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The Wonders of the Transatlantic Journey: Alice Munro's "The View from Castle Rock"

"The Wonders of the Transatlantic Journey in Alice Munro's "The View from Castle Rock".
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Abstract

In "The View from Castle Rock" (2006) Alice Munro imagines her ancestors' journey from Scotland to Canada. She uses the setting of the ship (a heterotopia, in Foucault's reading) to introduce disruption and show changes in her characters, revealing lines of flight. But Munro also uses her ancestors' transatlantic crossing to claim her Scottish and literary heritages, in a slightly subversive way, drawing attention to the female body and suggesting parallels between parting from a child and parting from a story. Furthermore, the crossing is also a journey into her earlier fiction.

In the title story of her 2006 collection, *The View from Castle Rock*, Alice Munro, who was born Alice Laidlaw, imagines the six week journey her ancestors undertook in 1818 when they left Scotland to go to Canada. The patriarch, Old James (Laidlaw), is accompanied by his daughter Mary, his son Andrew, Agnes (Andrew's wife who will give birth to a child during the journey), his 17-year-old son Walter and his grandson, two-year-old James. Blurring the divide between fiction and non-fiction, Munro has included fragments from the journal Walter wrote during the journey as well as fragments from actual letters written by Old James into the narrative of the journey which focuses on the Laidlaws' feelings and thoughts. **The main setting of the story is the ship that undertook the transatlantic crossing from Scotland to Canada**, in other words, Munro places her characters between two worlds and two lives. In "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" Foucault describes the ship as a "floating part of space, a placeless place, that lives by itself, closed in and on itself and at the same time poised in the infinite ocean" (Foucault 356). Foucault calls the ship a "heterotopia par excellence," in other words, **a place of otherness that is neither here nor there, where people find themselves in a sort of total breach of their traditional time (354)**. In Munro's story, the passengers arrive dazed at the end of the journey, feeling that they have been transported to Canada on a "giant wave" which has landed them in the middle of Quebec City, as if the voyage on board had not happened. However something has happened to them, **which I propose to analyze using the definition of the short story put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in "1874: Three Novellas or 'What Happened?': "everything is organized around the question 'what happened?'" (Deleuze and Guattari 192). They also argue that it is "defined by living lines, flesh lines, about which it brings a special revelation" (195), which proves particularly relevant to "The View from Castle Rock"**. Secondly, I suggest that as she draws attention to bodies and bodily functions, Munro proposes a semiotization of the female body

and draws parallels between parting from a child and parting from one's text. The passengers' crossing is paralleled with a journey back in time and back to Scotland: telling the story of her ancestors' journey is a pretext for Munro to reclaim her family heritage, albeit in a subversive way. This transatlantic crossing also enables her to propose a journey back into her fiction through echoes with earlier stories.

At first sight "The View from Castle Rock" describes a journey of exile, the first steps of a family's immigration to the new world. The narrator draws attention to Walter's attempt to convey the significance of the moment as he writes "a single sentence" (45): "And this night in the year 1818 we lost sight of Scotland" (45). Parting is experienced as loss, most notably for Old James who is shown going through, and fighting against, the process of uprooting. As soon as he is on board, the man who initiated the journey of immigration, the one who criticized the place he was born in as a "backward" place, redefines Scotland as the native land and the lost land, wishing he had not taken the decision to leave: "Oh, that we ever left our native land!" (32). The old man "tells his name, and says that he comes from Ettrick, from the valley and forest of Ettrick" (42), he also refers to his grandfather's house, explaining that the man's name, Will O'Phaup, came from the name of the place itself (47). James does not only claim his roots, he tries to reverse the process of uprooting he is experiencing. Amusingly, Walter will also claim his roots in his later life: he will make a trip back to Scotland where he will be photographed with the paraphernalia of the Scottish gentleman, "wearing a plaid and holding on to a bouquet of thistles" (Munro 87).

