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“Like Following a Mirage”: Memory and Empowerment in Alice Munro’s “The Bear Came Over the Mountain”

Robert Lecker

- 1 Alice Munro’s “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” is a study of grief, loss, betrayal, and above all, female agency. The story, originally published in a double issue of *The New Yorker* (December 27, 1999 and January 3, 2000), has sparked interest from fellow writers—most notably Jonathan Franzen—who describes it as one of Munro’s most accomplished works. It has also been turned into a film entitled *Away from Her*, directed by Sarah Polley and released in 2006. In its book form, “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” is the final story in *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001). This placement suggests that Munro saw it as the closing statement in a collection that focuses intently on the lives of women and the strategies they engage in to navigate complex emotional landscapes that resist easy description. The importance of the story is also suggested by the fact that when Munro won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013, *The New Yorker* chose to reprint it in its entirety in a single issue, a dedication of space that is highly unusual for a magazine of its stature. The editors could have chosen one of the many stories Munro had published in *The New Yorker* since 1977, but their selection of “Bear” lends further credence to the idea that it is a pivotal work, one that breaks new ground in its depiction of male-female relations, and in capturing Munro’s understanding of what it means to get old, or what it means to get even.
- 2 On one level, the story presents the tragic account of Fiona—a seventy-year-old woman apparently caught in the early stages of Alzheimer’s. For me, that word “apparently” is key to the story’s double-edged power. Through subtle suggestion, Munro demonstrates that Fiona’s act of withdrawing from the world is a deliberate act that she engineers in order to avenge Grant, her philandering husband. I propose that Fiona fakes her disease in order to empower herself and to facilitate an escape from her husband’s hypocritical love. In this way, the story becomes one of the most powerful expressions of Alice Munro’s desire to depict women in their day-to-day circumstances,

and to explore the means by which those circumstances can be creatively transformed through the deliberate invention of an altered identity. This kind of transformation appears in many of the stories Munro has published throughout her later career. One thinks of stories such as "White Dump," "The Albanian Virgin," and "A Wilderness Station." In "Bear," however, Munro's exploration of the ways in which identity and memory can be intentionally altered in order to transform agency reaches into new territory, for in this story she begins to link identity with performativity, and to show that agency can be achieved through deliberately constructed enactments of remembering and forgetting.

- 3 Although this powerful story has gained popular recognition, there are few studies of the way it depicts the relation between memory and agency. Héliane Ventura reads the story as an exploration of "the ambiguities of the uses and misuses of language on two levels, that of a Nonsense charade and that of the parodic re-writing of mythology to demonstrate that, through the enduring power of poetic language, senile dementia is momentarily deferred and, if not defeated, at least challenged." Although Ventura's words suggest that the depiction of dementia may be "deferred," "defeated," and "challenged," she comes to the conclusion that "the elderly heroine is undeniably in the grip of Alzheimer's," even though she notes that the story favors "a playful, distanced, and ironic approach to the ravages of aging" that foregrounds a "blurring of difference between sanity and dementia." The vacillation I detect here in Ventura's description—between the assertion that Fiona's disease is real and the recognition that its reality is open to challenge—is not developed in Ventura's article. In what follows I propose that Fiona's dementia is deliberately constructed, and that it is Fiona herself who engineers her dementia in order to regain the agency she has lost through her marriage to Grant.
- 4 I was first attracted to "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" by Franzen's review in *The New York Times*. He points out that:

More than any writer since Chekhov, Munro strives for and achieves, in each of her stories, a gestaltlike completeness in the representation of a life. She always had a genius for developing and unpacking moments of epiphany. But it's in the three collections since "Selected Stories" (1996) that she's taken the really big, world-class leap and become a master of suspense. The moments she's pursuing now aren't moments of realization; they're moments of fateful, irrevocable, dramatic action. And what this means for the reader is you can't even begin to guess at a story's meaning until you've followed every twist; it's always the last page or two that switches all lights on.
- 5 Franzen notes that "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" is a prime example of the way in which a Munro story can be reconfigured at the very moment of its ending. So what kind of lights go on when we get to the end of this tale?
- 6 The story seems simple enough: Fiona and Grant have enjoyed a relatively stable marriage for close to fifty years, despite the fact that as a university professor Grant has proven himself to be a philanderer, constantly chasing after his female students. The sub-story concerning Grant's various affairs and how they compromised his career are crucial to the narrative. Grant specialized in Norse mythology, and his students tended to be hippie-style women who were open to a fling or older women returning to university. In Munro's text, Grant's recollections of how his affairs affected his career adversely are central to the narrative line. The story's narrator clearly feels a lot of contempt towards Grant, the way he treats women, and his ongoing deception of Fiona.

