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The Skald and the Goddess: Reading "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" by Alice Munro

Héliane Ventura

- 1 Alice Munro's short story entitled "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" was first published in *The New Yorker* (December 27, 1999 and January 3rd, 2000) before it was anthologized under the same title in her tenth collection of stories, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, in 2001 and adapted for the cinema, to great acclaim, by Sarah Polley in 2006 under a different, shorter title extracted from Munro's text: "Away From Her." The puzzling short story title reads like a close variant from a North American Folk Song, "The Bear Went Over the Mountain," while the concluding paragraph in the story features a characteristic trait from the world of childhood, which is linked with language learning, since the main female character, Fiona, strives to find the correct irregular form of the verb to forsake: "and forsook me. Forsooaken me. Forsaken" (Munro 322).
- 2 Nevertheless this story does not belong in children's literature and neither does it highlight any specific events in the lives of fictional children. As pinpointed by Robert McGill "Children are virtually nowhere to be found in 'The Bear Came Over the Mountain,' and because Fiona and Grant are not parents, the story offers no consolation in the glimpse of a younger generation's possibilities, no catharsis through a child or grandchild coming to grips with Fiona's institutionalization, no redemption through the passing on of memory. Any hope lies in the future of Fiona and Grant themselves" (*Canadian Literature* 197). Fiona is afflicted with a degenerative disease which is not named but presents the symptoms of Alzheimer's and she has to leave the house in the country, near Georgian Bay, where the couple had taken early retirement twelve years before, in order to settle in a near-by nursing home. Framed as it is between a Folk Song title and the groping for the right form of an irregular verb in the last lines, the story seems to refrain wittily from pathos and self-pity in order to favour a playful, distanced, and ironic approach to the ravages of aging.

- 3 This analysis will focus on the ambiguities of the uses and misuses of language on two levels, that of a Nonsense charade and that of the parodic re-writing of mythology to demonstrate that, through the enduring power of poetic language, senile dementia is momentarily deferred and, if not defeated, at least challenged with "the spark of life," (275) as Munro resorts to the double hook of Folk Song and mock epic aggrandizement, in her reconfiguration of love at twilight.
- 4 At first sight, the North American Folk Song that reports the actions of the adventurous bear going over the mountain is a far cry from the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, the Snark or Tweedledum and Tweedledee:

5

The Bear Went Over the Mountain

The bear went over the mountain,
The bear went over the mountain,
The bear went over the mountain,
To see what he could see.
And what do you think he saw?
And what do you think he saw?
The other side of the mountain,
The other side of the mountain,
The other side of the mountain,
Was all that he could see.

- 6 The Folk Song reads like a morphological pun, a self-parodic play on words, which relies on the opening up of expectations only to frustrate curiosity with the platitude of a tautological closure. Because of its contradictory relationship with language, I would like to posit the hypothesis that "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" belongs in the tradition of "Nonsense" as evidenced in the writings of Lewis Carroll and Lear, and that, like Nonsense, it constitutes a logician's entertainment which explores the limits but also the redeeming possibilities of language.
- 7 Let us compare "The Bear Went Over the Mountain" with this limerick from Lear:
- There was an Old Man of the Nile
Who sharpened his nails with a file;
Till he cut off his thumb, and said calmly, 'this comes -
Of Sharpening one's nails with a file!' (quoted by Lecerclé, 97)
- 8 As demonstrated by Jean-Jacques Lecerclé in his founding essay on Nonsense which I will substantially quote in my analysis of Munro's story, there is, in the British limerick, a "down-to-earth attitude," a "refusal to be surprised" (97) by the turn of events and to yield to emotion or become a prey to a sense of pain or catastrophe. We find the same sense of restraint in the American Folk Song, a spelling out of ordinariness no matter what happens, which Lecerclé shows (92) to stand in sharp contrast to the marvellous. In the wake of Propp, Todorov, and Greimas's analyses of the structural and semiotic components of marvellous Folk Tales, we have been led to expect the bear who is engaged in a quest to come up against a number of qualifying ordeals, to reveal his heroic stature during a confrontation with a villainous character and to complete his journey satisfactorily with the discovery of the object he is looking for. But the Folk Tale Munro has selected is not marvellous; it seemingly defeats all our expectations of heroic aggrandizement and magic discovery. As theorized by Jean-Jacques Lecerclé, the marvellous is ruined by parody, play on word, and platitude (Lecerclé 100).

