

‘Something not startling until you think of trying to tell it’: Alice Munro’s *Open Secrets*

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Abstract

In a 1995 interview, Alice Munro talks about her collection of stories, *Open Secrets* (1994): ‘I want these stories to be open. I wanted to challenge what people want to know. Or expect to know. Or anticipate knowing. And as profoundly, what I think I know.’ The word ‘open’ indicates Munro’s resistance to narrative closure, while the words ‘expect’ and ‘anticipate’ show her attempt to challenge what Frank Kermode calls ‘narrative sequence’. ‘Secrets’, Kermode argues, ‘are at odds with sequence’.

What Kermode calls ‘secrets’ here, as Nicholas Royle interprets, are ‘textual details, specific aspects of the language of a text, particular patterns of images or rhetorical figures’ ‘which can provoke a sense of mystery’. The word ‘mystery’ here seems to be opposite to Munro’s definition of ‘open secrets’, as seen in the last sentence of the story that serves as a metafictional comment on Munro’s art of narrative: ‘She [Maureen] seems to be looking into an open secret, something not startling until you think of trying to tell it.’ Drawing on Kermode’s essay entitled ‘Secrets and Narrative Sequence’, this paper explores how Munro makes her stories ‘to be open’ and how her concept of ‘open secrets’ is similar and differs from Kermode’s ‘secrets’ by examining Munro’s ‘Open Secrets’, the title story of her collection of stories.

Keywords: Alice Munro, Frank Kermode, open, secrets, narrative sequence