

“authenticity, singularity and identity” bring Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zones” into digitized visual as well as linguistic culture. How closely, for example, should one’s avatar in *Second Life* resemble oneself? What image of oneself is constructed by the commercialized web through targeted advertising as it appears on-screen, in response to search queries or in connection with database-mined email and IM messages?

While opportunity and ability to go online present initial public challenges, Nakamura capably examines some of the deeper concerns of the “digital divide”—such as in connection with measuring “media interactivity” rather than simple “access.” Her discussion of “*kinds of access*” reflects the tensions between hopes for youth culture and its engagement with the Internet and the skills needed to modify, interpret and criticize the resulting and connected visual culture. Although somewhat narrow in its geographical scope, Nakamura’s critical study provides an illuminating and reflective analysis that merits the attention of scholars of visual culture and visual rhetoric.

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Bloom, Harold, ed. *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views: Alice Munro*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009. vii, 210 pages: ISBN 978-1-60413-587-9, hardcover \$40.50.

One must be impressed by the reach of Harold Bloom’s reading project and elucidation of the Western Canon. His series *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views* is an abundant productive survey of a vast temporal and geographical space in literary history. The first book in the series was published in 1969 on Kate Chopin, and this year already thirteen new titles have come out. His critical view on Alice Munro arrived in 2009 which corresponded quite timely with her receiving the *International Man Booker Prize* for life-time achievement. The form of the series is an introduction by Bloom where he discusses the writer in question and his or her place within the canon followed by a selection of critical essays. Given the scope of the critical undertaking, it is understandable that the increasing speed of publications involves short-cuts in the readings. But, one is still troubled by Bloom’s only reliance on the *Selected Stories* from 1996 for his comprehension of Munro’s writing. As a result he misses almost half of her production and several of her more important stories, and this when there is an excellent se-

lection made by Margaret Atwood from 2008 offering a more far-reaching perspective on Munro's *œuvre*. Because of his exclusions, I find Bloom's descriptions of her art imprecise and even inaccurate at times. The most unlucky example is his idea of her mimetic skills. After having stated quite correctly that she is not a fantasist or a visionary and scarcely a symbolist, he ends up with the notion that her "sense of a concluded human life avoids retrospection" (1). But as is clear from the essays that Bloom has chosen to include in this collection, Munro is the retrospector par excellence.

There is no explanation of any criteria for the selection of essays, but in themselves they provide an expansive understanding of Munro's narrative ingenuity. To mention the most expressive, Magdalene Redekop's lucid reading of Munro's earliest collection discusses how the complex patterns of irony and humor reverse gender roles and empty the symbolic order of meaning while refilling signs with contextual meaning. She argues that this pattern is crucial to the formation of artistic identity and artistic potential as it evolves around questions of authority and the limit of story-telling. The ambiguity between narrative as power and narrative as failure is also a topic in Katherine J. Mayberry's essay. She concludes that in Munro's stories the failure of narrative to reach the truth is also a spur for narration to proceed.

In Ajay Heble's deconstructive perspective on *The Progress of Love*, we understand how Munro's retrospective narrators build the intricate and conflicting layers of truth and honesty. He makes a thorough investigation of Munro's poetic form in terms of its relation to realism and narrative self-reflexivity, whereas Mark Levene, through a fascinatingly rich tracing of developments and transformations in Munro's collections, includes also the reader in this self-reflexivity. He demonstrates how Munro's stories establish a bond between story world and the world beyond, grounding this in a discussion about genre characteristics. Adding to the important discussion about the short story form, Janet Beer succeeds in showing that *Lives of Girls and Women* can simultaneously be both novel and short story collection. With a focus on the stories that tell of men's lives, she discusses the meaning of closure in the light of the overarching female *bildungsroman*.

In Judith McCombs's tracing of the gothic element in one of Munro's most significant stories, "The Love of a Good Woman," (not included in *Selected Stories*) the intertextual echoes sound from fairytales to Bible stories and canonical ancestors. Perhaps the most evocative are Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth* and Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*. The most recent essay is by Coral Ann Howells. She studies how identity formation is related to charac-

ters' subjective impressions of space. While throwing light on the multiple dimensions of reality between which Munro's characters slip, she explores how the foundation for experience and identity can arise out of the mirage.

What many of these essays show is how radical Munro's writing is and how she overturns well-established notions of social behavior and expands our awareness of the workings of human life. In demonstrating the richness and complexity of Munro's art, this essay collection also suggests that there is much more to be discovered within her body of work.

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