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Irony and the present tense in Alice Munro's "Dance of the Happy Shades": A cognitive perspective

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Abstract:
This study investigates the relationship between present-tense usage and irony in short fiction. It chooses the short story "Dance of the Happy Shades" by Alice Munro (1968) for its narrative and textual complexities. The paper's descriptive-analytical methodology works on three interrelated levels: the story level, the discourse level, and the text level. On the story level, the study detects situational ironies in "Dance" by deploying Shelley's bicoherence theory (2001). For the discourse level, the paper attends to Munro's present-tense usage and the technique of free indirect speech and investigates how they ironize the readers' performance both as readers and as social units. Analysing the juxtapositions that Munro's text sets up with its mythical subtext is a matter of the text level; the paper argues that the Orphic subtext backs up the tensions between the characters. Minimizing the distance between the story and the discourse levels, present-tense narration and the technique of free indirect speech carry out a meta-cognitive function by sharing a common ground between the readers and the characters. Highlighting the distinction between the dual-voiced narrator's restrictions and the readers' freedom to "glance back" and re-envision their mimesis, the paper detects an intricate ironical turn in the latter's perspective with respect to children with Down syndrome.

1 Introduction

This study adopts a cognitive approach towards situational irony and investigates its relationship with present-tense narration in a short story. Among the three types of irony (verbal, situational, and dramatic), situational irony has received relatively less attention from cognitive, linguistic, and literary scholars. The present paper does not approach situational irony rhetorically, taking it as a literary device, a figure of speech (Booth, 1974), or "a strategy of 'discursive politics' in the rhetoric of texts" (Hutcheon, 1995). Rather, it focuses on the various cognitive functions of situational irony for the fictional characters and their changing situations within the storyworld, for the readers, and for the narrator (and/or the author). Lucariello is among the few scholars who propose a schema-oriented investigation of irony (1994). Drawing upon Schank and Abelson's notion of script (1977), she detects four features in the situation where ironic schemata are activated: unexpectedness, human frailty, outcome, and opposition. However, as criticized by Cameron Shelley (2001), Lucariello's taxonomy of 28 ironic schemata organized into eight basic groups does not disclose "any principled relationship between situational irony and other cognitive phenomena" (2001, p. 777). Instead, Shelley offers his bicoherence theory of situational irony and applies it to a corpus of 250 examples of situational ironies gathered automatically from electronic news sources. This paper investigates the applicability of bicoherence theory to literary texts, aiming to reveal the cognitive-affective impacts of situational irony on both the characters and the readers. Simultaneously, the application discloses the pros and cons of the bicoherence theory for the literary analysis of situational irony.

The paper also attends to the tense of narration and seeks its possible interrelationships with situational irony. It draws upon Carolin Gebauer's narratological model of present-tense narration (2021). While Gebauer develops the theory through her analysis of novels, this study applies it to Alice Munro's "Dance of the Happy Shades" (from now on referred to as "Dance") taken from her first short story collection which bears the title of the same story (1968). In this story, Munro utilizes the potentials of present-tense narration to mark it with irony. In addition, the study argues that the story's mythical subtext and the technique of free indirect speech enhance the story's doubleness which gives readers the illusion of having an all-encompassing vision over the storyworld.

The questions which comprise the core of this study are: a) What are the situational ironies that characterize "Dance" on both the story and the discourse levels? b) How does Munro achieve

and back up simultaneity in her story and how does it contribute to ironies? c) What are the juxtapositions between Munro's text and its mythical subtext and what is their contribution to the ultimate end of the story? And d) How does the technique of free indirect speech enhance the ironical tone of the story? Adopting and adapting James Phelan's distinction between the story and the discourse levels (1996, p. 6), the paper detects situational ironies on the story, the discourse, and the text levels. On the story level, it detects ironies of situation in "Dance" by relying upon Cameron Shelley's bicoherence theory of situational irony (2001). Pinpointing the limitations of bicoherence theory draws attention to the potentials of the present-tense usage and the technique of free indirect speech which increase the illusion of narrative immediacy in the readers on the discourse level. On the text level, the ironic relationship between the story's text and its mythical subtext is argued to contribute to the instabilities between the characters. The descriptive-analytic approach of the paper focuses on the discourse level and concludes that Munro's deliberate use of the narrative and tense techniques ironizes the readers by disillusioning them in the process of reading, calling on them to "glance back" by challenging drastically their social imaginary of children with Down syndrome.