In contrast, the narrator often seems amused by Fiona's antics, and repeatedly draws our attention to her interest in games, mischief-making, and role-playing. The most frequently repeated word in "Bear" (21 times) is "seemed," a repetition that emphasizes the ways in which this story is focalized on deception.

- 7 During his various affairs Grant experiences "a gigantic increase in well-being" (306). When one of his liaisons threatens to compromise his department, Grant saves himself the embarrassment of a public reprimand (and perhaps a firing) by retiring early. He reasons that "the feminists and perhaps the sad silly girl herself and his cowardly so-called friends had pushed him out just in time" (291). He doesn't feel any shame about pursuing his students. Rather, "the shame he felt" after being challenged by one of them "was the shame of being duped, of not having noticed the change that was going on" in women's values (289). The narrator reminds us that Grant remains largely unselfconscious and unable to grasp the implications of his own philandering. Instead of feeling any sense of guilt, we learn that "nowhere was there any acknowledgment that the life of a philanderer (if that was what Grant had to call himself—he who had not had half as many conquests or complications as the man who had reproached him in his dream) involved acts of kindness and generosity and even sacrifice" (290). The narrator repeatedly draws our attention to Grant's self-serving nature. Even after his deception is revealed, Grant never thinks of leaving Fiona. He rationalizes his deception as a form of generosity: "He had never stopped making love to Fiona in spite of disturbing demands elsewhere" (290). Now, years later, Grant and Fiona would be living a relatively quiet life except for one problem: Fiona is starting to forget things, and the couple has gradually come to the conclusion that she would be better in a special care facility—Meadowlake. In fact, it is Fiona who tells Grant that "You're going to have to put me in that place" (283). But even when she names "that place" associated with her illness, she can't quite resist having fun with its name: "'Shallowlake, Shillylake,' she said, as if they were engaged in a playful competition. 'Sillylake. Sillylake it is'" (283).
- 8 Over the course of the story we see Fiona make the transition from the domestic life she has known with Grant to a new life where she is surrounded by people with various mental and physical afflictions. It's there that she meets Aubrey, a man she says she knew "years and years ago" (294). From the beginning, their relationship was also based on playing, or as she explains to Grant: "He and I were always kidding around" (294). Aubrey's own problems are apparently caused by a virus that left him partially incapacitated. But there is that word again—"apparently"—for no one really knows what Aubrey is suffering from. Later in the story, his wife draws our attention to the questionable status of his illness, arguing that "I don't mean exactly that he got sick on purpose" (320), which of course makes us wonder whether that is exactly what he did. What becomes clear to Grant, the more he visits Fiona, is that she has fallen in love with Aubrey and that their time together is dependent upon their so-called illness, for only by remaining ill can they justify their presence at Meadowlake. We see the story develop primarily through Grant's eyes, but also from the perspective of the narrator, who stands back and judges him. In one sense, it is a tragic story about love, loss, and aging. At another level, it is an intricate story about the effects of adultery. But at yet another level, it is about how Fiona takes revenge on the husband who has repeatedly deceived her.

