

"CERTAIN VAGUE HOPES OF DISASTER":
A PSYCHOSEMIOTIC READING
OF ALICE MUNRO'S "THE FOUND BOAT"
AS THE FLOODING TEXT

Jane Sellwood

At the end of Bell Street, McKay Street, Mayo Street, there was the Flood. It was the Wawanash River, which every spring overflowed its banks. Some springs, say one in every five, it covered the roads on that side of town and washed over the fields, creating a shallow choppy lake. Light reflected off the water made everything bright and cold, as it is in a lakeside town, and woke or revived in people certain vague hopes of disaster. Mostly during the late afternoon and early evening, there were people straggling out to look at it, and discuss whether it was still rising, and whether this time it might invade the town. In general, those under fifteen and over sixty-five were certain that it would. (Munro "The Found Boat" 125)

The Flood of the Wawanash River opens Munro's text, evoking the creation myth of Noah and his Ark, and the mythological origin of gender opposition in the Judeo-Christian symbolic order. However, the patriarchal inscription of patriarchy in the Flood symbol is paradoxically exceeded by the river's threat to invade the town. The Munroean oxymorons "hopes of disaster" and "bright and cold" alert the reader to the text's subversive disposition which, like the river invading the town, also threatens to overflow the boundaries of its authority, offering the chaotic prospect of "vague hopes of disaster."

The text of "The Found Boat" foregrounds the cultural inscription of its female subject by the phallogentric society in which she lives—a twentieth century Canadian small town with clearly delineated traditional gender roles. The story begins with the discovery by Eva and her friend Carol of an abandoned

wooden boat washed up during the flooding of the Wawanash River. They alert three boys to their find, and the latter proceed to commandeer the wreck and carry it back to Clayton's house, the girls following along. The boys decide to repair the boat, and the girls assist them. The group launches the repaired boat, taking turns riding it in the water, and then celebrates the event with a picnic outside the town in an abandoned train station. Playing the game "Truth or Dare" compels them all to remove their clothes and run naked in a group through an open field before plunging headlong back into the river. Clayton spits water at Eva's breasts, and the mood generated by the game is broken. The boys and girls resume their oppositional stances. Eva vows that if the boys "tell," the girls will say "it never happened."

Munro's text also posits a "lie": mimicking literary convention and psychoanalytic tradition, "The Found Boat" implicates itself, like the double image of the Flood, in paradox's subversion of authority. The female subject of "The Found Boat" undergoes the repression and definition by lack necessary in the traditional psychoanalytic view for her entry into the symbolic order. However, the semiotic disposition of Munro's text resists the formation of its female subject according to the episteme of phallogocentric psychoanalytic theory through the operation of paradox, which as Lorraine McMullen has noted, "is a structural device as well as a technical or linguistic attitude in Munro; though it is humourous at base, it goes beyond the superficially and conventionally comic towards a doubling of perspective" (145).

According to Lorraine York, Munro's texts, like photographs, display the tendency of narrative to both recreate perceived reality and to expose it for its doubling of surface order and subterranean disorder, like tidily posed family portraits which on close reading reveal complex features of disharmony and disarray. As York asserts in her conflation of contemporary literary and photographic theory, the story, like the photograph, represents its subject in "free-standing particles" rather than in extended linear wholes. The linked sequences of Munro's short narratives such as those arranged, for example, in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), the collection in which "The Found Boat" is located, are "perfectly suited" to a concept of reality that stresses discontinuity with a dominant, more powerful whole (York 48).¹

Munro's story, "The Found Boat," is one discrete particle located at the centre of the series of thirteen exposures arranged in the collection, linked by the strategies of paradox in narrative structure, linguistic style and narrative technique. As Lorna Irvine points out, the third person in Munro's narratives, of which "The Found Boat" is an example, establishes ironic distance between the narrator and the central character (93). This effect also evolves from the strategy of paradox in narrative technique because the two attitudes represent positions which reify and resist conventional attitudes towards institutions of marriage, the family and the gender roles of women. The double vision or "split image" (Irvine 5) in the text of "The Found Boat" of the conventional *bildungsroman* of adolescent sexual awakening and the positioning of the female by the construction of gender represents their false and irrevocable power. Female desire, as the figure of Eve demonstrates, straddles this ironic splitting of the reification of and resistance to gender construction.

