

# The Temporal Art of the Short Story *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*

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**Abstract**—Alice Munro is a Canadian author writing in English. Her stories explore human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style. Munro's work has been described as having revolutionized the architecture of short stories for its tendency of moving forward and backward in time is in particular. This paper attempted to give a deep analysis on the times order in the short story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" to explore the temporal art of the story.

**Index Terms**—Alice Munro, temporal order, narrative time, story time, inter weaved.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *Alice Munro and the Purpose of This Paper*

Alice Ann Munro (1931—), a Canadian writer, who set much of her canon in her native southwestern Ontario, has long been considered one of the most important writers of psychological fiction. She always insisted on the particular importance of women's lives and her stories embed more than announce, reveal more than parade. During her sixty-year career, Munro has not only published thirteen collections of stories and a novel but also received lots of awards, including the Man Booker International Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award and the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature for her work as "master of the contemporary short story".

Alice Munro has always been a writer's writer for her works like a diamond. That's the way memory works and storytelling goes even which seems not logical. It's remembering and recounting through memory what happened just like the way dreams work. It is often said that a good fiction corresponds closely to the structure of dreams if it is aesthetically and morally purposeful. It's dazzling when you read Munro's story because it is cubic, not exactly linear. So if you outline one of her story in cause and result chronologically, you would find that it hold big gaps in time, sometimes of whole decades. The story *the bear came over the mountain* is one of the examples.

This paper makes an analysis on the narrative time of the short story from the points of view of the temporal order and duration so as to get a better understanding and appreciation of Alice Munro's narrative techniques in the story *the bear came over the mountain*.

### B. *Summary of Story The Bear Came Over the Mountain*

Alice Munro's story, *the bear came over the mountain*, first published in *The New Yorker* in 1999, then collected in Munro's 2001 book *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*. The story follows a married couple, Fiona and Grant, living their elderly life in Ontario, regularly and peacefully. They usually prepare the meal together and often chat or read to each other. They talk the mutually remembered but seldom discussed matter of Grant's past adulteries. With Fiona's development of what appears to be Alzheimer's disease, she enters into the assisted living center Meadowlake, while Grant must abide by the institution's policy prohibiting visitors for the first month so that new residents can adapt to their surroundings. During that month, Fiona forgets her attachment to him and develops a fondness for another resident, Aubrey, who has been stricken by a virus that left him mostly mute and in a wheelchair. Without any memory of her relationship to Grant, Fiona has lost her faithfulness. Although Grant is jealous and persistently watchful over her and Aubrey, he seems to adapt to this change and does not chastise her for her changed allegiance. One day, Aubrey is removed from Meadowlake by his wife Marian, leaving Fiona heartbroken. In response, Grant seeks out Marian and implores her to allow Aubrey to visit Fiona. However, Grant's own loyalty undergoes a further test by Marian's invitation to a dance. He plays on Marian's attraction in order to gain her permission with regard to Aubrey's visit.

## II. THEORETICAL BASIS

### A. *Narrative Time*

The narrative text is temporal art, and it is never separate from time. Narration develops in time and time passes in narration. Making full use of temporal factors is one of important ways for a novelist to succeed in maneuvering the textual mechanism of his novel. In narratology, narrative is a doubly temporal sequence: the narrative time and the story time. The former one also called the time of the signified or internal time, which refers to the arranged time that based on the successive order of a series of events. The narrative time also called the time of the signifier or external time,

which refers to the temporal conditions presented in a narrative text. According to Genette, the duality not only renders possible all the temporal distortions that are commonplace in narratives and more basically, it invites us to consider that one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme. (Genette, 1980, p.33) Genette isolates three major aspects of temporal manipulation in the movement from story to text. Studying the possible relationship between the story time and narrative time, he points out that they may be classified in terms of order, duration and frequency.