1.1. Summary and review

"Dance" is the first-person narrative of an adolescent, middle-class girl whose sensitive eye reports the events at Miss Marsalles's June recital held at her home. The story starts with the narrator's mother receiving an invitation from Miss Marsalles who had previouly been her music teacher and is her daughter's now. The narrator relates Miss Marsalles and her older sister having moved their house from Rosedale to a smaller place on Bala Street. What distinguishes this recital from previous ones is the arrival of some children with Down syndrome to whom Miss Marsalles teaches piano; the presence of these children proves disconcerting to the guests. Among these children, there is one girl, named Dolores Boyle, whose musical performance is brilliant and impresses the audience profoundly. But the girl's performance remains at odds and irreconcilable with her appearance.

Robert Thacker begins his overview of Munro fiction with *Dance of the Happy Shades* collection because "with that book Munro really began herself: the breath of its survey – in time, imagination, approach, technique, and biographical space – lends itself to a long view of her art" (2017, p. 17). Although Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) is her first collection of short

stories, for which she won her first Governor-General's Award (Duncan, 2011, p. 2), it proves to be no less complicated and demanding than the longer and structurally more elaborate stories that she wrote later on. Brad Hooper contends that the stories "in the first collection are not apprentice pieces... They are mature, well-accomplished stories showing Munro's understanding of the traditional form, which of course is the necessary groundwork for her later transcendence of those traditions to make her own mark on the history of short story" (2008, p. 14). In contrast, for Margaret Atwood (2016), Munro's *Dance* collection fails to fully develop the tripartite thesis-antithesis-synthesis of rhetoric; "instead, the book presents somewhat raw chunks of 'material' – the small-town mother-lode that Munro would later revisit from various angles" (2016, p. 96). In Atwood's analysis of the stories in the *Dance* collection, "*either* and *or* are kept apart, but the title story is an exception" (2016, p. 97). The present study narrows down its scope on the title story.

The parallels that Coral Ann Howells detects between "Dance" and Euroda Welty's story "June Recital" show the distinct affinities between the two stories; Howells even takes Munro's story as "her version" of the Welty story: "I believe that Munro learned a great deal from Welty's stories about ways of translating the multidimensional social map of small-town life into fiction" (Howell, 1988, pp. 28-30; also in Hooper, 2008, pp. 14, 16). The great difference between the two seemingly similar stories which has escaped Howells's notice is while Welty's story is rendered in the past tense, Munro's is related in the present tense and this marks a great distinction between them.

Marlene Goldman (2017) is the other Munro critic who investigates the way Munro's fiction interrogates the prevailing social imaginary of the fourth age in "In Sight of the Lake" and of children suffering from cognitive impairment in "Dance of the Happy Shades". Among other Munro critics, Goldman's analysis shares more common ground with the present study since she works on the irony in both stories. Detecting ironic reversals in Munro's "Dance", Goldman believes that this story "invokes the anti-gothic motif of rescuing people with cognitive impairment from the land of the dead" (Goldman, 2017, p. 289). Goldman's analysis of irony relies on the story's emphasis on dream and performance, specifically, the parade that "constitutes one of Munro's signature motifs" (2017, p. 292). The present-tense narration of the story and its contribution to the text's irony and Munro's technique of free indirect speech have escaped Goldman's notice. This study fills in the gap.

1.2. Bicoherence theory of situational irony

Irony is marked with inherent doubleness. It involves discrepancy or incongruity between words and their meaning (verbal irony), between expectations and reality (situational irony), or between what the audience knows and what the characters do not know (dramatic irony). There are different major and minor types of irony; but the present study focuses on situational irony out of which Munro's "Dance" story emerges. This paper approaches irony and its functions from a cognitive perspective. Cameron Shelley's bicoherence theory of situational irony (2001) is adopted to meet the cognitive needs of the present study.

Shelley bases his bicoherence approach on the theory of conceptual coherence (Kunda and Thagard, 1996; Thagard and Verbeurgt, 1998). He views human cognition as a "system of concepts organized by maximal conceptual *coherence*" (original emphasis; Shelley, 2001, p. 777; see also Thagard, 1989; Thagard and Verbeurgt, 1998; Thagard, 2000). Shelley's bicoherence theory of situational irony comprises three main notions of bicoherence, salience, and emotions. He explains that situational irony can be recognized when the accepted interpretation of a situation displays a bicoherent conceptual structure, affords adequate cognitive salience, and evokes an appropriate configuration of emotions (Shelley, 2001, p. 778).