- 9 The world that the bear discovers is just as ordinary as the one he has just left. He goes on the other side of the mountain and discovers the other side of the mountain. Expression is reduced to tautology, and tautology is fraught with rhetorical power. It reinforces and guarantees the ideology we live by: boys will be boys. The other side of the mountain is the other side of the mountain. The assertion is extremely sensible at the same time as it refrains from conveying meaning. It confirms the real world, the existence of which is clearly posited: the other side of the mountain exists and the bear has been able to find its location which is to be accepted as part and parcel of the real world, but this real world is simultaneously questioned because it is reduced to a self-parodic play on words. The bear indulges in an anthropomorphic quest which reveals its self-referential dimension because instead of killing the serpent or marrying the king's daughter, it comes up against "the other side of the mountain" that is to say a self-reflexive textual construction which is the result of the constraints of a particular fiction or self-parodic verse. In the words of Lecercle :

Le Nonsense utilise donc la longue tradition des jeux de langage de façon sélective : il ne retient que ceux qui prennent au piège la langue pour mieux la renforcer. Il s'agit de prendre celle-ci au pied de la lettre, de la forcer dans ses retranchements, en jouant par exemple sur les ambiguïtés syntaxiques. (Lecercle 49)

- 10 The literal-mindedness of Nonsense and its often tautological syntax reinforce its fictional dimension, its being circumscribed by allusions to itself or to other texts. Munro multiplies the indexes of fictionality in her own fiction. The title is a case in point but we can find several other references to fiction, for instance in the names given to Fiona's dogs. The Russian wolfhounds are called Boris and Natasha, which reads like a wink that Munro is addressing to her readers. These names, which seem to come straight from a Russian novel, are in fact the names of fictional characters from an American animated cartoon in the 1960's entitled: "Rocky and his friends" featuring spies called Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale. The obvious puns in the spies' names wittily expose them as "bad enough" and "lethal." In addition to indirect, witty and self-denigrating allusions to children's fictions, Munro also multiplies self-parodic similes which make it possible to erase the difference between the world of children and the world of senior citizens. When Fiona catches a cold, shortly after being accepted in the nursing home, the nurse called Kristy reassures Grant using a tell-tale comparison: "Like when your kids start school," Kristy said. "There's a whole bunch of new germs they're exposed to, and for a while they just catch everything" (281). The nursing-home pensioners could not be more eloquently equated with children and the pragmatic nurse more eloquently ironized for her flat and unintentional put-down.
- 11 Once familiarized with her new life in the institution, Fiona starts developing a social network through playing cards with some of the inmates and she makes a comparison with her life at college: "I can remember being like that for a while at college. My friends and I would cut class and sit in the common room and smoke and play like cutthroats" (289). Grant's response to Fiona's simile is particularly remarkable because it reintegrates the young card players' activity into the world of children's fiction: "Wreathed in smoke, Fiona and Phoebe and those others, rapt as witches" (289). Through the play of similes, Munro blurs the frontiers between the world of childhood and the world of pensioners, the world of ordinary existence and the world of fabulous creatures. She allows her characters, and her readers, to go down the rabbit-hole and through the looking-glass as she erases the difference between one side of the mountain and the other.