Munro's treatment of the motif of the journey to the new country is more complex than I suggest here. First she reverses expectations about the fate of the family by drawing attention to Young James: Mary and her father wonder about what James will remember about the journey (38, 80) and the description of Old James telling his tales to his grandson (69-70) suggests the child who receives them should become a storyteller too. It comes as a surprise to read (in the final paragraph of the story) that the child who felt "the burden of the future" (81) when the family landed in Quebec died shortly after they left Quebec for Montreal.

Secondly, the phrase "the burden of the future" is key to the story as it echoes the characters' sudden desire at the end of the journey to flee from their planned future. The main section of the story takes place on the ship, which Foucault defines as a placeless place, poised in the ocean between two worlds, and a heterotopia par excellence (Foucault 354): a setting that enables Munro to highlight the changes her characters go through. As Foucault defines it, the heterotopia can mirror but also "suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relationships designed, reflected, or mirrored by themselves" (Foucault 352). At first, the boat seems to

reproduce social divisions, which the family discover when they see the sleeping arrangements (Munro 33). However as a heterotopia the ship is a place where order – natural, traditional and social – can be disrupted. From the moment they are on board, Old James the patriarch loses his power: his authority is repeatedly challenged by his 17-year-old son, Walter, who speaks up and contradicts his father (32). Natural order is challenged when the animals that are taken on board – a pig, a cow and hens – are lifted through the air **so that they seem to be flying**: “someday [James] may remember this. *I saw a cow and a pig fly through the air*” (38). Social order is repeatedly challenged. For instance Walter finds himself a place on the deck that is reserved for the wealthiest passengers and there he strikes an unlikely friendship with Nettie, a girl from a rich family (43). When Agnes gives birth, she is taken to a place where she would normally never go to, a cabin, where ladies actually help wash the baby (52-53). On the boat, unlikely meetings and opportunities occur: Walter is offered a position as companion to Nettie. At the end of the journey, disruption is epitomized by the wild dancing that seems to start spontaneously and breaks down all sorts of conventions and limits as men dance with men, women dance with women, and people dance “not just in the figure of the reel but quite *outside* of it, all over the deck” (69, emphasis added).

When the characters arrive in Canada at the end of their six-week journey, they feel as if they have been magically transported into the heart of Quebec, “on **one giant wave**” (81) – a **sudden move that seems to obliterate the journey**. Yet in spite of the fact that, in Walter’s own words, “nothing happened” (47), something *has* happened to the characters. **As I read it, the key moment in the story is the moment when the characters start thinking of the life they will have in the new world** (the Laidlaws are supposed to take up land and become farmers in the colony of Upper Canada). Andrew, Agnes, Walter and Mary all wish they could disrupt the pattern of their lives as it has been planned. **Deleuze and Guattari posit that the short story is defined by “living lines, flesh lines, about which it brings a special revelation” (Deleuze and Guattari 195) and the Laidlaws’ planned future which is referred to as “the burden of the future” (Munro 81) can be analyzed as an instance of what the French philosophers identify as a (first) line of rigid segmentarity**. Walter, Mary, Agnes and Andrew all dream of escaping “the burden of the future,” for instance Walter “thinks of being a trader to the Indians, a sort of explorer. Or a miner for gold” (78). The eldest son, Andrew, “thinks of what it would be like to be here as a free man, without wife or father or sister or children, without a single burden on your back” (81). **For Deleuze and Guattari, the second line “is very different from the previous one; it is a line of molecular or supple segmentation the segments of which are like quanta of deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari, 196) yet there is no doubt that “a**

