. This is a term that is interesting to adapt to Munro's fiction, considering that so many of her stories are about the manners in which people are able to see patterns in their lives only to have them disrupted in some unforeseen way.

White points out that the aspect of fulfillment is a key difference in how we interpret events in the past; that events that we consider historical have this sense of fulfillment, while events we consider natural do not. "A given historical event can be viewed as the fulfillment of an earlier and apparently utterly unconnected event when the agents responsible for the occurrences of the later event link it 'genealogically' to the earlier one. The linkage between

historical events of this kind is neither causal nor genetic" (*Figural Realism* 89). The best example of the relationship between figures and fulfillment put forward by both Auerbach and White is the link between the Christian doctrine and Judaism. Figuralism has a long tradition in Christianity where:

> Christian interpretations of ancient Judaism [serve] as an anticipation or prolepsis of Christianity. According to Christian exegetes, those personages, events and actions reported in the Old Testament are to be understood as having both a literal and a figurative dimension. On the one hand, they are to be apprehended as real and not merely as fictions. On the other, they are to be apprehended as indicators of yet-to-come personages, events, and actions that will fulfill – that is, both complete and reveal – the relevance of the earlier ones. (94-95)

I believe that this conception of history is key to understanding *Castle Rock*'s approach to the past. In truth, there are many similarities between the structure of the Christian Bible and *Castle Rock*. As with the Old Testament, the first part of the collection presents narratives of historical figures through a genealogical framework. The second part of *Castle Rock* is structured similarly to the New Testament in that it follows a single person that serve as a fulfillment of what came before in the text. That is not to say that the author is consciously structuring her collection in the manner of the Bible. Yet, it is this structural similarity that reveals a comparable historical consciousness between Munro's *Castle Rock* and the Bible, a historical consciousness that is deeply rooted in western historical conceptions of figuralism.

I have already touched upon some figural elements in earlier chapters of this thesis, particularly in 4.1. I have examined the collection's preoccupation with themes of social mobility, class, social hierarchy, and gender. I don't intend to dwell much more on these specific topics in this section of my thesis, but it is necessary to point out that there is quite a bit of figural engagement in the text relating to these themes. The poverty of Munro's heritage and her own upbringing is central to her conception and rendering of the historical past. From the beginning, in "No Advantages", the Ettrick Valley in Scotland and Canada are compared and contrasted:

> the valley disappointed me the first time I saw it. Places are apt to do that when you've set them up in your imagination. . . . the hills were brown, or a kind of lilac brown, reminding me of the hills around Calgary. Ettrick Water was

> running fast and clear, but it was hardly as wide as the Maitland River, which flows past the farms where I grew up, in Ontario. (5)

The fulfillment of the Ladilaw family's hopes for the future, "America, where all the blessings of modern invention were put to eager use and the people could never stop improving the world around them" (62), are also fulfilled in the second part of the collection with Munro's own upward social mobility to a middle-class lifestyle.

One of the key thematic concerns of *Castle Rock* is creativity and art. In some ways, we can read the collection as Munro's attempt to find the reason for her own interest in art and why writing in particular attracted her. Pascal writes regarding autobiography that "the best autobiographies are by men and women of outstanding achievement in life. Their standpoint is not as it were chosen by them, it is not at all a question for them to decide as it is with younger people, when they come to review their life: it is there, the indubitable result of their life's work" (10). It is therefore natural that the art of writing is one of the key themes of the collection. Not only is art highly important to the "meaning" that Munro has made out of her life, but it is also of principal interest to her readers and therefore an important facet of her autobiographical writing.

In the "Foreword", Munro comments on the prevalence of writers in her heritage. She writes: "every generation of our family seemed to produce somebody who went in for writing long, outspoken, sometimes outrageous letters, and detailed recollections" (“Foreword”). She also, early in the first story "No Advantages", draws parallels between herself and the Scottish writer and poet James Hogg, with whom she shares a distant relation. With regard to Hogg's fiction and artistry, Munro writes:

> Self-dramatization got short shrift in our family. Though now that I come to think of it, it wasn't exactly that word they used. They spoke of *calling attention*. *Calling attention to yourself*. The opposite of which was not exactly modesty but a strenuous dignity and control, a sort of refusal. The refusal to feel any need to turn your life into a story, either for other people or for yourself. And when I study the people I know about in the family, it does seem that some of us have that need in large and irresistible measure – enough so as to make the others cringe with embarrassment and apprehension. That's why the judgement or warning had to be given out so frequently. (20, emphasis in original)

In this passage, I would argue, Munro is not as much talking about her ancestors in Scotland and the Ettrick Valley, for, she could of course not really know how they responded or thought about the creative spark that she describes in this passage. Instead, we can see that Munro superimposes her own experience as a writer who often draws on materials from her own lived experience and that of her family. In this way, we can see how Munro engages with figuralism with regard to her career as an author. Looking back into the historical past, Munro sees historical events that she can draw parallels to in her own life, and in this manner see them as a sort of prefiguring of her own vocation, e.g. James Hogg's career, his poor relations in the countryside, his use of material from this same countryside. Not one of these events are directly linked to Munro herself, but looking at these historical events, Munro can make parallels out of the events that she knows will be later fulfilled by her own experience. This is the historical method that Munro utilizes in this collection to make sense of her own vocation and attraction to fiction-writing. In investigating the past, she finds figures that will be later fulfilled by her own personal history, so when she writes that in every generation there has been a writer in the family, and that there is always someone calling attention to themselves, she can make her own life part of this narrative, while also explaining part of her identity through viewing and reflecting on history.

The character that does something unconventional is a recurring element of Munro's family history. For example, in "Township" Forrest decides to build a house for himself in the field next to the house where the rest of his siblings live. In describing him building this house, the narrator tells us that "he put up the frame of his house. It was to be two stories high, with four bedrooms and a back and front kitchen and pantry and a double parlor. The walls were to be planked, with a brick veneer" (120). I would propose that Forrest's building of the house can be imagined as a form of artistry similar to that of Munro. In branching away from his family, planning, and building the house, Forrest is engaging in artistry of sorts. Munro has in interviews likened her stories to houses and has said that she wants them to feel like walking through different rooms. The house is then a motif in Munro's fiction, that in stories such as "Township" stands in for artistry and creativity.

In the stories in the second part of the collection, there is also this use of figuralism, where an event in Munro's life seems to serve as a sign to be fulfilled by Munro later in her life. For example, the ending of "Hired Girl", when Munro receives the copy of Karen Blixen's *Seven Gothic Tales*, becomes an important sign that represents, I would argue, Munro's attentiveness to literature and her future career as an author. When she begins to read

the story collection, the narrator tells us that, "I came to believe that this gift had always belonged to me", hinting towards the seemingly predestined relationship between Munro and literature. The story "Lying Under" also ends in a similar vein as "Hired Girl", with the narrator's experiencing self picking up a book to read and getting lost in it, while the Munro-narrator of the story explains the importance of literature to her life, and so prefigures Munro's later, successful career as a writer.

The story that most clearly bring together the historical and the personal in *Castle Rock* is the story "What Do You Want to Know For?" at the end of the second half of the collection. In this story, we follow the Munro character in the early 1990s in Ontario, where she has settled down with her second husband only 20 miles from where she grew up. The narrative is spliced between two stories that happen more or less simultaneously. In the first strain of the narrative, we learn about Munro and her husband's search for a burial mound that they had discovered a few years earlier. The second strain of the narrative follows Munro's cancer scare at the same time.

In this story, Munro draws parallels between the geography of her home and her own body. The burial mound that she and her husband discover is correlated to the growth that is found in Munro's breast. It is first described as a "large, unnatural mound blanketed with grass". The unnaturalness of the burial mound and the anomaly of the growth in Munro's body that "the doctor nor I had been able to feel" (317) is clearly symbolic of each other. After both the burial mound and the growth are introduced into the narrative, a little over three pages is devoted to describing the topography of the landscape Munro knows best. "The landscape here is a record of ancient events" (318), says the narrator. The landscape becomes, then, a sort of historical archive itself, and it is a kind of archive that mirrors the position of the body in autobiographical writing. For just as the topography is a detailed historical archive of the country in which Munro has lived her life, so is her body the archive of her experiences.

