

I

**ALICE MUNRO:
DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE FROM
THE TRADITIONAL TO METAFICTIONAL**

P.K. PRABHA

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English Literature
to the University of Calicut*

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
SEPTEMBER 2006**

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SEPTEMBER 2006**

M. Snehaprabha, M.A. (Eng.), M.A. (Mal.), B.Ed., Ph.D.
Former Head of the P.G. Department of English,
Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College,
Calicut.

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the thesis entitled **Alice Munro – Development of Narrative from the Traditional to Metafictional** submitted by **P.K.Prabha** to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature is a record of the bonafide research work done by her under my guidance and supervision.

Place : Calicut

Date: 18 - 09 - 2006


Dr. M. Snehaprabha

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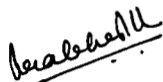
P.K. Prabha,
Lecturer (Selection Grade),
Department of English,
Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College,
Calicut.

DECLARATION

I, **P.K. Prabha**, Lecturer, Selection Grade, Department of English, Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Calicut - 14, hereby declare that this thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Title or Recognition, at any time.

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P.K. Prabha.

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PREFACE

Canada, the land that extends from ocean to ocean, was once the land of dreams and later the land of the dispossessed and alien. Now it is a land far advanced in terms of economy and technology. Its policy of multiculturalism embraces the native, mixed-blood and foreign cultures now inbred in Canada.

The literature of this land evolved slowly and has come into prominence since the 1850s. The early themes included 'landscape,' 'wilderness,' 'child's consciousness' and 'the presence of the North in man.' The second phase was marked by the experience of voyage over the sea. 'Winter' also exerted a significant influence in the Canadian experience. Because of the close association of Canada with the European age of industrialisation, mechanisation and urbanisation, literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflected these socio-economic realities. The First Nations people, the French, the English, the American presence etc. have a vital role in shaping the life and literature of Canada.

A unique factor that singles out Canadian literature is the presence of female writers who came into prominence by the 1840s. The writing by women in the early stages was characterised by the recurrent symbol of the Canadian Lady, who struggled to stay lady-like even under the

constraints of her social ambitions and a rigid sense of propriety. These narratives provided resistance to the male-centered portrayal of life in the American literary scene. The First World War and Suffragism marked the post-Victorian era and the writings provided pictures of muffled, baffled heroines battered by the community, family or their own ideals. The woman writers of the second World War period explored themes of unhappy and frustrated women whose liberation was stalled by challenges from society.

Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro and Margaret Lawrence, the writers of the post-fifties, focussed on themes of survival, women's role, status and potential, mother/daughter relationship and also the concept of strong woman. These writers portray Canadian women as free and passionate, not only as young girls but also as middle-aged and old women.

Alice Munro, whose works form the subject of this study, is one of the most revered woman writers of contemporary Canada. She was born in Wingham, Ontario, in 1931 as the daughter of Robert Eric Laidlaw and Ann Chamney Laidlaw. She was named Alice Ann Laidlaw. She attended the University of Western Ontario. Alice married James Munro in 1951, moved to Vancouver and later in 1963 shifted to Victoria. After the birth of her three daughters, she returned to Ontario. In 1972, she divorced James and married Gerald Fremlin in 1976. Her life in the country side as the daughter of a fox farmer who was shattered by the Great

Depression, and her stay in Vancouver deeply influenced her career as a writer.

The purpose of this study is to explore indepth the development of the creative artist in Alice Munro, focusing on the narrative theme, structure, plot, characterisation and use of language. Eight short story collections and one story from the New Yorker have been selected for this purpose. The story collections are:

<i>Dance of the Happy Shades</i>	(1968)
<i>Lives of Girls and Women</i>	(1971)
<i>Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You</i>	(1974)
<i>Who Do You Think You Are?</i>	(1978)
<i>The Moons of Jupiter</i>	(1982)
<i>The Progress of Love</i>	(1986)
<i>Friend of My Youth</i>	(1990)
<i>Open Secrets</i>	(1995)

The short story taken from the New Yorker is “The Children Stay” (1997). Six more collections of Munro have been since published by Alfred. A. Knopf., New York.

The first chapter of the thesis traces the evolution of the short story as a genre, probing the themes it deals with from the ancient times to the present. The post-modern context and the theories based on which the evaluation is done are also introduced.

The second chapter introduces the techniques--traditional and post-modern, and analyses the various methods employed by Munro with illustration from her stories.

The third chapter examines in detail various aspects of narrative including structural techniques, intertextuality and manipulation of Time and Space. The stories ranging from “Walker Brother’s Cowboy” of the first collection to “The Children Stay” have been studied indepth. Each of the stories highlights one or the other aspects of Munro’s narration.

The fourth chapter is a study of Munro’s female characters and their problems. The female spectrum ranging from young girls to older women, belonging to different generations and different walks of life are studied in the light of modern feminist theories.

The fifth chapter is an attempt to understand the magic of narrative that evolves through Munro’s use of language. Sociolinguistic and stylistic parameters and theories on female use of language are employed in investigating the development of Munro’s narrative from the traditional to metafictional stance.