"The Found Boat" is a case in point of Munro's general strategy of paradox and its exposure of the split image of gender in the female subject, which, as Deborah Bowen notes, entails an epistemological emphasis on the spatial in its rendering of short, apparently disconnected, flashes (33).² Marlene Goldman also focusses on space in her deconstructive analysis of "Boys and Girls" (*Dance of the Happy Shades* 1968), but associates its location in this narrative with the gender construction of its male and female subjects:³

Children, as the text clearly illustrates, do not evolve naturally into gendered adults. Instead, the construction of gendered subjects constitutes a form of production. Yet unlike other systems of production, the mechanisms which assist in the creation of gendered adults remain invisible; they seem natural, and for this reason are taken for granted. (62)

The construction of gender by the "invisible" process of naturalization and the contingent division of space is also represented in "The Found Boat" where the derelict wooden boat is re-constructed according to the seemingly natural roles the boys and girls play in the process. Munro's narrative simultaneously constructs the gendered divisions between female and male, and

then subverts these positions by making visible the process by which these constructions are naturalized. Like Munro's work in general, the text of "The Found Boat" draws attention to its paradoxical use of structure, technique and language, thus drawing attention to itself as a lie—a construction—the authority of which it both asserts and challenges.

The paradoxical doubling of perspective dealt with in the body of Canadian criticism on Munro's work is extended here to a reading of "The Found Boat" that considers French theorist Julia Kristeva's concept of both the literary text and the gendered subject as participating in a paradoxical process of symbolic formation and semiotic transgression. In her consideration of the "semiotic disposition" of both texts and subjects, Kristeva sees them both as unstable and discontinuous, a view that reflects her deconstructive move away from traditional psychoanalytic theories of Oedipalisation and the totalizing inscription of the entry of the subject into the symbolic order of language and society.

Kristeva's semiotic consists of a processual interchange between that which resists articulation by the social codes and the linguistic operations of social codes, an interchange in literary texts of "genotext" and "phenotext." The genotext of any literary text signals its destabilizing influence, both resisting the authority of its phenotext, and pressuring it to change. The presence of genotext in the phenotext signals its "semiotic disposition," a paradoxical moment when "practice is taken as meaning the acceptance of a symbolic law for the purpose of renovating it" (Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject" 28-29).

Identifying the semiotic disposition means in fact identifying the shift in the speaking subject, his capacity for renewing the order in which he is inescapably caught up; and that capacity is, for the *subject*, the capacity for enjoyment.⁴

This capacity for enjoyment, or *jouissance*, which eludes the symbolic order in order to "renovate" it, is similarly constitutive of written texts which also participate in signifying practices transgressing the linguistic order. Kristeva's model of the semiotic disposition of texts and subjects holds the possibility of a view of the female subject as an active participant in discourse, where, contrary to the Freudian/Lacanian view which positions her in

subordinate relation to the symbolic order, she has the capacity to both identify with it and pressure it to change. Kristeva's psycho-semiotic concept of the semiotic disposition of speaking subjects and written texts allows that which is repressed in traditional psychoanalytic views of the unconscious to slip through the prohibitions of the symbolic in outlaw fashion to both mime and subvert it.

Paradox, as Kristeva's theoretical model demonstrates, operates strategically in the female subject, which is both constituted by and elusive of the symbolic order of language and culture. Texts too behave paradoxically, both mimicking convention and subverting its prohibitions. My reading of Munro's story adds to the considerable body of criticism on the structural, linguistic and thematic location of paradox in her narratives. Kristevan theory of the paradoxical desire to reify and subvert authoritative structures of language and literature serves to illuminate further the ironic positioning of Munro's work, which, as Lorraine York has noted, "straddles the boundary between realism and post-modernism" (York 18).