- 12 In particular one can notice that she erases the boundaries between human beings and animals, birds, and fish. The similes which equate the characters with creatures are inescapable and all characters seem concerned with this potential transformation. Fiona is compared with her dogs: "The dogs' long legs and silky hair, their narrow, gentle, intransigent faces made a fine match for her when she took them out for walks" (278). Grant undergoes the same metamorphosis: "And Grant himself, [...] might have seemed to some people to have been picked up on another of Fiona's eccentric whims, and groomed and tended and favored" (278). Aubrey, the man Fiona attaches herself to in the nursing home is compared with a horse: "He had something of the beauty of a powerful, discouraged, elderly horse" (290). The inmates are said to be "happy as clams" in their new life in the nursing home (280). Fiona's outfits, in typical Munroian fashion, are elaborately described and the one with which she leaves home is markedly suggestive of the bird and animal kingdom: she has "a fur-collared ski jacket," a "turtle-necked sweater," and "fawn slacks" (275).
- 13 Besides, by choosing the title of the American Folk Tale for her story, Munro seems to have implicitly required the reader to compare the adventures of the bear with the actions of the main characters in the short story. Fiona, like the bear, engages in a journey which takes her to a different world called Meadowlake. The name of the nursing home inspires Fiona with a series of play on words: "Shallowlake, Shillylake," she said, as if they were engaged in a playful competition. "Sillylake. Sillylake it is" (279). As demonstrated by Freud, puns are transgressions which create pleasure and the function of the present play on words is certainly to reduce, through playful amusement and scorn, the dramatic intensity and trauma linked with confinement in the institution. It also fictionalizes the place; it inscribes it in a nonsensical enumeration, that is to say in fictional language, at the same time as in reality, further erasing the boundaries between the two realms and the experiences of the "fictional" bear and the "real" Fiona.
- 14 By choosing Nonsense verse for her title Munro draws attention to the opposition between sense and non-sense and by destabilizing the boundaries between fiction and real life, between senior citizens and infants, between people and animals, Munro implicitly paves the way for a more radical equivocation, that is to say the blurring of difference between sanity and dementia, between those who are on one side of the mountain and those who are on the other. She performs this "[t]umble of [r]eason" (Heble) or radical blurring in a very subtle and ambiguous way, through Grant's disbelief at his wife's disease and through the impossibility of pinpointing the exact nature of the intermittent degeneration that Fiona seems to be afflicted with. The sentences expressing Grant's perplexity abound: "It was hard to figure out" (277). "She's always been a bit like this" (277). In his utter incredulity, Grant even goes as far as imagining that Fiona is indulging in some sort of charade and plays a game with him. He resorts to hypothetical sentences and extended modal verbs:
- "Or was playing a game that she hopes he would catch on to." (277)
 He could not decide. She could have been playing a joke. It would not be unlike her.
 She had given herself away by that little pretense at the end, talking to him as if she thought perhaps he was a new resident.
 If that was what she was pretending. If it was a pretence. (291)
- 15 Grant is a professor of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic literature and the journey he undertakes to accompany his wife through the meanders of degeneration can also be equated with the bear's, going over the other side of the mountain. Grant does not

"forsake" Fiona in the institution. He phones the nurses every day during the first month of their forced separation (no visits are allowed for the initial thirty days) and finally settles for two visits a week. His repeated journeys to Meadowlake are indeed forays into the other side of the looking-glass, a descent into the world of senile dementia which, at times, mirrors in inverted fashion Alice's journey in Wonderland. Like the young Alice, the elderly Grant is an intruder in a territory which is not his and, like her, he meets with unmitigated hostility. For instance, when he goes to the common room to try and see Fiona who is sitting at the card table with her new friends, he can easily feel their opposition: "They all looked up – all the players at the table looked, with displeasure. Then they immediately looked down at their cards, as if to ward off any intrusion" (288). The exasperation of the card players towards Grant transforms the generosity of his visits into a *faux-pas*.

- 16 The inversion of values that is characteristic of Nonsense is fully displayed in Grant's itinerary who, from the beginning, manifests symptoms which, strikingly enough, mirror Fiona's loss of memory. Munro embeds into the depiction of his actions a series of apparently innocent anecdotes which pave the way for a subtle elimination of the frontier between Grant's sanity and Fiona's dementia. For instance, we find "Grant could not remember now" (278); "Or it might have been after her mother died" (278). When he visits Aubrey's wife, Marian, he cannot find the proper word to describe the swooping curtains she has decorated her windows with. More importantly, he himself uses the term "unhinged" to describe his behaviour: "Every once in a while it came to him how foolish and pathetic and perhaps unhinged he must look, trailing around after Fiona and Aubrey" (295).
- 17 Like Fiona, Grant has gone over the threshold which separates madness from sanity and one of the differences with her is that he has, so far, been able to conceal it from the rest of the world. The most eloquent sign of his potential insanity is the moment when he is represented as comparing himself with Christ through a blasphemous quotation from Luke 2, 52. After reciting and translating a majestic ode, in front of his students, he feels lionized:
- All applauded. [...] Driving home that day or maybe another he found an absurd and blasphemous quotation running around in his head.
And so he increased in wisdom and stature-
And in favor with God and man.
That embarrassed him at the time and gave him a superstitious chill. As it did yet.
But so long as nobody knew, it seemed not unnatural. (302)
- 18 Munro is particularly apt at representing university professors as "bloated, opinionated, untidy men" surrounded with "soft-haired young girls awash in adoration" (*Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You*, 24). Like Hugo from the story entitled "Material" and dating from 1974, Grant is represented, in 2001, as a narcissistic and egomaniac philanderer, with a major difference, nonetheless. Despite his having had a great many affairs, he has never left Fiona and the final act he indulges in acquires an ambiguously redeeming dimension.
- 19 Because of her degenerative disease, once Fiona is on her own at Meadowlake, she forgets Grant, the husband she has lived with for nearly fifty years, and falls in love with another inmate whose stay in the institution is only temporary. After this man, called Aubrey, who is afflicted with paralysis, is removed from the institution by his own wife, Marian, Fiona falls into severe depression and Grant shows himself capable of the greatest sacrifice. Because he loves his wife with the utmost selflessness, he

