

No Honey, I'm Home  
Place Over Love in Alice Munro's  
Short Story Cycle,  
*Who Do You Think You Are?*<sup>1</sup>

Helen Hoy's account of Alice Munro's revisions to what would become *Who Do You Think You Are?* instantly achieved something of legendary status in Canadian bibliographic studies and publishing lore. Its chief features, earlier recounted by Munro to J.R. (Tim) Struthers, are the eleventh-hour radical transformation from a book of stories divided between the characters Rose and Janet to a book about Rose only; the rapid translation of Janet stories into Rose stories; and, not least to a professional writer, the monetary expense to Munro of making extensive changes to a book in galley proofs (Struthers, 29-32).<sup>2</sup> As Walter Martin observes, "these changes and revisions . . . bear witness to Alice Munro's exacting artistic conscience and her devoted commitment to her work" (101). Certainly they do, and it is worth adding that this literary artist's devoted attention to the final form of *Who Do You Think You Are?* occurred with the only fully formed short story cycle she has written. In what follows, I want briefly to contextualize the masterful *Who Do You Think You Are?* in the continuum of Canadian short story cycles, to provide a fuller description of its complex form than has hitherto been given, and finally to offer a reading that addresses the essential question of selfhood and identity aggressively posed in the book's title. In doing so, I will pay closest attention to two stories: the second, "Privilege," and the last, "Who Do You Think You Are?" because "Privilege" fictionally analyzes the beginning of romantic-sexual love in Rose, and because the title story takes her home. In suggesting solutions to the endemically Canadian riddle of identity, *Who Do You Think You Are?*

argues fictionally for the potentially definitive importance of love and for the abiding residence of forgiveness and affirmation in the place of origin.

**A**s I have suggested elsewhere, for possible reasons of history, philosophy and national character, even of geography and political arrangement, the short story cycle form has proven especially accommodative of Canadian writers ("The One," 93-94, 102). I have also argued that story cycles can most usefully be categorized broadly as interested primarily in either place or character. Canadian story cycles of place begin with Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker* (1836), find pre-modern expression in Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* (1896) and Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), and continue into the contemporary period with such works as George Elliott's *The Kissing Man* (1962) and Jack Hodgins' *Spit Delaney's Island* (1976). Needless to say, there is some overlap in story cycles belonging to either of the two categories of place and character. *Who Do You Think You Are?* is in fact a supreme example of a contemporary story cycle of character wherein place, Hanratty, is recovered to play a definitive role in the formation of character and, later, the affirmation of identity, Rose's. Nevertheless, *Who* remains the story cycle's version of the bildungsroman, even of the künstlerroman, being about the growth of the protagonist Rose, and not about Hanratty per se. In the context of Canadian short story cycles of character, *Who* can be seen as part of a tradition that begins with Frederick Philip Grove's *Over Prairie Trails* (1922), and includes such other works as Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House* (1970) and Clark Blaise's *A North American Education* (1973).<sup>3</sup> Like Grove's persona, Rose travels from home in quest of herself, is tested, experiences failure, loss, ultimately enjoys some success, and temporarily returns home in something of a compromised and compromising frame of mind. In doing so, both the Grove persona and Rose can be viewed as expressing their authors' variously contingent answers to the key modern question of self-identity contained in *Who's* titular riddle, as well as illustrating that traditionally Canadian engagement with the question of individual and national identity in relation to place.<sup>4</sup>

The question posed in the title must of course be squarely addressed in any serious discussion of *Who Do You Think You Are?* Although the cycle includes considerations of representation in art and literature (see Heble, 105), Munro's fiction is not only, or even chiefly, metafiction, that self-

reflexive trope, indulgence in which the reactionary John Gardner dismissed as “jazzing around” (82). Alice Munro’s fiction is so overwhelmingly realistic and representational that its questions about the presence of a centred self in the fictional character Rose should make us wonder, surely, about the same in ourselves. Is Rose presented finally by Munro as having won through to a stable sense of self? (Is stability of self-identity a thing to be desired? Robert Kroetsch’s essay, “No Name Is My Name,” offers one interesting answer in the negative.) If the answer is yes to the first question, how does Rose manage it? Or does Rose *manage* it? Is fictional selfhood not perhaps the mystery gift of her providential author, something like the surprising bounty of silver that pours forth from a pay-phone slot on the fairy-tale mountain in “Providence” (149)?<sup>5</sup> Or is Rose at the end of the story cycle the self-deluding figure of similarly essentialist notions of autonomous selfhood? In its recurrent use of acting and imitation as a metaphor of self-construction (to say nothing more, as the present essay does not, of the question of representation as theme [see Mathews]), *Who Do You Think You Are?* does tend to produce characters who are reflections of reflections of reflections, as Rose imitating Milton Homer in the title story is actually imitating Ralph Gillespie imitating Milton Homer, that “mimic of ferocious gifts and terrible energy” (192), who is himself something of a reflecting emanation of old Hanratty itself. In the mirror-in-a-mirror image, as in the *regressus ad infinitum* and the literary *mise en abime*, Munro signals the difficulties of ultimately condensing, grounding and centering an ideal of self, though not necessarily the impossibility. And, again, as I have argued elsewhere (“The One,” 96), the short story cycle form, with its various strategies of fragmentary coherence, has shown itself well suited to the modern and post-modern relegation of selfhood to a vaporous filter of various internal and external stimuli rather than the metaphysical ground of identity and meaning—or better suited than the conventional novel, with its implications of continuity, coherence and totality. As Ajay Heble has since observed (though without recognizing the story cycle form), Rose’s story is a “kind of discontinuous history with its own missing chunks of information. By refusing to fill in gaps in time, by leaving out whole sections in the chapters that constitute Rose’s life, Munro leaves much unexplained” (Heble, 117). And further:

The text is marked by an absence that encompasses worlds of meaning, an absence that—like Munro’s rhetoric of supposition and her use of the acting metaphor—lends thematic and structural instability to the stories in the collection. The instability in

this instance serves once again to complicate the ontological problem. By refusing to construct narratives of continuity, by, as it were, letting the absences speak, Munro reformulates the volume's central question: just what or who is real? (117-18; see also Blodgett, 94)

Despite the compelling logic of such deconstructive considerations, I will argue and conclude below that Munro in *Who* does present the mature Rose as having achieved more of a stable sense of identity than Heble allows; and, what is as remarkable, Rose does so in relation to place and not to the ideal of a reifying love that she chases around most of the stories of this cycle.