- 9 As the story unfolds, Grant seems to understand that Fiona is truly in love with Aubrey, and that her happiness and wellbeing are in many ways dependent on him. When Fiona finds out that Aubrey has left Meadowlake, she begins to go downhill fast. Grant realizes that the only thing that will save Fiona is to bring Aubrey back, so he pays a visit to Aubrey's wife, Marian. Their meeting is charged. While their surface discussion appears to be about Fiona and Aubrey, we understand that Grant is repeating an old pattern: he is attracted to Marian and she is attracted to him. Munro suggests that this is another marital betrayal in the making. As the narrator puts it: "It gave him a satisfaction—why deny it?—to have brought that out in her. To have roused something like a shimmer, a blurring, on the surface of her personality" (324). Grant's ego is stoked by the idea that Marian might see him as an eligible single man—"just the realization that he was a possibility, a man on his own" (324)—so long as he can keep Fiona in Meadowlake. Grant's selfishness and self-deception know no bounds. He thinks: "It would be a challenge. A challenge and a creditable feat. Also a joke that could never be confided to anybody—to think that by his bad behaviour he'd be doing good for Fiona" (324). And then he starts thinking that "he'd have to figure out what would become of him and Marian, after he'd delivered Aubrey to Fiona" (324).
- 10 It is this kind of scheming that makes the ending of the story so richly ambiguous. Grant is back at Meadowlake, visiting Fiona. She seems happy. She seems to realize that he could have abandoned her: "You could have just driven away," she says. "Forsooen me. Forsaken." Grant's final words provide the mysterious turning point. He embraces Fiona, and whispers, "Not a chance" (327).
- 11 What exactly happens at the end of this story? Does Grant realize that he came close to abandoning Fiona, and that he owes her his support and understanding? Does he finally discover some kind of morality? Is he finally going to do the right thing and stand by Fiona? When he says "Not a chance," does he mean that there is no chance that he will forsake her? That would be the positive view of his actions. Grant finally gets insight, supports Fiona, and becomes a better man. But this would make for a banal ending. After all, the narrator has made it clear to us that Grant cannot be trusted, and that throughout his marriage to Fiona he has been prepared to betray her at every turn.
- 12 I'd like to propose a different reading. Perhaps Grant has convinced Marian to bring Aubrey back to Meadowlake to assuage his conscience. He and Marian can then go on to pursue the sexual relations they no longer have with their legitimate partners. Here's how the narrator puts it: "Anything was possible. Was that true—was anything possible? For instance, if he wanted to, would he be able to break her down, get her to the point where she might listen to him about taking Aubrey back to Fiona? And not just for visits, but for the rest of Aubrey's life" (324). Here we find the narrator listening in on Grant's thoughts, and what we hear demonstrates just how completely Grant has failed to transcend his interest in other women.
- 13 Some critics have argued that Grant altruistically rises above himself at the end of the story in order to facilitate Fiona's love for Aubrey. For example, Ventura says that "because he loves his wife with the utmost selflessness, he sacrifices his honour and his pride in order to arrange for Aubrey to return to the nursing home and live close to Fiona. He ambiguously rescues his wife by making possible her lover's return to her." Robert McGill also sees Grant's final actions in a positive light: "Grant seeks out Marian and implores her to allow Aubrey to visit Fiona, thus proving his own fidelity to Fiona by facilitating her 'infidelity' to him." But does Grant actually do this out of generosity?

I don't think so. Grant defines generosity in this way: "Many times he had catered to a woman's pride, to her fragility, by offering more affection—or a rougher passion—than anything he really felt" (290). His final act of "generosity" in "Bear" is truly horrific. He abandons Fiona to another man so that he can take up with that man's wife. Dreaming of Marian, he imagines how he might "break her down" at will ("if he wanted to") by exploiting her loneliness and frustrated sexuality so that he can experience "the practical sensuality of her cat's tongue" and "her cleavage, which would be deep, crepey-skinned, odorous and hot" (326). In truth, what most interests Grant in his pursuit of Marian is "finding the stone of blameless self-interest inside her robust pulp" (324). This is consistent with his life as a philanderer. We could just leave the story on that very disturbing note, and condemn Grant for his callousness and scheming. However, it isn't that easy.

14 The final irony of this story might be that Grant isn't the one who has set up Fiona, but quite the reverse. Fiona might be sick and tired of Grant and want desperately to escape him. She might have been secretly in love with Aubrey all along, and has finally found a way to cement their relationship. In other words, Fiona might fake her illness just so she can get into Meadowlake to be with Aubrey and leave Grant behind. Once there, she might engineer things so that Grant will finally take off, leaving her with her real lover while forcing Grant to pay for her room and board. Such revenge would be sweet. Throughout the story, Munro slowly but deliberately introduces clues that allow us to see Fiona as the true mastermind here. How much more of a mastermind could you be than to fake Alzheimer's convincingly and to use that deception as a means of getting to the lover you really want? What follows is a brief discussion of some of those suggestive clues as they are presented to us from the beginning of the story.

15 The story's title itself is mysterious. It is taken from the well-known North American folk song, "The Bear Went Over the Mountain":

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

16 As Ventura points out, the song "reads like a morphological pun, a self-parodic play on words, which relies on the opening up of expectations only to frustrate curiosity with the platitude of a tautological closure." The bear goes over the mountain but nothing changes. Movement results in stasis. The status quo is preserved. In this sense, the title suggests that nothing changes in the story—the ending reflects its beginning. If that is true and the central motif of "Bear" is circularity, then what we see at the end of the story is what we saw in the beginning: Fiona demonstrating her individuality and precociousness.

