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The love of a good narrative: Textuality and digitality

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ABSTRACT: It has often been observed that Alice Munro is a master of narrative complexity. "The love of a good woman", in particular, is a story that challenges conventional notions of structure in short fiction through digression or deferral, discontinuity, layering, and so on. Ross (2002) rightly observes that conventional theories of reading fail to get at the process involved in achieving successful "apprenticeship" with Munro's short fiction. This paper explores the intricacies of Munro's creative craft as exemplified in "The love of a good woman" and proposes an approach to facilitating students' engagement with complex narratives. Through creative writing in a computer-based "wiki" environment, it is argued, we encourage students to undertake the project of "layering" narrative and of establishing and interrogating complex narrative relations. This creative exercise, in turn, may facilitate their understanding of short fiction such as Munro's.

KEYWORDS: Digital literacy, textuality, English education, literacy education.

THE LOVE OF A GOOD NARRATIVE: TEXTUALITY AND DIGITALITY

The title story of Munro's *The love of a good woman* begins in a small-town Ontario museum where, among the butter churns and horse harnesses, is displayed a box of optometrist's instruments along with an explanatory note: "This box . . . has considerable local significance, since it belonged to Mr. D.M. Willens, who drowned in the Peregrine River, 1951. It escaped the catastrophe and was found, presumably by the anonymous donor, who dispatched it to be a feature of our collection" (Munro, 1999, p. 1). The box and accompanying note comprise the kernel of a complex narrative, the organizing principle of which might be characterized, in keeping with the instruments on display, as the question of vision and/or perception. For readers, the story presents a challenge: there are multiple character-narrators and narratees, and the temporal sequence and causal relations are highly complex. As Carrington observes, this is a "many-voiced narrative about narration, a story that not only tells how and why stories are told or not told – or retold and reinterpreted – but also compels its readers to participate in the narrative, interpretive, and reinterpretive process" (Carrington, 1997, p. 160). In this paper I wish to outline some key features of the narrative, to consider what theories of reading might illuminate the process of engaging such texts, and to discuss the ways in which a response exercise undertaken in a wiki environment shed light both on readers' preparedness to engage such narratives and on ways in which educators might prepare readers to engage such narratives.

NARRATIVE COMPLEXITY IN "THE LOVE OF A GOOD WOMAN"

In its structural complexity, "The love of a good woman" is quintessentially Munro. It is

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constituted of the five-paragraph museum introduction alluded to above, in which the optometrist's instruments are described in detail, followed by four sections: "Jutland". "Heart Failure", "Mistake", and "Lies". The first of these, comprising fully a third of this ninety-page story, is told in limited omniscient voice from the perspective of three boys who discover Willens in his car, submerged in the local river. Story-driven readers might well key on this incident combined with the description of the optometrist's instrument box in the museum and hope for the unravelling of a murder mystery. But this expectation is thwarted: The boys, who discover the car and depart to report their discovery by page six of the narrative, find endless diversions – including accepting early garden flowers from the unsuspecting widow – before one of them eventually relays the news to an adult some twenty-five pages later. Ross (2002) characterizes "Jutland" as a "*tour de force* of deferral" (p. 795). We might well apply this description to the entire narrative, for this is a mystery that refuses to be.

"Jutland", for example, is succeeded by "Heart Failure", a lengthy divergence to an isolated farmhouse in which the local practical nurse, Enid, is tending Jeannette Quinn, a terminally ill mother of two young children. In this long section, which focuses primarily on Enid's character and her growing attachment to her patient's husband, Rupert, there are sparing references to Willens, none of which shed light on the incident with which the story begins. Even when the narrative turns back to the circumstances of the drowning in "Mistake", the details provided are ambiguous and contradictory. The unreliable focalizer of this section is the weak and possibly delusional patient, whose deathbed confession to Enid that her husband murdered Willens in a fit of jealousy is literally punctuated on either end by the word *lies*.