In both cases, Munro believes to a large extent that she knows it, that is, her body and the landscape of her home, but in both cases, she is pleasantly surprised to learn that she will never fully comprehend the history of either her home or herself. This idea is repeated throughout the narrative, for example when Munro and her husband are unable to find the burial mound again, even though they are sure that they know its location; or when Munro asks her radiologist why nobody has told her about her growth even though she has had it for a few years, and she responds: "Oh . . . they must not have seen it" (339). This sense of the incomprehensible possibilities of the past is something that has been a recurrent theme

throughout the collection, with the narrators of many stories commenting on their own fictions, questioning their own narrativizations, but never castigating themselves for their fiction-making because of the very sense of possibility in the historical past. As much can be seen in the interaction between the central character and Mrs. Mannerow: "'Nobody knows why they did it. They just did.' She smiles at me with a sociable sort of perplexity, her almost colorless eyes enlarged, made owlish, by her glasses. She gives a couple of tremulous nods. As if to say, it's beyond us, isn't it? A multitude of things, beyond us. Yes" (339). And this questioning, this irresistible urge to probe into the past and narrativize the past is exemplified in the final lines of the story, when both Munro and her husband wonder if the Mannerows had put oil in the lamp by the Bible in the crypt.

We can see in this story how the historical and the personal has been brought together by the parallels drawn between the history of the landscape and the history of Munro's own body. It is then fitting that this is the last story of the collection, only followed by the epilogue (as I have mentioned earlier, "What Do You Want to Know For?" was in earlier drafts of the collection intended to serve as the epilogue). In this story, the concerns of the family history section of the collection and the autobiographical section are brought together in some sense. The narrator of this story is both the historian uncovering something about the life of the pioneers in Canada and the autobiographer who narrates to the reader something personal about her own lived experience. The personal and the historical is therefore brought together in this story, and I would argue that the narratives in the previous sections of the collection are made more cohesive by this final story's act of bridging the concerns of the first half of the collection and the second.

I would argue that to understand this collection, it is of critical importance to understand that *Castle Rock* conceptualizes the identity of one individual not only through the lived experiences of that individual, but also through the lives of her ancestors and the historical past of her community. Heritage, then, is a critical component of one’s understanding of the self. The Munro narrator in these stories is able to draw parallels and figures between the lives of her ancestors and herself, and in this manner better solidify those aspects of her own identity that she sees in the historical past, or those aspects of her identity that she wants to solidify. It is no secret that the past is a powerful engine to produce and maintain a sense of identity; it is, after all this power of the past that movements such as nationalism to a great extent rely on. In *Castle Rock*, Munro is moving even further towards a more comprehensive examination of her own self than she has done in previous

autobiographical works, such as the collection *Lives of Girls of Women*, a collection she considers autobiographical not in incident but in emotion (*Probable Fictions* 61). In *Castle Rock*, Munro understands that to examine the self, she must go beyond examining the self in its own temporal field to examining it historically, through her own heritage.

In this final chapter of my thesis, I have examined the use of family history writing and autobiographical writing in *Castle Rock*. In this examination, I have paid particular attention to the conventions of these different genres to better understand the different thematic concerns of the collection both at the level of individual stories and as a whole. I have examined how these two different genres of history writing work together and what sort of effect is created by their intermingling. Through this examination, I have argued in that Munro has included both these elements in *Castle Rock* to more fully examine the individual than she has ever done before, to look booth at her own lived experiences and heritage, and in this manner to represent to the reader more fully a picture of herself than either family history or autobiography can do by themselves. To accomplish this effect, the various narratives engage with figures, where the historical past often prefigures the events and concerns of Munro's own lived experiences, drawing together the personal and the historical and weaving them together.

5 Conclusion

> *Now all these names I have been recording are joined to the living people in my mind, and to the lost kitchens, to the polished nickel trim on the commodious presiding black stoves, the sour wooden drainboards that never quite dried, the yellow light of the coal-oil lamps*
>
> Alice Munro, *The View from Castle Rock* (349)

The quote in the epigraph is from the second to last page in the epilogue to *The View from Castle Rock*, a piece entitled "Messenger". It serves as a sort of epiphany for the narrator in the text, not only for the short piece in question, but also for the collection as a whole. The epiphanic moment comes when the narrator remembers her visit to the graveyard of her Canadian ancestors. Among the graves, she finds a stone belonging to her distant ancestor Jane Laidlaw (a baby in the story "Illinois"). Jane died in childbirth, and the narrator realized that her child James Armour must have been Jimmy Armour, an old man she remembers from her own childhood. The epiphanic moment comes when the divide between the lives of her ancestors, lives she only has witnessed through archives, and her own life is bridged by the character of James Armour. A continuum between historical time and personal time is established.