For Shelley, bicoherence is the reverse of coherence. Coherence denotatively means fitting together and incoherence involves resisting fitting together. In coherence, therefore, elements are pairwise. Conceptual coherence relations include positive association between concepts when there are several objects to which two concepts both apply; conceptual incoherence relations between concepts include negative association when there are few or no objects to which two concepts both apply (Shelley, 2001, p. 778). A positive constraint holds between the two elements which cohere, in the sense that either the two elements are both accepted or both rejected. A negative constraint occurs between the two elements that incohere, in the sense that one element is accepted while the other one is rejected. Therefore, elements can be of two classes: accepted or rejected.

Bicoherence occurs when the same class contains two elements which incohere with each other or when different classes contain the same element but those classes incohere with each other. As Shelley analyses, in situational irony, concepts in the accepted set of a coherence solution are activated in a bicoherent pattern (2001, p. 779). Conceptual coherence relations consist of positive association, which include similarity (sub-typified as analogy, coincidence, collocation);

policy (sub-typified as intention); and constitution type (sub-typified as role, status, title, model). Conceptual incoherence relation is negative association and consists of: antisymmetry, antonymy, disproportion, and dissimilarity (Shelley, 2001, pp. 781-782).

Based on these, Shelley provides a classification scheme for situational ironies and divides ironies into two basic types: bicoherent class (b-class) and bicoherent element (b-element). Bicoherent class is subdivided into four types: analogy, coincidence, catch-22, and exchanged. Elements such as policy, constitution, type, and disproportion fall under the category of bicoherent elements (Shelley, 2001, p. 786). This paper deals with these classes and elements selectively, focusing on those which are applicable to Munro's story. Therefore, the definition of each usable class or element is provided in the analysis part.

Salience means the importance or noticeability of something in contrast to other things (Shelley, 2001, p. 783). Two main factors are involved in determining the salience of a situation: the contents of the situation, and how those contents relate to the cognizer. As far as the contents of a situation are concerned, salience can be the result of the individual's biological and cultural dispositions (Lyons, 1977, pp. 247-249).

Like conceptual structure, emotional configuration lies at the core of situational irony. Shelley's bicoherence theory relies on Oatley's communicative theory of emotions (1992). Emotions relate to situational irony in at least two ways: a) some kinds of situational irony may evoke only a particular emotion; and b) the salience of a situation may increase due to the heightened emotional response "and thus may increase the sense that the situation is ironic" (Shelley, 2001, p. 784). Emotional response greatly depends upon how the situation measures up to the cognizer's goals (Oatley, 1992), concerns (Frijda, 1986, pp. 335-340), or preferences (Damasio, 1994, pp. 198-200).

Shelley adopts "manner" as the main measure of the distance between a situation and the goals, concerns, and preferences that a cognizer applies to it (2001, p. 785). The two discretely valued scales of manner are physical and moral. Physically, a goal may not be accomplished because the task aimed to achieve it is done improficiently (left incomplete), incapably (left utterly incomplete), or excessively (taken too far). On a moral scale, a goal may not be accomplished because someone pursues it licentiously (outside the bounds of custom or authority), maliciously (voluntarily choosing to do wrong), or overzealously (applying a moral principle beyond its proper place) (Shelley, 2001, p. 785).

2. The story level: Bicoherent ironies

Viewed from Shelley's bicoherent theory of situational irony, "Dance" has some ironies of situation. In the comparison that Munro's story draws between the adolescent narrator and Dolores Boyle, who suffers from Down syndrome (Munro, 1986, p. 159), there is a bicoherent class irony. Both the narrator and Dolores activate the concept of adolescent girls; but they are negatively associated when considered pairwise: biologically, the narrator is healthy and sounds normal, while Dolores is cognitively impaired and classified as abnormal. The salience raised in this comparative situation is raised in two ways: by the unfairness and undeservedness of Dolores being rejected for her biological state, and second by the activation of the common schema of normality and suitability in terms of biology. Beyond the surprise and shock of an unfavourable evaluation, the dominant emotions in this irony are bitterness and anger. Bitterness is a complex form of disgust experienced when Dolores's proficiency in music is not acknowledged by the mothers. Anger is evoked as Dolores's cognitive impairment leaves a negative impression upon others' assertion of her ability.

Dolores Boyle herself can be a basic bicoherent element irony since she is an element to which two concepts of being a genius at music and being cognitively impaired apply, but her being a genius is negatively associated with her Down syndrome. In other words, Dolores falls under two concepts which are related antonymously. The salience of this situation is heightened by the absurdity of her great performance at playing the piano while her mental features stigmatize her. Her status evokes two emotions, namely, pity and a feeling of frustration. Pity derives from her being rejected by society due to her illness; the narrator comments that "The facts are not to be reconciled. . . the girl's ability, which is undeniable but after all useless, out of place, is not really something that anybody wants to talk about" (Munro, 1968, p. 160). The feeling of frustration comes out of the uselessness of her ability and the fact that it is appreciated only by Miss Marsalles but not acknowledged by society: "To Miss Marsalles such a thing is acceptable, but to other people, people who live in the world, it is not" (p. 160).