At the last we are left none the wiser as to the circumstances of the drowning with which the narrative commences. Enid, who in the final section schemes a way of confronting Rupert about the matter during a rowboat excursion on the river, stands on the bank waiting for him to retrieve a set of oars from beneath the willows. Significantly, she loses sight of him in the trees. The story that begins with a detailed description of instruments for the examination of the eye ends with attention to other forms of perception:

> In a moment she lost sight of him. She went closer to the water's edge, where her boots sank into the mud a little and held her. If she tried to, she could still hear Rupert's movements in the bushes. But if she concentrated on the motion of the boat, a slight and secretive motion, she could feel as if everything for a long way around had gone quiet (p. 89).

The experience of attempting to untangle the fragments of information she has gleaned through the summer and to reconcile these fragments with her own unsettling memories, thoughts, dreams and hopes apparently causes Enid to become attuned to life in a different way. Here we might recall Gatsby, whose ability to register the tremors of human possibility is likened to the seismograph: "If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away" (Fitzgerald, 1953, p. 1).

Like Enid, readers of this complex narrative are encouraged to revise the way in which they are attuned to their (textual) surroundings. Although they are invited at the outset to

key on the box of instruments, any reading of this narrative motivated solely by the desire to solve the mystery of the circumstances of the drowning is bound to fail, for the bulk of the story has little to do with this situation. It is, rather, a meandering tale of human relations in a small-town community. It is a story of three boys, their families, and of the gendered roles of the adults in their lives. It is the story of a dying mother and her embittered and hopeless attempt to make a difference in the final hours of her life. And, most of all, it is the story of the quiet but efficient practical nurse, a "good woman" who tends her patient (almost) to the end of her life and then, presumably, steps into her shoes.

It has often been observed that Munro is a master of narrative complexity. Observes Ross (2002), in summarizing the critical sentiment:

> Munro's narrative interest in absences, gaps, discontinuity, disruption, fragmentation, parallel lives, "funny jumps", and missing chunks of information used to be called "the art of disarrangement" (Mathews) and more recently has been called a postmodern rejection of totalizing systems and master narratives (Nunes) (p. 805).

"The love of a good woman" in particular might be read as an experiment in deconstructing the nature of creative imagination or perception as it is embodied in narrative. This project is hinted at in the detailed description of the optometrist's instruments in the third and fourth paragraphs of the story. These are complex devices, but to provide a layperson's description, the *ophthalmoscope* is "used for the visual inspection of the interior of the eye" (Simpson & Weiner, 2004, ¶ 1); *retinoscopy*, on the other hand, entails examination of the retina's response to refraction of light in the eye "through the observation of the movement of a shadow on the retina, caused by the rotation of [a] mirror" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, ¶ 1). Although Munro describes two instruments, in keeping with older technology, modern ophthalmoscopes often function in both capacities.

Munro is careful to point out that the retinoscope is lighted and fitted with a mirror: "out of the top of the column a tiny light is supposed to shine. The flat face is made of glass and is a dark sort of mirror" (p. 1). The allusion here, I would suggest, is to the classic text on imagination and Romanticism, *The mirror and the lamp* (Abrams, 1953), in which Abrams outlines the root metaphors by which artistic imagination has been conceived in western culture. Abrams observes that early mimetic theories, which make their first appearance in Plato's dialogues, view art as "essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe" (p. 8) – that is, *art as mirror*. In the Romantic period, this view is complicated by individuals such as the early nineteenth-century journalist and critic, William Hazlitt, who combines the mirror with the lamp "in order to demonstrate that a poet reflects a world already bathed in an emotional light he has himself projected" (p. 52). Green (2002) observes that each metaphor has been perceived as having different limitations in Western philosophy and theology: "As a mirror, the imagination always runs the risk of producing mere copies, or even distortions, of the original. As lamp, the creativity of the imagination threatens blasphemy or hubris" (p. 78). The postmodern response to the plight of the imagination, put by Kearney (1988) and here summarized by Green, is "the labyrinth of mirrors, in which the imagination produces only endless reproductions, copies of copies of copies where there is no longer any original, a kind of self-deconstruction of imagination that erases the very distinction between the imaginary and the real, leading to the collapse of the concept of imagination itself" (2002, p. 78). Green

rejects this pessimistic outlook and argues, instead, for a different metaphor altogether, one that "preserves the representational intent of language" and "allows us to make sense of what we perceive" (2002, pp. 78-79).

