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Life and Death, Lines of Flight, Patterns of Entrapment and Survival in Alice Munro's "Dimensions" and "Runaway"

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Alice Munro first published "Runaway" in *The New Yorker* in August 2003 and later included the story in her 2006 collection, *Runaway*. A very disturbing story and a tour de force, "Runaway" ends with the decision of the female protagonist to hold out against the temptation of finding the truth about a death that might herald her own. The story forces upon most readers the unshakeable conviction that a husband might kill his wife. The possibility of the murder, which haunts the story, constitutes its main mystery; there is nothing new in this, as Judith Miller's analysis of Munro's techniques at work in "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You" has shown¹. "Munro "writes mystery stories, *maybe* murder stories" (Miller 2002: 43, my italics). "Dimensions" was first published in June 2006 (in *The New Yorker*) and later included in *Too Much Happiness* (2009) and readers familiar with "Runaway" may experience a shock of recognition when reading it. Yet there is no murder mystery in "Dimensions" since midway through the story the reader learns that the tragedy alluded to in the opening pages is the murder of the protagonist's children by their own father. The under-current of violence that remained a menace in "Runaway" had erupted in "Dimensions"². The story is not a sequel to "Runaway," rather it reads as a variation on the same pattern: the depiction of a passionate relationship that entraps the women and the gradual intrusion of actual or symbolic violence, and possibly murder.

I would like to show that the patterns that "Runaway" and "Dimensions" foreground illustrate Deleuze and Guattari's theory that a novella is defined by lines, flesh lines, living lines, the first of which are lines of "rigid segmentarity" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 195) and that in Munro's stories, these lines create patterns of entrapment, since the passionate relationship which is envisioned by the women as 'exquisite submission' and 'captivity,' gradually entraps them. I will

¹ Miller explains that she looks at clues that are "not even really clues," but "just bits and pieces of information that appear here and there, floating through the telling of the story, many of them unspoken, coded, implied, resonating through silences" (Miller 2002: 43) as she tries to explain her feeling that the protagonist killed her sister.

² The experience a Munro reader may have that a previous story hovers as a subtext, or ghost text, is nothing new either. Nor did it end with "Dimensions" since similarities in "Gravel" (Munro 2012), "Child's Play" (Munro 2009), "Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux" (1986) and even "The Time of Death" (1968) are striking.

suggest that Carla and Doree repeat a pattern which is also a literary model. As I explore the gradual intrusion of violence, I will show that the stories explore what survival means as they challenge the idea that escape is possible. One aspect that deserves to be examined is the variation in the pattern since at the end of “Dimensions” the character decides to break her journey, raising the question of whether she might move on, while the character in “Runaway” holds out against moving to the clearing where she might discover the truth. I will analyse the differences in the endings, considering whether “Dimensions” can be interpreted as a journey towards freedom, or, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, away from lines of rigid segmentarity towards a line of flight and absolute deterritorialization.

The similarities in the story lines and the depictions of the relationships are striking. Both female protagonists in “Runaway” and “Dimensions” were very young (respectively eighteen and sixteen) when they met and married their older husbands, who are clearly the dominant partners in the relationship. Both women find themselves isolated or alienated from their families, and psychological and physical isolations go hand in hand. In “Runaway,” Carla is alienated from her family, who have moved to the other side of the country, while Doree, the protagonist in “Dimensions,” is an orphan. Both women only have one female friend in their new life, and since the husbands dislike and resent the women their wives befriend, this results in further isolation. Lloyd, Doree’s husband, is the one who engineers the move across Canada to a house in the country (Munro 2009: 4)³ while Carla and Clark own a riding school, in the country. Clark (whose name meaning “scribe”) and Lloyd (a Welsh name meaning “grey”) are depicted as authoritative figures, and they either have or assume positions of authority. Clark is a riding instructor and Lloyd is said to have been “authoritative enough to be sometimes taken for a doctor” when he was an orderly at the hospital⁴ (Munro 2009: 4). These men have strong opinions, which often results in their disagreeing with their neighbors: Lloyd has “enemies” at work (Munro 2009: 11) and Clark has rows and fights with various people (Munro 2006: 6).