The thesis concludes with the findings that in theme, structure, style, language, character development, plot and technique, Munro’s story world develops gradually from the traditional to metafictional method. Munro emerges as a gifted writer who can capture the imagination of the reader and leaves behind a lasting, indelible impression.

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Chapter I

Story Telling--From the Primitive to the Post-modern

“Once upon a time there lived a king...” begins the itinerant storyteller, sitting by the fireside and spinning a simple tale to narrate to his eager listeners. He describes the characters when he wishes, detailing what they think, feel and do. He inserts his own comments and ideas. Vera Lysenko, in her novel *Yellow Boots*, comments on the role of voice modulation resorted to by a storyteller, “The primitive voice has a peculiar quality which it loses in civilization. It has a greater range, from shrill to bass, and has a mastery of assonance. There is rhythm in/the telling, a relic of ancient time when ancestors had danced and sung in chorus--rhythm of labour in the fields, rhythm of seasons, rhythms of wind and clouds” (173-174). He is not bothered by the style or form of the story but just goes on to create a tale that will entertain his listeners. The course of the narration is decided by the response from the audience. Salman Rushdie observes:

An oral narrative does not go from the beginning to the middle to the end of the story. It goes in great swoops, it goes in spirals or in loops, it every so often reiterates something that happened earlier to remind you, and then takes you off again,

sometimes summarizes itself, it frequently digresses off into something that the story teller appears just to have thought of, then comes back to the main thrust of the narrative. Sometimes it steps sideways/ and tells you about another related story, then all come back. (Malak 113-114)

And thus, the teller opens the magic casement of fairy tales and fables before the audience who are rapt in attention. The wonderful stories about Alibaba, Aladdin and *Alf Layla Wa Layla* from the deserts of Arabia take our imagination to a world of eternal bliss. The stories from Greek mythology, the Bible stories and the *Aesop's fables* from the West, together with the interesting narratives of *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, *The Panchathantra* and *The Jataka Tales* excite and amuse millions round the world.

These tales, embellished with music, convey certain morals too. They are meant not only to entertain the listeners but also to disclose certain truths about life that ordinary men may not perceive. Justice, truth, knowledge, chastity, charity, compassion and such other virtues are impressed upon the mind of the enthusiastic hearer. Stories about kings as well as laymen, which portray the social life of the times and give expression to the 'wishful thinking' of the common man, are among these beautiful stories.

The stories of the medieval age, replete with romance and chivalry, compose another type of narrative. This age of knights, the daring youth of the countryside and of the highwaymen who frequent lonely paths beside the mansions of great lords and the houses of ordinary country folk gives an equally interesting set of stories to literary tradition. Stories about Lorna Doone and about King Arthur and his knights stir the heart of the readers even today. It was a time when both the wealthy and ordinary people were held in fear of being attacked by wicked highwaymen. The common themes were of chivalry and love. Before the nineteenth century, the tale or the story was a formless discursive narrative, lacking in economy and control. Writers of short fiction before the middle of the nineteenth century ignored the limitations of the story.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a sweeping change in the west, especially in England. More and more women of wealthy families had access to education. Upper and middle class women with enough leisure formed a significant segment of novel readers. Those women were not concerned about earning money. Free time and a growing thirst for knowledge augmented the demand for long stories. Moreover, women had the freedom to choose their own partners, which sometimes led to disaster because of misguided choice, bringing with it a sense of guilt and self-reproach. This situation resulted in many women deciding never to

get married. Such women had more time at their disposal for more leisurely reading. The expansion of the reading public that included the urban middle classes--tradesmen, shopkeepers, clerks and their families--and also, to some extent, servants, has long been seen as the underlying social condition for the rise of novel as a form of literary expression. Favourite themes in fiction were the conflicts between the interests of parents who wanted their children to marry for gain and of children who wanted to marry for love. The concept of ideal marriages found place in the works of eighteenth and nineteenth century writers right from Henry Fielding to Jane Austen.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, a small group of writers in America, Russia and France realised the scope of short fiction by tightening plots and stripping narratives to a more concentrated form. Nathaniel Hawthorne contributed greatly to the development of the American story with his tales of moral seriousness. He examined a problematic situation by means of allegory and symbolism. Like Henry James and other later story writers, Hawthorne was more concerned with theme and character than with plot. Edgar Allen Poe, with his *unity of effect*, influenced short fiction writers of America and Europe. By 1860, the short story was beginning to be recognized as a new and distinct literary form. Writers, including Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe, dealt with the exaggerated, the extraordinary, or the horrible.

But later story writers concerned themselves with dramatizing the ordinary in human experience by presenting common men in real situations. Thus, realism became a dominant literary movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century and provided a ready and fertile ground for the rise of short fiction.

Realism paved the way for a new mode of seeing and recording life and its influence extended far into the twentieth century. The late nineteenth century was a period of long short stories or novels. One finds Charles Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and the Bronte sisters dominating the space. *Adam Bede*, *David Copperfield*, *Vanity Fair*, *Wuthering Heights*, etc. belong to this phase and their themes:

[P]ossess in themselves a substantial value and a genuine human meaning because they are concerned not with the mere trivialities which lie upon the surface of existence, but with passions, conflicts and problems which, however their forms may change, belong to the essential texture of life.