Interestingly, to return to Munro's ophthalmic instruments, Green proposes the *lens* as an alternate metaphor, one that in his view incorporates both the mirror and the lamp, and that acknowledges the role of the imagination in both focusing and projecting our perceptive and creative energies. As well, Green notes that it is important to recognize that these two ways of engaging the imagination, perception and creation, "employ the lens in opposite directions: in the first case, the lens gathers in light from the outside, focusing it internally for apprehension; in the second, the lens projects light outwards, replicating it for potential use" (2002, p. 80). In highlighting instruments that allow for examination of the eye in distinct ways (one through magnification for the purpose of close inspection and the other through projection of light for the purpose of measuring refraction), it would appear that Munro, like Green, is exploring metaphors of perceptive and creative imagination. We are invited to employ these instruments of imagination (equipped with mirror, lamp and lens) to reflect, refract, illuminate, dim, focus and defocus the narrative.

READING THE COMPLEX NARRATIVE

Munro's complex narratives are commonly viewed as presenting challenges for readers (see, for example, Clark, 1996; Carrington, 1997; Ross, 2002). Ross (2002), in particular, argues that conventional theories of reading fail to get at the process involved in achieving successful "apprenticeship" with Munro's short fiction. By way of example, she discusses the "rules of reading" forwarded by Rabinowitz (1987). Rabinowitz suggests that readers follow "rules of notice," a process of identifying more significant details and sorting these from less significant details. Rabinowitz's "rules" recall the theory of narrative structure proposed by Chatman (1978, pp. 53 ff.), wherein kernels (major events) are distinguished from satellites (minor events). Several influential models of reading are also premised on this understanding that readers must separate "wheat from chaff," as it were, in negotiating narrative. For example, the Construction-Integration Model proposed by Kintsch (1988) delineates a process whereby readers construct meaning by identifying potentially relevant elements and developing an integration system wherein appropriate elements are strengthened and inappropriate elements are weakened or discarded. Ross (2002) rightly observes that employing an approach such as Rabinowitz's with "The love of a good woman" will "produce instabilities," for reading this text often engenders "interpretations that, far from converging, are in conflict with each other" (p. 791). For example, the story thwarts genre expectations; as well, presumably significant elements established at the outset are abandoned for large portions of the narrative.

The inadequacy of models such as Rabinowitz's in accounting for the process of reading complex narratives is something I have remarked upon elsewhere in discussing the ways in which readers approach an equally complex genre, hypertext fiction (Dobson, 2001). For Chatman (1978), complex stories that subvert narrative convention might be termed "anti-stories" or "anti-narratives" (pp. 56-57). The example he provides is "The garden of forking paths" (Borges, 1962), which attacks convention by treating "all choices as

equally valid" (p. 56). Many first-generation hypertext theorists later took up this example, identifying the story as one of the harbingers of hypertext fiction (for example, Bolter, 2001; Landow, 1997). Chatman argues that such complex narratives call into question narrative logic, but that it is "incorrect to say that they are without plot, for clearly they depend for their effect on the presupposition of the traditional narrative line of choice" (p. 57). Of course, "The love of a good woman" does not offer infinite choice, relying instead on another mode of subverting convention: deferment or the intentional failure to follow up on significant events.

While it is true that readers of long fiction, such as the novel, may be accustomed to holding particular elements in the mind while other threads of the narrative are developed, this is a strategy that readers of short fiction are less habituated to. As Hollingshead (1999) observes, the difference between the short story and the novel has to do not with merely with wordage, but with the "long-distance haul of meaning":

> In a good short story the meaning is not so abstractable, so portable, as it must be in a novel, but is rather more tightly and ineffably embodied in the formal details of the text. A scene in a short story – and there may be only one – operates with a centripetal force of concentration. But a scene in a novel spins off a good deal of its energy looking not only backward and forward in the text but also sideways, outside the text, towards the material world, to that set of common assumptions considered ordinary life. That energy is centrifugal, opening out, not constantly seeking to revolve upon its own still centre (p. 878).