17 In the opening section of "Bear" we are introduced to Fiona, her parents, and their house. The emphasis is on Fiona's youth, and on how much of her youth was involved with play and mischief. She liked to put "The Four Insurgent Generals" on the phonograph when visitors arrived: "if there was a guest she thought she could make

nervous" (279). She also liked to tease her various suitors: "She made fun of them all and of Grant as well" (279) and even when she proposes to him (a sign of her ability to control her relationships) Grant "thought maybe she was joking." And perhaps, at a certain level, she was joking, because she asks Grant, twice, "Do you think it would be fun if we got married?" (280). Throughout the story, Fiona is shown to be a woman drawn to play, whether it be in her parents' house, or with Grant, or at the card table in Meadowlake. Once, she forgot that she had stored her fur coat for the winter, and when Grant reminded her about it she insisted that her forgetfulness was "unintentionally on purpose" because forgetting the coat "was like a sin she was leaving behind" (282), much like the way she leaves Grant and his sins behind once she enters Meadowlake. Even when Grant tries to explain the symptoms of Fiona's memory loss to her doctor, he has to admit that "She's always been a bit like this" (282), as if her game-playing and memory lapses had always been a part of her personality. The reader is led to wonder how serious her current disease can be if she had always been "a bit like this."

- 18 If the opening section of the story links Fiona's playfulness with agency, the rest of the story presents us with so many direct references to this playfulness—and the art of deception—that they cannot be ignored. After all, Fiona's marriage to Grant—the central relationship in the story—is itself framed in terms of deception, both Grant's and Fiona's. When that deception is initiated by Fiona, it is usually tied to her sense of empowerment. Almost fifty years after Fiona proposes to Grant, when they are setting out for Meadowlake, she refers again to the theatricality of her life to come: "I guess I'll be dressed up all the time," she says. "Or semi dressed up. It'll be sort of like in a hotel" (280). To set the stage for her departure, Fiona rehearses the effects of memory loss. She walks into town and calls Grant from a phone booth "to ask him how to drive home" (281). But then she returns by following a country fence line because "she'd counted on fences always taking you somewhere" (281). The narrator tells us that "It was hard to figure out. She said that about fences as if it was a joke" and notes that Fiona "had remembered the phone number without any trouble" (281), prompting us not to take the incidents connected with her memory loss at face value. The narrator also reminds us that Fiona's most normal appearance and dress is in fact a disguise, a costume she chooses to alter from day to day, sometimes even going so far as to dress up as herself: "She looked just like herself on this day—direct and vague as in fact she was, sweet and ironic" (281).
- 19 When Grant worries about Fiona's memory lapses, the narrator begins to wonder about her motives: "Fiona's surprise and apologies about all this seemed somehow like routine courtesy, not quite concealing a private amusement. As if she'd stumbled on some adventure that she had not been expecting. Or was she playing a game that she hoped he would catch on to" (282). After all, we learn, "they had always had their games—nonsense dialects, characters they invented." We also discover that "some of Fiona's made-up voices . . . had mimicked uncannily the voices of women of his that she had never met or known about" (282), an eerie indication of her ability to play multiple roles and even to assume the voices of Grant's various lovers. And their favourite TV show, it turns out, is a British comedy about life in a department store in which "actors who died in real life or went off to other jobs" were "born again" when they returned after many episodes, a clear foreshadowing of Fiona's own acting, and her own impending rebirth (287).