In the introduction of this thesis, I explained that I intended to examine the historical consciousness of *The View from Castle Rock*. In this examination, I intended to look at the structural features of the text, especially those relating to the concepts of narration, focalization, and perspective. I also intended to examine some of the thematic concerns of the text, through a close reading of the various short stories that looked both at the thematic impact of the individual story and at the collection as a whole. I hope that to some extent this aim has been achieved and that the reader of this thesis feels that he or she has a better understanding of the historical consciousness of *Castle Rock.*

In this thesis, I first began to examine the collection analytically by looking at the structural components of some of the narratives collected in the text. In the first chapter, I particularly looked at the troubling position of the narrator in first-person narratives that straddle the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, the personal and the objective. In this chapter, I made the claim that the narrating voices of the stories in the first-person perspective played the part of the historian and the autobiographer. I introduced the neologism

(dramatized) implied authorial narrator and made the claim that in *Castle Rock* we encounter such a narrating voice; a complex narrating voice that repeatedly attempts to "trick" the reader into thinking that it is the voice of the author herself, both by implying that she is the narrator, and by existing and moving through the narrative space as if she was the author.

In this same chapter, I examined how some of the narratives in the collection navigated the historical and fictional aspects of their structure. That is, I examined how by introducing narrativization into her historical writing, Munro manages to reveal something critical about the nature of historical writing. What she reveals is that history writing is itself comprised of narratives and that different narratives, when put together, often can reveal the constructed nature of historical writing. This does not necessarily mean that history is not "real", so to speak, but instead that one must be critical and open to the fact that history can never truly be known.

What I believe to have established about *Castle Rock*'s historical consciousness in this second chapter is that the collection is interested in establishing a complex narrating voice in both the first part and the second part of the collection. In the first part, we encounter the historian as narrator. This narrating voice, through her masquerade of the author and also her presence in the narrative space of the story, is playing both the part of a traditional historian of a narrative and a historian *in* a narrative. By crossing the borders between traditional history writing and fiction. This narrating voice raises questions about the authenticity of historical "truth" and the various archival materials that we use to establish this truth. The historical consciousness of *Castle Rock* is, then, for starters, firmly established in the postmodern conceptions of the historical past.

In the next chapter of this thesis, I explored the structural elements of focalization and perspective in the stories in *Castle Rock* that were predominantly narrated from a third-person point of view. In this chapter, I also examined how many of the narratives in the family history section of the collection engaged with a blending of narrativized text and actual historical documents, producing an intradiegetic narrative. In this chapter, I illustrated how the same concerns that I discovered in the first chapter were being explored in these types of narratives as well.

Particularly in 3.1, I examined the use of multiple focalization in two of the stories in the collection. "The View from Castle Rock" was particularly beneficial to illustrate the point that when Munro makes use of shifting focalization in these narratives. It is often to approach the historical past in a manner that is impossible for traditional historical writing to do. In

these narratives with shifting focalization, Munro attempts to illustrate the emotional lives of her various ancestors in their own historical setting. Through such an examination of the historical past, Munro is engaging with a facet of historical writing that is questioned in some academic circles, but also a facet of historical writing that is highly beneficial to imagine the historical past and question the documents we find in the archives.

I have also argued that the elasticity of archival documents is one of the concerns of the first part of *Castle Rock*. In many of these narratives, Munro utilizes historical documents not only to establish her own representation of the historical past, but to question the limitations of these documents. In most cases, when an historical document is introduced into the narratives of *Castle Rock*, the narrator either expands on the information provided in these documents or comments on their contrasting nature with other historical documents or artifacts.