The literary basis of the plots, devices, and intertextual and intratextual allusions in these stories need to be emphasized. With “Dimensions” and “Runaway,” Munro is pursuing, exploring, and exploding, patterns that she described in earlier stories. “Runaway” and “Dimensions” suggest that their protagonists were bound to fall in love with these men and that the promise of a passionate marriage to a dashing stranger, against the advice of friends and family, was irresistible. Both Lloyd and Clark are good looking: Lloyd, who has bold eyes, was very popular with female patients while many women at the riding school found Clark very attractive (Munro 2006: 27). As Mary Condé points out, Clark’s very name “encapsulates [his] appeal for the star-struck Carla and his own romantic construction of himself” (Condé 2014: 179). Clark’s portrait—his moustache, his lock of

³ Page numbers all refer to the printed collections, not *the New Yorker* versions.

⁴ Clark used to work at a mental hospital, which is yet another echo between the characters.

dark hair falling over his forehead, his mocking eyes and his boyish smile—evokes the romantic hero par excellence, if not a film star, as suggested by his name. In other words, Carla and Doree fell in love according to promises offered by well-known plots. Carla nicknames him “Gypsy Rover” after the song, which reinforces the impression that Clark is the epitome of the romantic lover, and the inevitability of Carla’s running away with him is underlined: “Naturally Carla had to runaway with Clark” (Munro 2006: 29). “Dimensions” offers an ironical comment on the plotline when Lloyd remarks “How original can you get?” as he kisses Doree and calls her a “flower in the desert” (Munro 2009: 4). Munro is indeed suggesting that there is no originality in the plot she is presenting. In “Wigtime,” an earlier story from *Friend of My Youth*, two seventeen-year old girls find their vision of life in magazines and expect romantic love: “they believed that something remarkable was bound to happen to them. They could become heroines: love and power of some sort were surely waiting” (Munro 1986: 253). When one of the girls elopes with a man, the regrets felt by the one who stays behind are couched in terms that will be echoed in “Runaway” and “Dimensions,” with striking passive voice structures: “she would rather have been chosen. She would rather have been pinned down by a man and his desire and the destiny he arranged for her” (Munro 1986: 263). “Runaway” and “Dimensions” explore the life of women who have achieved Anita’s dreamed fate, revealing that the fantasies and clichés that seduce women endanger them. One literary model is exposed in “Jakarta” (from the *Love of a Good Woman*) through an allusion to D.H. Lawrence’s depiction of marriage in “The Fox”. Munro’s protagonists discuss the idea of marriage as depicted by Lawrence as complete dependence, since Lawrence’s male protagonist wants “to veil her woman’s spirit” and “to put her independent spirit to sleep” (Lawrence 1992: 70). One of the women finds it “beautiful” (Munro 1998: 85) while the other is alarmed at the idea that this woman’s happiness depends on her husband (85). In the recent stories, Carla’s marriage is described through her eyes as submission and captivity: “She saw him as the architect of the life ahead of them, herself as *captive*, her *submission* both proper and exquisite” (Munro 2006: 32, my italics). Exquisite captivity and submission turn into a horror story when Carla realises that her husband might have killed their pet goat, and understands that her own attempt at running away might have put her life at risk. In “Dimensions,” Munro plays on the double meaning of “bond” as Doree, who argues that “the truth of things between them, the bond, was not something that anybody else could understand” (Munro 2009: 12), also feels “a sense of destiny, *submission*” (29, my italics): the apposition turns destiny into submission. Captivity in “Runaway” also emerges through references to rings, fences, barriers, and barricades—words that one can expect to find in the context of a riding school—but Clark is shown to be instrumental in turning their home into an enclosed space as he strings fence wire across the field (5) and plans to roof the barn (5-6). It is no coincidence that in “Dimensions,” Lloyd is said to be good at carpentry, suggesting he can have helped with fixing the house. Eventually, on a figurative level, home in “Runaway” turns into a choking space when Clark’s moods are said to “weight down all their inside space” (Munro 2006:

9). Clark's insistence that Carla blackmails Sylvia is couched in terms that denote entrapment too: "I'm not going to let you off the hook" (11). The figurative prison in "Runaway" turns into a literal prison in "Dimensions" as Doree finds that Lloyd resents her spending time with Maggie, stopping short of forbidding her to go out (Munro 2009: 12).