The subversive effect of doubling signalled to the reader in the story's opening image of the Flood and its prospect of disaster carries through into the next paragraph where Eva and her friend Carol ride their bicycles "right into a field," over the authoritative boundary of a wire fence already flattened by nature's recently melted winter snow, right over to the edge of the Flood. Also drawn to its possibilities are three boys, likewise, it seems, under fifteen. This early association of the girls with a field links them to the semiotic possibilities of the "open field" the group runs through later in the story. The opening establishes, in their contrasting interactions with the water, gender distinctions between the girls and the boys signified by oppositional behaviours already inscribed by the patriarchal culture of the symbolic order.

The girls, instigated by Eva, push a log into the water and, straddling it, paddle around in the shallows. Their use of a "natural" object and spontaneous entry into the swollen river contrasts with the actions of the boys who have been busily attempting to construct a raft "from lumber they had salvaged from the water" (FB 126). The girls' interaction with water places them

in the conventional association of the female with nature; their willing contact with the Flood contrasts the littoral relation of the boys to it, linking the latter to the hegemony of culture.

The paradoxical operation of phenotext and genotext becomes apparent as the third person narrative focusses on Eva's consciousness. She imagines the log in the floodwater as a Viking boat on the sea with the lost continent of Atlantis stretched out beneath the surface of the water. The fantasy offers her autonomy and adventure—male privileges in a phallogentric hegemony—but this self-image is shaped by constructions of gender difference in the cultural and linguistic order within which she speaks:

"This is a Viking boat," she said.

"I am the carving on the front." (126)

The found boat also is "man-made," but like the water in which it functions, it takes on significance according to the discursive codes surrounding it. Significantly, the boys refer to the vessel as "she" immediately upon their appropriation of it. During the repairs in which Eva and Carol play supplementary roles (Eva gets to stir the tarpot on the stove in Clayton's mother's kitchen) they want to name it, an act which implies discursive power. But, since the boys show no interest, the boat remains unnamed. They construct it according to the cultural discourse to which they are heir—carpentry hints from *Popular Mechanic* and Clayton's father's tools, "left over" from when he was alive: "though they had nobody to advise them, the boys seemed to figure out more or less the manner in which boats are built, or re-built" (130).

The boys, led by Clayton, construct the found boat, "a flood-smashed wreck" out of things floating around in the swelling river, debris such as

branches, fence-rails, logs, road signs, old lumber; sometimes boilers, wash-tubs, pots and pans, or even a car seat or stuffed chair, as if somewhere the Flood had gotten into a dump. (126)

Significantly, these signs are random, a heterogeneous mixture of both nature and culture. Similarly, Munro's text constructs its female and male subjects with the discursive debris of the sym-

bolic order. The seemingly natural roles of the boys and girls are constructions which the phenotext of Munro's narrative asserts and its genotext subverts. Eva inscribes herself as the carving on the front of a Viking boat; the boys, led by Clayton, use the Flood's debris to reconstruct the found boat. Eva is positioned by the phenotext in negative relation to Clayton, thereby reifying the ancient opposition of Adam and Eve, who are fashioned by the highest Judeo-Christian authority out of "clay."

Moreover, the girls and boys interact according to the linguistic debris that has washed up in their experience of the cultural order. In the opening scene, while Eva and Carol are paddling their log away from the shore in the floodwater, the boys shout at them,

"Look at the fat-assed ducks in wading."
 "Fat-assed fucks."(126)

Eva retorts to this less than heroic couplet by hurling "sucks" across the Flood, challenging the boys to come out where the water is "ten feet deep." The boys hurl back, "Liar," which is true—the water there is not ten feet deep. But the epithets "fat-assed" and "fucks" confirm the positioning of the girls according to sexual difference. And the epithet "liar" foreshadows the story's paradoxical implications of truth and lies which emerge again later and operate as genotext to pressure the story's phenotextual assertions of hierarchical gender difference.