point of rigidity” is introduced. Walter knows what his duties are. There is little doubt that the line of rigid segmentarity will soon prevail for Andrew and his wife. Agnes's dream entails a repetition of the same (she can only see a future where she is dependent on men), which shows how trapped she is: “marriage to a man with enough money to let you ride in a carriage [...] If you were not married already and dragged down with two children” (82). Walter’s dream becomes stronger as the modal “will” is next used, suggesting that his desire to flee has grown stronger: “he will go and attach himself to the Hudson’s Bay Company and they will send him to the frontier where he will find riches as well as adventures” (82). Yet in Walter's case something happens which disrupts the lines of rigid segmentarity and of supple segmentation: “Walter reflects that his brother is strong and Agnes is strong—she can help him on the land while Mary cares for the children” (82). The pronoun “him” allows for another reading, as Walter’s desire for Agnes has been revealed throughout the story, it is quite possible to read a (silent) wish to see his brother dead — after the dash Agnes’s husband is not mentioned anymore. For her part, Mary wants to kidnap her nephew, whom she loves with a fierce passion: she “thinks she could snatch up young James and run away into some part of the strange city of Quebec and find work” (81). The choice of the modal verb is quite revealing as “could” suggests that she envisions this flight as a possibility. At the end of the journey, nothing has happened, “[a]nd yet everything has changed” (Deleuze and Guattari 197). Mary and Walter have reached “something like a new line, a third type, a kind of line of flight that is just as real as the others” (197), a “line of flight” or “absolute deterritorialization” (197) as their secret and forbidden desires surface.

A few biographical elements about the Laidlaws’ fate in Canada (Walter did not kill his brother nor did he become a trapper, and Mary did not flee with her nephew) are provided at the end of the story together with a description of the Laidlaws’ stones and graves in the Canadian cemetery where all the passengers but one are buried, which enables Munro to both ascertain their re-rooting in Canada and create an echo with the central passage¹ in the previous story in the collection. In “No Advantages” Munro describes her actual visit to the churchyard by Ettrick Church (6-7) where she found the stones of Will (O’Phaup) Laidlaw, of Margaret Laidlaw and her son James Hogg, and of Old James’s father.

For Munro’s own transatlantic crossing to Scotland is the background to “The View from Castle Rock” and her account of her ancestors' journey enables her to reclaim her heritage and the fatherland, as Old James does. Most importantly, James does not simply bemoan the loss

¹ It must also be noted that the next story describes Munro as narrator looking for the cemetery in Illinois where James's other son (Munro's direct ancestor) must have been buried.

of his native land, he also claims his ancestry as he repeatedly evokes his ancestor, Will O'Phaup (47, 48) and the stories that were told about him (59, 61, 69). The tales (which Munro cites) are not only folk tales grounding James in Scotland, they are also tales enabling him to celebrate Will O'Phaup. Since Old James and Will O'Phaup are revealed to be Munro's direct ancestors (Munro 6, 25, 88) Alice Munro is claiming this heritage, claiming her father's ancestors. It is also a literary heritage since James picks up the mantle, and role, of the storyteller: before his son's eyes he turns into another man, "the old fellow, the old tale-spinner" (64) — yet "old" here may not only refer to age but to his role and to a family tradition. In a 1974 interview Munro told the interviewer that she had been delighted to discover that the Laidlaws came from "an old family of minstrels" ("Alice Munro's rural roots").

For the story depicting the Laidlaws' journey towards Canada is also a journey backward in time for Munro. At the end of "The View" she places herself in Scotland when she shows her hand as narrator when she mentions James's letter which was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* "where [she] can look it up today" (83). Munro is also claiming a literary, albeit unlikely, heritage as she turns James, her direct ancestor, into "the old fellow, spouting all over the boat" (64). In her 1974 interview she also insisted that "storytelling is literature," and by foregrounding Old James spinning and spouting tales, she proposes an avatar of the writer as she establishes a connection, a direct line to him. Munro introduces and reclaims three (male) figures of the writer: Old James the storyteller, Walter, the 17-year-old boy who got himself a notebook before the journey so that he could record it there, starting, in Munro's own words, a family "custom" (111)² and the Scottish writer James Hogg, the Laidlaws' cousin. Hogg's mother was Will O'Phaup's daughter and James's aunt, a relationship that is detailed at length in "No Advantages" (6, 19-22). Yet Munro does not claim Hogg the famous novelist, instead she conjures up Hogg as a figure of derision: a shepherd and a liar. Hogg is referred to as "a raggedy lying poet" (35) by Agnes and Munro reveals that he was actually called a liar by James Laidlaw in the letter the old man wrote and which Munro includes in her narrative: "Hogg, poor man has spent most of his life conning Lies" (84). Munro herself draws the connection by calling herself a liar too: "And 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).

