

Resisting Reduction

Closure in Richard Ford's *Rock Springs* and Alice Munro's *Friend of My Youth*

The writer of the realistic short story has two primary aims: first, to create a vivid and lifelike world, something that approximates the reader's idea of the way the world really works, and secondly, to create characters who move and change. These principles are taught in almost every beginning fiction class. But every beginning writer eventually becomes aware that these two aims are often in conflict, and especially so in the context of the short story, which because of its condensed form naturally lends itself to a kind of neatness which might not ring true to both writer and reader. For instance, the traditional epiphany of Joyce or Proust, with its stressing of a single clear moment of revelation, may seem forced to today's audience.

This is not to say these realizations do not exist in the real world. People do learn things they may label as truths and experience sharp moments of clarity. However, the power of these realizations may be lessened for today's audience: the moment of insight at the end of Joyce's "The Dead" may be less pointedly instructive than the omniscient-narrator-as-teacher in a novel such as, say, *Henry Fielding*, but epiphany still implies a set of fixed values, a single correct way to see the world.

Of course, all literature is instructive; people learn from any and all sensory information. The mere placement of words on a page implies a set of fixed values, the assumption that ideas can be communicated through language, for instance. But just as the story-with-epiphany showed strong doubt in the reliability of an omniscient narrator, much contemporary liter-

ature calls into question the authority of the epiphany. It's a complex world, both audience and writer announce, and moments of clarity may be attractive half-truths when viewed in hindsight.

The evasiveness of truth is no new idea, of course. Each generation of writers deals with this quandary in a new way. Epiphany itself can be seen as an attempt to escape the story as simple moral lesson: an effort to make the fictional world more complex while also showing how characters can move and change over the course of a condensed number of pages. Shifts in aesthetics and styles can be seen as developing new partial-solutions to the same old problems.

Two contemporary writers from somewhat different perspectives handle this particular problem as well as anyone: Alice Munro, who is almost exclusively a writer of short fiction, and Richard Ford, who is primarily a novelist, but who has published one collection of short fiction, *Rock Springs*, in 1987. They are writers from very different backgrounds. Ford is an American mid-westerner whose terse style is sometimes compared favourably to Hemingway's. Munro's stories usually focus on the small patch of Canadian ground where she lives. At first glance their work is as different as the regions they call home.

In their best work, however, from Ford's *Rock Springs* to Munro's *The Progress of Love* to what might be her strongest collection, *Friend of My Youth*, both writers can be seen confronting the problem of realistic closure and character growth in the short-story form. To do this, they manipulate time in a variety of ways, extending or expanding a series of events so that any one moment becomes less and less definitive. Their fictional worlds are complex to the point of confusion.

Again, it is important to understand that Ford and Munro are not really reacting against the traditional epiphany of Woolf, Proust and Joyce; Ford and Munro are a segment of a larger movement of which traditional epiphanic techniques and their newer techniques are both a part. Stephen Dedalus staring at letters scratched in a desk in *Portrait of an Artist* and Anita continuing her conversation with Margot in Munro's "Wigtime" should be seen as extensions of the same line of thought, not as fundamentally bipolar techniques. In general, this movement focuses on small moments and moves away from explanation on the part of the writer.

Placing thoughts in the mind of a character or recasting them as images and locating them symbolically in the landscape can be seen as a way of

opening up interpretation relative to previous, more narrator-dominated, techniques, just as Munro's and Ford's techniques open up interpretation relative to Joyce, Proust and Woolf; because of this, collections like *Friend of My Youth* and *Rock Springs* require more effort on the part of the reader as far as interpretation is concerned.

When the big picture is viewed, it becomes a question of methods, not aims. Ford and Munro, continuing, not abandoning, the Joycean aesthetic, put more and more responsibility for interpretation on the shoulders of the reader. Anything like this requires the use of all sorts of apparatus, of which clear epiphany is one, to make, paradoxically, the writer more invisible. Ford and Munro favour alternative apparatus, such as multiple epiphanies, time jumps, and reordering of chronology to make their stories more complicated machines; these pieces often move in more directions, present more interpretive options, and consist of more component parts than typical short fiction.

