

Ailsa Cox

### **‘Almost Like a Ghost’: Spectral Figures in Alice Munro**

Alice Munro’s stories derive their power from what is unspoken, misremembered or concealed. Over her long career, she has often explored the ambiguities of memory and perception through an engagement with liminality, which is typically embodied by the rivers and lakes of Ontario; or by characters who live in the marginal spaces on the edge of fictional small towns. In this paper, I focus on characters who are positioned in a liminal space between life and death, presence and absence in stories from recent collections, including ‘Dimensions’ (Too Much Happiness, 2009), and ‘Dear Life’ (Dear Life, 2012). Applying Bergsonian concepts of temporality, memory and perception, I relate Munro’s presentation of these characters a fluid and multiple subjectivity. Her most recent collections have shown an especially acute engagement with encroaching mortality; I end my paper with a close reading of ‘In Sight of the Lake’ (Dear Life, 2012) in which the spectral presence becomes the central narrative consciousness. I shall also refer to the liminal nature of Munro’s work as a type of writing which inhabits a zone between fiction and autobiography.