sacrifices his honour and his pride in order to arrange for Aubrey to return to the nursing home and live close to Fiona. He ambiguously rescues his wife by making possible her lover's return to her. This uncanny act of love is made even "curiouser" by an additional twist in the plot, at the end of the story. When the lover is about to be reunited to the forgetful wife by the selfless husband, Fiona temporarily regains her sanity, recognizes her husband, and suggests returning to their old farmhouse together, thus ruining the sacrificial gesture her husband had engineered.

- 20 Munro's *dénouement* is extremely flippant and de-stabilizing because it juxtaposes the sublime and the farcical, the weird and the noble, the heretic and the pragmatic, on the threshold between life and death, in a senior citizen's residence. This remarkably ironic *dénouement* could be envisaged as a self-parodic treatment of sacrificial love. By comparing himself with Christ, Grant indulges in an operation of self-aggrandizement and endorses the role of the redeemer. However, the type of sacrifice he engineers when procuring a lover for his wife turns redemption topsy-turvy since he simultaneously becomes the agent of her betrayal. Through his own selflessness, Grant confirms the reversal of her faithfulness into faithlessness. After a lifetime of skillfully managed deceptions, he proves true to himself by allowing her to reciprocate infidelity. As rightly pointed out, if erroneously spelt by Robert Thacker, Grant is eminently a "long time rué" [*sic*] (Thacker 502).
- 21 There lies the crux of Munro's "art of indeterminacy" (Howells 85) as mentioned in many critical works about her: her highlighting of "[p]aradox and [p]arallel" (Martin), her ability to examine human surroundings and human actions as simultaneously and reciprocally "touchable and mysterious" (Munro 1974, 33, Thacker), "strange and familiar" (Martin 1), but also elevated and degraded or transcendent and immanent. One description caps the point in an unusually explicit way: "Through the window came a heady, warm blast of lilacs in bloom and the spring manure spread over the fields" (321). By compounding fragrance with stench, Munro conjures up a non-judgmental universe in which the absence of moralism is articulated upon an all permeating irony. The ambiguity of her moral philosophy, which has yet to be documented substantially, lies in the constant reversal of one sensation into the other and the simultaneous reinforcing and ruining of the former with the latter.
- 22 Grant, whose love has been freely distributed among his students and who is capable of sacrificing himself for his wife's sake, ambiguously impersonates on the self-parodic mode the figure of Christ who died on the cross to redeem mankind. But because he is a professor of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic literature and reads aloud Skaldic poetry to his students, he is simultaneously allowed to cut the figure of the emblematic Icelandic poet or Skald. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* reminds us that, contrary to anonymous Eddaic poetry, Skaldic oral court poetry, which originated in Norway but was developed chiefly by Icelandic poets from the 9th to the 13th century, could be attributed to single identifiable characters. The magnificent Ode which is mentioned by the narrator as being read aloud in class by Grant is one of the most famous: the Hofuolausn by Egill Skallagrímsson, whose life and works are preserved in the Egils Saga attributed to Snorri Sturluson. This allusion to Skaldic poetry is worth investigating because it throws additional light on the redeeming power of language that is highlighted in Munro's story.
- 23 Egill Skallagrímsson, one of the greatest Icelandic skalds was said to be "headstrong, vengeful, and greedy for gold but also a loyal friend, a shy lover, and a devoted father."