Munro skilfully draws disturbing connections between the lines the stories inexorably follow. The characters' lives are defined by rigidity, evoking lines of rigid segmentarity. Clark is said to be "stuck in his moods" (Munro 2006: 15), which is why Carla invents the stories of Sylvia's husband's indecent behavior towards her, but this results in Clark's being obsessed with his blackmailing scheme: "during the last month he had harped on the scheme (13)—the narrator's musical metaphor visually evokes half of a fishing hook, the harpoon. The central and final quarrel in "Dimensions" is caused by a dent in a tin of food (Munro 2009: 17), in other words, a catch or snag in the routine, which also symbolizes Doree's rebellion, since her conscious decision to save money by buying the cheaper product is followed by her decision not to start the "performance" she usually performs to stop their quarrels (13). As Munro explores these patterns of entrapment, she is also interested in the moment when danger and violence erupt. As the men fight with their neighbours or people at work, the women find that they are not supposed to mend fences but to take sides. They have to side with their husbands in order not to be considered an enemy, as Lloyd is "easily provoked" (Munro 2009: 11). The danger the women find themselves in is gradually revealed. Carla feels "there was nothing she could say" (Munro 2006: 23) while Doree is aware that she needs to watch herself to avoid danger: "if Doree could watch her own loyalty it would be all right." (12), the sentence epitomizes Doree's double bind: while she feels she would be to blame for the next outburst of violence, it is obvious that things can never be "all right" in such a situation.

Violence seeps in through language in "Runaway," first through seemingly unremarkable images and clichés such as letting someone off the hook or Carla's "seesaw misery" (Munro 2006: 16) which contains the word "saw". It also surfaces through the remarkable allusion to Lizzie Borden—one of the horses at Clark and Carla's stable is called Lizzie and is nicknamed Lizzie Borden. As Héliane Ventura points out, the allusion to the woman who killed her family "establish[es] an ominous dimension, a forewarning of symbolic or actual violence" (Ventura 2010: 252). In this respect, Lloyd's nickname for his wife's friend in "Dimensions" is striking: he calls Maggie, "the Lezzie". With its capital L and double z, Lezzie strikes a very disturbing visual echo with the name of the horse in "Runaway," Lizzie, and hence with the name of the axe murderer Lizzie Borden. The visual echo draws a connection between the stories but also heralds the murder of the children. Secondly, most conversations in "Runaway" and "Dimensions" are fraught with danger. Both men play with words but use language to hurt people—for instance Lloyd calls Mrs. Mitchell, "Mrs. Bitch-out-of-Hell" (Munro 2009: 11) and Clark calls Hi and Robert Buckley's Building Supply, "The Highway Robbers Buggery Supply" (Munro 2006: 6); their intent is to avenge themselves and their words are loaded weapons. Doree discovers that these games are no

laughing matter since laughing can be just as dangerous as not siding with Lloyd: “she was even allowed to laugh with him, as long as she wasn’t the one who started the laughing.” (Munro 2009: 10). The conversations that turn into fights in both stories rest on the characters using words such as “crazy”, “mad” or “silly”. However banal they might seem, these words always herald the intrusion of violence and take on a disturbing and ominous dimension in “Dimensions” since Lloyd was found insane at his trial. The power of one dialogue in “Dimensions” hinges on the banality of the word “silly”:

“I’ve got experience with that kind of woman.”
“What kind?”
“Her kind.”
“Don’t be silly.”
“Careful. Don’t call me silly.” (Munro 2009: 12)