(Hudson 132)

The nineteenth century stories are generally straight forward, realistic narratives in which action determines meaning and themes are explicit. The writers of this period, “unlike modern writers, move their narratives forward smoothly, with controlled plots to an important conclusion”

(Hughes 8). They do not shatter the pattern of temporal chronology but present their stories from an omniscient point of view, employing the narrator's control over the narrative. The role of the newspapers and periodicals in popularising short fiction in America and Europe is worth mentioning.

The twentieth century, marked and marred by the industrial revolution, the World Wars and the developments in cosmology, greatly altered people's life styles. In the wake of industrialisation, men and women began working. They could find little time to read elaborate books. Still, the desire for books was tremendous and, consequently, short fiction gained wide popularity. Somerset Maugham, James Thurber, Guy de Maupassant, Anton Pavlovich Chekov, George Orwell, O. Henry, Katherine Mansfield, etc., dominated the scene. In the beginning of the twentieth century, when short fiction evolved as a distinct literary genre, R.L. Stevenson enunciated the cardinal principles of story writing:

There are, so far as I know, three ways, three ways only, of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly... you may take a certain atmosphere, and get actions and persons to realise it. (Hudson 342)

The period from 1890 to 1910 is called the modern period which dismantled much of the structure of pre-twentieth century practice in literature and other forms of art. Vienna is acclaimed the epicentre of this earthquake that later extended its influence to France, Germany, Italy and, eventually, Britain by way of arts movements like Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Futurism. Modernism rejected the fundamentals of literary practice as well as other art forms. There was a rejection of traditional realism (chronological plots, continuous narratives relayed by omniscient narrators, closed endings, etc.) in favour of various experimental forms. The period from 1910 to 1930 is considered to be a period of high modernism when T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens, Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust, Stephan Mallarmé, André Gide, Franz Kafka and Rainer Maria Rilke imprinted their personality. Some of the important characteristics of literary modernism practised by these writers include the following:

1. A new emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity, that is, on how we see rather than on what we see (a pre-occupation evident in the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique).
2. A movement (in novels) away from the apparent objectivity provided by such features as: omniscient external narration, fixed narrative points of view and clear-cut moral

positions. 3. A blurring of the distinction between genres, so that novels tend to become more lyrical and poetic, for instance, and poems more documentary and prose-like. 4. A new liking for fragmented forms, discontinuous narrative, and random-seeming collages of disparate materials. 5. A tendency towards 'reflexivity', so that poems, plays and novels raise issues concerning their own nature, status and role. (Barry 83)

By the middle of the twentieth century, a sort of fear, a feeling of insecurity, a sense of loss and a loss of faith grew among the people. Two tendencies prevailed: one was to cling to the lost order with a sense of nostalgia and the other, to strive for betterment, towards a new horizon where man would be free of such horrors. This search for order in the face of moral and social chaos was a peculiar aspect of modernism, which believed in the autonomy and self-sufficiency of art. The authority of the work of art and its claim to represent an authentic view of life was apparent in the so-called Modern Age. The representational system of that age permitted only one point of view: that of the male subject. At this point, Gregor McLennan's comment is worth examining, "The contemporary world, in spite of patches of surface civilization, remains too ravaged by

oppression, ignorance and malnutrition for privileged intellectuals to trade in seriousness for the sparkling interplay of language games” (Mc Robbie 62).

By the 1960s, a new trend was set in motion in writing. It was termed the ‘post-modern,’ which was first imported from France and accepted immediately by American academics like Frederic Jameson and was associated with a cultural critique. Angela Mc Robbie states:

First there was post-modernism in the field of the arts and in visual culture. From architecture to fine art, from remarks of B movies to the cinema of David Lynch from Talking Heads to Laurie Anderson, what was becoming increasingly apparent was indeed a concern with surface, with meaning being paraded as an internationally superficial phenomenon (what Jameson labelled ‘waning in effect’ or depthlessness). Not only was meaning in art or in culture all there, for all to see, stripped of its old hidden elitist difficulty, but it also, again as Jameson pointed out, seemed already familiar, like the faint memory of an old pop song, a refrain, a chorus, a tune, a ‘cover/ version’ of an original which never was.

(Mc Robbie 2)

She adds that “post-modernism can more convincingly be constructed as an effort to re-examine the historical ‘master narratives’ in

order to question their claims to mastery, exposing historiography as a human construction, not unlike the writing of fiction” (Mc Robbie 2). Following this argument, Mc Robbie asserts that post-modernism represents neither an absence of seriousness, nor a kind of political immorality or irresponsibility. She defines it as a concept for understanding social change.