**W***ho Do You Think You Are?* is a wonderfully well wrought short story cycle, arguably Munro's best book (*pace* Martin, 98-101, who fails to appreciate the middle stories). With the exception of Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches*, I can think of no other story cycle so carefully shaped to its purposes (Lynch "Religion," 83-84). Most obviously, the stories follow Rose's growth chronologically from childhood to adolescence to middle-age, though there are temporal gaps, slippages and recurrences which readers would not expect to find in the conventional novel's version of bildungsroman but which are typical of the story cycle's destabilizing strategies. Martin has described the other obvious feature of the book's structure: its ten stories are divided so as to comprise a beginning, a middle, and an end. The first four stories focus on childhood and adolescence, the next four on Rose's life away from Hanratty, and the final two on her return to her place of origin (Martin, 98). But these two most apparent and conventional structural features can readily be seen to play both off one another and against readers' expectations: the chronological development is repeatedly disrupted not only by each discrete story<sup>6</sup> but also by those large narrative blocks grouping stories of childhood, adulthood and middle-age; and neither element (chronology and Aristotelian divisions) really accomplishes the illusion of continuity and coherence it usually does in novels. The stories of Rose are experienced by the reader more in stroboscopic flashes and flashbacks than in a steadily growing light, in piled reminiscences of memories in hindsight, with time sometimes looping back on itself like a claustrophobic Möbius strip, and with dead and freshly buried characters popping up in the opening of subsequent stories (as Flo does at the end of "Spelling" and the beginning of "Who Do You Think You Are?"). Thus is a life constructed and narrative time manipulated in the contemporary story cycle of character, in a way that ideally marries form and function for the post-modern sensibility.

Further, Rose's conservatively circular journey is doubly framed by the question posed in both the book's title and the title of the final story, which is then asked in the first story by her stepmother Flo (13) and in the final story by her English teacher, Miss Hattie Milton (196). And apart from the chronological development and those large groupings described by Martin, there are many other linkages among stories. For example, the middle section of four stories can be seen to form two groupings of companion pieces. The blatantly consumerist affair of "Mischief" (see Mathews, 189, and Redekop, 131) follows consequentially from the failure of marriage recounted in "The Beggar Maid"; that is, in "Mischief" Rose is used in a manner that could be read as poetic justice for the way she uses Patrick in "The Beggar Maid." The titles of the final two stories of the middle section, "Providence" and "Simon's Luck," obviously relate them as complementary, or juxtaposed (Heble, 114), stories on such important matters as the limits of self-determination and the role of happenstance in its mystical ("Providence") and mundane ("Simon's Luck") forms.

There may also be a principle of alteration at work in this story cycle.<sup>7</sup> The theme of the second story, "Privilege," the first flowing of Eros, recurs and is developed in the fourth, "Wild Swans," with its depiction of an act of complicit (and questionable) molestation, which theme recurs and is developed in the sixth story, "Mischief," with its tawdry failed affair and group sex, and is seen again in the eighth story, "Simon's Luck"—and seen to doom that potentially redemptive relationship. Such procrustean construing may seem less violent when it is considered that all the other stories of the first eight—"Royal Beatings," "Half a Grapefruit," "The Beggar Maid" and "Providence"—are not about romantic-sexual relations. "The Beggar Maid," about Rose's meeting her husband, may seem to contradict this pattern, but it doesn't: it, like the other three stories in this alternate group—one, three, and seven—is about acting as an alternate means to Rose's empowerment in her search for and shaping of self-identity. All of which is to say, the first eight stories may alternate in exploring two possible avenues to answering the question of the book's title: acting and love. And there are yet other possibilities, complementary and enriching, for viewing the ordering of stories in *Who do You Think You Are?* But suffice it to say that it is no wonder Munro was kept up all one weekend and busy for a week, at considerable eventual monetary expense, revising towards the final version of the book (Ross, 82). Although her first major revision of the "Rose and Janet"

manuscript, which comprised six stories for each, had been to do away with the structural symmetry (Martin, 106) which, with various kinds of rigid ordering, is a *bête noire* of so much of Munro's fiction, it would appear that an organic, architectonic impulse is inherent in this artist, perhaps in all art, and beyond even Alice Munro's conscious control.

Over all, the stories of *Who* proceed in a way definitive of the story cycle's reliance on what Forest L. Ingram has called "the dynamic patterns of recurrence and development" (20; see also Luscher, 149). To give but one example of the book's many dynamic patterns: the covert imagery used to describe the molestation of fourteen-year-old Rose in "Wild Swans" (60-62) is inverted in "The Beggar Maid" when Rose assaults Patrick (79), is used again in "Mischief" (113) and in "Simon's Luck" (161), and ultimately in the title story (199). The recurrence of the imagery of concealment in these instances is not obvious, and its development from contexts of molestation to power games to complementary love to non-sexual bonding is even less so. In the first instance Rose is supposedly powerless; with Patrick she is bullying; with Clifford in "Mischief" she is shown to be somewhat naive and victimized, though in the final instance here she again turns disadvantage to selfish advantage; in "Simon's Luck" she is under the covers with a potential nurturing life mate, "the man for my life!" as Rose says (164); and in "Who Do You Think You Are?" Rose and Ralph Gillespie are secretly forming a bond that will ultimately tie Rose to Hanratty in affirming fashion. But *Who Do You Think You Are?* is woven through with imagery in such patterns of recurrence and development. A close reading of all the stories for the purpose of highlighting their many patterns would provide what is hardly called for any longer: evidence of Munro's artistry in layering meanings (see the subtitle of Carscallen's book, *The Other Country: Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro*). What is worth remarking here, however, is the way in which short story sequencing generally, and the dynamics of the short story cycle especially, facilitate this strength of her literary art.

Another intriguing, and previously unremarked, formal feature of *Who* is the way that each individual story mimics the shape and movement of the whole cycle. The example of one story can adequately illustrate this final formal observation. "Royal Beatings," the first story, tells its tale of two beatings—the one, of Rose, melodramatic, female-orchestrated and cathartic; the other, of Becky Tyde's father, real, male and murderous—and concludes with an epilogue of sorts (see Mathews, 185-86), a kind of literary coda. The

reminiscent narrative in the subjective third person, followed by a later reminiscent reflection (the coda), is typical of the structure of most of the stories in *Who*.<sup>8</sup> One purpose of these literary codas, and most didactically so in “Royal Beatings” and “Half a Grapefruit,” is to show how she who controls the representation of the past—in these two it is the sensationalist/sentimentalist media—controls its presentation in the present, thereby enabling revision of the past and creation of self-serving histories. In a magnification of this arrangement, the whole cycle begins in Hanratty and childhood and moves steadily outward, to adolescence and high school across the bridge, to university in London, Ontario, to Canada’s west coast, and swoops back to Hanratty in the final two stories. The concluding story, “Who Do You Think You Are?” functions similarly to those reflective codas to most of the individual stories; and in it Rose—former TV hostess, popular actor—finally assumes a kind of creative control of the representation of her own history, establishing grounds for optimism for her present and her imagined future. So, despite Magdalene Redekop’s assertion that “these stories cannot be construed as making up concentric circles like Dante’s celestial rose” (129), *Who Do You Think You Are?* can nonetheless be conceived as cycling/spiraling away from the original site of self-formation constituted by Flo and Hanratty, reaching an apex of self-willed explorations, then diving back to the place of origin (to Flo in “Spelling,” the penultimate story, and to Hanratty in the last), which is seen now through Rose as affirmingly definitive and forgivingly redemptive. Excursus and recursus, the romantic quest pattern, whether in the *Odyssey* or *The Wizard of Oz*: as destabilizingly post-modern as *Who* can be in its interrogation of subjectivity, it is also finally quite conservative and conventional in its structure and in its conclusions about the basis of self-identity, quite reassuring. And such an appreciative reading may also account for Munro’s simultaneous popularity with general readers and paramount status among literary critics.