Miss Marsalles is music teacher to the mothers' daughters as she was to the mothers themselves, but during the recital it becomes apparent that she is teaching children with Down syndrome. It is her neighbour who informs them of this, "They're [the children] from that class she has out at the Greenhill School" (p. 158). The situation is a basic bicoherent class irony in the sense that Miss Marsalles was and is a music teacher for children; but the children that she teaches

are negatively associated when considered pairwise: normal children and children with Down syndrome. The situation is salient in two ways, first by the social imaginary concept of children with Down syndrome as being cognitively incapable and second by the activation of the common schema of education for only the mentally healthy children. The emotions the mothers experience at the recital are shock, surprise, and anger which are evoked due to their moral evaluation of Miss Marsalles's new manner adopted as a teacher. For the guests, Miss Marsalles proves to be a moral failure because she has decided to pursue her goal of teaching licentiously (in Shelley's term) – beyond the norms of custom and culture. Her teaching the abnormal children makes the guests experience a situation which is far from their goals, concerns, and preferences and challenges their concepts of education and teaching.

3. The discourse level: Present-tense narration and the technique of free indirect speech

The analysis of the discourse level where the readers are involved consists of two sections. The first section focuses on the use of the present tense and its contribution to the rise of situational ironies in Munro's "Dance". The second section investigates how Munro utilizes the potentials of the technique of free indirect speech to ironize her readers' cognitive reaction. The paper first discusses the limitations of Shelley's bicoherence theory of situational irony for the discourse level. These limitations open up the space to attend to the tense of Munro's narration and her technique of free indirect speech.

Although Shelley's bicoherence theory reveals ironies of situation in Munro's story, it only works on the concepts which are cued up in the character and/or narrator's mind. One of the limitations of this theory when applied to a literary work is that it leaves no space for the narrative dimensions of a literary text. It is so because the samples Shelley works on are taken from electronic news sources which are essentially different from literary texts. For Shelley, understanding the rhetoric of irony includes "the study of how ironies affect or bring about persuasion". One of the ways to reach this understanding is focusing on "manner" as the key to "understanding the emotional responses of people to the perceived physical and moral qualities of situational ironies". Shelley then continues that for studying the rhetoric of irony one should research "how bias affects the reporting of ironies" (2001, p. 804). By "manner" Shelley means the distance between a situation and a cognizer's goals, concerns, and preferences. This view of "manner" appeals to the communicative function of present-tense usage in the narration.

3.1. Present-tense narration

Shelley's approach does not address the simultaneity which Munro's use of present narration in "Dance" creates for the readers. Carolin Gebauer believes that simultaneous access to the storyworld occurs due to the immersive function of the fictional present (2021, p. 95). She explains this based on the deictic shift which helps readers to mentally experience the concrete timespaces of fictional worlds (2021, p. 94). In Segal's words, the readers' perspective is relocated to "a cognitive stance within the world of the narrative" (Segal, 1995, p. 15). The immersive function of the fictional present enables readers to project themselves into the here-and-now of the narrative. It thus creates the impression of simultaneous narration, suggesting that the narrative events are still unfolding. For Ryan, this simultaneity occurs due to "the principle of minimal departure" based on which "we reconstrue the central world of a textual universe in the same way we reconstrue the alternate possible worlds of nonfactual statements: as conforming as far as possible to our representation of AW [Actual World]" (Ryan, 1991, p. 51; Gebauer, 2021, pp. 95-96).

The other limitation of Shelley's view is that it fails to distinguish the two levels of literary texts: the story level, and the discourse level. The present paper borrows the distinction from James Phelan whose analysis of instabilities and tensions is related to the rhetorical function of present-tense usage in fiction (2002, p. 211). In exploring "narrative progression", Phelan argues that the focus is on "how authors generate, sustain, develop, and resolve readers' interests in narrative" (2002, p. 211). He then distinguishes two major kinds of unstable relation: instabilities and tensions. Instabilities are related to the story level, where they constitute conflicts "between characters" which are "created by situations, and complicated and resolved through actions" (Phelan, 2002, p. 211). By contrast, tensions emerge on the discourse level, and represent "instabilities – of value, belief, opinion, knowledge, expectation – between authors and/or narrators, on the one hand, and the authorial audience on the other" (Phelan, 2002, p. 211). Situational irony is a matter related to the rhetorical function of present-tense usage and in Munro's "Dance" it occurs on both the story and the discourse levels.