Each of these forms therefore elicits different reader expectations and promotes different reading strategies. Hollingshead also remarks, however, that Munro is a master of short fiction whose stories seem to fall between genres because they are "amazingly porous yet concentrated and undiffused" (p. 879). "The love of a good woman" is such a story – one that is perhaps best identified as a form of story *manqué* (Chatman, p. 57).[1]

Van Peer and Chatman (2001) observe that the "diverse narratives of the Twentieth and Twenty-First centuries" (p. 5) are incompatible with contemporary narrative models in part because most of these models reflect a Western perspective (and, I would add, do not take account of new media genres). It is not sufficient, however, merely to identify the form (or *anti*form). We need, rather, to investigate how people deal with these complex narratives and to revise our perspectives on narrative structure, reading processes, and methods of teaching with literature. In the next section of this paper I wish to discuss a creative writing assignment completed by nine students in response to the first five paragraphs of "The love of a good woman". The way in which this introductory section prompted the participants' perspectival and creative imaginations revealed some interesting patterns, perhaps indicating that appropriate expectations respecting perspectival complexity are established early in this narrative, and that it is possible to attune readers to these expectations through instructional strategies that invite students to modify the manner in which they engage the text.

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[1] Booth [1951] points out that in the first part of the nineteenth-century, short story "situations were conceived subjectively" and "rapid movement led to an impressionistic climax. There was little arrangement, proportion, or emphasis to what is now called the short story *manqué*" [p. 142]. While the term initially referred to apparent inadequacies in early examples of the short story genre, it is now used to identify narratives that challenge conventional forms.

RESPONDING TO MUNRO

In the context of a series of workshops on digital literacy, I worked with a group fifteen students who had just completed bachelor's degrees with English majors or minors and who were enrolled in a post-degree, teacher education program. The intent of the workshop series, part of a larger research project on digital literacy, was to introduce this group to new, computer-based literary forms (e-literature) and to engage them in both responding to and writing such texts. Students began by reading several examples of hypertext fiction and poetry before commencing collaborative creative writing projects in a "wiki" environment. (For those who may be unfamiliar with this computer-based writing space, wikis are a form of social software that enables collaborative writing in a networked environment. The most well known application of the software at this point is *Wikipedia*, a large online encyclopaedia that is collaboratively produced by its readers. Wikis are often referred to as anarchistic writing environments, because they are simple to edit and are frequently "open access" – that is, anyone with Internet access may contribute changes to documents in an open wiki system. In this sense wikis subvert conventional notions of the discrete text and of ownership of ideas.)

Students had been working with e-literature and various spaces for networked writing on an intermittent basis for about three months when I asked them to complete an individual creative writing project in the wiki environment using the opening of "The love of a good woman" as a prompt. The nine individuals who were in attendance at this session were directed to nine wiki pages into which I had typed the five-paragraph introduction. I did not provide the students with the title or the author of the selection (the wiki pages were titled, simply, "Museum1" through "Museum9"), and I established at the outset that none of the students knew the prompt text.

Being familiar with e-literature and with wiki writing spaces, participants saw this as an invitation to write in networked form. In other words, none of the texts they produced were structurally linear; rather, participants employed a combination of linking patterns, the most common of which was a "wheel" structure, whereby several links were embedded in the five-paragraph opening or in a subordinate node, which then served as the "hub" of a text with several "spokes" (see Figure 1). Because these narratives exist as literary artifacts, I will speak of them in the present tense in the subsequent sections.