*Who Do You Think You Are?* is a story cycle, then, not only in terms of genre labels and the theorizing of that genre (Ingram; Luscher; Lynch, 1991), but also cyclical in its overall movement because, quite simply, it is a sequence of stories that begins in Hanratty and returns there. And more than that: dizzily, it comprises cycles within cycles and utilizes the short story cycle’s dynamic patterns of recurrence and development to marked advantage in the exploration of its most obvious theme, which is, as I have said, posed neatly in its riddling title.

In fictionally formulating answers to its titular question, *Who Do You Think You Are?* emphasizes nurture over nature, especially (and perhaps inevitably in a bildungsroman) the importance of the formative years, and focuses on place of origin as equally definitive of why you are who you are. Why else does the first story, “Royal Beatings,” begin with Flo as a kind of primary speaker (see Heble, 97, 101, 109), with the remembered death of the biological mother, and with so much talk of eggs (1-2) if not implicitly to downplay the *ab ovum* argument in favour of the environmental? Of greater potential importance throughout the stories, however, is the role of love, all forms of love, but especially of romantic-sexual love whose formation and exercise is determined both circumstantially and inherently. Why else is the character named Rose if not to underscore the potential importance of romantic-sexual love in the formation of her character and sense of self?<sup>9</sup> As Ildikó de Papp Carrington has indicated, *Who Do You Think You Are?* “constitutes an organic whole, and the humiliations of love are one of the major themes integrating and unifying it” (124).

The generative figure of romantic-sexual love in *Who Do You Think You Are?* is honey, which is soon figured as candy, and subsequently as all forms of sweets, and is used euphemistically in the epithet “honey-dumper” to figure the fusion of the romantic-sexual and the scatological. (Undoubtedly Munro is playing seriously with those two stereotypical gifts of the romantic lover: flowers—Rose—and candy.) Following the introduction of the home environment in “Royal Beatings,” the second story, “Privilege,” details the formation and first expression of love in Rose. Here, the primary image of Eros as honey is given after the young Rose has her infatuation with an older girl, Cora, encouraged by Cora’s teasing invitation to “*Come on up, honey*” (32):

The opening, the increase, the flow, of love. Sexual love, not sure yet exactly what it needed to concentrate on. It must be there from the start, like the hard white honey in the pail, waiting to melt and flow. There was some sharpness lacking, some urgency missing; there was the incidental difference in the sex of the person chosen; otherwise it was the same thing, the same thing that has overtaken Rose since. The high tide; the indelible folly; the flash flood. (33)

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this passage or the story in which it occurs. The narrator is speculating on an essentialist view of Eros and stating regretfully (“the same thing, the same thing”) that the pattern of love which “Privilege” narrates becomes deterministically repetitive in Rose’s life. Its sensually symbolic description of “the hard white honey in



the pail” that liquefies supports a view that Munro will be dealing exclusively with female desire, despite “the incidental difference in the sex of the person chosen.” And although this narrator, here more third-person omniscient than subjectively Rose, will eventually return to a portrayal of romantic-sexual desire in suggestively Freudian-Lacanian terms—as a striving to satisfy either a biological or psychic-linguistic lack—Eros here is the inexplicable given of human nature. (As I will argue below in discussing the title story, Hanratty as place of origin is ultimately accorded a similar generative/metaphysical significance.)

In the beginning of “Privilege,” the very first unconscious rousing of Rose’s proto-sexual interest is presented against a backdrop of tacit Freudian theorizing on the child’s confusion of the excremental and procreative functions. In spying on Mr. Burns in his outdoor privy, Rose “thought she had seen testicles but on reflection she believed it was only a bum” (25); and the copulating brother-and-sister act, Shorty and Franny, “perform” in an outdoor toilet (25-26). This scatological connection between procreation and defecation, with associations of defenceless exposure, persists figuratively in Rose’s romantic obsession with Cora. As the realist Flo sneers, Cora’s grandfather is none other than the “honey-dumper” (36), the cleaner of outdoor johns, with “honey” being a euphemism for excrement: “Her grandfather was the honey-dumper. That meant he went around cleaning out toilets” (30). (Perhaps it is only fortuitous that the central passage above uses the word “flow” twice to signal the beginnings of romantic-sexual love; but such use, if intentional, would be nicely ironic, because sharp-boned Flo is anathema to the kind of prostrate puddling being described; in fact, she provides the “sharpness lacking,” if too cuttingly.) I am guided here by Norman O. Brown’s intriguing analysis-cum-defence of Swift’s “excremental vision” in *Life Against Death*. Brown argues that the “real theme” of Swift’s scatological writings “is the conflict between our animal body, appropriately epitomized in the anal function, and our pretentious sublimations, more specifically, the pretensions of sublimated or romantic-Platonic love” (186). Brown’s citations from Freud’s writings provide a compelling gloss on Munro’s story of the birth of Eros (187-88), but suffice it here to say that in “Privilege” Munro is no less intrigued by humankind’s repressive repugnance at the knowledge that *inter urinas et faeces nascimur* than was the original speaker of the phrase, St. Augustine, or Freud himself, or Brown.<sup>10</sup> In the “conflict between our animal body” and “our pretentious sublimations,”

the body ultimately equals disruptive death in the “life against death” war waged by neurotic consciousness. Consequently, it is not surprising that the passage giving *Who’s* informing vision of Eros as honey is followed immediately by a description of “the game of funerals,” which is played only by girls (33). In many of the stories of *Who Do You Think You Are?* the female body especially is associated paradoxically with death, with the scatological (for instance, the patriarchal Principal in “Half a Grapefruit” refers to a Kotex pad as a “disgusting object” [40]), and with imagery of entropic tendencies towards disorder against which struggle predominantly male notions of order and respectability.

Moreover, sexual desire becomes for Rose, as a consequence of her first love, decidedly narcissistic, in a way that will also persist deterministically through her various affairs. Rose’s love for Cora is announced in an oddly phrased one-sentence paragraph: “It was Cora Rose loved” (30). The inverted construction of this sentence emphasizes the subjective experience of loving at the expense of the object of love, a condition that the central passage on Eros-as-honey makes clear again with its dismissal of the importance of such features as the sex of the beloved, that “incidental difference.”<sup>11</sup> Rose’s loving Cora leads to a worship which expresses itself in a suggestively Lacanian desire to *be* Cora, which can be seen as a wish to represent the object of desire to herself (to Rose) as herself—there is never any real desire on Rose’s part for a real relationship. What Rose craves is to possess, to internalize and embody, Cora’s presence and power, and the high road to that empowerment is imitation: “... Rose was obsessed. She spent her time trying to walk and look like Cora, repeating every word she had ever heard her say. Trying to *be* her” (32). Thus in responding to her first love—the initial “high tide” and “flash flood”—Rose finds what eventually will become her life’s vocation: acting. But acting, the convincing assumption of other identities, though it may provide an expedient *modus operandi*, cannot furnish an answer to the crucial question of identity. In ironic point of fact, such a career path leads (“indelible folly”) in the very opposite direction, as much later (in “Simon’s Luck”) Rose will flee her potentially ideal mate for an acting job.