Because of this change in technique, raising questions, not answering them, becomes the central concern. The reader substitutes her own thoughts into the spaces previously occupied by clear epiphanic moments. In the ongoing redistribution of power, and the consequent movement away from clear epiphany, the questions themselves become more and more the focus. This is not just a side-effect of technique, but one of Munro's and Ford's central concerns, and should be seen as an extension of epiphanic techniques, not a reversal of them.

In Ford's "Optimists," the young narrator relates a singular event, his father killing a man, and transforms this into a reflection on his parents' relationship. In Munro's "Friend of My Youth," the narrator compares the mother of her childhood to the woman she later became, but the analysis produces many images, none definitive. These stories differ from stories like James Joyce's "Araby" in that closure opens up instead of closing down possibilities; of course, no closure can empty a story of possibilities, but the difference between "Araby" and "Friend of My Youth" or "Optimists" is one of degree.

This is also not to say epiphany is completely absent in the work of either Ford or Munro. Ford's "Communist," for example, does contain multiple and possibly contradictory epiphanies, as well as falling action which signals the story's close. The story, similar to "Optimists," revolves around a single event,

the shooting of some geese, but rather than ending with the event, Ford continues for three more pages, moving ahead in time, layering small additional events (all much less completely drawn than the central scene) over the main event, making the central scene seem muddier, although also more complex.

The narrator, a man named Les, looking back at an event in his youth, continually says things which work against clear epiphany: "I don't know what makes people do what they do, or call themselves what they call themselves, only that you have to live someone's life to be the expert" (232-233). We, as readers, can apply this to Glen Baxter, or, removing it from context, the narrator's mother, or even further, the narrator himself; we are left with the knowledge of the limitations of knowledge, how difficult it is to definitively know anything (the narrator, like ourselves, expends considerable effort in this area).

The last scene ends with the young Les on the porch with his mother. They exchange words, experiencing a moment of closeness, and although the story could end at that moment, Les continues, saying, "I tried to think of something else then and did not hear what my mother said after that" (235). Even this scene is not conclusive.

The last paragraph moves forward further in time, twenty-five years, adding another layer, muddying the situation even further by working against the closeness Les and his mother have established in the previous scene. He says, "I think about that time without regret, though my mother and I never talked in that way again, and I have not heard her voice now in a long, long time" (235). Each movement forward acts as a different perspective on the major scene, the shooting of the geese, and no single jump in time can be said to offer a definitive epiphanic moment. The juxtaposition of the contrary information produces question after question in the mind of the reader, and that is what we are left with at the story's closing.

"Great Falls" uses the central incident of a husband confronting his wife's lover at gunpoint. The scene is observed by the son, Jackie, then a young man, although many years have passed since the confrontation. After the lover drives away into the night, Jackie wonders about the conversation his parents had: "Did she say, I love you? Did she say, this is not what I expected to happen? Did she say, This is what I've wanted all along? And did she say, I'm sorry for all of this, or I'm glad, or none of this matters to me?" (44); this series of questions, not rhetorical in that they require some kind of response on the part of the reader, works to resist closure. The

reader must ask herself these questions as Jackie does, and look for information in the main incident to reinforce her conclusions, which, in the end, are really just hunches. As Jackie points out, “These are not the kind of things you can know if you were not there” (44). The story could have been concluded at this point and still would have resisted closure. Instead, Ford pushes the envelope a bit more by tacking on two more sections relating the events of the next day, when Jackie talks with his mother. This raises more questions while answering none of the previous ones. For instance, is Jackie’s father lying when he says that Jackie’s mother has been married previously? Is his mother lying when she tells Jackie that she hasn’t?

The last section involves even more movement in time, with the Jackie of the present commenting on what has happened in the years since the incident:

In five years my father had gone off to Ely, Nevada to ride out the oil strike there, and been killed by accident. And in the years since then I have seen my mother from time to time, in one place or another, with one man or another, and I can say, at least, that we know each other. But I have never known the answers to these questions, have never asked anyone their answers. (49)

Ford’s attitudes seem to be plainly evident in the statement that opens one of the stacked sections: “Things seldom end in one event” (44). This sentiment is echoed later in the narrative when Jackie remarks, “I know now that the whole truth of anything is an idea that stops existing finally” (47). Ford offers partial truths, like his conjecture at the end of the story, but for the most part the clear, direct truth of epiphany is something that escapes his characters, and in this way, his stories are as much about not knowing as about knowing.