- 20 When they are on the road to Meadowlake—it's a cold January morning—Grant and Fiona drive through a swampy hollow surrounded by fields where they had once gone skiing. Fiona remembers it perfectly, and Grant finds himself thinking, "So if she could remember that so vividly and correctly, could there really be that much the matter with her" (284). He observes that all the little yellow notes stuck all over the house might not be signs of increasing forgetfulness because Fiona's note-making was "not entirely new. She'd always written things down—the title of a book she'd heard mentioned on the radio or the jobs she wanted to make sure she did that day." He senses that "the new notes were different" (281), but he still can't quite decide whether that difference is a true sign of advancing disease. Grant realizes that "Trying to figure out Fiona had always been frustrating. It could be like following a mirage. No—like living in a mirage" (322).
- 21 Once they arrive at Meadowlake, Fiona settles in, and soon Grant is wondering whether she is actually ill. He reflects: "She could have been playing a joke. It would not be unlike her" (295). Besides, "some of the others treated the whole thing as a joke" (297) and even the nurse, Kristy, tells Grant that "I wonder whether she isn't putting on some kind of charade" (298). Later, Kristy describes Fiona as "a real lady" in a way that makes Grant picture Fiona "in one of her long eyelet-trimmed blue-ribboned nightgowns, teasingly lifting the covers of an old man's bed" (298). Try as he might, Grant will not find out whether Fiona is faking it, especially if he attempts to obtain that information from the medical staff at Meadowlake. Kristy is the only staff member who puts up with him. In fact, one of the other nurses (a "tough old stick") "laughed in his face. 'That Aubrey and Fiona? They've really got it bad, haven't they?'" (297). The joke is on Grant.
- 22 Kristy seems fixated on Fiona's potential charade (even though she claims not to understand the word "charade"). She is drawn to the element of collusive play that seems to define Fiona's relationship with Aubrey. Fiona's empowering deceptions even make Grant doubt whether she still recognizes him. She talks to him "as if she thought perhaps he was a new resident. If that was what she was pretending" (295). Through her apparent memory lapses, Fiona has taken control:
- [Grant] could not demand of her whether she did nor did not remember him as her husband of nearly fifty years. He got the impression that she would be embarrassed by such a question—embarrassed not for herself but for him. She would have laughed in a fluttery way and mortified him with her politeness and bewilderment, and somehow she would have ended up saying either yes or no. Or she would have said either one in a way that gave not the least satisfaction. (296-97)
- 23 So who is acting, and what is real? Grant asks Kristy, "Does she even know who I am?" (295). Kristy tries to reassure him by noting that Fiona gets distracted when she is playing cards with Aubrey, but her words provide little relief:
- Kristy said, "You just caught her at a bad moment. Involved in the game."
 "She's not even playing," he said.
 "Well, but her friend's playing. Aubrey." (296)
- 24 At one point, Grant gets lost in the maze of corridors at Meadowlake and ends up in the lecture theatre, where he lapses into a dream of his former life as a professor, speaking to a hall full of students. In this dream, he imagines Fiona sitting in the front row, "holding out there against the tide, with some people who were like herself, as if the dramas that were being played out in other corners, in bedrooms and on the dark verandah, were nothing but childish comedy" (289). Grant's dream, prompted by his wrong turn into the theatre, draws our attention to the theatricality that surrounds

him and makes us aware, yet again, that reality and artifice at Meadowlake are always intertwined. This is why Grant has to "haul himself out of the dream" so that he can "set about separating what was real from what was not" (289).

25 When Grant calls to check on Fiona every day, Kristy "seemed a little amused at his constancy" (286). Why would she seem amused? Why is it that she only "seemed" amused? Fiona catches a cold and is put on antibiotics. When she was off the antibiotics "she didn't seem as confused as she had been when she came in" (286), as if the medication had somehow cured her memory problems, or as if those problems had never existed in the first place. As Kristy muses, "She was definitely coming out of her shell" (287). The narrator can't really say anything factual about Fiona's state of mind: "she seemed to enjoy sitting in the sunroom. She seemed to enjoy watching television" (286).

26 Life at Meadowlake is deceptive. The narrator reminds us that many aspects of what goes on there are confusing or duplicitous, as if the residents might just be acting or "living a busy life in their heads" that is not available to outsiders. The residents seem to switch clothing, almost as if they were changing costumes, or, as Grant speculates, "the fact must be that they didn't bother to sort out the wardrobes of the women who were roughly the same size" (303). Meadowlake is like a theatrical set that changes with each of Grant's visits. Its shifting scenery and props disorient Grant and make him question his own sanity:

The more he explored this place, the more corridors and seating spaces and ramps he discovered, and in his wanderings he was still apt to get lost. He would take a certain picture or chair as a landmark, and the next week whatever he had chosen seemed to have been placed somewhere else. He didn't like to mention this to Kristy, lest she think he was suffering some mental dislocations of his own. He supposed this constant change and the rearranging might be for the sake of the residents—to make their daily exercise more interesting. (302)