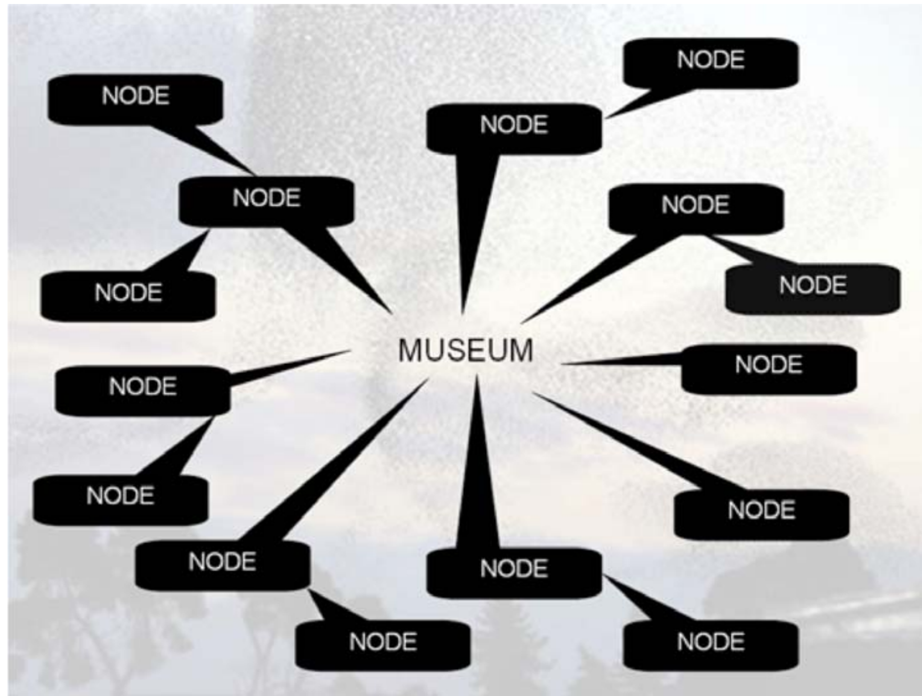

Figure 1. A representation of the "wheel structure", wherein several nodes are layered around a central node[2]

Five of the narratives clearly demonstrate versions of the wheel linking structure: in some cases the structure is relatively simple, with only one layer of spokes and little interlinking between spoke nodes; in some cases it is complex, with a high degree of interconnection between the spoke nodes, occasional branching out to a second or third layer of nodes, and extensive cycling back to the primary node (see Figure 2). Two of the texts are relatively undeveloped, but appear to be moving in the direction of the "sieve" structure identified by Bernstein (1998), which, through the use of a series of branching textual lines or trees, sorts "readers through one or more layers of choice in order to direct them to sections or episodes" (¶ 26). Another two texts employ a combination of the approaches outlined above.

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[2] Figures included here are taken from the slide show prepared by the author for presentation of this paper at the Canadian Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities, York, Ontario, May 2006.