The ironies extracted above with the help of Shelley's bicoherence theory occur on the story level and reveal instabilities between characters. These instabilities, created by the ironizing arrival of Miss Marsalles's cognitively impaired students, take root in the guests' social imaginary of children with Down syndrome. To Goldman, cognitive disability and Alzheimer's disease are conventionally categorized as "morally wrong and horrifying"; they are therefore "seen through

the lens of the gothic, which typically exposes the existence of evil and features monsters and monstrous transformations" (Goldman, 2017, p. 286; also Goldman, 2015, p. 74). The way Munro's adolescent narrator describes the reaction of Miss Marsalles's guests to the retarded children reveals their gothic social imaginary and the way their expectations have been ironized by being exposed to this situation. The narrator, who is at the piano and does not have a complete view of the children who have recently arrived, describes the hush and shock of the guests in this way: "above or behind all this cautious flurry arrival there is a peculiarly concentrated silence. Something has happened, something unforeseen, perhaps something disastrous" (p. 158). Upon seeing the first child, she describes her as being "peculiar"; then she notices a boy's profile with "heavy, unfinished features, the abnormally small and slanting eyes" and another boy with "a very large head and fair shaved hair, fine as a baby's". The other children, who have regular and unexceptional features, are "marked only by an infantile openness and calm" (p. 158). Mrs Clegg refers to them as "that kind" and describes them as "nice little things" (p. 158). The narrator notices the upset sound in her mother's voice when she enquires about the children. Mindreading her mother and the other guests, the adolescent narrator reveals their inner thoughts and simultaneously displays their gothic social imaginary of these children: "*No, I know it is not right to be repelled by such children and I am not repelled, but nobody told me I was going to come here to listen to a procession of little – little idiots for that's what they are*" (original emphasis; p. 159). Munro's narrator thus reveals the instabilities that they experience when they get exposed to children with Down syndrome. The readers, nonetheless, are not left immune to such instabilities because of the immersion they experience thanks to the story's present narration.

The simultaneity which present-tense narration facilitates minimizes the distance between the story level and the discourse level. This reduction is temporary and occurs only while reading. In texts whose narrator uses a first-person point of view, the reduction is most overtly felt and dominant. As soon as the text finishes, the readers get delinked from the story level and return to the discourse level. As notified by Ryan, simultaneity gives readers the illusion of constructing and construing the storyworld in the same way they construct and construe their actual world (1991, p. 51). But practically while reading, readers' construal occurs under the unavoidable impression of the narrator. Put in other words, readers take for granted the storyworld and let themselves be guided by the narrator. Sonja Zeman aptly refers to this as the meta-cognitive usage of the present tense which is beyond merely conveying "vividness" and "concreteness"; for her,

present-tense narration "stimulates a complex relationship of simultaneity between narrator, audience, and the story world, and thus contributes to establishing a shared experience in the sense of a common ground" (Zeman, 2016, p. 168). This meta-cognitive function of present-tense narration accords the narrator and the narratorial force significance here.

3.2. The technique of free indirect speech

The problem with Munro's narrator is that based on what the adolescent girl reveals, her being the sole narrator is doubted. In the first two paragraphs, there are some hints that make readers suspect the presence of another narrator as well. The first paragraph starts with the content of Miss Marsalles and the narrator's mother's dialogue over the former's having a party. All through this paragraph and the next one, there is only one clue that hints at their dialogue being held on the phone. In this instance, Miss Marsalles expresses the sorrow and disappointment she would feel if she ever gave up her parties. In reaction to this, the narrator reveals: "Considerably more, says my mother to herself, but of course she cannot say it aloud; she turns her face from the telephone with that look of irritation – as if she had seen something messy which she was unable to clean up – which is her private expression of pity" (p. 152). This clue makes the readers conclude that they are talking on the phone: the adolescent narrator who is with her mother has direct access to her mother's speech on the phone, but she can only guess at the speech of Miss Marsalles based on her mother's reactions and responses. The question which arises here is how she comes to know about Miss Marsalles's emotional state on the other end of the line when she reports: "*Now*? asks Miss Marsalles, stung, pretending mystification, or perhaps for that matter really feeling it" (original emphasis; p. 152).