Foucault and Derrida claim that “post-modernism is a regression from, rather than a supercession of, the modern” (Godard 1990 133). Godard states that post-modernism here becomes a synonym for post-metaphysics, post-humanism and post-structuralism. It may also be, according to Godard, a synonym for post-history, post-industrialism, post (late)-capitalism, as it is used by Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton, who perceives post-modernism as “the cynical belated revenge wreaked by bourgeois culture upon its revolutionary antagonists” (Godard 1990 133). Patricia Waugh, in her book “*Feminine Fiction*,” examines Frederic Jameson’s view of post-modernism as ‘nostalgia’ plus ‘schizophrenia.’ She remarks that he refers particularly to the way in which Lacan has shown the experience of time, history, memory and identity to be an effect of language. She quotes Jameson:

We have a sense of time as lived because language has a past and a future and sentences unfold in time. For the

schizophrenic, language articulates not temporal continuity but the sense of a perpetual present with no casual relation to a time conceived of as before or after: in other words, schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our/ feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the 'I' and the 'me' over time. (Waugh 78-79)

In the light of these statements, Waugh explains the shift from modernism to post-modernism as a “change from an aesthetics of impersonality (schizoid) to one of extreme depersonalisation (schizophrenic)” (Waugh 79).

American critics have called post-modernism, “the extreme non-representational textual play and self-reference of ‘surfiction’” (Hutcheon 1988 2). But Linda Hutcheon lays this opinion aside as “yet another form of (late) modernism, the logical extreme of its aesthetic (and aestheticist) tenets and its romantic faith in the imagination” and continues that “post-modernism is more paradoxical and problematic” (Hutcheon 1988 3). By undermining the master narratives, post-modernism seemed to create new space for pluralism, marginality, and difference, which are values, stressed by feminists also. In other terms, post-modernism is also an effort to re-examine the historical ‘master narratives’ in order to question their claims to mastery, exposing historiography as a human construction, not unlike

the writing of fiction. This insight, which has been articulated most forcefully by Hayden White, informs the works of “historiographical metafiction that Hutcheon sees as central to the post-modern corpus” (Kudchetkar 116). Rinner Fridrun remarks that, the “post-modern age is particularly marked by a crisis of cultural authority, especially the kind of authority with which Western European culture and its institutions are equipped” (Fridrun 149). He also states that in the post-modern age, a work of art claims no authority.

Post-modernism undermines the prevailing values and conventions in order to provoke a questioning of the hitherto unquestioned norms of contemporary culture. Post-modernism “mimes the formal resolution of art and social life attempted by the avante-garde while remorselessly emptying it of its political content... post-modernism is thus a grisly parody of socialist utopia having abolished all alienation at a stroke” (Eagleton 61). This act displaces the post-modern writer to the periphery of the existing dominant culture. From the periphery, he looks back and forth to weave a new sensibility with a new centre which is at the periphery of the ‘existing culture.’ This is a violation of the boundaries and, from this newly created centre, the writer gets a new perspective which subverts the old cultural order.

Christopher Nash, in his book *World Post-modern Fiction*, says that myth and folklore, which are the primordial forms of narrative, have as its most prevalent motif the dramatisation of the power of 'the word' as a source of creation: 'In the beginning was the word.' He describes how mythology exalts 'logos' as formative principle and how the 'act of naming' becomes an act of creating. In the Book of Genesis (11: 4-7), the 'power' of word is asserted and it continues even after the emergence of Christianity. It is this superiority of the 'spoken' word that is questioned by Derrida in his essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Post-modern fiction writers question the validity of the spoken word.

Post-modern fiction is characterised by the interaction between texts. The narrators or central figures appear as writers or storytellers and the problem involved in the work of narrating becomes an intrinsic aspect of narrative. Emphasis is given to 'scriptive' rather than 'passive' description of experience and that leads to the idea of the 'textual' aspect of experience. The oscillation of focus, between the written and the outside texts, becomes a post-modern exercise which challenges the boundaries of tradition.

Post-modernists view writing as an act of reading. The writer, in his attempt to write, appropriates the pre-written texts. The process is termed Intertextuality. This written text is read by the 'informed' reader or the

'*Rasika*' as Abhinavagupta puts it, to be appropriated according to one's awareness of the situation. For an evaluation or understanding of the text, the pre-existent reality, i.e., the author is not a necessary factor. The work is not seen as the product of a characterisable person through whose personal nature and intentions, the reader should view the text. Emphasis is given to the product of language itself and to the reading of it. "Once the author is gone," writes Roland Barthes, "the claim to 'decipher' a text becomes quite useless. To give an author to text is to impose upon the text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification to close writing" (Nash 66).

The most formal practice in post-modernism is metafiction, the fiction that in some way foregrounds its own status as a fictional construct. It is essentially ironic and it undermines the very idea of its form by the way in which it is told. Metafiction reminds the reader about the fictional status of the presentation. It also encourages pursuing the fact that fiction is fictional, and no more than reality. The effect of metafiction is to momentarily break the distinction between fiction and reality by causing the 'outside world' to intrude into the story world. When metafiction calls attention to its own status as fiction it is called Narcissistic representation. Narcissistic writing is another peculiar feature of post-modernism that includes the genre of novel called the 'Buildungsroman' in which the