To know the temporal order of a narrative text is to explore the relationship between the chronological order in which events are arranged in the story and the order in which these events are presented in the narrative text. Any departure is termed anachrony by Genette in the order of presentation in the text from the order in which events evidently occurred in the story. It mainly includes two forms of temporal motion track such as prolepsis and analepsis.

Prolepsis refers to any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating in advance an event that will take place later while analepsis designates any evocation after the fact of any event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment (Genett, 1980) However, it is not entirely limited to the two terms. Chinese narratologist HuYamin points out that there exists another form of temporal motion track such as achrony besides prolepsis and analepsis, which means that the track of narrative time is sometimes unintelligible, and past, present and future are complicatedly interweaved.

### B. Temporal Order in *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*

In the short story *The bear came over the mountain*, Munro makes full use of chronological disorder to succeed in maneuvering the textual mechanism. There exists the normal temporal order, but anachronies are more used. A lot of prolepses and analepses make the temporal order of the story chaotic, and the narration which shuttles past, present, and future makes the time sequence of story even more chaotic and fragmented. For example, at the beginning of the story, the narrator begins with the story from their young age life, then suddenly skips to their seventy years old situation at the next paragraph.

“Do you think it would be fun—” Fiona shouted. “Do you think it would be fun if we got married?” He took her up on it, he shouted yes. (p 164)

The next paragraph:

Just before they left their house Fiona notices a mark on the kitchen floor...She was a tall, narrow-shouldered woman, seventy years old but still upright and trim. (p 164)

In order to know the temporal sequence of this story, it is necessary to make a comparison on the two kinds of orders. They are the order in which events or temporal fragments in the narrative discourse and the order of succession these same events or temporal fragments have in the real story. In fact, according to many historical events and actual dates provided in the novel, the time sequence of the story can be roughly constructed. In *the bear came over the mountain*, the temporal analysis of such a text consists three vital clues in the story. Clue A presents any events happened in their youths of Grant and Fiona. Clue B represents Fiona’s amnesiac and some reminiscence near their elder age. Clue C naturally shows the Grant’s experiences after Fiona enters into the assisted living center Meadowlake. The internal order of the Clue A, B, C are sometimes interweaved but here a rough line can be given. They are as follows:

Clue A	narrative order	A1	A2	A3	A4
	story order	A3	A1	A4	A2

A1: It presents their younger lives and their love of each other. Grant wanted never to be away from Fiona for she had the spark of life.

A2: Grant’s dream about his deceiving for Fiona: his love affair with other girls

A3: Their flipped love in their teen ages.

A4: Grant’s adultery with a woman Jacqui Adams who was the opposite of Fiona and after that, he get involved with a girl who was young enough to be Jacqui’s daughter.

Clue B	narrative order	B1	B2	B3	B4
	story order	B3	B2	B4	B1

B1: Fiona’s appearances of Alzheimer’s disease became apparently. She put many little notes stuck up all over the house to remind her memories. She got lost on the road to home and she asked policeman that if he’d seen Boris and Natasha who were dead wolfhounds she had adopted many years ago.

B2: several years ago, they visited Mr. Farquhar, an old bachelor farmer who had been their neighbor. Fiona could not bear the gloomy and the smell of the old Meadowlake.

B3: After the death of Fiona’s feather as well as the two wolfhounds Boris and Natasha, Grant and Fiona rebuild their house, leading a new life where no more Grant’s adulteries.

B4: In the last few years, Fiona had developed an interest in the Iceland.

Clue C	Narrative order	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
	Story order	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5

C1: The scene before entering into the care center Meadowlake.

C1-1: Fiona's preparation when she gets ready to enter into the care center Meadowlake.

C1-2: They made the drive to the care center in January and adopted the rules of there.

C2: After one month, Grant go back to Meadowlake for the first visit with anxiety. Unfortunately, he finds that Fiona develops a fondness for another resident, Aubrey, and does not know who he is.

C3: The reflection and experiences of Grant in the Meadowlake.