As a young man he "killed the son of King Eiríkr Bloodaxe (Erik I) and placed a curse upon the king, which he inscribed on a pole in magic runes. Later, shipwrecked off the coast of Northumbria, England, he fell into Eiríkr's hands (c. 948) but saved his own life by composing in a single night the long praise poem *Höfuðlausn* ("Head Ransom"), praising Eiríkr in a unique end-rhymed metre" ("Egill Skallagrímsson," Encyclopædia Britannica).

- 24 Munro who composed in 1986 a short story which relies allusively on Old Norse mythology ("White Dump") takes up explicitly and literally, in 2001, the theme of the redemption brought about by the power of poetry. When referring to the *Höfuðlausn*, she highlights the miraculous transformation that poetry operates, its power to transform a death sentence into a gift of life:

He risked reciting and then translating the majestic and gory ode, the head-ransom, the *Höfuðlausn*, composed to honor King Eric Blood-axe by the skald whom that king had condemned to death. (And who was then, by the same king-and by the power of poetry-set free.) (302)

- 25 By reciting aloud the *Höfuðlausn*, Egill saved his head because the beauty of his words moved the heart of the king who, in return, granted him his life. By taking up Egill's words and reciting them in front of his class, Grant turns into the skald and, like him, he escapes scot-free, despite his repeated misconduct and improper behaviour.
- 26 The transformation of the character necessarily reverberates on the story which relates his adventures. Thus the allusion to the Icelandic ode reverberates on the short story and provides it with a mixed inheritance in which learned references rub shoulders with popular culture. Reflecting as it does the Great Code as well as Nordic Mythology, British Nonsense and American Folk Song, to mention some of its most prominent intertexts, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" is a *mise en abyme* of the redeeming power of words, and of the performativity of poetic language which ensures that an action is accomplished at the same time as it is uttered. Consider the ending of *Alice in Wonderland*. To the Queen of Hearts who shouts to her: "Hold your tongue," Alice replies: "I won't." When the Queen threatens to decapitate her, Alice finally retorts: "Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!" Alice's words do not have the majestic beauty of the Icelandic Ode but they have the same power: they reach their target and reduce the Queen of Hearts to her rightful status, that of a card which dissolves into thin air and keeps Alice from losing her head. Alice's words, like the Skald's are fraught with immediate efficacy.
- 27 It is this magic efficacy that Munro's stories strive to recapture. In "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" Grant is endowed with the power of a Skaldic poet who casts a spell over his students and ensures the remission of his sexual sins. He ironically acquires his truly heroic stature when he undertakes to rescue Fiona from the severe depression which would ensure the further degradation of her present condition. As if in a mirror, Fiona's fully-fledged dimension manifests itself through the use of language, in an equally ironic manner. Of her, Kristy the nurse, says "She's a real lady" (293) and she repeats the epithet to Grant several times in a tone that does not reassure him and leads him to form conjectures. In the institution, Fiona may have turned into a wanton old lady who does not want to sleep alone in her empty room but teasingly lifts the covers of an old man's bed:

"You'd think it'd be the old guys trying to crawl in bed with the old women, but you know half the time it's the other way round. Old women going after the old men. Could be they're not so wore out, I guess." [Sic] (293)