Therefore, in "Dance" there is also a heretordiegetic narrator who mostly but not always aligns with the adolescent girl. The heterodiegetic narrator most of the time remains close to the girl's I-origo but occasionally moves freely and provides details which are logically beyond the girl's reach and therefore not expected from her. The presence of an extradiegetic narrator can justify some comments and remarks which normally do not match a girl's potential. As an instance, one can refer to the part which tries to explain Miss Marsalles's emphasis on children's need for music:

> It is one of Miss Marsalles's indestructible beliefs that she can see into children's hearts, and she finds there a treasury of good intentions and a

> natural love of all good things. The deceits which her spinster's sentimentality has practised on her original good judgment are legendary and colossal; she has this way of speaking of children's hearts as if they were something holy; it is hard for a parent to know what to say. (p. 152)

These points can be expressed by an adult rather than an adolescent observer; even the diction featured by such words and expressions as "spinster's sentimentality", "original good judgment", "legendary and colossal" does not match an adolescent's. "Dance", therefore, relies upon the potentials of the technique of free indirect speech which confirms the doubleness of the narratorial voice.

The technique of free indirect speech adds to the meta-cognitive function of present-tense narration in that it mixes the two voices together, sounding more logical and natural. Olga Blinova defines free indirect speech as "a writing technique which allows the author to convey a character's thought in a way that are 'contaminated' with the narrator's speech" (2012, p. 366). Stylistically, in free indirect speech a merge occurs between the voices of the narrator and the character to a variety of effects, "from expressing sympathy for the latter to irony and sarcasm" (Blinova, 2012, p. 366). In Munro's narration, some parts are in focalizer mode where the adolescent's I-origo is focused, while some others are in narrator mode filtered through the extradiegtic narrator and to whose perspective the readers are shifted deictically. This deictic situatedness facilitates the process of immersion or transportation into the storyworld, and the readers take the storyworld as their actual world and thereby project onto that world their own perspectives. The immersive and rhetorical functions of present-tense narration help the readers experience without mediation the situational ironies the narrator gets exposed to.

Whereas on the story level in "Dance" irony is situational, the ironic on the discourse level is of a more delicate nature. The difference is due to the limitations of the narrator and the freedom of the readers. The heterodiegetic narrator aligned with the adolescent girl leaves Miss Marsalles's house and vows never to return; they drive out of the city "leaving Miss Marsalles and her no longer possible parties behind, quite certainly forever" (p. 160). But the last impression of the disabled girl's musical performance remains with the girl and the other characters just as it remains with the extradiegetic narrator and the readers forever. The immersive function of the present tense turns the readers into the narrators' companions and establishes a shared experience in the sense of a common ground; it makes the readers confined to them, so that the narrators' ironizing

situations become the readers' and the long-lasting impression of the disabled girl's performance becomes part of the readers' experience. As accomplices in this story, the readers also fall muted at the end, unable to say "*Poor Miss Marsalles*" (original emphasis; p. 160). This is all achieved through present-tense narration and the technique of free indirect speech.

However, there is a delicate difference between the readers and Munro's dual-voiced narrator. While the narrator and the characters remain locked up in their storyworld and are thereby muted forever, the readers do have the opportunity to reflect back upon the story and their complicity all through. This chance has a corrective function for the readers, demanding that they re-envision their performance in a critical way and reform their stance. The simultaneous narration functions to increase in the readers the illusion of narrative immediacy and bring them to a state of mimesis. But as Phelan reminds, "mimesis is not a product of faithful imitation of the real (whatever that is) but rather a set of conventions for representing what we provisionally and temporarily agree to be the real" (1994, p. 228). The simultaneity of present-tense narration backed up by the technique of free indirect speech makes the readers experience mimesis, drawing upon the guests' social imaginaries of children with Down syndrome and temporarily taking them to be real. But when the readers distance from the storyworld and retain their ground on the discourse level, they reflect back upon their performance in a critical way, and become aware of their being held by the narratorial force. The realization of this narratorial arrest is in itself enlightening and illuminating for the readers in the sense that it casts critical light upon their performance as readers as well as on their social imaginaries of children with Down syndrome. When restored to the discourse level, the readers are disillusioned with the way they have let the narratorial voice construct and construe the storyworld for them in the light of its social imaginaries. It thus leads to a self-corrective perspective. As social units, the readers become aware of their myopic attitude towards the cognitively impaired children; this realization makes them revise their stance.

4. The text level: "Dance" and its Orphic subtext

Munro's story calls for readers self-reflection and gives the urge a mythological basis and thereby universalizes it. The title of Munro's story, named after the children's musical piece, is drawn from the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, which relates a lover's failed attempt to rescue his beloved from the underworld. Goldman notifies that the title "refers to a far more prosaic allusion to the myth: a piano piece played at a children's music recital by a girl with Down syndrome" (2017, p.