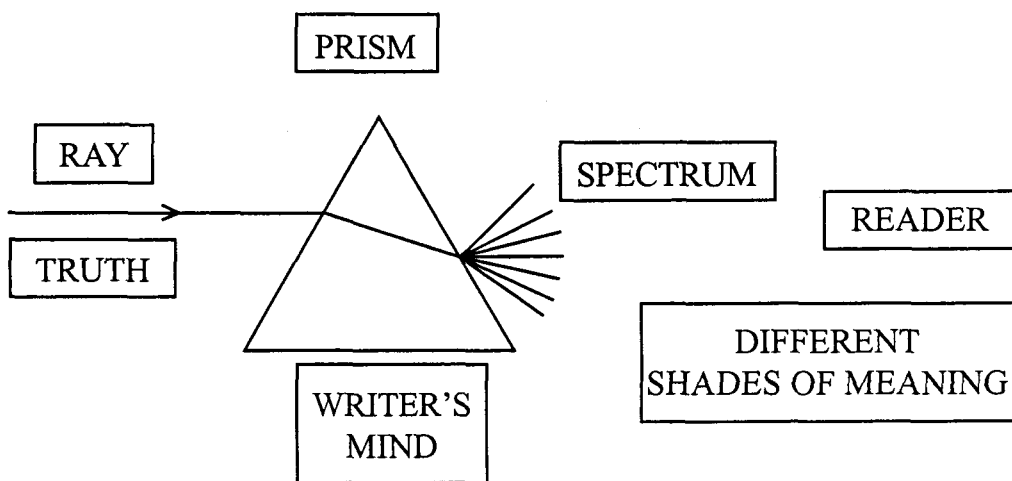
protagonist learns what she/ he may perceive, to be a writer. Barbara Godard remarks:

In the narcissistic novel, the process of engendering the self occurs with literary not biological parent, the writer becoming critic of tradition, foregrounding the genesis of the work from the communicating of a message to the inciting to produce meaning, as well as the act of reading becomes a creative, interpretive one, partaking of the experience of writing itself. The critical and creative meet in fiction when the reader, like the writer, becomes critic. (Barbara 1994 71)

The idea of the reader as collaborator of the writer and his/her work initiated by Roland Barthes in his essay "Work to Text" becomes relevant in this context. The text cannot consume the status of a whole, unless the reader takes it up. And post-modern fiction provides enough scope for the play of imagination of the reader whom Jay MacPherson in her poem "The Boatman" defines as "the gentle reader" (MacPherson 292), an arc accepting the different facets of a literary work. Central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction between its structure and recipient.

Such post-modern literature, which questions the master narratives, the existing dominant culture and the authority of the spoken word,

literature, which anticipates the reader, is surely complex. It shows that there can be no single view of it. Since literature reflects life, which has more than one aspect, it is not capable of providing a single unified truth. Factual description just expresses one point of view. But literature, which is complex, presents the complex nature of reality and provides scope for different perspectives from which it can be viewed and analysed. This scope is known as irony, which is different from sarcasm. In sarcasm there are two meanings at first, but is different from ambiguity since ambiguity occurs when one is unable to decide what the truth is, because information is scant. In ambiguity, there is no relationship between the two possible meanings and in sarcasm, there is only one possible meaning. Irony is like a spectrum. It emanates different shades of meaning from a single ray of truth.



Irony means a provision for more than one version of truth, all of which are valid. Irony is “a point of view, a way of presenting the complexity of things...it is a way of suggesting the complexity of a situation, character or event. Irony always suggests that there is no single truth which can be stated in a direct way: there is often more than one way of looking at things, and contradictory meaning can be valid” (Marsh 86). For the same reason, the post-modern writers make use of irony to question the idea of authority and single meaning.

Linda Hutcheon, the well-known post-modern Canadian critic, says that at the base of irony as a trope and the historical and cultural nature of Canada as a nation, the familiar cliché is the doubleness of Canada, “Historically this was first inscribed in the ‘meeting’ of native peoples and colonizers, of French and English, and re-inscribed in the governmental configuration of Upper and Lower Canada; later the politico-geographic doubling came to be articulated as well as in terms of East and West, North and South. There is also, of course, the French/English linguistic and cultural doubling and the federal/provincial and House/Senate legislative ones” (Hutcheon 1992 12).

Irony, with the blending of the playful and the provocative, plays an important role in post-modern fiction as something “irresponsible, anarchic, undermining and above all, not serious” (Hutcheon 1992 68). Linda

Hutcheon, in her work *Double-Talking*, counters the attacks on irony saying that the usage of irony has changed over the last hundred years. She continues, “one of the major changes has been the shift in the usage (and therefore meaning) of fundamentally pessimistic, and detached view of existence to the notion of irony as a more positive mode of artistic expression with renewed power rhetorical and structural strategy of resistance and opposition” (Hutcheon 1992 11). Post-modern irony is undoubtedly a weapon that undermines the hierarchy of things. It is through displacement, subversion and undermining the hierarchy that a new system, a new order comes into existence. For this order to be, irony is necessary. It is the sharpest shaft in the hands of post-modern writers to attack notions such as authority and single meaning. Linda Hutcheon observes:

Saying one thing and meaning another (the basic semantic part of the definition of irony) is certainly one way of subverting a dominant language from within. Saying one thing and meaning another is also, by definition, a dialogic or doubled mode of address. And any attempt to jiggle simultaneously both literal and ironic meanings cannot help but disgust our notions of meaning as something single, decidable, or stable. (Hutcheon 1992 13)

Alan Wilde, in his study “Horizons of Assent, Modernism, Post-modernism and the Ironic Imagination,” observes that post-modern irony is “suspensive in that it is more radical in its awareness of contingency and multiplicity, deliberately refusing the modernist dialectic” (Hutcheon 1991 69).