C3-1: Grant is jealous and persistently watchful over Fiona and Aubrey.

Day by day, Grant does not get used to the way they were but Fiona seemed to get used to him, but only as some persistent visitor who take a special interest in her.

C3-2: Being influenced by his sees and hears in the care center, Grant gets more familiar with the people's living style here and begins to understand Mr. Farquhar's situation at that time.

C3-3: Grant keeps trying and takes the book Iceland to Fiona but she was not interested in it because she is greatly grieved for the departure of Aubrey.

C4: Fiona can not get over her sorrow and her living gets worse, Grant find out Aubrey's house.

C4-1: Grant implores his wife Marian to consider taking Aubrey back to Meadowlake, but failed.

C4-2: Marian invites Grant to join a dance party (actually it's Marian's flirtation and his accepting would get her acquiescence to Aubrey visiting Fiona). Grant is caught in a dilemma that he hesitated what he should do would lead a better result to Fiona.

C5 Grant brings Aubrey to Fiona. Surprisingly, Fiona reads the book Iceland near window. Her memory regained and she considers that Grant just leaves here for a long time.

The whole narrative order is

A1→C1-1→B1→C1-2→B2→A2→B3→C2→C3-1→A3→C3-2→B4→A4→  
C3-3→C4→C5,

The whole story order is based on the three clues lined each other, they are as follows:

A3→A1→A4→A2→

B3→B2→B4→B1→

C1-1→C1-2→C2→C3-1→C3-2→C3-3→C4-1→C4-2→C5

From this analysis, we can find that the normal time sequence is somewhat used, anachronies are more often found in the story. Clue C mostly follows a line sequence, while clue A and clue B do not progress chronologically and embedded in the clue C. In the whole text, the three clues presents disordered. They may overlapped or skipped. In fact, they are often interrupted by analepses and prolepses.

### C. Examples

In the story, analepses are easily found. Here gives three examples.

a. Although they have been to the Meadowlake before Fiona entered into, the narrator put it later.

..the supervisor said, "we find that if they're left on their own the first month they usually end up happy as clams."(p 167)

The next paragraph:

They had in fact gone over to Meadowlake a few times several years ago to visit Mr. Farquhar. (p167)

b. When narrating Grant's single life in the first month after Fiona entered into the Meadowlake, narrator firstly turns to their former old age time, then from Grant's dream backs to Grant's young life experiences.

Grant skied for exercise. He skied around and around in the field behind the house as the sun went down... (p 168)

They had usually prepared supper together...In a dream he showed a letter to one of his colleagues...he hauled himself out of the dream, took pills, and set about separating what was real from what was not.(p 168)

The next paragraph:

There had been a letter...he promised Fiona a new life. (p 169)

c. When narrating Grant's borings for the people in the Meadowlake, the narrator turns to the narration of the event which happened in Grant's young life.

On a Wednesday...-- and when Aubrey and Fiona were again in evidence, so that it was possible for Grant to have one of his brief and friendly and maddening conversations with his wife... (p 177)

The next paragraph:

When Grant had first started teaching Anglo-Saxon and Nordic literature he got the regular sort of students in his class... (p 178)

With the help of these analepses, Grant's young life stories which happens several years ago overlap his old age life experiences today so that the two stories about Grant taking place in different time are presented simultaneously. Thus, the narrator shows us an implied connection between his scandalous affair and his today's sufferings.

Except for those analepses, there are also some prolepses which cannot be ignored. For example, Fiona's preparation for the Meadowlake is told in advance, which happened later than her appearance of Alzheimer's disease that is being narrated. Within the first month after Fiona entered into the Meadowlake, Grant's guilty conscience from his scandalous affair is being pre-exposed in his dream, which is not known clearly by reader until the event of his adultery with Jacqui

Adams being narrated later.