289). For Goldman, this intertext draws a comparison between the children with cognitive impairment and Eurydice who is condemned to live in the underworld, in "a form of live burial" (2017, p. 289). However, the contribution of the mythical subtext to the theme of Munro's story is more than this as it sets up an ironical relationship between itself and the main text. This intertextual link allows for an ironic approach by juxtaposing a romanticized outlook on saving the marginalized with a more realistic one favoured by Munro's double-voiced narrator. The irony can be detected when oppositions between the text and subtext are revealed.

The mythical Orpheus is a singer, a poet, and a musician who enchants the gods and denizens of the underworld with his art, succeeding in obtaining their agreement to restore his recently deceased beloved, Eurydice, to the world of the living. In Munro's story, the children who are the residents of the world of the forgotten enchant the guests through their musical abilities. In the story, it is only Miss Marsalles who tries to restore the cognitively impaired children; but she herself is a resident of the underworld, being too old; or at least, she lies at the threshold between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Therefore, the children are to be claimed and approved by the guests who belong to the world of the living. However, the guests neither make an effort nor show an inclination to do that. Instead, they express their disgust and try to avoid them.

In the myth, Orpheus fails because he breaks his word and glances back at Eurydice before she was safely ensconced in the upper world. In Munro's story, the children could be saved only if the guests glanced back at them in a less biased and more humane way. For the mythical figures, glancing back at the dead is disastrous, while for the children, it is redeeming. These oppositions between the story and its mythical subtext add up to the instabilities between the characters on the story level and enhance the conflicts between Miss Marsalles and her guests. The teacher's attempts to restore the children to society stand in stark contrast to society's shunning them. Orpheus fails because he errs out of his love for Eurydice. But Miss Marsalles fails because of society's disgust: her guests do not take her as one of them anymore, due to her age. This is crystal clear in the way the narrator characterizes and categorizes her.

From the very beginning, the narrator draws a circle within which she puts herself and her mother and without which are Miss Marsalles, her sick sister, and her cognitively impaired students. In the first paragraph, she speaks of her mother's reluctance to participate in Miss Marsalles's recital: "My mother is not an inventive or convincing liar, and the excuses which occur

to her are obviously second-rate" (p. 152); she keeps thinking of "weak schemes for getting out of it". The first paragraph describes Miss Marsalles as "getting too old", living with an "older sister [who] is in bed, following a stroke", and having moved "to an even smaller place" on Bala Street the location of which sounds unfamiliar to the narrator who parenthetically asks "(Bala Street, where is that?)" (p. 152). Miss Marsalles's parties are "getting out of hand" and witness a "widening gap in the ranks of the regulars. . . . Every June reveals some new and surely significant dropping-out" to the extent that the question which arises is "will anybody else [other than the mother and her friend, Marg French] be there?" (p. 153). The mothers are said to no longer hold their belief in Miss Marsalles and her insistence on music; they "are plagued sometimes by a feeling that they have fallen behind" (p. 153). They "had complained for a week previously about the time lost, the fuss over the children's dresses and, above all, the boredom" (p. 154).

The narrator gives Miss Marsalles a ghostly presence. Miss Marsalles is overheard on the phone; she has an "idealistic view of children" and is "useless as a teacher" for her "tender or simple-mindedness" (p. 153). Upon her first physical appearance in the story, Miss Marsalles is "wedged between the door, the coatrack and the stairs. . . she looks like a character in a masquerade, like the feverish, fancied-up courtesan of an unpleasant imagination . . . her eyes, when we get close enough to see them, are the same as ever, red-rimmed and merry and without apprehension" (pp. 155-156). Miss Marsalles greets them with a kiss; but the narrator refuses to give her agency by using a passive structure: "My mother and I are kissed . . . and we get past" (p. 156). Miss Marsalles is said to have been looking beyond them while kissing them. The neighbour, Mrs Clegg, refers to Miss Marsalles and her older sister as "a couple of old ladies, a couple of babies, the pair" (p. 156).

While Dolores Boyle's musical performance arrests the guests, the narrator describes Miss Marsalles being in her usual way neither "like a magician" nor like a teacher at whose very end of life would light up with the importance of having discovered someone she can teach to play the piano (p. 159). Instead, she categorizes her as "people who believe in miracles [and therefore] do not make much fuss when they actually encounter one" (p. 159). In the last scene, the narrator leaves Miss Marsalles and "her no longer possible parties behind" while she is no longer an object to be pitied by her and her people; rather, Miss Marsalles becomes part of the world of the "Happy Shades" residing in "the other country" (p. 160).