² In "The Wilds of Morris Township", another story from the collection, she mentions another Laidlaw, Robert, whose memoirs she used for her story "A Wilderness Station".

She however establishes a connection between the old man, Walter and Hogg, using the word “trick” for each of them, a word that Munro has often used in connection with writing. The word is first used to refer to James when Andrew remembers his father taking him to the castle to look at Fife claiming this was America, **and wondering whether his father had not been “playing one of his tricks on [his friends and son]” (31).** It is then used to refer to both Walter and Hogg when Walter starts writing in his journal:

he has a vial of ink as well, held in a leather pouch and strapped to his chest under his shirt. That was the trick used by their cousin, Jamie Hogg, the poet, when he was out in the wilds of Nithsdale, watching the sheep. When a rhyme came to Jamie he would [...] uncork the ink which the heat of his heart had kept from freezing. (39)

As Munro is claiming her family literary heritage, we may wonder whether this is a suggestion that the heart is at the source of her writing. **Incidentally, this is a question which Geoff Hancock raised in his 1987 interview when he asked Munro, “So you write from the heart more than from the head?” (Hancock 191).** It might be the case if we understand this not as sentimentality but as feelings such as lust, resentment, shame, extreme love, or jealousy – all of which are illustrated in this story.

However the heart as body is clearly highlighted too when Walter starts writing: “and the ink warmed on his chest flows as willingly as blood” (39). 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” (Brooks xii). In “The View from Castle Rock,” as in many other stories by Munro, the body, whose materiality is foregrounded, takes center stage in both Walter’s (actual) journal and Munro’s own narrative. For instance in his journal, Walter wrote of people being sick and vomiting (43) while Munro describes the pig shitting on the passengers (38), evokes Agnes’s swollen vagina and has Walter think about a religious question – what happens when the soul leaves the body – through a joke that includes farting (41). Holes and ejections from the body are explicitly mentioned, and Munro challenges the divisions between the divine and excrement, the low and the high, body and mind, nature and culture. The foregrounding of bodily functions, the blurring of the divide between low and high cultures in nothing new in Munro. **In 1991 Helen Hoy commented on “the strong sense of the body in Munro’s fiction” (Hoy 6), underscoring her “frankness about unmentionable details of sexuality, menstruations, and excretion (6). In her 2004 monograph Ailsa Cox invoked the Bakhtinian concept of “carnival ambivalence” to analyse Munro’s stories from the 1990s (Cox 47). Not only does carnival ambivalence propose a “suspension of hierarchical precedence” (Bakhtin 10), which is relevant to the wild dancing on the final**

day of the voyage, it also celebrates bodily functions (Bakhtin 22), focusing on apertures and convexities (26), which is relevant to the details that pepper Walter's journal and Munro's narrative.