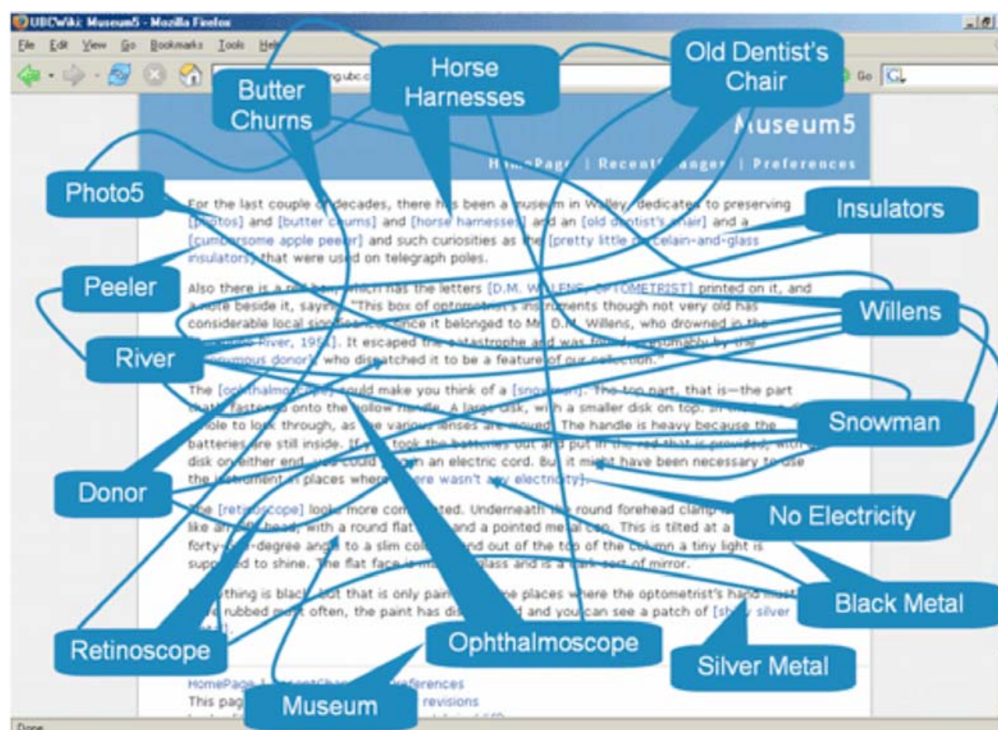

Figure 2. The linking structure of "Museum 5", showing a wheel structure with substantial interlinking between nodes and cycling back to the prompt text.

Of the wiki contributions, one ("Museum2") is encyclopaedic in nature, identifying name places and such that occur in the prompt passage. The other eight are narratives. "Museum4" follows the story of an unwed mother who is, apparently, pregnant with Willens's child at the time of his death. "Museum3" takes up the question of what should be deemed of "local significance". Here we are introduced to the defiant Juniper Leigh, whose parlour inventory of family artifacts in her estimation deserves the attention of the curator of the Walley museum. This character-centred narrative is clever, detailing complex family relations in the course of describing a host of eclectic items.

The remaining six responses hinge on Willens's character and/or the circumstance of his drowning. In "Museum6" and "Museum9", perception is of chief significance and the term "mirror" in the prompt text is utilized as a key link word. "Museum6" in particular tends in the direction of magic realism, portraying Willens as a man who, in the course of hours of self-contemplation in an antique mirror, has acquired the art of seeing into the soul, a skill he applies in the context of his profession. "Museum9" takes up the question of reflection – as distortion, perception, absorption, imagination, contemplation, memory, and image – as the following eloquent passage reveals:

> Whenever there is a reflection, it has come as some form of reassurance, an acknowledgment of presence and being. But some mirrors do not reflect exactly. Some distort, like the mirrors in a [carnival], or the orbital world reflected in an intimate's gaze. Still other mirrors do not reflect so much as absorb distant entities into the proximate, the telescope of fame and microscope of solitude, the charged imagination of the optical nerves, the embodied mirrors which are our children, and in their absence, our domestic appendages, our pets, possessions, obsessions, fascinations, the grotesque reliquary of memory, the concave mirror of the self, the convex mirror of the world and its wine-

> darkly shining seas (ADarkSortofMirror9).

Demonstrated here is sophisticated understanding of the significance of the ophthalmic instruments as a metaphor for the complexities of perception and imagination, an understanding that, interestingly, is gleaned by this reader/writer in the context of only a very few lines of the Munro text.

The remaining four narratives are mysteries. Two of these, "Museum7" and "Museum8", are relatively undeveloped: both take a "cold-case" approach, introducing present-day archivists or amateur sleuths in the early stages of delving into the events of 1951. In spite of its limited development, "Museum7" is perspectivally and temporally complex. "Museum8" is less so (although all narratives were complex on a structural level given the nature of the writing environment). "Museum5" is a well-developed mystery that is written in the second person and is reminiscent of text-based adventure games. Clever use of the hypertext linking structure (a wheel with substantial interlinking between spoke nodes) is made to provide fragmentary information that readers must piece together in order to reveal the circumstances of the death – or deaths: The precursor to Willens's drowning at the hands of his wife is the fate of his six-year-old son, who dies attempting to retrieve his father's retinoscope from the stall of an unpredictable stallion. As in the Munro text, the instrument is witness to events that are only partially revealed to readers.