These juxtapositions render the text-subtext relationship highly tensed as the mythical subtext casts a critical light upon the (post)modern text. What Munro achieves through these textual tensions is to criticize her contemporaneous society and their concepts of heroism and love. The mythical subtext revolves around a love relationship: Orpheus from the world of the living braves death for his beloved, Eurydice, and takes a dangerous trip into the world of Hades. But in Munro's story the living people ignore or even deliberately avoid the forgotten; not being capable of any heroism, they take the adventure-less trip by force, remain negligent all the way through, and take a repellent attitude with respect to the children, calling them "*little idiots*" (original emphasis; p. 159). Munro's call for "glancing back" is therefore beyond the potentials of the characters and the narrators. The mythical subtext takes the call beyond the limits of the text and thus addresses itself to the whole nation or even the whole human race. It thus functions as "cultural consciousness and remembrance" (Evans, 2018, p. 6). In addition, "glancing back" is itself based on the principle of repetition which is an inherent feature of the mythic time; it is an act of "re-membering" the so-far forgotten or ignored into one's own community. As Mircea Eliade observes, "An object or act becomes real only insofar as it repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation" (1954, p. 34). The Orphic subtext seeks to realize the act of "glancing back". Technically also, the mythical subtext accords the main text an eternal scope and thereby renders its situation and theme timeless. This timelessness well matches the simultaneity the story thrives on thanks to its present-tense narration.

While the story level leaves no chance for the redemption of the children, the discourse level offers an opportunity for reformation. The simultaneity of present-tense usage makes the readers approach the storyworld in the same vein as the narrator's; at the end, the readers are shown they think like the narrator, and this realization disillusions them as they feel surprised and shocked when the limitation of their vision is exposed to them. The guests remain locked up in their avoidance on the story level. On the discourse level, however, when the readers become disillusioned and aware of how they have been misled by the narratorial hold, they preserve the chance to "glance back" and revise their social imaginaries. Munro's ultimate target is her audience. Goldman accurately reinscribes "Dance" within its socio-cultural context in the first half of the 20th century, when children with Down syndrome were advised to be institutionalized at birth and "physicians routinely informed parents that their child might never talk and could not be taught" (Goldman, 2017, p. 289). In Goldman's view, Munro's "Dance" posed a radical challenge

to what Mark Jackson (2000, p. 149) calls the "crucially established . . . convenient physical and ideological distance between the healthy middle classes on the one hand, and the polluted and contaminated 'residuum,' on the other" (see Goldman, 2017, p. 289). Munro's story targets this demarcation and attempts to realize a "glancing back".

5. Conclusion

The detection and analysis of situational ironies in "Dance" proves quite revealing on both the story and the discourse levels. Shelley's bicoherence theory of situational irony with its focus on salience and emotional reactions to ironic situations evinces the cognitive-affective dimension of the situational ironies that Munro deploys on the story level of her narration. Through the shock and repugnance that Munro's characters experience when exposed to the incohering ironic class and element, Munro exposes and targets the cultural defects of her context with respect to the children with Down syndrome. Extending and evoking the same emotional reactions well through the text to the discourse level by means of the present-tense narration and technique of free indirect speech, Munro challenges her readers and their schematic expectations. The situational irony that the readers of "Dance" experience pushes to their limits their cognitive-affective responses. However, the story's Orphic subtext offers the readers the opportunity to "glance back" upon themselves in a revising and re-visiting gesture to re-configure their construal of the world in which children with Down syndrome live.

The present analysis also achieves two theoretical objectives simultaneously. First, it discloses the pros and cons of Shelley's bicoherence theory of situational irony for literary analysis. While this theory proves beneficial at the story level, it falls short at addressing the intricacies of the discourse level. Second, Gebauer's narrative model proves to have some limitations. It focuses on the hidden potentials of present-tense usage and proves to be quite beneficial in highlighting the cognitive operations which are activated in the readers during the process of reading. Concurrently, however, the analysis of Munro's story displays a basic limitation of Gebauer's theory. The problem with Gebauer's narrative theory is that in the story-reader relationship, it is the reader who construes the world based on their own perspectives. But in fact, the simultaneity of narration facilitated by present-tense usage reduces the distance and/or distinction between the story and the discourse levels. This reduction results in a mutual relationship between the two levels: just as the readers from the discourse level may project their

own perspectives on the story level in their construal, the narrator from the story level can also impress upon the readers' construal of the storyworld. The realization of this impression is in itself ironic in the sense that it disillusions the readers and calls for their detachment from the narratorial impression and re-approach the storyworld from a less dependent perspective.

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