- 28 The mistaken use of the wrong past participle might be taken as a revelatory "infelicity,"¹ a Freudian slip of the tongue, through which Kristy unconsciously pinpoints Fiona's nature. Neither a lady nor a whore, Fiona embodies Friia, the goddess Friia also called Frigg or Frija (in German) and Frea. She is the goddess of love, the very same goddess who is called Aphrodite by the Greeks and Venus by the Romans. It is through this tell-tale crack of language that Fiona's goddess-like stature is indirectly established because it is powerfully "half-uttered" or "*mi-dit*" to use the pun that Lacan coined for such linguistic return of the repressed.
- 29 In Munro's short story, the Skald is an untidy university professor and the Goddess is no longer a rosy-cheeked maiden. Fiona's skin or her breath gives off "a faint new smell, a smell [...] like that of the stems of cut flowers left too long in their water" (322). There is definitely a sense of decomposition and rottenness which invades this family Saga, a corruption which is repeatedly suggested through the simile linked to Fiona's depiction and the heady odors wafted through the windows of her bedroom and which implicitly reverberates on Grant. The offering that Grant makes to his wife in the shape of a paralysed lover destined to comfort her is the result of a shady deal that he has engineered with the man's wife. Grant has probably offered himself and his sexual services to Marian, in ironic sacrifice, in order to make her accept her husband's return to Meadowlake.
- 30 In her adaptation of the story for the screen, Sarah Polley renders this improbable trade-off explicit by allowing the spectators more than a glimpse into Grant and Marian's bedroom; in the short story we are not allowed to witness such *rapprochement*. Munro leaves unuttered the terms of Aubrey's return. This powerful ellipsis, which seals "her art of the secret,"² (Ventura and Condé, 2003-2004) highlights her commitment to a moral philosophy which rises above conformity to the moral values of the community and commits itself to more complex and more covert ethical principles, of which silence, restraint and reticence are significant components.
- 31 The sense of physical and moral degradation which permeates the story is far from being magically dispelled with the closing lines. It is simultaneously confirmed and ruined to remain in keeping with the Nonsense genre in which the story of the Skald and the Goddess is couched. In the last line of the story, there is a process of reparation of language and reparation of the self at the same time as a powerful alliterative pattern which conspicuously stresses the menacing repetition of the consonant "s":
- You could have just driven away," she said."Just driven away without a care in the world and forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken."
- He kept his face against her white hair, her pink scalp, her sweetly shaped skull. He said, Not a chance." (322)
- 32 Kristy, the uneducated nurse and the good Christian, degrades and upgrades past participles as she keeps watch over her patients. Fiona, the victim of Alzheimer's and the Goddess of love, repairs the irregularities of grammar, like a pink-scalped child learning language. Simultaneously, the negative last words and threatening sibilant alliterations confirm Grant's enduring love, in the inverted mirror of Munro's weirdly ironic writing. The word "chance," which is to be found recurrently in her work and is used as the title of a later story in the Juliet trilogy of 2004, means a risk but it also means an opportunity: by using it negatively, Grant makes room for a rejuvenating impertinence, a challenging of fate which is also an acceptance of fate.

- 33 The coming of dawn at the end of night is a *topos* encapsulated in many works of art, *The Sun also Rises* being paradigmatic of this final redemption. At the end of Jean Giraudoux's play entitled *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, the last lines make the audience reflect on its resonance: "Cela a un très beau nom, femme Narsès. Cela s'appelle l'aurore." Godard was particularly impressed with this sentence, which deeply influenced the films he made. In a poem by Emily Dickinson, which resembles a Nursery Rhyme and whose first line reads: "I know some lonely houses off the road" an old couple goes to sleep leaving the door ajar and the poetess, like a thief in the night, allows the reader into the intimacy of the old couple's home, until Chanticleer screams to welcome the sunrise. In Dickinson's poem, the sunrise is literally an offering which is made to celebrate Grace Abounding.
- 34 In Alice Munro's narrative, the reader is seemingly denied the lyrical coming of dawn at the end of the journey to the other side of the mountain because the elderly heroine is undeniably in the grip of Alzheimer's; yet the loss of language, the ruin which it entails, is itself ruined by the transgressions of the various thresholds which are enacted throughout the story. The ultimate threshold, that of life versus death, is itself destabilized in the dissolution of the boundaries between sanity and dementia as Munro stage-directs the confusion between life and illusion. Her reenactment of Calderon and Shakespeare's *Life is but a Dream* results in more than a well-wrought short story. It dissolves the boundaries between metaphysical poetry and nursery rhymes to highlight a celebration of the power of language as, in the words of Jean-Jacques Lecercle, "the place and the means of freedom." (11) Her story does not herald the coming of dawn: it orchestrates the twilight of the gods and it provides the disquieting possibility of equating it with the sunrise.

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NOTES

1. Austin, 1961, "Performative Utterances", *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 233-252, quoted by Lecerle, 20.
2. In the title of my article: "Alice Munro's Secret Ort," to be found in the special issue of *Open Letter* dedicated to *Alice Munro Writing Secrets*, I use the German term "Ort" which means place to define Munro's art of secreting secrets. The secrets to be found in Munro's stories make their presence felt through tell-tale errors or infelicities in language.

ABSTRACTS

Cet article propose une micro-lecture d'une nouvelle de Munro fondée sur l'explicitation de son titre "The Bear Came Over the Mountain." En utilisant le titre d'une chanson du Folklore américain, Munro recontextualise et dédramatise l'expérience de l'hospitalisation dans une maison de santé pour cause de dégénérescence sénile. Elle accomplit une reconfiguration de cette expérience en la fictionnalisant sous forme de conte ou de légende.

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