Alongside the post-modern tendencies that developed in art and literature, another important perspective, that is, the feminist perspective also developed as part of women’s liberation movement. It was then a new consciousness about women and their position in the patriarchal society began to be problematised. The differentiation between sex and gender paved the way for an evolution against the suppression of women on the basis of biological difference. They came to realise that, “One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that human female presents in society, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as ‘feminine’” (Beauvoir 1972 249). Subsequently, women began their search for an identity and began to recognise that once she stopped conforming to the conventional picture of femininity she should be able to enjoy being a woman. They also understood that, “Even a very young woman today must think of herself as a human being first, not as a mother with time on her hands, and make a life plan in terms of her own abilities, a commitment of her own to

society, with which the commitments as wife and mother can be integrated” (Friedan 295).

Critics like Betty Friedan condemn the picture of a happy housewife doing creative work at home--painting, sculpting, and writing--as one of the semi-delusions of the syndrome that she names the ‘feminine mystique.’ She says that both men and women can do these jobs. The difference is that when a man works at home, his wife keeps the children strictly out of the way but when a woman works she must either find some place away from the home to do it, or risk becoming an ogre to her children in her impatient demand for privacy. Her attention is divided and her concentration interrupted, on the job and as a mother. These problems, which the existing cultural scenario posed, necessitated the development of a greater sense of identity and relationship and a need for connection which was an attempt to reproduce their psychological problems and oppression. “Dependency, insecurity about self-concept, feelings of ‘loss’ and depression, the desire to please, a sense of inadequate boundaries, and therefore vulnerability to criticism or attack on the ‘self,’ are conditions present more often in women than in men, and arise out of their economic and cultural situation” (Waugh 85). Gradually women began to view themselves not through the culturally biased male gaze but through a journey into their psychological realm.

This search for woman's 'self' resulted in a spurt of successful autobiographical texts, childhood accounts of the time during and after the wars. Coldness, silence, absence and unsociability characterised the theme of father-daughter relationship. As a counter-tradition, woman writers began creating works examining mother-daughter relationship, of how the cultural situation instils aversion for the mother, and the ensuing estrangement between mother and daughter. They further went on to re-vision their own behaviour towards the mother and revive that great figure of the 'Mother' that had become an absence as far as the Western traditional narratives were concerned. Through this process of revision and revival, the daughter who also becomes a mother, recognises her position in the world before crossing the threshold of her future, with firmness in her heart. As part of this endeavour, French post-structuralists like Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Helen Cixous made efforts to reach an 'écriture féminine' or a female literary tradition.

The change that has come over the lives of girls and women, the change from:

[A] nondescript influence, fluctuating and vague, to a voter, a wage earner, a responsible citizen, has given both in her life and in her art a turn towards the impersonal. Her relations now are not only emotional, they are intellectual, they are

political. The old system which condemned her to squint askance at things through the eyes or through the interests of husbands or brother, has given place to the direct/ and practical interests of one who must act for herself and not merely influence the acts of others. Hence her attention is being directed away from the personal centre which engaged it exclusively in the past to the impersonal, and her novels naturally become more critical of society, and less analytical of individual lives. (Waugh 18-19)

Female writers at this time focussed on the analysis of gender, which is a socially constructed weapon to oppress women. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir, “the situation of women is that she a free and autonomous being like all creatures nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other” (Singh 22). They drew strength from the ideas of “humanist Marxism, liberal theories of inalienable rights, sociological role and social learning theory, and on theories of psychology which emphasised the need to ‘actualise’ the ideological production of ‘femininity’ as the ‘other’ of subjects and to discover their ‘true’ selves” (Waugh 9). The use of the personal conversational tone has been regarded as an important aspect of female narratives.

Post-modernism evolved as a critique of and corrective upon Modernism. Feminism evolved as a critique of patriarchal norms and values. Post-modernism contested against cultural dominants like patriarchy, capitalism, humanism, etc., knowing well the impossibility of extricating itself completely from these. Both post-modernism and feminism work towards an awareness of the social nature of cultural activity, but feminism is not content with just the exposition of the contemporary situation. Linda Hutcheon argues, “feminisms want to go beyond this work to change those systems, not just to ‘de-doxify’ them” (Kudchetkar 77).