To sum up, although these anachronies cause the temporal order of the story to be chaotic, they are aesthetically and purposefully. From these examples, these analepsis in the text not only provide the backgrounds of Grant and Fiona, but also present a complicated inner world of Grant and his guilty conscience, which play an important role in filling up the character's integrity. In the process of reading the story, these analepsis like flashbacks in a movie, making readers know more about their experiences and their characteristics, felling their ambiguous feelings. While prolepsis gives reader some hints in the development of their life and arose reader's interest. In my opinion, these anealepsis and prolepsis are all the author's firm grasp on the complicated interplay between character's desires and the outside forces over which they have almost no control.

### III. DURATION

#### A. *Duration in Narrative Work*

In narratology, duration refers to the relationship between the amount of time covered by the events of a story (the duration of a story) and the amount of time involved in presenting those events(the duration of a narrative). Since it is hard to measure the duration of a narrative, narratologists explore duration by studying the speed of a narrative that is defined "by the relationship between a duration(that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months and years) and a length(that of the narrative text, measured in lines and pages)"(Genette, 1980, p. 87). There are five basic forms of narrative movement whose narrative speeds are different. Ellipsis indicates the form of narrative movement of maximum narrative speed while pause refers to that of minimum narrative speeds. Between them, there exist other forms of narrative movement of various narrative speeds, which are called summary, scene and slow-down. Those five different narrative movements thus become distinguishable:

Ellipsis	Narrative time =0	story time $> \infty$ narrative time
Summary		story time $>$ narrative time
Scene		story time $\approx$ narrative time
Slow down		story time $<$ narrative time
Pause	Story time=0	story time $< \infty$ narrative time
Here	$>$ means longer than	$\infty$ means infinite
	$<$ means shorter than	$\approx$ means round equal

#### B. *Duration in The Bear Came Over the Mountain*

##### 1. **The summary in the bear came over the mountain**

Summary refers to the form of narrative movement in which the narrative time is obviously shorter than the story time, and to be more specific, the event of a long period is narrated in succinct language. Since most stories often cover long periods of time, summary is often need. Different summaries are different in narrative density.

For example, their old age life before Fiona getting ill is narrated in one paragraph:

It was a new life. He and Fiona worked on the house. They got cross country skis. They were not very sociable but they gradually made some friends. There were no more hectic flirtations. No bare female toes creeping up under a man's pants leg at a dinner party. No more loose wives. (p170)

For Grant, each Saturday's scenes in Meadowlake are narrated in a few sentences:

Saturdays had a holiday bustle and tension. Families arrived in clusters. Mothers were usually in charge; they were the ones who kept the conversation afloat. Men seemed cowed, teenagers affronted. (p 176)

##### 2. **The scene**

A scene is like a scene in a play, which unfolds characters; activities or actions and also reveals their conversations or dialogues. A conversation between characters is considered to be a most typical scene. In a scene, the duration of the story and that of the narrative are roughly the same, and the narrative tempo is slower than that of a summary or an ellipsis. Here is a scene where Grant talked to Fiona:

"I brought you some flowers," he said. "I thought they'd do brighten up your room. I went to your room but you weren't there."

"well, no," she said. "I'm here" she glanced back at the table.

Grant said, "you've made a new friend." he nodded toward the man she'd been sitting next to. At this moment that man looked up at Fiona and she turned, either because of grant said or because she felt the look at her back.

"it's just Aubrey,"she said. "The funny thing is I knew him years and years ago." (p172)

In this scene, Grant's and Fiona's actions and dialogues leap up vividly, and the event seems to be going on before reader's eyes. Besides this, character's actions or postures are meticulously described. For example, when Fiona backs to her seat, the narration is:

She slipped back into her chair and said something into Aubrey's ear. She tapped her fingers across the back of his hand. (p 173)

When Aubrey is going to leave from Meadowlake, Grant watch them in the room, the narration is:

They were hanging on to each other's hands and they did not let go.