"Museum1", the last of the mysteries, also takes up the theme of perception, and is remarkable because it so closely echoes plot elements of "The love of a good woman". The narrative keys on an old newspaper article that is on display near the instrument box and that details the springtime drowning of Willens and his two passengers (a local couple) when their vehicle washed from a bridge into the flooded river. As the narrative develops, it is intimated that Willens had been making advances on the woman, much to the chagrin of her long-time lover, and that possibly there is more to the accident than meets the eye. But understanding, the writer cautions, requires use of one's imaginative and perceptive powers: "Many people complain that the articles found in museums seem dead. These people have no imagination. An afternoon spent wandering in the dusty shadows of a museum can bring the entire history of a place to life in the mind….A name embossed on a box of obscure instruments can become a part of a tragic love triangle" (LivingMemory1).

It is worth emphasizing that the only plot elements revealed in the prompt passage are the drowning of Willens in 1951 and the anonymous donation of the instrument box some time later. The remainder of the passage is given over to description of items in the museum, including the detailed descriptions of the ophthalmoscope and the retinoscope. There is no mention of the time of year or the manner of the drowning in the introduction of the Munro story. Thus, the similarity of the "Museum1" scenario to "The love of a good woman" in terms of story elements (the springtime drowning, the submerged car, the love triangle) and the guiding metaphor of the narrative (perception and imagination) is remarkable. Indeed, one sophisticated reader and published short story writer who did not participate in the workshop writing but who subsequently read "The love of a good woman" and reflected on aspects of the nine narratives was astounded by how close some of the writers came to identifying key narrative features and patterns, observing that she herself had found the opening paragraphs obtuse (albeit in a delightful Munro sense) and that she did not glean such understanding in the course of her reading in spite of her own

familiarity with Munro's narrative technique.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

I would propose that the key to the insights gleaned by participants in the context of reading and responding to "The love of a good woman" were twofold:

1. Inviting students to engage the text through writing achieved the effect of shifting participant's imaginations from the perceptive to creative mode;
2. Because of its networked capabilities, the wiki environment apparently devalued a story-driven approach, encouraging writers, instead, to key on narrative elements other than plot.

With respect to the first of these, clearly the concept of a writing-prompt exercise such as the one I provided is not original. Predictive strategies that entail projecting possible sequences of events based on reading of narrative fragments are widely employed, often as a means to develop in new readers awareness of common narrative patterns and to encourage so-called appropriate reader expectations. In this case, however, the intent was not to predict events (indeed, the prompt text was selected because it lacked common narrative features); rather, the intent was to use the prompt text as a catalyst for creative engagement of the imagination.

"The love of a good woman" has been established as complex, one that defies conventional approaches to reading. In engaging this narrative through writing readers were required to focus their imaginative energies differently than they might have had their goal been reading alone. For example, attempting to identify potentially significant details and to sort these from less significant details (for example, Rabinowitz, 1987) is a process that tends to focus readers' energies on plot elements (in this case, the drowning). Indeed, many models of narrative reading propose that readers' first order of business is constructing the situation (for example, Zwaan, Magliano & Gaesser, 1995). Presumably it is later, perhaps on reflection or re-reading, that the import of particular details that are not essential to the plotline (Chatman's satellites) might be established. But in Munro, satellites are at least as important as kernels, and a story-driven reading approach (that is, one that focuses primarily on plot) is bound to produce an impoverished reading. When students were invited to engage the text in a writerly mode, they did not overlook elements of the narrative that did not seem immediately relevant, or set them aside to integrate when the situation became clearer; rather, they took up the various curios on the museum shelves, considering whether or how to integrate them into their own narratives, and in the process discovered much about the nature of this complex, many-faceted story.