Even though both post-modernism and feminism developed simultaneously from the 1960s onwards, there are certain points at which they converge. Both are concerned with disrupting the traditional boundaries between art and life, masculine and feminine, high and popular culture, the dominant and the marginal. Both analyse the decline of an effective literary voice, or the absence of a strong sense of stable subjectivity, as a result of which polyphony and fragmentation in structure began to be celebrated. Both post-modernism and feminism discuss the impact of consumerism and technology, which places human beings in a gothic situation since they do not fit into traditional moral paradigms. Patricia Waugh explains this situation thus:

Post-modernism expresses nostalgia for but loss of belief in the concept of the human subject as an agent effectively intervening in history, through its fragmentation of discourses, language games, and decentring of subjectivity. Feminism sets a subjective identity, a sense of effective agency and history for women, which has hitherto been denied them by the dominant culture. Post-modernist writers express the disintegration of the potency of that 'individual vision' mediated through the 'unique' style of modernism and stress the inability of the contemporary subject to locate - 'himself' historically. (Waugh 9)

Female literary tradition also constructs a variety of oppositional strategies in the depiction of gender institutions in narrative. In order to create this counter-tradition, woman writers break the sentence, break the sequence and, ultimately, the expected order of the existing modes of narrative which tends to repeat, sustain or embody values. The new literary tradition has had to resist the mode of characterisation of women by writers like Barth, Bellow, Kesey, Pynchon, Mailer and the like. Their portrayals are viewed by female writers as projection of primitive masculine fears and desires, very often close to myth. The jokes which 'hate women' and the extreme objectification of the female body in pornographic manner

which form the bulk of such literature, are to be condemned, since women have come out of the trap of economic dependence. Another vocation of female writers has been to object, “the ‘splitting’ of women characters into idealised and asexual or highly sexualised objects” by modern fiction writers (Waugh 68).

To create a new sensibility regarding women, the feminist theorists use both the post-structuralist mode of deconstructing master narratives and the post-modernist way of locating and freeing the female subject. Thus a new form, the feminist Odyssey--not with Ulysses at the centre but Penelope going in quest of the unknown truth--has developed in the world of literature. But, this is a Herculean task because a complete sabotage in the outlook of the world has to be brought about in order to make this endeavour successful. As Barbara Godard states, “If she is to write, a woman must deconstruct the self that is male ‘opus’ and discover a living inconstant self. She must, in Bloomian terms, replace the ‘imitation’ with ‘originality,’ rejecting and replacing crippling patriarchal prescriptions” (Godard 1994 72).

And for this purpose, the most effective subversive strategy is parody which misuses the common male tradition and genres. “Art is subversive when it articulates that power is what arises from the inside, not from the outside... Art is subversive when it asks improper questions,

demands new answers, and does anything that fundamentally threatens the accepted 'status quo, either within the macro--or micro--power structure'" (Kudchetkar 100). Barbara Godard gives the example of this sort of digression explaining the definition given by Ellen Moers'--as interior travel through corridors and tunnels in castles or monasteries-- that provide the response of woman writers to the journeys of picaresque heroes. She goes on to assert that in order to establish an alternative literary tradition, the woman writer must write her own 'family romances' with herself at the centre, return to her primal scene, give birth to herself as authentic being and as text. For this, she needs to make contact with her lost foremothers as the Canadian folk tale about Mother Trudy and the inquisitive girl explicates. In this story, the inquisitive girl who peeped into Mother Trudy's life was transformed into a bird, which was allowed to travel far and wide, to return with a story that Mother Trudy had never heard. The bird had collected a large number of stories during its sojourn and she related them one by one, but Mother Trudy was not satisfied. At last the little bird opened its beak to tell her own sad story and words began to flow like the waters of Niagra. This is the case with all female writers who in order "to deconstruct male literary tradition... should create shared spaces and emphasize the collective nature of creation--texts which are not authored and without authority" and, thereby, fulfil the dream of a common language (Godard 1994 73).

When the text is not authored, when the text is about one's own experience of life it goes on and on unable to stop anywhere like the ancient stories to which more and more anecdotes could be added. And the post-modernist writing is also open-ended, avoiding closure and embracing disorder, which again emphasises the connection between the two 'isms' post-modernism and feminism. The common basis of these two trends is their shared "ex-centric" position (Hutcheon 1988 3). The use of the short story form in itself is a decanonization effort because of the "ex-centric position of the short story among fictional genres" (Kudchetkar 248). At this juncture, one may be forced to accept Alice Munro's position as a post-modernist, feminist writer. These two positions are quite challenging when Munro herself claims to be very traditional in her writing. Munro is a post-modern writer because she is a writer who writes from the so-called 'ex-centric' position making use of the form of the linked short stories. Her first collection, *Dance of Happy the Shades*, is a, "collection which is termed 'sequence stories' or 'linked' with the effect of a novel" (Keith 255). Other collections like *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Open Secrets* are also linked stories. Susan Fromberg Schaeffer observes, "they are short stories, and yet they expand in the mind until they become novels" (Kudchetkar 249).