Lloyd’s warning echoes one of Clark’s remarks to his wife when she calls him mad: “Don’t tell me what I am” (Munro 2006: 11). Lloyd and Clark men believe in the literal meaning of words, which triggers more fights as they react to their wives’ words. By having Lloyd kill his children after Doree calls him crazy, Munro questions the relationship between language and truth, and reveals the violence of language that arises when someone decides to act in order to illustrate the truth the words carry. After Doree and Lloyd’s final dispute, Doree leaves the house in the hope of making him see reason, and later realizes she wanted him to see the truth about himself: “So was that what she had been thinking—that she could make him see, finally, who it was who was crazy?” (Munro 2009: 17) Eventually, Lloyd turns the table on her, proving her right by killing his own children.

As Lloyd punishes Doree for having left home, the interplay between the stories reinforces the pattern of inevitability; not only do both women find shelter with a friend but Lloyd describes a scene that actually takes place in “Runaway”:

“She’ll get you over there bawling and whining about what a bastard I am” (Munro 2009: 13)
“She howled and wept and gulped for air and tears ran down her cheeks [...] What could she not stand? It turned out to be her husband.” (Munro 2006: 22-23)

Since Lloyd claims the murders in “Dimensions” are the direct result of Doree’s leaving the house, the parallel situation confirms the reader’s impression that Carla will be punished for having attempted to run away. This is also suggested by the fact that Flora, the couple’s pet animal which had run away too, came back, as witnessed by Clark, and disappeared again. When Carla learns that Flora came back and that Clark lied about this, she feels terrified and suspicious, yet decides never to challenge Clark about this.

In “Runaway” and “Dimensions” Munro forces her reader to look at these marriages through her female protagonist’s eyes: in “Dimensions,” several sentences warn the readers: “Lloyd had a certain way of looking at things”; “Maggie had her own sharp way of looking at things.” (Munro 2009: 11). Munro encourages her readers to look at every dimension in these relationship, which the title “Dimensions” suggests. In both stories Munro powerfully examines the women’s persistent bond with their husbands. In “Runaway,” Carla’s double bind is conveyed through a very powerful image that challenges the very notion of survival: “It was as if she had a murderous needle somewhere in her lungs, and by breathing carefully, she could avoid feeling it.” (Munro 2006: 46) The thought that Clark could be a murderer is unbearable and Carla has to ignore it in order to remain with him, in other words, as the image suggests, she has to stop breathing in order to be able to breathe. Carla’s failed attempt to leave Clark is one of the most striking scenes in the story, as Munro plays with and reverses the image of the horse, as Héliane Ventura has shown in her analysis of the story (Ventura 2010: 247-9). Munro also engages in yet another intertextual game as the model for Carla’s failure is to be found in James Joyce’s “Eveline”. The echo relies on the resemblance between Carla and her pet animal, as the final paragraph in “Eveline” offers a close up on Eveline’s face, “passive, like a “helpless animal” (39) and on somewhat similar situations. Joyce’s heroine, who “felt herself in danger of her father’s violence” (Joyce 1967: 33), refuses to board the boat that is supposed to take her away, while Munro has Carla leave the bus. Eveline chooses her familiar life over an unknown adventure, even though her life is tinged with abuse while Carla choose to return to the prison of marriage. Munro also powerfully suggests that running away entails following another line of rigid segmentarity as Carla’s doubts as to her own fate appear:

She was riding on this bus in the hope of recovering herself. As Mrs. Jamieson might say—and as she herself might with satisfaction have said—*taking charge of her own life.* (Munro 2006 : 34)

The apparently minor difference between “might say” and “might have said” alerts us to the fact that these words are not Carla’s. Furthermore, a dash separates the final phrase, “taking charge of her own life,” which is also italicized, so that the phrase is doubly marked off, suggesting that these words are what people like Sylvia expect from her. Trying to live up to Sylvia’s “expectations,” she has replaced one line of rigid segmentarity with another. Yet Munro also questions what choosing life means when Carla decides to leave the bus, thinking that life without Clark is meaningless. She places her heroine in an impossible situation since choosing life with Clark may mean choosing death.