The passage on Eros as honey is echoed immediately, amplifying its importance, in the description of Rose longing for Cora: “When she thought of Cora she had the sense of a glowing dark spot, a melting center, a smell and taste of burnt chocolate, that she could never get at” (34). Apparently it

is the possession, not of the ostensibly real object of desire, but of the sweet impossible ideal of that desire that is unattainable (and again both Freud's concept of the narcissist's unattainable "ego ideal" and Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage" come to mind). In the confused attempt to secure what is really the reflecting fabrication of Eros (or of libido)—its displacement in/cathexis of Cora—Rose steals some candy from Flo's store and takes the bag to school, "carrying it under her skirt, the top of it tucked into the elastic top of her underpants" (34). Not to belabour the obvious lasciviously, but the secreted location of the bag of candy makes obvious indeed that the sweets are to be read as a love offering from Rose's brimming honey-pot (the image and fictional logic *are* Munro's: "hard white honey in a pail"). Everything goes wrong. Rose's thievery and normal girlish foolishness are brutally exposed. And it is Flo's role to dam the first flowing of romantic-sexual love in Rose, in effect doing the seemingly impossible and making the flow of honey retreat. Flo is seen to do so in a passage that, again, picks up on the central image of Eros as an inherent lump of honey that melts. Following the exposure of her crush, Rose's "feelings were at the moment shocked and exposed, and already, though she didn't know it, starting to wither and curl up at the edges. Flo was a drying blast" (35). "The candy was in no condition for eating, anyway. It was all squeezed and melted together, so that Flo had to throw it out" (35). But what is it that Flo finds bemusedly repellent in Rose's romantic infatuation? The un-subjective third-person narrator gives the answer unequivocally: "It was love she sickened at. It was the enslavement, the self-abasement, the self-deception" (35). The coda to "Privilege" then describes the changes in Hanratty before and after the war, and concludes with another one-sentence paragraph, "Cora's grandfather had to retire, and there never was another honey-dumper" (37). Readers can confidently conclude that there is no need for another honey-dumper because, in terms of the excrement-equals-honey-equals-a-generative-and-potentially-definitive-Eros trope of this story, Rose has had all the honey dumped out of her. And the candy-disposing honey-dumper is Flo, her not-so-wicked stepmother, if one yet full of witchery.

The lesson that Rose learns in "Privilege" comes hard, then, at the feet of Flo. It is not a lesson to encourage hope for the character's achieving stable selfhood via love, because it involves love intimately with humiliating exposure (prepared for at her real school in the confusion of the excremental and the procreative functions surrounding the unaware Mr. "Burns-your-balls"). To avoid the shame of exposure, Rose opts to pursue the path of actress,

mistakenly thinking she thereby acquires the power responsible for her humiliation, and unconsciously she now takes Flo for her model, the true perpetrator of the humiliation. Imitation/acting for Rose is indeed a sincere form of flattery, but what it flatters is power, and Rose's desire to act is a strategy of empowerment. At the close of "Wild Swans," the story that gives the swan song of Rose's childhood, she is shown expressing envy of a woman who imitates Frances Farmer, the actress whose life and career were significantly tragic. And in the story's concluding sentences, imitation/acting is presented not in imagery of the fairy-tale, ugly-duckling metamorphic, but in skin-shedding, reptilian imagery: "[Rose] thought it would be an especially fine thing, to manage a transformation like that. To dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named skin" (64). Prepared so at the end of childhood, like some shirking, serpent-supplanting Eve, Rose enters on the preposterous affairs of her adult life.

Also, because of the events of "Privilege," love continues for Rose as very much a narcissistic passion and pastime, with unfortunate repercussions in her various love affairs throughout the cycle. The two best examples are with Clifford in "Mischief" and with Simon in "Simon's Luck." With Clifford, Rose's attraction in her first and most unsuccessful adultery is clearly narcissistic. Clifford's wife's, Jocelyn's, description of his background shows it to be the mirror image of Rose's: "the arthritic father, the small grocery store in a town in upstate New York, the poor tough neighborhood. [Jocelyn] had talked about his problems as a child; the inappropriate talent, the grudging parents, the jeering schoolmates" (110). Too obviously perhaps, this description could, with but an insignificant change of detail, accurately describe Rose's life. Reflecting on Jocelyn's information, Rose thinks, "What Jocelyn called bitterness seemed to Rose something more complex and more ordinary; just the weariness, suppleness, deviousness, meanness, common to a class. Common to Clifford's class, and Rose's" (111). Rose's desire for romantic-sexual love from Clifford is mostly a greedy and selfish need, however justified by her situation in a bad marriage to the patriarchally named and honey-filled Patrick Blatchford (which marriage Rose nonetheless determined). But the whole of "Mischief," easily the ugliest story of the cycle, portrays relationships in cannibalistic/consumerist terms, from the woman at the party who has written a play "about a woman who ate her own children" (106) (and note Clifford's first words to Rose: "Oh Rose. Rose baby" [109]), to the concluding sexual threesome, which

comes across more as a sort of witch's smorgasbord than as sexual pleasure, or even as voyeuristic titillation: "Though Clifford paid preliminary homage to them both, [Rose] was the one he finally made love to, rather quickly on the nubbly hooked rug. Jocelyn seemed to hover above them making comforting noises of assent" (132). The deceptive, forest-dwelling Jocelyn of the "foul fire" (131), who is also a maternal echo of stepmother Flo, can even be seen to have orchestrated this humiliating consumption of Rose by Jocelyn herself and the fiddling Clifford.

Having fallen into the midst of a *ménage-à-trois*, Rose, "at some level she was too sluggish to reach for, [feels] appalled and sad" (132). Rose may be too weary to exercise her moral muscle, but as Redekop observes, "surely the reader is urged not to be so sluggish a consumer" (131). The "level" here gestured towards is the level at which Rose lives, or lived rather, in Hanratty, with Flo, both of whose prudish morality and proscriptions against public display, "parading around" (191, 203), would have kept Rose from baring herself on the nubbly rug. Furthermore, the spatial imagery of levels points to the concluding story of the cycle, whose title repeats the book's definitive question and which substitutes place of origin for romantic-sexual love as foundational answer, employing in its closing lines the more comforting image of horizontal "slots" over (277) in place of the vertical and disturbing "levels" down of "Mischief." But it is indeed an ugly lesson in using other people that Rose adopts from her experience in "Mischief," as the ending makes clear in the style of shallow self-affirmation movements: "Sometime later she decided to go on being friends with Clifford and Jocelyn, because she needed such friends occasionally, at that stage of her life" (132). I would suggest that for Rose "that stage" not only connotes the mistaken thespian trope but also something of an extending mirror stage. What "Privilege" made clear, "Mischief" confirms: Rose is not going to answer the titular question through romantic-sexual love, though love remains a powerful inducement—as had Clifford himself, the male tease—to that end. In "Simon's Luck," Rose is allowed one final, stumbling kick at the honeyed can.