Removed from the Flood and repaired at Clayton's house, the boat is carried by the boys and girls to the river which has resumed its conventional course, now flowing "between its normal banks"(132). They take turns riding in the boat which now becomes a space merging the oppositions of nature and culture. The appeal of the boat is that the water cups it, "so that riding in it was not like being on something in the water, but like being in the water itself"(132). Genotext here begins to posit neutralisation of the gender constructions of the girls and the boys; they ride in the boat

in mixed-up turns, two boys and a girl, two girls and a boy, a girl and a boy, until things were so confused it was impossible to tell whose turn came next, and nobody cared anyway. (133)

This merging of gender continues as the group moves away from the water to picnic at an abandoned station where the floor is covered with litter—shards of glass broken from the windows, beer bottles, candy wrappers—the debris of the impermanent and the clandestine. The group adds the litter of their picnic to the disorderly discourse of the “dark ruined station”:

they cleared a space in the middle of the floor and sat down and ate their lunch. They drank the pop just as it was, lukewarm. They ate everything there was and licked the smears of peanut butter and jam off the bread-paper in which the sandwiches had been wrapped. (134)

The dark ruined station is a paradoxical sign, its original patriarchal authority (one of the boys has the authority of knowledge about this place because his father is the station agent in town) subverted by its abandonment to literal chaos. The order of schedules of arrivals and departures, and regulations of railway and station agent have been replaced by the disorder of graffiti inscribed on the walls by previous visitors:

I LOVE RONNIE COLES
 I WANT TO FUCK
 KILROY WAS HERE
 RONNIE COLES IS AN ASSHOLE
 WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
 WAITING FOR A TRAIN
 DAWNA MARY-LOU BARBARA JOANNE (133)

Embedded as a found poem in Munro’s text, this seemingly random smattering of linguistic debris both constructs and is constructed by discursive codes. The seven lines present a range of experiences which are inscribed by the symbolic order and here subverted by the disordering effect of genotext—desire, sexuality, hatred, metaphysical speculation. “Ronnie Coles” is positioned as object, inscribing him in the first four lines with love and desire, hatred and violence. Gender opposition is inscribed by the structure of the seven lines: the last line, signatures of four female names, is separated from the opposition inscribed in the first four lines by a spatial hiatus which poses a perennial metaphysical question of the human subject in dealing with the other, “What are you doing here?” a question contiguous to the

temporality implied in the next line: "Waiting for a train," the existential ramifications of which are of course ironic in the context of the ruined station. The point is that the found poem, like the found boat, both inscribes and is inscribed by the discursive debris which has "gotten into" the cultural order. The poem, like the boat, is found because the the finder, or discursive agent, constructs it in a dialogic that both reifies and challenges codes inherited from language, the great Flood of signification.

The dark ruined station, with its paradoxical signification of authority and chaos, exerts the subversive pressure of genotext in the excitement it generates in the group, who participate in this subversion by not only adding to the litter, but also by playing "Truth or Dare," a game in which what is false and forbidden by the symbolic order paradoxically operates as truth, the discursive factor that keeps the game going:

"Tell the truth—what is the worst lie you ever told?" (134)

The game climaxes in a final dare for them all to take off their clothes, and is met with Eva's exuberant challenge to propriety. She declares:

"I don't care, I don't care. Truth or Dare. Truth or Dare." (135)

Eva leads them streaking naked in the sunlight across an open field towards the river where they have left the boat. The story's genotext finally exceeds its phenotext here in this pull away from the hegemony of culture and its construction of gender. Significantly, this genotextual flooding of the boundaries is signalled by the daring move of the female:

Eva, naked first, started running across the field, and then all the others ran, all five of them running bare through the knee-high hot grass, running towards the river. Not caring now about being caught but in fact leaping and yelling to call attention to themselves, if there was anybody to hear or see. They felt as if they were going to jump off a cliff and fly. They felt that something was happening to them different from anything that had happened before, and it had to do with the boat, the water, the sunlight, the dark ruined station, and each other. They thought of each other now hardly as names or people, but as echoing shrieks, reflections, all

bold and white and loud and scandalous and as fast as arrows. (135)

Here, in the space of the open field, the "other" no longer is; gender oppositions "despecularize"⁵ in the spatial refraction of "echoing shrieks, reflections"; here, in images of speed and light, the story's genotext floods the conventional boundaries of gendered subject and realist text.

The Kristevan semiotic foregrounded here may be seen to comply with psychoanalytic theories of the pre-Symbolic, that is, with Freud's concept of pre-Oedipal bi-sexuality and Lacan's pre-Oedipal integrity of the real, a state of utter innocence where being is not ruptured by language and thought, and the encounter with the phenomenal world is not falsified by the self/other split. The semiotic flooding of the text of "The Found Boat" challenges and subverts the hierarchical binary oppositional codes that have negatively positioned its female subjects, Eva and Carol, since their discovery of the boat. The semiotic of the open field suggests, too, a view of the human subject that sees the unconscious, with its set of libidinal anarchical drives, not as a site of repression, as in a Freudian/Lacanian hierarchy of conscious and unconscious, but as participant in a discursive transgression, a challenge to the symbolic order, working to express what it seeks to repress—the paradox of *jouissance* and the Phallus imaged in Munro's text by the despecularizing move from the temporal limitations of the dark ruined station to the spatial transgressions of the open field.

The merging of gender continues until the story's final scene, where the group plunges naked into the "now normal" river. The narrative here again focusses on Eva, the water and her association with it. This time, however, authoritative codes of culture and language do not govern the way she positions herself in relation to them. Instead of imagining herself as a passive construct, she stands upright in the river, waist deep, the water flowing between her legs, and faces Clayton, who stares back at her as they both blink the water out of their eyes:

Eva did not turn or try to hide; she was quivering from the cold of the water, but also with pride, shame, boldness, and exhilaration. (136)

Eva and Clayton are situated in a key moment in the semiotic disposition of Munro's text. The female and male subjects here occupy a moment of potential recognition and radical alliance which exceeds the gendered laws of patriarchy and the symbolic order.

However, the phenotext of "The Found Boat" asserts the authority of gender construction through Clayton, who rejects this possibility of positioning himself in a non-hierarchical relation with Eva:

Clayton shook his head violently, as if he wanted to bang something out of it, then bent over and took a mouthful of river water. He stood up with his cheeks full and made a tight hole of his mouth and shot the water at her as if it was coming out of a hose, hitting her exactly, first one breast and then the other. Water from his mouth ran down her body. He hooted to see it, a loud self-conscious sound that nobody would have expected, from him. The others looked up from wherever they were in the water and closed in to see. (136)

The language describing Clayton's response to the threat of despecularization reflects the phenotext's reinforcement of its authority. His victorious "hoot" verbalizes the violent action of the "tight hole of his mouth" with which he shoots the now normally flowing river water at Eva, reifying hierarchical gender opposition based on sexual difference. The male sexual image of ejaculation appropriates both the water's potential of excess, the *jouissance* of flooding, and Eva's subjectivity. Standing upright and at eye-level with him when this shooting occurs, she crouches down in front of Clayton in the water, covering her body, and swims away from the group, who have also been re-appropriated as "others" by the phenotext.

The gender merging initiated in the boat launching scene is the phenotext's concession to feminine participation as long as the action is appropriated by the masculine. The normally flowing river conveys both female and male subjects in the boat, which has been appropriated and constructed by the boys. The Kristevan "semiotic" of heterogeneity and the genotext's assertion of it threatens this authority. But Clayton's action asserts patriarchy's orthodoxy, putting Eva in her place. His act of shooting the water at first one then the other of Eva's breasts returns

her to the conventional gender position of the female subject. His ejaculatory hoot vocalizes the phenotextual naming of her body in the "straitjacket" of phallogocentric discourse.⁶ Clayton's castrating action also destroys the heterogeneity of the group, splitting it into its former opposition of male and female subjects.