27 Grant's meetings with Fiona are similarly disorienting. Sometimes when he visits, Grant sees a woman at a distance "that he thought was Fiona, but then thought it couldn't be, because of the clothes the woman was wearing" (303). He's simply not used to seeing Fiona in one of her new costumes. She torments Grant by prompting him to wonder "if it was a pretense" (296). Grant still doesn't understand. He thinks Fiona is too nice to torment him in that way. He reasons: "would she not have run after him and laughed at him then, once the joke was over? She would not just have gone back to the game, surely, and pretended to forget about him. That would have been too cruel" (296). What most troubles Grant is Fiona's dedication to Aubrey, who is repeatedly cast as her new lover. Now, the tables have turned. We see Grant "stalking and prowling" the corridors at Meadowlake "like a mulish boy conducting a hopeless courtship" (300), and eventually it is his own sanity that he is forced to question: "every once in a while it came to him how foolish and pathetic and perhaps unhinged he must look, trailing around after Fiona and Aubrey" (300). Their real or imagined love affair torments him. Every sighting of Fiona and Aubrey drives him to deeper and deeper self-doubt. He watches them in the conservatory at Meadowlake:

The pair found themselves a seat among the most lush and thick and tropical-looking plants—a bower, if you like—which Grant had just enough self-control to keep from penetrating. Mixed in with the rustle of leaves and the sound of splashing water was Fiona's soft talk and her laughter.
Then some sort of chortle. Which of them could it be?
Perhaps neither—perhaps it came from one of the impudent flashy-looking birds

who inhabited the corner cages.

Aubrey could talk, though his voice probably didn't sound the way it used to. He seemed to say something now—a couple of thick syllables. *Take care. He's here. My love.* (299)

- 28 Does Grant imagine these conspiratorial phrases? Or is Aubrey truly in league with Fiona, protecting her from Grant's possessive gaze? The truth is that Fiona is no longer the person Grant thinks he knows. She has a new lover and a new look. She has reinvented her identity, restyled herself. Or as the narrator tells us when Fiona chooses a new hairstyle: "They had cut away her angelic halo" (303).
- 29 Right to the end of the story, Munro shows us that Grant is not only self-deluded but also emotionally impoverished. He persuades Marian to sell her house in order to pay for putting Aubrey back into the retirement home. But when Grant wheels Aubrey to Fiona's door and walks into her room, Fiona is alert, present, and reading a book. Meanwhile, Grant is so preoccupied with seducing Marian that he completely overlooks the way he has been played by Fiona. She understands the depths of his betrayal and knows that no matter how much she hints at her own deception, he will never understand exactly what she has done. She even tells him that "The people staying here are not necessarily honest" (326-27) and that "they've got the clothes mixed up," confirming that Meadowlake is a kind of costume room and its inhabitants the performers on a shifting stage. I think that's why Jonathan Franzen talks about how the last page of this story switches all the lights on. They are stage lights. Through her performances from the very beginning of "The Bear Came over the Mountain," Fiona demonstrates that her freedom and well-being depend upon her self-invention, a liberating act of deception that she has rehearsed for years. By the time we get to "The Bear Came Over the Mountain," the rehearsal is over, and the play is on.

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ABSTRACTS

La nouvelle "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" d'Alice Munro est une étude sur la douleur, la perte, la trahison et, en premier lieu, une réflexion sur le principe féminin. La nouvelle a attiré l'attention d'autres écrivains – en particulier celle de Jonathan Franzen qui la classe parmi les plus belles réussites de Munro ; ou Sarah Polly qui a réalisé *Away from Her*, l'adaptation d'un texte fort ambigu. Le présent article souhaite revenir sur cette ambiguïté. À première vue, la nouvelle décrit la tragédie d'une femme qui sombre peu à peu dans la maladie d'Alzheimer : Fiona doit apprendre à vivre avec ses défaillances mémorielles et accepter de quitter son foyer. Munro ne se satisfait jamais de présenter le point de vue limité d'un personnage. Elle laisse entrevoir, par le biais de subtiles suggestions, que le choix de Fiona de s'écarter du monde social relève d'un désir de se venger de mari volage. En d'autres termes, cet article suggère que Fiona joue la malade pour reprendre sa vie en main et ainsi échapper à l'amour hypocrite de son époux. De cette manière, la nouvelle devient l'une des illustrations récentes les plus fortes de l'ambition de Munro de décrire les femmes dans leur vie de tous les jours et d'explorer les moyens mis en œuvre pour en améliorer les conditions.

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Robert Lecker is Greenshields Professor of English at McGill University, where he specializes in Canadian literature. He is the author of numerous books and articles, and the editor of several monographs and anthologies.