The techniques behind “Great Falls,” “Optimists” and “Communist” are somewhat similar to Munro’s “Goodness and Mercy,” although Munro, in keeping with her nature, complicates matters even more. “Goodness and Mercy” is a story within a story.

The place where traditional epiphany most obviously would be placed would be at the end of the captain’s story, when Averill appropriates it as her own. She, as well as the reader, realizes something hinted at throughout the story, that she harbours a secret wish for Bugs’ death: “Believing that such a thing could happen made her feel weightless and distinct and glowing, like a fish up in the water” (178). All the traditional techniques are evident, the self-awareness, the masking of the realization in metaphoric language.

But Munro does not stop there. Four brief paragraphs, about a half-page, describe how Bugs actually does die, two weeks later. The reader naturally compares this actual death to the death in the captain's story, both for similarities and differences. In the manner of "Communist," another jump is then made, larger, spending another half-page on Averill's subsequent marriages. This information is inconclusive as well, ending with her pregnant, hoping for a girl. She "never saw again, or heard from, any of the people who were on the boat" (179).

The third and last section is very short, two brief paragraphs, and focuses on the captain and Averill, possibly in a kind of imagined state. They "bid each other good night. They touch hands ceremoniously. The skin of their hands is flickering in the touch" (179). These sections, especially the last, work against what has come before, opening the possibilities the traditionally-styled epiphany had closed. Does Averill pine for the captain, feel guilt over Bugs' death, or a sense of release? Is she trapped in a bad marriage, or has she escaped a bad one into a good one?

The answer is: maybe all of these. The stacking of short, vague events at the endings of some of Ford and Munro's stories forces the reader to reflect in a way that traditional epiphany does not (or close the book, which some people admittedly do).

The use of detail seems important. Munro often relies on dense use of detail, utilizing complex flashbacks and multiple scenes. Ford is more sparse, oftentimes staying close to a single well-wrought event, except in a story like "Empire." Both, however, use a somewhat minimalist style when manipulating time during closure.

This minimal release of information puts the reader in what may feel like an uncomfortable situation. For instance, she is not given enough information to judge conclusively if Averill's second marriage is good, bad, or a bit of both. Why has Les of "Communist" not seen his mother in a long time? No answer is given, although one may be inferred.

The reader must match the revelations of closure with the body of the story and develop parallels (which point at, if not definitive answers, at least a kind of understanding); these include the parallel between Averill's later marriage and the marriage of Leslie and the professor, as well as Les' comments about love not being a reliable commodity (233), which can be compared to the absence of his mother in his present life. This is how the reader becomes involved on a different, more analytical, level.

Although this is Ford's most used technique in closure (see the stories "Communist," "Optimists" and "Great Falls"), he also uses others in an attempt to produce similar general effects. Ford's "Empire," for example, ends with a kind of reverse epiphany: "[Sims] felt dizzy, and at that moment insufficient, but without a memory of life's having changed in that particular way" (148). That last clause, "without a memory of life's having changed in that particular way," takes back a lot of progress Sims makes in the previous action. Instead of constructing a clear epiphany, Ford sets the reader up for one, undercutting it when it is finally delivered. The imagery of reverse epiphany continues: "Sims felt alone in a wide empire, removed and afloat, calmed, as if life was far away now, as if blackness was all around, as if stars held the only light" (148).

However, reverse epiphany can close a story as strongly as the epiphany itself; "Empire" is a good story, but in trying to escape from epiphany, Ford may have reversed direction and run back into it. This reverse epiphany, with its emphasis on pure lack of knowledge, is as uni-directional as traditional epiphany. Stacking epiphanies does not produce a dearth of knowledge, but a substantial amount of it, a confusion of options. Reverse epiphany is just absence, which doesn't give the reader much elbow room. The body of the story, with its system of flashbacks, allows for juxtaposition and analytical thought, but in my judgment, the ending lets the reader down by closing a bit too hard, pushing the reader back into the role of passive observer. It's a little tyrannical, I think, especially given the freedom granted the reader in the rest of the story.

Although the reverse epiphany can be very effective, it is important to know that it is more sturdily connected to the traditional epiphany than one might think. It also proves that vagueness of detail is not automatically capable of creating an analytical frame of mind in the reader. Minimalistic portioning can sometimes shut down this process, if details do not work to trigger correlations. This might be what happens in "Empire."