Walter briefly writes of the birth of his niece, dismissing it as "nothing" since there is no major incident, and records the death of a child on board (40); Walter then pauses to imagine what happens to the child's body in the water and remembers a book of engravings featuring monsters that are half-human and half-animals (40). Another striking feature of Munro's story is the association with animals. The use of the verb "spout" (without a direct object) to describe Old James's storytelling suggests a connection with whales: "the old fellow, the old tale-spinner spouting all over the boat" (64). The word "wonders" is used to refer to the whales that are to be seen in the waters (65), indirectly drawing a connection with the old man's tales. Munro shows that both the surgeon and Walter are attracted to Agnes, and she reveals male gaze and desire when she has Walter look at Agnes's birthmark, comparing it to the skin of a deer ("[her skin] looks not like ordinary skin but like the velvet on a deer" [45]) – an animal which was often hunted, turning Agnes into the object of a hunt, evoking ancient if not mythical hunts. Thus the world of tales and myths is subtly introduced so that humans and animals are found to be embedded in common narratives. When the narrator describes the birth of Isabel from the point of view of Agnes, foregrounding her pain, the boundaries between the animal and the human are blurred: the pain is so intense that Agnes feels that "a cow that is so heavy, bawling heavy with milk, rears up and sits down on [her] stomach" (47). Munro's narrative foregrounds the female (and pregnant) body. Walter's desire to touch Agnes's birthmark, to "stroke it with the tips of his fingers" (45) is described in terms that suggest this is an instance when "the body marked, imprinted by desire enter[s] narrative" (Brooks 25). What is at stake is what Brooks calls the process of imprinting and inscription of the body (22) since Agnes's birthmark, which Walter longs to touch and stroke, is compared to "a splotch of pale brown as big as a handprint" (45). Munro proposes a semioticization of the body, bringing together body and text when the birthmark is compared to a handprint. In "Genealogy and Geology: of Metanarratives of Origins" Héliane Ventura argued that in the collection and more particularly in "What Do You Want to Know for?" Munro used her maiden passage to Scotland (and Edinburgh's Castle Rock) "as the seat of dissemination of literature through a woman's body" (Ventura 97). This is further illustrated in "The View from Castle Rock" when Munro draws attention to Agnes's vagina, referring to it as her "lips": "her legs throb and the swollen flesh in between them—the lips the child must soon part to get out—is a scalding sack of pain" (33). As is often the case, Munro's use of

punctuation is quite clever, visually speaking: the dashes break open the sentence, like two lips that part, as they stand on each side of the phrase, turning the text into a body at the same time as the body is turned into text. Using the word “lips” and the image of parting Munro clearly indicates that she sees the female body as the source of meaning and of literature.

The theme of parting reverberates throughout this story of exile, with people leaving their native land but with this foreshadowing of the child leaving the mother’s body, with the image of the lips parting, Munro is drawing parallels between giving birth and parting from one’s text. This loss or dispossession is both embedded and duplicated in “The View” with the letter James wrote to a Canadian magazine: “I once wrote a bit of letter to my Son Robert in Scotland and my friend James Hogg the Poet put it in Blackwoods Magazine and had me all through North America before I knew my letter was gone Home” (84). James Laidlaw bemoaned the fact that his private letter and his own words were taken away from him and published for everyone to read and it is a theft that Munro is repeating as she publishes this extract as well as an extract of the very letter James referred to. Munro also uses eight extracts from Walter’s journal in her story so that the historical documents are not only discovered in the archives, they are reclaimed and **repossessed** by Munro. She literally dismembers them as she selects the extracts with the ellipsis materializing the cuts: “We are to sail for Montreal tomorrow in a steamboat. . .” (79). Although the extracts from the journal are (slightly) set off since they are indented the same font is used as for the rest of the narrative, and there are no inverted commas, so the division between fiction and non-fiction is not that clear at first sight. Furthermore it is only after she cited the final extract that Munro reveals that they were fragments from Walter’s journal.