In “Dimensions” Munro does not content herself with depicting the impossible task Doree faces after the murder, she also depicts Doree’s paradoxical bond with Lloyd, after he killed their children. Doree’s own double bind is conveyed by the image of the knife she feels in her throat each

time she thinks of her children: “any thought of the children had been something she had to get rid of, pull out immediately like a knife in her throat.” (Munro 2009: 27) Munro is undoubtedly aware that trauma means “wound,” and she relies on the image of a physical wound to suggest intense pain. But the image also suggests that refusing to think about her children is equally lethal, since a pulled out knife entails bleeding to death. The opening pages place much emphasis on her new job as a chambermaid—her scrubbing floors and wiping mirrors, reflecting her attempts to start afresh—but they may also indicate a violent attempt to “scrape herself raw,”⁵ to deprive herself of memories and emotions, as suggested by verbs such as “scrubbed,” “stripped” or “vacuumed” (Munro 2009: 1). Lloyd’s letters will fill a void since Doree has been surrounded by silence about the children. The final letter is described as a gift and a refuge (27), it is said to bring “a light feeling” (27) which Doree can only define as “not pain” (27). The story forcefully conveys Doree’s impossible situation, showing that Lloyd’s letter simultaneously offers her relief and works as a trap, as all the other letters do.

From the opening lines, entrapment is suggested as the bus journeys to the mental hospital to visit Lloyd symbolize rigid lines: “Doree *had* to take three buses” (Munro 2009: 1, my italics). Doree’s reaction to Lloyd’s letters shows that she has not been able to break free of the web of entrapment; quite obviously Lloyd’s long letters enable him to recreate the bond he fails to establish when she sees him in the flesh. Munro uses italics to reproduce the letters, an oblique font that epitomizes the web that Lloyd is weaving, trying to entrap Doree, and Doree reads his letters several times, trying to find answers and to decipher meanings between the lines. The letters bring no information, express few regrets but serve a phatic function, as epitomized by the rather high number of questions or direct addresses, and an aside about a misspelled word: “*At the beginning was perturbation (Sp?)*” (Munro 2009: 22). Lloyd also manipulates Doree by announcing he has “*one special thing*” he wants to tell her about (23) *and* not telling her: “*cannot write it down*” (23). Most interestingly, the letter cuts her off from people, which is epitomized when Carla starts thinking about Lloyd’s letter as a “secret”: “she still *held on* to what he’d written, like a secret” (Munro 2009: 27 my italics). Not only does the verb “held on” reinforce the pattern of entrapment, the etymology of the word “secret,” to separate, to set apart, suggests that by comparing his words to a secret Doree cuts herself off from other people. This is made clear in the next passage: “But think. Aren’t I just as *cut off* by what happened as he is?” (28, my italics).

However, the endings suggests that Doree travels a journey from entrapment to freedom, as shown by the contrast between the opening pages that epitomize a pattern of entrapment to the final pages where the literal journey comes to an end. As Doree is riding the bus to go to the mental hospital, an accident (a truck crosses their path) forces the bus to stop. Doree and the bus driver

⁵ The image is used in an earlier story, “Differently” (*Friend of My Youth*), the main protagonist understands she has to break off with her friend and her lover: “what she had to do was to scrape herself raw” (Munro 1986: 241)

witness the accident and see the driver fly out of his truck and land on the road. Doree is the one who gives mouth to mouth resuscitation to the young man until she feels his breath. To understand how significant and potent the scene is, it has to be contrasted with previous images relating to breathing. After discovering the bodies of her children, Doree stops her howls and stops the images in her head, by literally stifling herself:

for some time Doree kept stuffing whatever she could grab into her mouth. After the dirt and grass it was sheets or towels or her own clothing. As if she was trying to stifle the scene in her head. (Munro 2009: 16)