Allusive to Eve's new shame in the Judeo-Christian Eden, Eva slinks down into the water to cover her nakedness, and, creeping out of the river, hides with Carol in the bushes until the boys begin rowing the boat upstream back to town. However, when Carol asks, "What if they tell?", Eva replies, "We'll say it's all a lie." Her response appears to reverse the challenge and subversion of "truth or dare" to reify the power of the symbolic order: the "truth" of the mutual subjectivity of the open field is a "lie" in the order of culture and language. The would-be "lie" represses the "truth" in the same way that in Lacanian theory the real is repressed by the castration of the subject in its entry into language and culture, thus allowing identification by and with it, a solution which thenceforth doubly castrates the female subject because she is doubly removed from identification with the Phallus.

However, Kristeva's subversion of the traditional psychoanalytic concept of castration subordinates it to a function within the semiotic disposition of subjects and texts. Noting Kaja Silverman's observation of three main fronts of Oedipalisation in Kristevan theory—psychoanalytic, social/historical and linguistic (Silverman 103-104)—we can see that in all phases of infancy, gender formation and linguistic identity, castration is not a singular event. Indeed, the influence of *jouissance* on the signifying process is to both mime and subvert the castrating imposition of the phenotext, so that it is always already never a *fait accompli*. Eva's instinctive solution is, in effect, a genotextual challenge in an ongoing process of rupturing phenotextual allegiances to an hegemonic order of "truth":

Eva hadn't thought of this solution until she said it, but as soon as she did she felt almost lighthearted again. The ease and scornfulness of it did make them both giggle, and slapping themselves and splashing out of the water they set about developing one of those fits of laughter in which, as soon as one showed signs of exhaustion, the other would

start up again, and they would make helpless—soon genuinely helpless—faces at each other and bend over and grab themselves as if they had the worst pain. (137)

The surface hilarity generated by Eva's "solution" parodies the exhilarating depth of clarity in the open field: "Helpless [with deliberate laughter]—soon genuinely helpless—" the text appears to repress the truth of the open field in order to receive identity within the order Clayton reasserts. However, the pain of castration undergone by the female subject assumes paradoxical status in Munro's text. The "scornful ease" of Eva's solution is the defiant pressure of the genotext on the phenotext. Like the "worst lie," the "worst pain" speaks its contrary opposite, "truth" in the former case and *jouissance* in the latter. In its facsimile of pain, the genotext insinuates the last word, an unresolved final cadence, behaving "as if [it] had the worst pain." Munro's text, like its female subjects, mimes the pain of psychoanalytic rupture and repression that permits the subject entry into the Freudian/Lacanian symbolic order. In the miming of this pain, both Eva and Munro's text resist construction by the phallogentric symbolic lexicon.⁷

Munro's text posits a "lie": mimicking realist literary convention and the psychoanalytic tradition, "The Found Boat" implicates itself, like its opening image of the Flood, in paradox's subversion of authority. The text foregrounds the gender construction of its female subject by the phallogentric society in which she lives. However, Julia Kristeva's psychosemiotic concept of the semiotic disposition of speaking subjects and written texts opens the possibility for that which is repressed in traditional psychoanalytic views to slip through the prohibitions of the symbolic order to mime and subvert it. Signalling the destabilization of the authority of both realist texts and gender construction, the genotext of "The Found Boat" both resists the authority of its phenotext and pressures it to change. Munro's text resists, through the psychosemiotic operation of paradox, the totalizing formation of its female subject according to the hegemonic episteme which naturalizes gender construction of girls and boys.