In “The View” the result of the juxtaposition between fiction and non-fiction can be surprisingly revealing as when Munro juxtaposes the (fictional) description of Agnes’s delivery (which foregrounds Agnes’s pain) with the reference to it in Walter’s (actual) journal: “she was not better till the 18th when she was delivered of a daughter. We having a surgeon on board *nothing happened*” (47, my italics). Walter’s silence – a male silence? – is then made visible. As she focuses on Agnes’s lips and the power of Mary’s cry there is ground to suggest that Munro reclaims her family’s journey and heritage from a somewhat unusual perspective, which could be female-oriented, **in spite of the fact that she reclaims her father’s ancestors, which means that the journey she undertakes is a journey back to the fatherland**. Mary’s empowerment is also an interesting aspect of the story, suggesting a female perspective. The girl who was dwarfed by her father and brothers (Old James refers to her as a dwarf [43]) is said to have discovered a new strength when she believes her nephew

is lost: “she feels in her chest the power of her own cry, she is astonished and happy” (76). The adjective “astonished”, which echoes the word “wonders” that occurs several times throughout the story, may suggest that Mary’s empowerment is one of the wonders of the journey. **Mary’s sense of empowerment is all the more remarkable as, apparently, nothing has happened to her and to her charge. Nothing has happened to James although Mary fears him lost, at least twice. He has neither fallen overboard nor has he been kidnapped, he has simply left her side but Mary feels that “[t]he nature of the world is altered” (Munro 49).** In Deleuze and Guattari’s words, “something has happened even if this something is nothing or remains unknowable” (194). Like Agnes, Mary has experienced the loss of a child. Munro has turned her ancestors’ journey into a story which is defined by living lines and organized around the question, “What happened?”

The literal journey is also paralleled with fictional journeys back into Munro’s fiction. Munro pieces the fragments of the past together, grafts them into her story but also turns her ancestors into her own characters. Not only does she imagine their thoughts and words, she also endows them with characteristics that her fictional characters often have. Agnes, who despises Hogg because he write stories (34) and whose family is said to possess the arts of cutting each other down to size (34) recalls many female characters who value practical skills, possess the art of cutting people down to size and despise those who read and write; Walter, who hides from his family in order to write, evokes the characters who become writers amidst surrounding scepticism. Mary, who promises to stop loving James if only he is found alive (50), evokes women who strike bargains in order to prevent disasters. **Munro’s characters resemble her ancestors, or her ancestors are made to resemble her characters.** The same holds true of themes such as sibling rivalry which surfaces after the birth of Agnes’s daughter (66). Walter’s desire for Agnes, culminating in his vision of a life with her, echoes an earlier story entitled “A Wilderness Station” (*Open Secrets*), for which Munro used another Laidlaw memoir, relating the death of James Laidlaw (one of Old James’s grandsons). “A Wilderness Station” hinges on a triangle involving two brothers and the wife of one of them and my reading of Walter’s desire to get rid of Andrew and be with Agnes is influenced by this story. Furthermore as he imagines the life he could have had with Nettie, had he accepted her father’s offer, Walter also summons many characters, both men and women, who, in secret, remember someone or imagine another life with them. The narrator notes that “sometimes he will even entertain himself with thoughts of what *might* have happened had he taken up the offer” (Munro *The View* 79, italics mine), a passage which illustrates what Ajay Heble has defined as Munro’s “paradigmatic discourse” which “enables Munro’s characters to imagine

possible correlations between sets of phenomena and to consider how ‘reality’ might be different if something absent or potential were substituted for what things are” (Heble 7). Munro has used the motif of the journey in other stories most notably in “The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink” where an old man evokes a train journey with his cousin and a girl. The man remembers this journey as a moment of happiness and wonders whether these moments of happiness “mean that we have a life of happiness with which we only occasionally, knowingly, *intersect*” (Munro *The Progress of Love* 160, my italics). Munro does not validate either reality as she suggests that the life of happiness is as real as what the life that one lives. Munro’s image of “a life of happiness” with which one might intersect resembles Deleuze and Guattari’s vision of the short story as being defined by lines which constantly interfere and act upon each other. In “The Moon”, the moment of happiness is clearly defined as the moment of possibility (“the moment was flooded—with power, it seemed, and with possibility” [Munro *The Progress* 157]), which also holds true of the moment when Mary, Walter, Andrew and Agnes envision other lives that could be theirs. This moment in “The View” can be envisioned as an instance of such moment when the characters intersect with their “life of happiness”.