Yet another image of stifling indirectly surfaces when the narrator describes Doree's feelings during the talks with the grief counselor. Her feelings are described as "a familiar impediment, that was like a hammer hitting her in the belly" (8) and as "heaves" at the bottom of her stomach (6). Although the first image seems to be more adequate to convey the violence of the trauma as it relies on blows, the "heaves" in Doree's belly (6) are more interesting than it might seem, since the verb "heave" denotes difficult breathing, and "heaves" in the plural form can refer to emphysema (chronic emphysema of horses), so that breathing difficulties are once more conveyed. By contrast, words such as "breathe," "breath," and "breathing" pervade the accident scene, fourteen words in total, that lead to two key statements, one referring to the boy's "duty to breath" (31), the second one shifting the emphasis towards Doree herself: "She spoke [...] as if she were the one whose breath was precious" (31), suggesting that her breath has indeed become precious to her. By contrast, the image of the needle in Carla's lung in "Runaway" that foregrounds difficult or limited breathing, suggests that there is no escape from her predicament. Carla can only survive by not breathing too strongly.

It is quite tempting to claim that in the final scene in "Dimensions" Doree gets to live up to her name—Doree comes from Dora, which come from Theodora, whose meaning in Greek is "gift". Munro offers Doree the possibility to give this young man his life back and (figuratively) the possibility to get hers back when she gives him the kiss of life. Does this mean that "Dimensions" offer closure as Doree is given the possibility to give the gift of life? Munro would thus impose a paradoxical dimension to the gift of life, since Doree can only save the boy by remembering what Lloyd had told her. So the man who had, literally, stifled his children is also given the possibility, through Doree, to breathe into the boy's mouth and help to save the boy's life and Doree's. When Doree decides to stay behind and to wait for the ambulance, instead of getting back on the bus, she seems to free herself from the obligation to go to the mental hospital. The bus driver asks Doree, "You don't *have to* get to London?" (Munro 2009: 31), an echo of the opening sentence, but the story ends on the word "No". Punctuation deserves comment: with the inverted commas, the driver's question is clearly marked as direct speech, but the words "Sure" and "No" are not surrounded by inverted commas, which means that Doree does not speak the words aloud:

“You sure?” he said.
Sure.
“You don’t have to get to London?”
No.

“No” without any inverted commas is not addressed to the bus driver. Neither is it spoken aloud. Whether Doree addresses them to herself⁶ or whether they are directly addressed to the reader, they can suggest that Doree frees herself from the obligation of going back to the facility. The ending suggests that, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, Doree has attained a kind of absolute deterritorialization, her line of flight. A line of flight, Deleuze and Guattari claim, normally “occurs in place” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 197): this is what happens when the character no longer has to look for answers, when deciphering no longer matters. Doree, then, is free of the obligation to try to understand who LLOYD is. This explains why it is unclear whether Doree might go back to the facility, this has become unimportant.

By contrast, in “Runaway,” Carla is said to hold out against the temptation to find out the truth about her goat. Having seen the vultures circle above the clearing, she assumes that she can find the body of Flora there, a certainty which is conveyed by a very puzzling image that resists interpretation: “a skull that she could hold like a teacup in one hand. Knowledge in one hand” (Munro 2006: 47). Munro does not tell us whether knowledge means life—if Carla sees evidence that Clark killed her, she might flee—or death, if she stays with him although she has seen evidence that he is a murderer. The very last sentence, “[s]he held out against the temptation” (47) conveys stasis, if not paralysis, with a character who chooses inaction. Yet the story ends with a very equivocal vision of Carla:

She might be free.
The days passed and Carla didn’t go near that place. She held out against the temptation. (47)

The sentence before last, “she might be free” deserves comment: the narrator is apparently referring to Flora the goat, yet since Flora and Carla are shown to be doubles, the phrase also refers to Carla’s own fate, and it can then be endowed with several meanings. “She might be free” is a very remote possibility, and I, for one, have always felt that the phrase actually called for the addition “if” as in “if she wanted to.” The possibility that Carla might escape can be supported by the fact that the name Carla means “free woman.” Yet by not going there and by denying the truth, Carla might also be trapped, and at risk, since Clark might be violent enough to kill her. The power of that ending, of course, resides in its very ambiguity, the fact that there is no knowing whether she might escape. The ending is, as Héliane Ventura pointed out, “overt narratorial manipulation” which keeps the

⁶ In her previous collections, Munro has used italics to signal words and phrases that are either silenced by a character or resonate in the protagonist’s memory. See Bigot 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013.

story from being resolved and enables the author and narrator to refrain from assigning the definite role of murderer to Clark. (Ventura 2010: 254).