The second aspect of the exercise that I believe was key to the students' insights as demonstrated in their writing is the network capability of the writing space in which they wrote their narratives – particularly, the way in which the wiki allowed students to create complex linking structures that reflected the implicit structure of the Munro narrative. I have identified "The love of a good woman" as an antistory or story *manqué* because it calls into question conventional narrative logic. This is in keeping with the view of several critics who have observed that Munro seems more concerned with "layering" text than with establishing a plot "line". New (2002), for example, observes that for Munro

"'story' is neither linear nor one-dimensional; story layers narrative – and as these stories make clear, no one ever knows how many layers there are" (p. 570). Ross (2002) likewise keys on this feature of Munro's narrative, noting that reading the stories in *The love of a good woman* required "digging down through layers and following threads backward through to earlier handlings of the same material" (p. 786). She points out, as well, that Munro herself intimates writing "The love of a good woman" entailed a process of layering. In her contributor notes for the 1997 O. Henry Award prize story collection, she identifies a crime of passion off the West Coast of British Columbia in which a woman's lover is slain by her husband as the incident with which she started (Munro, 1997). In a surprising turn of events, the couple cooperated in disposing of the body in open water. Writes Munro,

> the sudden switch from sex to murder to marital cooperation seemed to me one of those marvellous, unlikely, acrobatic pieces of human behaviour. Then the lover got transferred into a car…and the boys got into it, and their families, and Enid, who took over the story as insistently as she took over a sickroom. And there is the boat, still, waiting by the bank of the Mailand River (p. 443).

Munro's process, Ross remarks, appears to entail a task of getting the "initial scene adequately housed in a story that builds round it, often layering real and invented incident, past and present to convey the emotional reality, which is what the story is really about" (2002, p. 788).

This understanding of Munro's narrative process is in keeping with the way in which hypertextual writing spaces are understood and experienced. The observation that hypertext or hypermedia is a "layered" medium is ubiquitous. Certainly the participants in this study experienced the medium as such, and this influenced the ways in which they engaged hypertext reading and writing spaces. For example, one reader of networked e-literature observed that she became more comfortable with the texts when she accepted the peculiarities of the form, which "layers actions with moods with intentions" (2004-05). Another participant also took up the notion of layering in his description of his writing process in the wiki space, stating that he liked the idea of "interlocking rings" or "spirals, where you get this…core idea, and then around that is something else…an elaboration, rather – and then another layer of elaboration around that" (2004-08). Interestingly, the process described here – of identifying a core idea and building material around it – is remarkably similar to Munro's creative process as iterated in the preceding paragraph. Insofar as hypertextual spaces for writing narrative make explicit the concept of layering and question conventional narrative logic, they would appear to be ideal vehicles for facilitating students' understanding of print narratives that do likewise.

Munro represents the layered and complex nature of human imaginings in narratives that are similarly layered and complex. To engage such stories, whether print or digital, we must employ our own imaginative energies in a variety of ways, seeking to understand myriad perspectives, as well as the interrelations between these perspectives. Such a view is a tenet of complexity theory, which posits that understanding complex systems entails understanding the relations between subsystems and the way in which those subsystems come together to form larger, more complex systems (Davis and Sumara, 1997). I would argue that the students' hypertext writing exercise enabled them to undertake this project of establishing and interrogating complex narrative relations, which in turn enriched their

understanding of the Munro text.

As Enid follows Rupert to the riverbank at the end of the story, she muses on the bug clouds hovering sporadically along the trail: "The air was clear in some places, then suddenly you would enter a cloud of tiny bugs. Bugs no bigger than specks of dust that were constantly in motion yet kept themselves together in the shape of a pillar or a cloud. How did they manage to do that? And how did they choose one spot over another to do it in" (Munro, 1998, pp. 88-89)? Enid is no longer focused on the particular sequence of events that resulted in Willens's death; rather, she is focused on the swirl of things, layers of imagination gathered around an invisible core, and on how these layers come together in particular ways and in particular places. And the boat, still waiting in the shadows, whispers to her it wisdom: "*You know. You know*" (p. 72).

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