Munro’s intertextual games, including within her own fiction, are often complex and this holds true of “The View”. The story echoes and reverses another Munrovia transatlantic crossing which is depicted in “Goodness and Mercy” (*Friend of My Youth*)³: a journey from Montreal to Scotland undertaken by a mother and daughter and **which is furthermore duplicated in an embedded story**. In “The View from Castle Rock” the one event that happens to the family is the birth of a female child during the voyage from Scotland to Canada, while two deaths are evoked in “Goodness and Mercy”: the death of the mother, which is announced and deferred (it happens in Edinburgh) and the murder of a woman (killed by her sister during a previous journey). The murder appears in an embedded story told by the captain during the journey, **a story which the daughter recognizes as her own story, therefore acknowledging her desire to be rid of her mother**. Since the mother’s death will take place after the women arrive in Edinburgh, nothing seems to have happened to the daughter, yet everything has changed, even though it is unknowable to most. “The View” both reverses and duplicates the transatlantic crossing that is depicted in “Goodness and Mercy”.

In “The View from Castle Rock”, Munro takes us both backward to Scotland and to her fiction and

³ I am grateful to Héliane Ventura for having pointed out this echo.

forward as her characters are positioned within the Castle, as the title suggests. Characters and readers look towards America, at least in one's imagination as the story opens with Andrew being taken to Edinburgh Castle where his father shows him a coastline:

a pale green and greyish-blue land, part in sunlight, part in shadow, a land as light as mist, sucked into the sky.

"So did I not tell you?" Andrew's father said.

"America. It is only a little bit of it, though." (30)

Old James, Munro's direct ancestor, turns the coast of Fife into America by the mere power of his words. He turns the old world into the new one, bringing both worlds together. Munro also participates in the illusion since she boldly turns the land into water, into mist, through the power of the simile and words that evoke a visual trick. Secondly, by choosing "The View from Castle Rock" as the title (for both story and collection) she repeats the gesture, the lie, or, to use a word from the story, his "trick," suggesting that you can see America from Edinburgh castle – in your imagination. As Munro shows Walter reading about sea creatures that are half human and half monsters, and then trying to understand what happens when the body leaves the soul but finding no answer except in a crude joke, she challenges division between the sacred and the profane, at the same time as she challenges traditional (and Presbyterian) scepticism about knowledge and justifies Walter's desire for knowledge. Doing so she challenges notions about what literary material is by devoting much attention to bodies, from bodies that give birth to bodily matters, and choosing a "raggedy liar" who is a poet and a shepherd, an old fellow spouting tales and a 17-year-old boy who describes people being sick, as avatars of the writer. In this story Munro, who calls herself a liar, is playing tricks and using her tricks, using her family documents, tales about her family, and using her family, for her own enterprise. She stages at least two crossings at the same time; her family's exile from Scotland, emphasizing the effect of the voyage where nothing happened, in the words of her ancestor, to whom she gives the lie, and her own enterprise which is a voyage back to Scotland, another literal journey but also a voyage back in time, enabling her to reclaim her literary heritage, from a somewhat subversive perspective. Not to mention the fact that the transatlantic crossings that are the topics of "The View from Castle Rock" echo yet other famous transatlantic crossings: Munro further blurs the divide between the private and the public, between private documents and texts belonging to the Canadian canon when she mentions that Walter's journal was turned into a letter that was sent to Scotland. Not only does Munro inscribe her family's personal history into the history of British immigration to Canada, she also inscribes Walter's journal and her own narrative into the canon, as these

crossings echo *The Backwoods of Canada*, Catharine Parr Traill's journal which was turned into letters, then into a book that was sent to London to be printed.

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