“Dimensions,” it must be pointed out, retains several levels of ambiguity too. One question the story challengingly raises and refuses to resolve is who is to blame for what happens. The technique is somewhat similar to the ambiguities in Carla’s positions as demonstrated by Héliane Ventura, who argues that Carla “doubly endorses the role of the scapegoat: as the goat that is left to atone in the wilderness and a female Christ” (Ventura 2010: 257) and therefore becomes “the very embodiment of sacrifice” (257). The analysis relies on the resemblance between Flora and Carla, which has also been analysed by Mary Condé who points out the role played by the word “dandelion” (Condé 2004: 181). In “Runaway,” Flora, the goat emerges through the fog as “something spiky and radiant [...] a live dandelion ball” (Munro 2006: 39) and Carla’s face is described as “*crowned* with a frizz of dandelion hair (Munro 2006: 17, my italics). “Dimensions” shows that Doree is part of the equation too since after the murder Doree changes her name to her second name, Fleur, which evokes the name of the goat Flora, and, most importantly, Doree’s haircut is referred to as a “*crown* of spikes” (Munro 2009: 28, my italics) thereby echoing the descriptions of Flora and of Carla. In other words, through the intratextual games, Doree can be seen as a scapegoat, the one who is cast off but survives, although she is, in Lloyd’s eyes, guilty. Yet she too assumes the position of the sacrificial victim, through the striking image of her hair as a “crown of spikes” that clearly turns her into a female figure of Christ.

The ending of “Dimensions” also offers more ambiguity than I have so far suggested. Quite striking is the copula in “she spoke [...] as if she were the one whose breath was precious” (31). It simultaneously suggests that her breath has now become precious to her, and introduces a distance, preventing final interpretation. The final word of the story, “No,” also allows for several readings. “No” can free Doree from the obligation of going back to Lloyd, but more generally as her decision not to agree with Lloyd anymore, a brief and final rejection of the relationship and the web he has woven around her. Yet one must notice that both “Sure” and “No” are the only two words without inverted commas, which suggests another disturbing possibility, “No” can be a belated answer to “Sure,” which would mean that Doree is not sure about anything, and neither should the reader. Secondly, “No” may also be read as a belated and horrified cry of protest, in other words, a silent cry that signals the impossibility to deal with the tragedy. Furthermore, as a cry of protest, it can equally refer to Doree’s sudden understanding that she could have prevented the murders, if she had not left the house that night, *and* to Doree’s final realization that she could *not* have prevented the murders, even if had stayed home that night. As in “Runaway” the power of the ending resides in its very ambiguity, or rather, the contradictory meanings it offers at the same time.

While much of the murder mystery in “Runaway” rests on the possibility that Clark is a murderer, the question that “Dimensions” will not provide an answer to, is whether Lloyd is insane or a criminal, as epitomized by this shocking apposition: “He was not a criminal, he was only

criminally insane.” (Munro 2009: 21). Both the letter and Doree’s response to the letter place much emphasis on Lloyd’s supposed insanity, until it becomes impossible for Doree to tell insanity and sanity apart: “Insane if *you* wanted to call it that.” (Munro 2009: 27) “You” reads as a direct address to the reader, a warning, challenging her to form definite opinions about Lloyd.

Both “Dimensions” and “Runaway” force their readers to look at these marriages from various angles and to examine various dimensions. They both force the reader to try and reconcile the various dimensions and positions the characters are given. In other words, they force their readers to look at the pattern, placing them in the same situation Carla finds herself as she tries to decipher the patterns in the carpet in the trailer (Munro 2006: 8-9), which itself is a direct intertextual allusion to Henry James’s novella, highlighting the impossible task of interpretation.

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