With Simon, Rose is attracted at first because she thinks again that he is, as she says, "'Like me'" (159). But Simon soon emerges as more complement than reflection, and Rose declares that she has met the "man for [her] life!" (164). Indeed, there is no call to contradict her: Simon is practical, nurturing, a knowledgeable gardener (for this Rose): "'Learn not to be so thin-skinned,' said Simon, as if he were taking her over, in a sensible way,

along with the house and garden" (163).<sup>12</sup> And unlike all the other men in *Who Do You Think You Are?* (such as Rose's unnamed father and Patrick Blatchford), with the notable exception of Ralph Gillespie in the concluding story, Simon is a good actor (161), one whose name connotes foundation in a new law of love. It may be, therefore, that the potentially ideal mate for Rose, Simon, is something of a reflection and a complement. But Rose ultimately rejects Simon, for involved reasons of selfish un-involvement. All the parodic ratiocination accompanying her flight from Simon suggests that she is choosing to be finished finally with playing the woman-victim in romantic-sexual relationships—and that there is no other role for a woman in love other than the victim position, mainly because the aging of men's bodies is more acceptable, sexually speaking, than is women's.<sup>13</sup> Or Rose's self-involved reasoning can be summed up more sympathetically as follows: emotionally she does not want to leave herself vulnerable to the very humiliation that she first experienced at Flo's hands via the intermediation of Cora and at Jocelyn's via Clifford; and even if love with Simon would have proven to be the real thing, she finally prefers in her escape to recover "the private balance spring" of which love, whether good or bad in the end, robs her; she desires now only to renew her somewhat neurotic affiliation with a "little dry kernel of probity." The now-ironic, subjective third-person narrator caps Rose's implicitly feminist line of reasoning thus: "So she thought" (170), "thus implying the possibility that Rose's wholesale rejection of love might, after all, be a mistake" (Carrington, 142). That "little dry kernel of probity," like "Mischief's" untouched "level" of common (Hanratty/Flo) sense, is also a repetition in other form of the lump of "hard white honey" symbolizing immature or dammed romantic-sexual love. To touch base with Hanratty/Flo can be redemptive, as it could have been before participating in the threesome at the end of "Mischief," and it can be tragic, as in Rose's flight from Simon.

In a very real sense, then, Flo, by dumping all the "honey" out of Rose early in her life, has made her incapable of accepting the real thing when it comes along in the person of Simon. Although it may well sound like the cliché of an open-line talk show on love, Rose cannot permit herself to be vulnerable to potential humiliation for the sake of love, and Munro seems to be suggesting that such an open posture is prerequisite. A feminist reading might well argue that Rose has to reject Simon if she is to achieve an autonomous identity as a woman, and such an argument may have some-

thing ideological to commend it. However, because of the weighty irony of the true fictional situation—Simon’s dying—I cannot but agree with Carrington who writes that Rose’s running “lament thus becomes a subtle parody of the feminist protest against the exacting standards of sexual attractiveness men apply to women but never to themselves.” Carrington goes so far as to call “Simon’s Luck” an “anti-feminist story,” and observes too that “Rose’s protracted psychological struggle to free herself from Simon, to regain that ‘little dry kernel of probity’, though undeniably crucial to her conception of herself, turns out to be a fight to free herself from a dead man” (143). It is as difficult to accept that Munro, perhaps the English-speaking world’s reigning monarch on matters of the fictional heart, would dismiss the constructive benefits of, if not the ontological necessity for, romantic-sexual love. She did say in 1975 that “doing without men is an impossibility ... obviously sex is the big thing, and the whole thing of emotions that radiate out from good sex, which seems to be so central in adult life, and so irreplaceable” (quoted in Ross, 79; ellipsis in original).

Perhaps the most compelling argument in favour of my reading of Rose’s life in love is the fact that Simon dies of pancreatic cancer (172). The repercussions of this piece of news are ironic and immense. They involve, as the ending of “Simon’s Luck” makes clear, the baselessness of much of Rose’s reasoning in making the momentous decision to abandon Simon because she feels abandoned, aging, and thus vulnerable to exposure and humiliation. Here it is the male, not the female, body that represents disruptive death (“*memento mori, memento mori*,” Simon intones to Rose in his role as The Old Philosopher [161]), as Rose is shown to learn at the end: “It was preposterous, it was unfair ... that Rose even at this late date could have thought herself the only one who seriously lacked power” (173; see Carrington, 143). The piece of delayed information also comments, as this story turns at its conclusion to metafictional considerations, on the way stories work as literary art as opposed to how TV shows work, and how various forms of storytelling represent the unpredictability of reality. For my purposes, though, the piece of news about the cause of Simon’s death again picks up that central image of Eros as honey which was given first in “Privilege” and subsequently displaced in various ways. Which is to say, Simon’s death from cancer of the pancreas involves the very organ that regulates sugar in the blood. Simon could have functioned as a kind of pancreas in Rose’s life, for however long—never mind how silly such a pancreas-centric reading may

sound to those who believe that Munro is advocating the necessity of Rose's being totally independent of men if she is correctly to answer the riddle, Who do you think you are?<sup>14</sup>

By "Spelling," when the cycle first returns to the place of origin in Hanratty, returning Rose to Flo, Flo herself has developed a consuming, a revolting and suggestively obscene craving for any sweets. She "might tip the jug of maple syrup up against her mouth and drink it like wine. She loved sweet things now, craved them. Brown sugar by the spoonful, maple syrup, tinned puddings, jelly, globs of sweetness to slide down her throat" (175; see also 181-82). Well before this point in the cycle, such a craving can only signal a commensurate lack of love, the hungry absence which is attendant here on the abandonment that overtakes those who grow old in these stories. Flo's craving is monstrous indeed. By the logic of this fiction, she grows the greatest obsessive-compulsive need for the sweet substitute for love because she is the character most without love (her only rival in this regard is Milton Homer, about whom more below). In Rose's dream of the old folks home where Flo is to be committed, she sees the caged old people being offered "choice" food: "chocolate mousse, trifle, Black Forest Cake." In the final cage, Rose discovers Flo, "handsomely seated on a throne-like chair, ... and looking pleased with herself, for showing powers she had kept secret till now" (184). The queenly secret is, I believe, Flo's determining role in Rose's life, the subconscious "spelling" that she worked, which is echoed in the queenly Cora with her two "attendants" (31) and in Jocelyn's witchcraft in "Mischief." Flo's is a determining influence that the opening sentences of "Royal Beatings" can, in hindsight, be seen to have established: "*Royal Beating*. That was Flo's promise. You are going to get one Royal Beating." This can now be read both as prediction for Rose's life in love and as tribute to Flo's primary powers of suggestion.

As I have argued, the most damaging aspect of Flo's determining role is that she dried up the metaphorically and potentially definitive honey/love in Rose, acting as too severe a realistic check on Rose's romantic tendencies (which are evident immediately when Rose plays with the phrase "royal beating"). At the end of "Spelling," Flo is entering terminal senility, and in an increasingly delirious condition thinks she is in hospital for a gallbladder operation.