The stories in Munro's *Friend of My Youth* never rely on reverse epiphany although some close without use of much apparatus. The ending of "Wigtime," for instance, is less adorned than those of "Friend of My Youth" or "Goodness and Mercy," mainly because Munro seems to avoid closure almost completely. Margot and Anita discuss what has happened when they were children and in the thirty years since they have last seen each other. The conversation, although marked by many small realizations, does not

end in revelation. It ends, "Margot and Anita have got this far. They are not ready yet to stop talking. They are fairly happy" (273). The searching process continues.

Munro prepares the reader throughout "Wigtime" for an open-ended closure. Different stories regarding the same miscarriage are presented, two views of one event. Theresa's version: "A customer came in and found her. Thank God, said Theresa, for Reuel's sake even more than her own. Reuel would not have forgiven himself" (248). Georgia and Margot's version: "They had heard that it happened because Reuel told her he was sick of her and wanted her to go back to Europe, and in her despair she had thrown herself against a table and dislodged the baby" (250).

Qualifiers at the sentence level promote ambiguity, as in this description of Margot and her father: "And no matter what he did, Margot laughed. She laughed, she despised him, she forestalled him. Never, never did she shed a tear or cry out in terror. Not like her mother. So she said." All of this giving, then taking back, prepares the reader for lack of strong closure.

In "Empire," as in "Wigtime," the presentation of closure is simple, as well as fairly resistant to offering insight, placing much more reliance on the body of text, which contains all of the usable comparative images. However, Munro implies that some progress has been made, and there is more to be made (on the part of both character and reader).

The simple techniques behind closure in "Wigtime" or the Ford-like stacking of "Goodness and Mercy" are atypical of Munro. Whereas Ford commonly uses stacking to achieve his aims, Munro uses framing, somewhat similar to stacking in that it involves radical time shifts, except that a sort of home base is established early in the narrative, a look-out post in the present where the protagonist can stand and look back at the past. Oftentimes this is a simple situation, such as two people talking.

Because of this framing technique, narrative is free to move between present and past, generating a kind of friction of not-quite-right juxtapositions. Ford's narrators speak from a kind of limbo. Munro plants hers solidly in situation, and closure does not involve moving forward, but returning.

Although Munro's "grounding of the machine" helps to solve logistical problems, such as creating an overall cause-and-effect relationship (an early action in the present triggering a series of flashbacks), its real strength is in the way it adds layers of meaning to the present. When the narrative "returns," the circle complete, present now resonating with the complications of the past,

the act itself generates a certain kind of closure, albeit of the open-ended variety. This closure can be left more or less alone, as in "Wigtime," or modulated with a number of complications, as in "Friend of My Youth."

In "Friend," the mother in the dream-image is different at the beginning, more straightforward, than at the end, when the image has grown to contain the rest of the story, all the actions of the past; the old image has not shifted from one thing to the next, but expanded, becoming more complicated. The narrator comments on the dream: "How relieved I was, and happy. But now I recall that I was disconcerted as well. I would have to say that I felt slightly cheated. Yes. Offended, tricked, cheated, by this welcome turnaround, this reprieve" (26). New and different interpretations of the same event or image are presented, and unable to completely erase the first memory, they exist side-by-side, even if partially contradictory.

This resonance of image is a natural effect of repetition. Flash any variety of images and the instinct will be to look for connections. Munro seems hyper-aware of this fact, which might be why she uses the frame. A relatively uncomplicated image, such as the initial dream in "Friend of My Youth," is carried through the story, in the back of the reader's mind, until it collides with the same image coming the other way, now complicated, sometimes contradictory. Closure in Munro is where these images clash, forcing the reader into a state of reflection in order to analyze and possibly reconcile differences of interpretation.

This pattern is readily apparent in "Differently," in which Georgia, remembering her dead friend Maya and the other people she used to know, plunges into a series of deep flashbacks. This recollection is triggered by a ferry visit to Maya's ex-husband Raymond. Establishing a kind of base camp in the present, Munro can move deeper and deeper into the past. Yet, because of this base camp, the story will be able to return to the current Georgia quickly without jarring the reader, who has already been familiarized with the situation in the present tense. This situation may be hinted at, such as the dream in "Friend of My Youth," or more concrete, such as the conversations in "Differently," "Five Points" and even "Wigtime."