The hat on the bed. The jacket and tie. (p 180)

### 3. The Pause

A pause occurs much more frequently and it includes all narrative sections in which no movement of the story time is implied. Much attention is paid to one element, and at the same time the plot remains stationary. However, when it is continued later on, no time has passed. In that case, we are dealing with a pause. In a narrative text, pauses mainly involve the narrator's intruding narration and static description. The narrator's intruding narration means that the narrator stops narrating the story, and instead makes comments on characters or events. In this intrusion, there is no flow of the story time. Description also means that there is no flow of time, though some objects are described a lot.

In *the bear came over the mountain*, there exist a lot of pauses such as the narrator's intruding narration. The narrator always stops telling the story being narrated, and comments on the events or characters. Later she goes on with the previous story again.

For example, when the narrator narrates the conversation between Grant and Kristy about why Fiona does not know him, she interrupts the narration of their conversation and gives description on Grant's thoughts.

Grant said, "does she even know who I am?" He could not decide. She could have been playing a joke. It would not be unlike her. She had given herself away by that little pretense at the end, talking to him as if she thought perhaps he was a new resident. If it was a pretense. Kristy said, "you just caught her at sort of a bad moment. Involved in the game." (p173)

### 4. Slow-down

The slow down stands in direct contrast to the summary. In a narrative text, the slow-down can have an extremely evocative effect. In this story, there appears such narrative movement as slow-down. When Grant anxious about what he would do for Marian's invitation, his consideration before he dialed the phone takes several paragraphs to narrate his complicated thoughts.

"Drapes. That would be her word for the blue curtains-drapes. And why not? He thought of the ginger cookies so perfectly round that she has to announce they were homemade, the ceramic coffee mugs on their ceramic tree, a plastic runner, he was sure, protecting the hall carpet... The walnut-stain tan--he believed now that it was a tan-of her face and neck would most likely continue into her cleavage, which would be deep, crepey-skinned, odorous and hot. He had that to think of as he dialed the number that he had already written down. That and the practical sensuality of her cat's tongue. Her gemstone eyes." (p 191)

At the moment of Grant dialing the number to Marian, many words are used in narrating it. Although they are all Grant's inner world, the slow-down makes an endless effect and presents Grant's intertwined mood.

### 5. Ellipsis

Ellipsis means the form of narrative movement in which the narrative time stops while the story time is still stretching. In the story, after narrating Marian's invitation and Grant's ambiguous feelings, Munro leaves a lacuna with a sequence in which Grant and Marian enter a sexual relationship and directly skips to the Meadowlake where Grant brings Aubrey to Fiona. On the one hand, the ellipsis in the text can suspends the result firstly and then allows readers guess how Grant would do. On the other hand, the lacuna leads reader a depression when they know the results for they don't expect Grant to do any sexual infidelity with Marian, though in this situation he must make a choice for the sake of winning her acquiescence to Aubrey visiting Fiona.

To sum up, there exist five forms of narrative movement such as ellipsis, summary, pause, scene and slow-down in the story, but scene, summary and pause are more often seen. Not only do these various narrative movements bring the novel different narrative rhythms, but also they produce other particular effects for the novel.

## IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the narrative time is so cleverly maneuvered that particular effects have been achieved. With the help of the chaotic temporal order, the timeless surge of life is somewhat vividly revealed, so is the characteristic of the process of man's interior experience and the impingement of future and past on present. Scenes, ellipses, summaries and pause produce both different narrative rhythms and other special effects. Unlike many contemporary short fiction writers who capture moments in time, Munro can put backward and forward in time, which is often seen in novels instead of short stories. In her short stories, Munro is able to break off narrative then continue it later, and it's still connected. Meanwhile, readers can travel through the time, space even point of view so that sometimes we are closer in or further away. Alice Munro, seemingly creates a lot of pieces but actually a carefully arranged story and successfully brings us to her magical world.

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