"... Do you know how many gallstones they took out of me? Fifteen! One as big as a pullet's egg. I got them somewhere. I'm going to take them home." She pulled at the sheets, searching. "They were in a bottle."



"I've got them already," said Rose "I took them home."

"Did you? Did you show your father?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, that's where they are then," said Flo, and she lay down and closed her eyes. (188)

This concluding scene between the two women, as moving as it is, nonetheless argues fictionally that Flo substituted a stone of gall for the lump of honey in Rose, a displacement which subsequently made love something of a non-starter in her life, and made her, at the crux of her relationship with Simon, opt for the return of the symbolically echoing "little dry kernel of probity." James Carscadden similarly interprets the parting scene with Flo: "eggs and gall are what we expect from the stubborn Old Woman that she is, and Rose is accepting the Old Woman's role in taking them to herself" (517). Observe too that at the end of Flo's life there is a return to the mothers and eggs of the opening pages of "Royal Beatings." The difference here is that where Rose's biological mother died with the feeling that she had ingested an egg (2), Flo has the gallish egg removed from her and passed on to Rose. What are the expressions of this stony gall? It suggests generally an embittered narcissistic implosion rather than a loving flow, with associations of withholding, distrust, fear of exposure, prudishness and prurience, bitterness, irritability, and (inevitably) biliousness—everything, in fact, that is Flo (though in "Royal Beatings," "hard pride and skepticism" are already given as part of "Rose's nature" [5]). Conversely, Rose's father gives the accounting of Flo's virtues: "Flo was his idea of what a woman ought to be. ... A woman ought to be energetic, practical, clever at making and saving; she ought to be shrewd, good at bargaining and bossing and seeing through people's pretensions. At the same time she should be naive intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions, superstitions, traditional beliefs" (45). Interestingly, it is to this unnamed and long-dead patriarch, Rose's father, that Flo wants Rose to show the transferred gallstones. Perhaps Flo had also precluded warmer relations between Rose and her father; perhaps Rose, under Flo's tutelage, inadvertently became too much the kind of woman her father admired, for there is no mention of love in his catalogue.

Primarily, then, because of Flo's influence on who she is, romantic love could never be definitive for Rose. That is why Flo is the first to put the essential question to her: "Who do you think you are?" (13). In her quest to

solve the riddle of identity, it was necessary for Rose at the end of “Spelling” to recognize Flo’s role in her life and to accept emotionally that romantic-sexual love is not going to provide an answer for her. This latter truth she had recognized intellectually in “Simon’s Luck,” and the impossibility of a definitive love in her life would appear to be Rose’s luck, her bad luck: you do not get to choose your parents, biological or adoptive. But this is not to say that Munro is dismissing the potentially definitive role that romantic-sexual love can play in the construction and affirmation of self-identity, for men and women. Having recognized in this first of the two “return stories” that conclude *Who Do You Think You Are?* the primary importance of Flo in making her who she is—in fact, Rose affirms this recognition with her simple “Yes”—Rose is prepared for her return home. If she is ever to have a sense of self confirmed, apparently she must rely instead on her connection to place of origin, to Hanratty. That is why in the final story the third-person narrator at her most subjective is careful to dismiss any romantic-sexual element from Rose’s feelings for Ralph Gillespie: “She was enough a child of her time to wonder if what she felt about him was simply sexual warmth, sexual curiosity; she did not think it was” (205). That is about as declarative as Munro’s fiction ever gets. As far as Rose’s self-identity is concerned, we are no longer considering the reifying power of romantic love.

In “Half a Grapefruit,” the mistake which had led to Rose’s dreaded public humiliation had been her “wanting badly to align herself with towners, against her place of origin” (38). Where “Spelling” returned Rose to various sources—to Hanratty secondarily, but primarily to the font of her own spleen in Flo’s gall, as it were—“Who Do You Think You Are?” returns her most fully to her place of origin, returns the cycle to its titular riddle, and returns readers to that same question of identity. I have written in more detail elsewhere about the function of these characteristic return stories of story cycles (1991, 98), so will rehearse here only their broad outlines. Functionally, they probably derive from the tradition of the French *ballade*, where an *envoi* caps the poem in a refrain-like manner, restating the poem’s main theme(s) and often incorporating many of its preceding images and symbols. Thus the title of the return story to Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches*, “L’Envoi: The Train to Mariposa.” The term *return story* devolves from the Romantic Return Poem, typified in such classics as Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” and Charles G.D. Roberts’ “The Tantramar Revisited,” where the poet-speaker returns to a scene of his youth and medi-

tates on the passage of time and the effects of, as Roberts puts it, “the hands of chance and change.” But the true subject of a return poem, as of a return story, is identity, the identity of an individual in relation to a particular place, a community, and/or a country. Viewed in these terms, “Who Do You Think You Are?” is, like Leacock’s “L’Envoi: The Train to Mariposa,” exemplary of this element of story cycles. What may appear remarkable, though, is that a contemporary story cycle by a woman should conclude suggesting an answer to the riddle of self-identity that prioritizes the definitive power of place in a way that recalls Leacock’s musings on the importance of Mariposa and, before him, Duncan Campbell Scott’s on the value of Viger.

Within “Who Do You Think You Are?” the riddling question is asked in final framing fashion by one Miss Hattie Milton (196). She is very much a figure of origins, of what made Hanratty what it was and no longer is: “Miss Hattie Milton taught at the high school. She had been teaching there longer than all the other teachers combined and was more important than the Principal. She taught English . . . and the thing she was famous for was keeping order” (195). Thus, it could be said that the question of identity is finally asked of Rose *by* Hanratty itself through the person of Miss Hattie Milton. Because for Rose the answer to the riddle posed here figuratively by place *is* place, she must find a means of reconnecting herself affirmatively to Hanratty. And her only way to do so—to reconnect with her place of origin, and so to answer the question—lies through the grotesque figure of Miss Hattie’s nephew, Milton Homer. So I disagree with Redekop, who writes, “Hattie Milton’s question ‘Who do you think you are?’—if directed at Milton Homer—would have no answer” (143). That is only literally true; symbolically, Milton Homer could answer that he is more mascot and scapegoat than town idiot; that he is also a figure of carnival, loudly and viciously mocking the pretensions of official Hanratty as it does that thing which it censures in its citizens: parades about (191-93). He is also, I think, one of Munro’s richest creations: a personification of Hanratty, an emanation, symbolically evocative, yet nicely particularized. And as Heble observes, he “is of particular interest to Rose because he represents something of a mythology of the past” (119). Appropriately by this point in the story cycle, Milton Homer, like Becky Tyde in the first story, is presented as one who is silent only with sweets in his mouth (189); he also seriously snatches candy tossed for children at the parades (192), and gluttonously gobbles down sweets at the Milton sisters’ annual class party (197). As the latest generation of the foundational

Miltons, with his insatiable hunger for sweets which is matched only by Flo in "Spelling," Milton Homer (and was there ever a more foundational name than one that takes those of the two epic poets of the Classical and the Christian traditions?) argues that Hanratty was and is a town without love. And it is the only place that Rose has left, to return to.