The paradoxical propensities of both Munro's text and Kristeva's psychosemiotics do not, it appears, accommodate

resolutions that supplant the symbolic order of one lying truth with another truthful lie. Gender construction in "The Found Boat" is subverted by the text's mimicking of realist narrative. In their prospects of "hopes of disaster," both text and subject of "The Found Boat" behave conditionally, as if they had the worst pain.

NOTES

¹ W.R. Martin notes that the thirteen stories in *Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You* are linked according to structure, style and theme. Martin concludes that [in 1984], "the four books that Alice Munro has published are . . . perhaps in this new form" already introduced by Joyce's *Dubliners*. The linked sequence of short narratives, as my research shows, is salient in the Canadian short story from the nineteenth century to the present. My dissertation on linked short narratives by Canadian women writers shows how this form represents the split images of reification and recusancy in gender and genre.

² Deborah Bowen's distinction between the spatial in Alice Munro's stories and the temporal in Margaret Laurence's fiction stresses their divergent attitudes in capturing images, which she asserts, is an epistemological distinction—"the one based on function and the other on appearance"(21). Such a divergence may also be presented as a distinction in the temporal orientation of modernism towards unity and the spatial orientation of post-modernism towards fracture. However, as Fredric Jameson points out, the distinction between space and time is not an exclusive, oppositional one, but a matter of emphasis (Jameson 154). The emphasis on spatial rather than temporal construction of reality in Munro's texts signals her departure from modernist realism's concern with continuity and patterns of unity.

³ Marlene Goldman's deconstructive reading of "Boys and Girls" focusses on the resistance of Munro's narrative to the spatial divisions of gender construction that this text appears to reify. Goldman's conclusion, precursing mine regarding "The Found Boat," asserts that "the narrator's identity has not been completely fixed by an ideology which accords her a role and set of behaviours on the basis of her sex. The consistent tension between the bitter, mournful adult voice and the child's idealistic perception suggests that she continues to resist and criticize the patriarchal system which names her"(73).

⁴ Julia Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject" 29. Here, the English word "enjoyment," translating *jouissance*, falls short of conveying the significance of the latter in reference to the Lacanian concept of the feminine as marked by the female subject's capacity for *jouissance*, or that which is heterogeneous, exceeding the Phallus. See Jacques Lacan, "God and the JOUISSANCE of the Woman—a Love

Letter," *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982) 137.

⁵ Kristeva's view of the discontinuous subject and the destabilizing text moves towards Luce Irigaray's concept of "despecularization"; both feminist psychoanalytic projects hold the possibility of a view of the female subject which stresses the capacity of heterogeneous non-restraint within the "symbolical lexicon" of language and culture. Irigaray's strategy includes a metaphorical consideration of the female subject as reflected in the "convex" mirror of a speculum, instead of in the "concave" mirror of male culture. While the masculine mirror concentrates the image, producing a totalizing image of the subject, the convex speculum refracts the image of the subject, thereby despecularizing the phallogocentric gaze, which according to Irigaray, always appropriates the female ("Any Theory of the Subject" 144-146).

⁶ Irigaray's despecularization paradoxically both reflects and refracts, in the "undermining of patriarchy through the overmiming of its discourses"—one way, according to Toril Moi, "out of the straitjacket of phallogocentric discourse" (*Sexual/Textual Politics* 140).

⁷ "Baptizing" in Munro's linked story sequence *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) precedes "The Found Boat" with the image of gender positioning of the female by the male in the symbolic milieu of the Wawanash River. Del Jordan refuses the baptism by her lover Garnet French which would convert her not only to the rituals of the church but also to the position of his wife. After this refusal, Del speculates, "Suppose I had let myself lie down and be baptized in the Wawanash River?" (200). Interestingly, here too the "castration" of the female is neither a singular event nor a foregone conclusion within the symbolic order. Considering that *Lives of Girls and Women* narrates the artistic maturation of a young girl, the refusal of male "baptizing" and the recognition of its potential but conditional danger appear fundamental to the vision evident in this work.

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