Munro can use this added mobility throughout the story, but it can be especially useful in closure. In "Differently" all the major events occur in flashback, but when these are completed, and Georgia and Maya's friendship has ended, the narrative moves back to the present for three brief scenes.

The first focuses on Raymond's dialogue. "I did all I could do," he says (241), and Georgia's judgment of this statement is noticeably absent. In fact, she is absent from the entire section. The reader makes the judgments on Raymond's dialogue, comparing his statements to the previous flashbacks. "I didn't scoot off and leave her, like her Prince of Fantasy Land," Raymond concludes (241). It is left up to the reader to decide how much she believes this and other statements.

The second section, a shallow return to past, contains exactly the kinds of assessments absent in the previous section. "She had been happy there, from time to time. She had been sullen, restless, bewildered, and happy. But she said most vehemently, Never, never. I was never happy, she said" (242). These judgments, however, are not aimed at Raymond, but at herself; self-judgment, which can be seen as a by-product or cause of self-realization (or both), is an integral part of epiphany; it could be said that this is the most epiphanic of the sections. "People always say that," Georgia thinks, "People make momentous shifts, but not the changes they imagine" (242). The section ends with a reversal of Georgia's previous statements, but also with a kind of vague conclusion on her part.

But even this is undercut by the next juxtaposition, in the third section. It begins, "Just the same, Georgia knows that her remorse about the way she changed her life is dishonest. It is real and dishonest" (242). This is initially a rather hard contradiction of the previous statement, but Munro uses the second sentence as yet another juxtaposition; the word "real" softens the original contradiction, forming a long line of statements which work against the previous one, like gears rotating against each other to make a larger machine move forward.

A brief goodbye with Raymond follows, an awkward kiss "whose intention neither one of them, surely, will try to figure out" (243). Georgia leaves, the friction of past against present having offered up some nice insights, although some amount of confusion is still present, and none of the insights are as clear, as revelatory, as traditional epiphany; the undercutting of the insights by each subsequent insight, the juxtaposition of partially contradictory information, works against that.

"Five Points" uses this framing technique as well, although it is not as complex a story as "Differently." "Five Points" is a departure in that its focus is on the present (often, as in "Friend of My Youth," "Wigtime," or "Differently," the focus is on the past). It is typical in that the story of Maria

acts as a juxtaposition to Neil and Brenda's situation, not an exact parallel but nonetheless a likeness, except that the use of juxtapositions is simplified, more straightforward than "Differently," more in keeping with "Goodness and Mercy." The most interesting thing about "Five Points," though, is that it doesn't just do less work in muddying things up, it does more work in clarification. When Neil says, "I got forty dollars, which, compared to what some guys got, was just nothing. I swear that's all, forty dollars. I never got any more" (48), this brings the past clearly into the present. This piece of dialogue does a lot of work to align the juxtapositions that in other stories the reader would have had to align herself. This is not to say that the story is not a success (I think it works very well), but that it gives off an impression of conventional parallelism much more than any other story in *Friend of My Youth* ("Goodness and Mercy" runs a close second, but Munro works a little harder in that story to mess up the easy correlations).

Related to this parallelism is its offer of a more clear idea of knowing, much more than "Differently." At the end of the story, the narrator comments: "He has lost some of his sheen for her; he may not get it back. Probably the same goes for her, with him. She feels his heaviness and anger and surprise. She feels that also in herself" (49).

The parallelism finds its way even into the insights during closure. Their feelings run neatly parallel, heaviness, anger, and surprise, and although this may be her superimposing these feelings on him, little is done to make this seem as if it could be a possibility; Munro offers few contradictory juxtapositions, and the reader is left with the feeling that these insights should be taken at face value. The story ends with one of the most definitive closures in *Friend of My Youth*: "She thinks that up till now was easy" (49), an ending similar to that of Ford's "Going to the Dogs," in which the narrator remarks, "I realized it was only the beginning of my bad luck" (108). Closure in both stories tends to push in a single direction, much different than closure in "Communist" or "Friend of My Youth." Some might say this makes the stories less weighty; others might say they are focused and effective.

This debt to tradition becomes even more apparent in the recent work of both authors. Ford's "The Womanizer," a novella printed in a 1992 issue of *Granta*, and one of Munro's recent pieces, "The Jack Randa Hotel," a story printed in the July 19, 1993 issue of *The New Yorker*, are not as densely layered as "Communist" or "Friend of My Youth," or possibly even "Empire" and "Five Points."