The only way to Milton Homer for Rose—the way to touch base with her place of origin, and thereby to approach an answer to the story's and the book's and Flo's and Hattie Milton's and Hanratty's question of identity—lies through Ralph Gillespie, an old high-school friend whom she meets again on returning to Hanratty at the end of the story cycle. In keeping with her narcissistic bent, Ralph is like Rose; a kind of inherent familiarity is what first drew them to one another in high school (199). Ralph is also one of those who showed Rose the power of imitation/acting by doing a distinguishing Milton Homer imitation for his classmates: deeply impressed, Rose "wanted to do the same. Not Milton Homer; she did not want to do Milton Homer. She wanted to fill up in that magical, releasing way, transform herself; she wanted the courage and the power" (200). Naturally, Rose sees acting as an empowering activity, which it becomes for her (most damagingly so in her marriage to Patrick). But where Rose also learns to negotiate the extra-Hanratty world with other roles, Ralph fails in the outside world, is radically injured in a navy accident and has to be rebuilt "from scratch," as Flo says (201). Finally, Ralph "Milton Homer'd himself right out of a job" (202) at the Legion Hall, doing imitations none of the newer residents recognized, and mistakenly plunged to his death in its basement. Ralph Gillespie is for Rose, then, both a generative presence and a figure of entrapment within Hanratty, one who dies, as his obituary records, because "he mistook the basement door for the exit door and lost his balance" (206). Rose found the exit, as in leaving Simon she recovered a too-rigid "private balance spring" (170). So it is Ralph, not Simon, who can be read, if anyone can, as the measure to this point of Rose's liberated, limited success.

For present purposes, the more important aspect of this distant, deconstructed and reconstructed Ralph Gillespie is that he provides Rose's point of contact with what emerges as her redemptive place of origin in Hanratty. Rose's imitation of Milton Homer is, as was suggested earlier, an imitation of Ralph's imitation of Milton Homer. Remarking this chain of imitators, Heble concurs that "this movement away from a sense of an origin is re-enacted many years later when Rose meets up with Ralph at the Legion Hall

in Hanratty” (120). And, to repeat, Milton Homer is himself “a mimic of ferocious gifts and terrible energy” (192), whose subject is official Hanratty and its citizens at their most ostentatiously parading. Ralph is even associated with that other foundational character in Rose’s life, Flo, who, resurrected now in the manner of return stories, claims that Ralph in his refusal to show pain is “Like me. I don’t let on” (201). With Ralph established as a distant figure of origins in Hanratty—and, via the much imitated Milton Homer, as the only way back to remote Hanratty—the final few puzzling pages of *Who Do You Think You Are?* can be read as a conversation between Rose and Hanratty; or read as a narrative commentary on Rose and her relation to place of origin in Hanratty.

The narrator writes through Rose that Ralph/Hanratty does “want something” from her, but that he/it is unable to find expression:

But when Rose remembered this unsatisfactory conversation she seemed to recall a wave of kindness, of sympathy and forgiveness, though certainly no words of that kind had been spoken. That peculiar shame which she carried around with her seemed to have been eased. The thing she was ashamed of, in acting, was that she might have been paying attention to the wrong things, reporting antics, when there was always something further, a tone, a depth, a light, that she couldn’t get and wouldn’t get. And it wasn’t just about acting she suspected this. Everything she had done could sometimes be seen as a mistake. She had never felt this more strongly than when she was talking to Ralph Gillespie, but when she thought about him afterwards her mistakes appeared unimportant. (205)

Rose’s shame is that in her career as actress and retailer of Hanratty lore she, like Ralph, may have been Milton Homering, imitating only surface peculiarities, and thereby missing in others as well as herself the interior lives and relations that make us who we are. And not just in acting: “Everything she had done could sometimes be seen as a mistake.” What a monumental self-confession this is, linking her whole life to the falsification of bad acting, confronting her with the possibility that she has never had an authentic life. Whatever else can be said about this character, it must be conceded that Rose’s behaviour in the final pages of the book demonstrates commendable courage as she trains an unflinching gaze on the mirror of who she is: Ralph Gillespie, Milton Homer, Hanratty. But Ralph *as* distant Hanratty not only confronts her with this possibility of inauthenticity, he also proffers a kind of redemption. For Rose’s revisioning memory finds, through Ralph to Milton Homer to the Misses Miltons to Hanratty, some vague sense of forgiveness for her sins of imitative omission, a discovery which seems to entail a kind of confirmation

of the self-identity she has sought and fled throughout the cycle.

*Confirmation* is the right word, because one of Milton Homer's "public function[s]" (191) is as a priestly figure whose mock-christening incantation stresses, in typical Hanratty fashion, the possibility of the death of the newborn (see Redekop, 142). What gets confirmed at the end of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a middle-aged woman's acceptance of self-identity as connected intimately to an unattractive place of origin. Although I think that in the following comment Redekop is overly cautious, I nonetheless agree with the sense of her conclusion: "The fact that no powerful autonomous subject can be constructed does not negate the importance of knowing who you think you are, of knowing the limits of yourself, the place where the boundaries of self dissolve and flow into the self of some other. Munro pictures the pain of isolation and offers as comfort a sense of community—however small" (147). In line with such a modest reading, the enigmatic closing sentence of this story cycle is appropriately interrogative: "What could she say about herself and Ralph Gillespie, except that she felt his life, close, closer than the lives of men she'd loved, one slot over from her own?" (206). "Closer than the lives of men she'd loved" because, as I have argued, romantic-sexual love was, after the events of "Privilege," never potentially definitive for Rose. "One slot over from her own" in terms of a spatial and temporal image that places Rose beside Ralph, who is one slot over from Milton Homer, who is one slot over from his aunts, who are one slot over from Hanratty—the place of origin which is posited here by Munro (one slot over from Rose?) very much as a metaphysical signifier with the power to bestow a reassuring degree of identity, meaning, and presence of self to self—a reifying self-consciousness. True, this signifier, "Hanratty," is itself quite unstable, always changing, and perhaps it will eventually threaten a subject such as Rose with 'Ralph Gillespieing' herself out of a warmly confirmed sense of selfhood—thus the aptness of the closing question mark. But regardless of the hint of eternal deferment suggested by the *mise en abîme* of imitations of imitations and the indeterminacy of that closing question, this story cycle in its return to place of origin nonetheless confirms Rose's self-identity, her constructed subjectivity, if you will. Unless some radically positive development occurs in the human brain, an evolution which evolutionary biologists tell us is most unlikely, there will never be a compellingly logical way to establish the ground of selfhood, whether in fiction or philosophy (the enigmatic closing pages of *Who* at least make that quite

clear). Self-consciousness is *per se* its own proof. But after Rose has accepted that romantic-sexual love cannot be definitive for her, her obvious contentment at the end of the cycle, her sense of forgiveness and well-being, *can* be traced back to her relation to Hanratty as place of origin. Perhaps the complex point of view so artfully manipulated here at the close of the story cycle conveys that what Rose cannot be shown to say to herself, we as readers of educated imagination can intimate. *Who Do You Think You Are?* rounds itself off not as a fictionally philosophical writing of subjectivity as an endlessly deferred chain of signification, but as one masterful writer's act of faith in what George Steiner, in the title of his book, calls "real presences."

#### NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to the anonymous readers for *Canadian Literature* for their advice on an earlier version of this article
- 2 As Hoy documents so fascinatingly (59-62), three of the stories from the "Rose and Janet" manuscript—"Connection," "The Stone in the Field" and "The Moons of Jupiter"—became part of *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982); other Janet stories, which had begun life as Rose Stories, were translated back into Rose stories; "Simon's Luck" was added; and "Who Do You Think You Are?" was written especially to end the revised manuscript.
- 3 Although John Metcalf (45-87) argues (naively) the unimportance of such works as D.C. Scott's *In the Village of Viger* to the continuum of the Canadian short story (he phoned Alice Munro to ascertain if she had read the book; at that time she hadn't), one need simply recall Bakhtin's concept of "genre memory," which is illustrated by the following passage from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*: "We are not interested in the influence of separate individual authors, individual works, individual themes, ideas, images—what interests us is precisely the influence of the *generic tradition itself* which was transmitted through the particular authors" (159, emphasis in original; see further 106, 121). Northrop Frye's similar concept of an "imaginative continuum" also deserves quotation: "A reader may feel the same unreality in efforts to attach Canadian writers to a tradition made up of earlier writers whom they may not have read or greatly admired. I have felt this myself whenever I have written about Canadian literature. Yet I keep coming back to the feeling that there does seem to be such a thing as an imaginative continuum, and that writers are conditioned in their attitudes by their predecessors, or by the cultural climate of their predecessors, whether there is conscious influence or not" (250). I am grateful to Gwendolyn Guth for pointing me towards the Bakhtin material.
- 4 Another interesting bit of publishing lore about *Who Do You Think You Are?* is that its American and British publishers changed its title to *The Beggar Maid: Stories of Rose and Flo* because they feared their readers would not understand the implied put-down in the Canadian idiom (see Struthers, 29); also, from the beginning, Munro's American editor at Norton, Sherry Huber, strove to turn *Who* into a novel, whereas her Canadian editor at

- Macmillan, Douglas Gibson, accepted the work for what it is—a story cycle (see Hoy, 67-68)
- 5 See Blodgett (99), who views Rose's ill luck in arranging a rendezvous with her lover Tom as a providential parallel to the pay-phone money.
  - 6 The opening sentences of stories often flout readers' expectations of coherence: "Rose wrote the Entrance, she went across the bridge, she went to high school" ("Half a Grapefruit," 38); "Patrick Blatchford was in love with Rose" ("The Beggar Maid," 65); "Rose gets lonely in new places; she wishes she had invitations" ("Simon's Luck," 152).
  - 7 See Lynch (1992/3), where I make a similar argument for the organization of Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger*.
  - 8 Oddly, Gerald Noonan thinks the point of view first person, persistently speaking of "Rose, the narrator in all ten stories" (168). See Heble (103-04) for an enlightening analysis of a textual site where the narrative indeed slips from third-person subjective to first-person plural.
  - 9 See Redekop (126-130) for an extended discussion of Rose's name.
  - 10 See Carrington (43-48) for a discussion of "Royal Beatings" in terms of Freud's "A Child Is Being Beaten."
  - 11 Freud's controversial distinction (*On Narcissism* 6-11) between "object libido" and "ego libido" comes to mind as a useful gloss; in short, the narcissist is one whose libido turns from cathecting objects to cathecting the ego, which word, "ego," is used in the Narcissism essay as we use the word "self." I am grateful to Dr. David Fairweather for directing me to Freud's essay on narcissism.
  - 12 See Carrington (138-42) for a discussion of imagery of warmth in this story.
  - 13 It might be objected that Simon is the one who leaves Rose, since he doesn't contact her and eventually dies. But the story is told only from Rose's point of view, and from Rose's point of view her decision to leave constitutes a flight from Simon and the demands of reciprocal love. Moreover, the reasons for her decision to flee have only to do with her own unwillingness to submit to the exposure that enduring intimacy entails. Given the immediate cause of her self-centred flight west—one weekend's silence from Simon—her action is clearly rash, perhaps even hysterical. See the long internal 'monologue' that begins tellingly with "She could not remember what they had said about Simon coming again" (164) and concludes with what I read as un-subjective third-person irony: "So she thought" (170). Finally, had Rose overcome her fears, she would have discovered that Simon, perhaps even now aware that he is dying of cancer, was attempting to spare Rose the pain of his ultimate departure.
  - 14 There are numerous other uses of the honey image that, when taken together, support the argument that it forms a telling pattern in the cycle. Although it doesn't begin in earnest until the central passage in "Privilege," the image of compensatory sweets is introduced in relation to Rose's second model (after Flo), Becky Tyde, in "Royal Beatings." The performing Becky, another actress of a kind, "would put a whole cookie in her mouth if she felt like it" (6), and does so only to stop herself from telling explicitly the mysterious tale that determines her mocking role in Hanratty. The secondary displacement of Eros into sweets is shown later in this story when Flo placates the royally beaten Rose with rich treats (19), and Carrington (126) suggests that Rose's solitary self-teasing behaviour with the syrupy treats is masturbatory. The sluttish Ruby Caruthers salvages what self-



respect she can by refusing the bribe of cupcakes (42). Candy figures a number of times in "Wild Swans," but most significantly as part of the perverse undertaker's bribe in Flo's incident-determining story (57). When in "The Beggar Maid" Rose capitulates under various pressures to accept Patrick's proposal of marriage, she wakes up in the middle of the night craving sweets (80); similarly after first having sex with Patrick: "She thought of celebration. What occurred to her was something delicious to eat, a sundae at Boomers, apple pie with hot cinnamon sauce" (81). The craving in this latter situation is typical of the way the image is used throughout the remainder of the stories: those who lack love, or those whose love has remained a hard white lump of honey, crave the substitute, in a way that parallels (according to the Freudian theory of anal fixation) the misers' and millionaires' grasping after all filthy lucre. In "Providence," Rose feels guilty for giving her daughter Anna sweet breakfast cereals instead of the conventional mothering she believes Anna needs (140-41). In something of an ironic inversion, Rose's mistaken break from Simon is signalled to her in a restaurant's yonically shaped desert containers: "... the thick glass dishes they put ice-cream or jello in. It was those dishes that told her of her changed state. She could not have said she found them shapely, or eloquent, without misstating the case. All she could have said was that she saw them in a way that wouldn't be possible to a person in any stage of love" (170). She finds the empty concave containers for (substitutive) sweets reassuring because she is heading away from the real thing, from love with another, towards a mistakenly desired, loveless independence. And, of course, she is also moving towards that other wrong-headed alternative in her life, an acting job (in, by the way, a TV series that sounds very much like CBC's "The Beachcombers" [171]).

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