The third chapter of this thesis, I further examined the structural elements that I argued in the second chapter served as the foundation for *Castle Rock*'s historical consciousness. This is a historical consciousness that is postmodern and conceptualizes the historical past as something that can be approached but never fully known. As one of the narrators says: "When you write about real people you are always up against contradiction" (137). The historical consciousness of *Castle Rock* is then keenly aware of the narrative elements present in history writing, and because of this awareness, the text leans into this aspect of history writing and experiments with how far one can push narrativization before it is no longer considered historical and only fictitious.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis, I examined the elements of two genres of historical writing that structure the collection. That is, the family history aspects of the text and the autobiographical material. My intention in this chapter was to not only examine these genres at a structural level and how the collection utilizes and plays with the conventions of these two historical genres of writing. I also intended in this chapter to link these concerns up to the most prevalent thematic preoccupations of the collection. Finally, in this chapter I also intended to examine the collection as a whole, with particular attention to the concept of figuralism in history. I made the claim that figuralism plays a key part in the uncommon structure of *Castle Rock* and that it is an important facet of how the text conceptualizes the historical past.

It is my belief that in chapter four of this thesis, I approached some of the key thematic concerns of the collection, as well as some structural elements. Through a close reading of a

selection of the stories, I managed to illustrate how ideas of class, social hierarchy, and survival were key to the thematic concerns of the text, and that these themes were also implicit in the historical genres that Munro utilized in this collection, particular family history writing. I also identified a thematic concern with gender, both with how gender is represented historically and how gender norms throughout history have put restriction and limitations on the lives of women. Finally, I also argued that art and creativity were key thematic concerns of this collection, and that Munro has used her family history as a sort of argument for her own attraction to writing fiction.

From this chapter's examination of the thematic and the structural, I have made the claim that in this collection of short stories, Munro argues that one's identity is not merely contingent of the temporal location of the individual, but that heritage plays an important role in establishing a sense of self and for consolidating aspects of one's identity. The historical consciousness of *Castle Rock* is then very much engaged with this kind of identity-work. The historical past becomes in this text a space where Munro can examine her own self up against her ancestors and make figural assessments as to what her own identity is and where it prefigures from.

It is my argument that this historical consciousness is significant to Munro Studies. This is a historical consciousness that is postmodern to a great extent. By pushing the limitations of history writing and the narrativity in history writing, this historical consciousness is keenly aware that there are no single truths in history, but instead that there is a possibility of many truths. The possibility-space is something that the scholar Ulrica Skagert has written about in relation to Munro's fiction, and I must agree with her doctoral thesis that this is a key component of Munro's fiction. In *Castle Rock*. This possibility-space of multiple truths in the historical past is the crux of the text's historical consciousness.

The collection, as I have argued in this thesis, is very much interested in the historical past and its possibility, particularly its possibility to define and influence the present. This is illustrated in the epilogue of the collection, where the narrator says:

> I could pursue this. It's what people do. Once they get started they'll follow any lead. People who have done little reading in their whole lives will immerse themselves in documents, and some who would have trouble telling you the years in which the First World War was begun and ended will toss about dates from past centuries. We are beguiled. It happens mostly in or old age, when our personal futures close down and we cannot imagine – sometimes cannot

> believe in – the future of our children's children. We can't resist this rifling around in the past, sifting the untrustworthy evidence, linking stray names and questionable dates and anecdotes together, hanging on to threads, insisting on being joined to dead people and therefore to life. (347)

The possibility of the past is the same as the possibility of narrative in *Castle Rock*. Narrative create connections between people, living and dead, as well as producing and consolidating identities. The historical consciousness of *Castle Rock*, then. Is a postmodern consciousness attuned to the power and possibility that the historical past and narrativity plays in our individual lives.

Finally, I would argue that the historical consciousness of *Castle Rock* must not be overlooked in Munro Studies, or in Canadian Literature Studies for that matter. *Castle Rock* is the natural extension of Munro's narrative interests in the contrast between reality and fiction, the possibility-space, and in chronicling the identity of white Canadians. It has a greater historical scope than her earlier historical stories such as "A Wilderness Station" and "Meneseteung", and it also has a greater autobiographical scope than her earlier collection *The Lives of Girls and Women*. I believe that *Castel Rock* represents a significant moment in Munro's career, because of its unprecedented breadth and importance to her earlier narrative preoccupations. The collection also is significant in the studies of Canadian Literature, I would argue, as it is part of a larger wave of fiction that explore the heritage of Canadians as a means of better understanding individual identity.

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