“The Womanizer” and “The Jack Randa Hotel” are notable because the compression of time is largely absent. The authors are content to move from event to event more systematically. Each piece is more ordered from opening to closure, and there is less space for the reader to fill with her thoughts and judgments. Both pieces work well on their own terms.

Stories such as “Five Points” and “The Jack Randa Hotel” show that Munro is not sweeping the tradition of epiphany away with the back of her hand. Instead, using her framing technique, she builds around epiphany, just as Ford uses multiple endings to build on top of it.

An epiphany is a flash of self-knowledge which acts as narrowing of distance between character and reader, and closure is the name we give to the closing of this space, the point at which character knows what reader knows, and both stand on relatively equal footing (this is not true in absolutely every case, but it is often how it works). In the best stories of Ford and Munro, most effectively in much of *Rock Springs* and most of *Friend of My Youth*, the act of closure is not a reduction of irony. Reader searches in a similar manner to character, not watching from above, but involved as a participant, and because there is less distance between character and reader, there is less distance to narrow in closure.

Again, this can be a question of degree. In “Five Points” there is somewhat more distance than “Differently,” and closure does narrow in that case. Overall though, closure is not the moment at which possibilities are whittled to a sharp point: epiphany. In the way that clear epiphany moves the burden of knowledge from narrator to character, Ford and Munro move this same burden now to reader.

Some readers may feel uncomfortable with this burden, finding the techniques utilized too cumbersome, the use of detail too confusing. Ford works against this criticism by staying close to one dramatic scene; it is clear that the scene is important in the larger scheme of the character’s life, but not exactly how it is important. Ford also carefully modulates tone, the way a verbal story-teller might, so that non-closure washes over the reader.

Munro’s framing technique helps her convey the complexities of closure without unnecessary jarring, in that the cause-effect relationship it establishes early on has a simple logic that acts as the foundation for the story. Still, it seems reasonable that some readers may feel dissatisfied with closure in stories like “Communist” or “Wigtime.”

In “Differently,” Alice Munro writes:

Georgia once took a creative writing course, and what the instructor told her was: Too many things. Too many things going on at the same time; also too many people. Think, he told her. What is the important thing? What do you want us to pay attention to? Think. (216)

I think it is not a question of what to pay attention to, but that Munro and Ford want us to pay attention in a different way. Epiphany condenses complexity into a single moment; Ford and Munro spread this moment out, sometimes over years and years, dispersing the knowledge, diluting it with doubt. Although this technique still results in a simplification of the real world (there is no literature that isn’t), it does move closer to yet another kind of realism, a realism in which all knowledge is tentative. In an age when over-abundance of information turns knowledge into a kind of pollution, when people in general find the world harder and harder to understand, Munro and Ford are writers crafting fiction which reflects the time we live in.

In the end, the underlying theme to Munro and Ford’s most distinctive work may be this: that what each of us sees as the “real” world is also a kind of fiction, as manufactured as the books we read. This may initially seem pessimistic; ultimately it is positive, because it is a perspective which liberates the observer and acknowledges an audience’s ability to make meaning.

When Munro’s and Ford’s fiction is described as movement toward realism, this implies that realism is the finish line of the race, and writers take steps toward it, passing a baton from one generation to the next. This is not the case; realism is a label connected to an aesthetic. Depending on the given audience’s aesthetic, any fiction can conceivably be labelled as realistic. Like all aesthetics, Munro and Ford’s doesn’t necessarily progress, but rather shifts.

None of the previous analysis should imply that realism is necessarily a positive goal for the fiction writer, or even that Munro and Ford have it as a concern. It is a truism perpetuated by everything from fiction workshops to one’s grandmother that fiction makes sense out of a confusing world through careful selection of detail: the idea of art putting a frame around a small section of the universe. The meta-fictionalists, to whom Ford and Munro owe no small debt, reversed this idea: not art as mirror, but art as itself, completely self-contained.

Ford and Munro find themselves somewhere in between these two perspectives, conscious of their work as a fictional artifact but also aware that it must still have the internal consistency the meta-fictionalists denied. Ford and Munro play the game of the realist, but use many of the meta-fictionalist's tricks. The important thing, then, is to ask ourselves as an audience what we think is realistic, and then to see how this particular aesthetic works on the page.

WORKSCITED

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