Another generic boundary, which the collections touch upon, is autobiography. Thus, both Munro and her protagonist Helen Louise are daughters of fox farmers. Like Munro, her protagonists write stories. Depression is an important factor that decides the predicament of both the writer and the protagonist. Her later stories depicting her relationships with her mother, father and other people of the small town in which she had lived also reflect the autobiographical structure of her stories. The stories that re-vision and revise her life experiences also possess an autobiographical touch. Stories like "Peace of Utrecht," "Progress of Love," "Winter Wind," "Ottawa Valley," "The Children Stay," etc., take Munro a long way forward in the path of post-modernism and feminism. The point of convergence of these two 'isms' in Munro is in appropriating the feminist themes through post-modern techniques of writing. She presents her female subjects with their woes and disillusionments and strategies of survival to reach the ultimate aim of a free woman, within the framework of post-modern techniques. In a story like "Peace of Utrecht," Munro uses the reflexive or double-bending mode of narration to re-vision the 'Mother' figure, and in "The Children Stay" it is used as a weapon against the existing system of ethics woven around the institution of marriage and family. In "Carried Away," the story seems to move like the spokes of a wheel centred on the death of Jack Agnew and his connection with the

female protagonist who, unlike the traditional stereotyped woman, callously reviews her life experience, thereby explicating the story of Agnew. In each story, Munro revises and re-visions the situation of women in different layers of society. For this, she adopts the trope of Elegy, which is a post-modern technique in fiction. It is applied to stories like “Peace of Utrecht,” “Meneseteung” etc., and ‘the mother-daughter’ plot is made use of in the stories like “The Progress of Love” and “Friend of My Youth.”

Yet another blurring of generic boundary becomes evident in the inclusion of historical details. The major event of Canadian history touched upon is the Great Depression of 1930’s. Helen Louise (in Munro’s “Walker Brothers Cowboy”) becomes aware of the Depression when prices fall and her father is unable to continue his fox farming and is forced to become “a peddler knocking at backwoods kitchens”(Munro 1968 4). Another important event touched upon by Munro is immigration from France or England. An example is seen in the mention of the French sledge fields and ancestral family name by the Aunts in “Connections.” Again, History and Myth are used as techniques by Munro in *Something I’ve Been Meaning To Tell You*, *The Moons of Jupiter* and *The Progress of Love*. This mixing of genres or the existence of different genres within a text is because of the blurring of fact and fiction which is an important aspect of Munro’s writing.

Alice Munro is a post-modernist feminist not only in the mixing of different genres but also in the use of the trope of Bildungsroman. Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* are female Bildungsromane, the portraits of the artist as a girl and a young woman. Del, the protagonist in *Lives of Girls and Women*, is her own chronicler. The narrative point of view is kept under the control of the central female character/ narrator while it follows the history of the heroine's growing up, maintaining an ironic distance between voice and event. In *Who Do You Think You Are?* the story of Rose growing up to be an actress is narrated by an omniscient narrator. The Bildungsroman is a distinctive form of post-modernist feminist literature where the narrator enters the text and becomes a character in it. Munro is also aware of the fact that Canadian women's writing is characterised by "those shifts of emphasis that throw the story line open, to question the disarrangements which demand new judgements and solutions, and throw the windows open on inappropriate unforgettable scenery" (Kudchetkar 102).

For Munro, the process of writing is partly invention, partly remembering the way something looked, the way somebody spoke, a certain feeling. It is not, as she has often said in interviews, a process directed by a theory of how to write. She never thinks about how to write her next story. She does not have a plan for a collection, preferring to

write whatever story comes along and to respond to the demands of her material. She begins each story by writing a scene, revising it as many as thirty times to “get it right” (Ross 292). It seems, she says, like an enormously “chancy thing every time and not a process she can analyse” (Ross 292). Munro further emphasises the “discrepancy between the ideal of civility and the actualities of a disorganized small town” (Hutcheon 1992 42). Hutcheon states that the form used by Munro is appropriate for the disunified harmonious small-town life of Canadian communities.

Feminism has given new and emphatic value to the idea of ‘experience.’ The feminist writers have provided a different angle for the post-modern question of what constitutes a valid historical narrative and who decides the validity. Munro’s stories like “The Progress of Love,” “Friend of My Youth,” “Material” etc., discusses this question of validity. Through these stories she also proves that all representations are misrepresentations. This goes in tune with Catherine Stimpson’s comment, “the history of feminist thought on this topic includes the confrontation of dominant representation of women as misrepresentations” (Hutcheon 1988 8).

Another genre that Munro subverts is the Gothic. The Victorian Gothic was dominated by women, written by women, choosing as its central figure a young girl, the Gothic heroine. The romantic paradigm of

a popular Gothic asserts the importance of the relationship between the male and the female and is based only on a quest for romantic love. "Boys and Girls" is a story by Munro, which deals with this theme. The adolescent protagonist begins with dreams in which she, as heroine saves others. It gradually changes shape and she begins to realise that someone else happens to save her. This change is the outcome of her experience as a girl growing up to be a woman. In stories like "An Ounce of Cure," "Carried Away" and "The Children Stay," Munro discusses the topic with a difference. The protagonists are more critical in their evaluation of their experiences, quite different from the way in which the heroines of Victorian Gothics dealt with theirs. The helplessness has vanished and a certain strength has developed in the visions of the Munroian heroines. New Gothics, which discuss mother-daughter relationships, mark the development of Munro as a post-modernist feminist writer. "Peace of Utrecht," "Princess Ida," "The Progress of Love," "Friend of My Youth," and "The Children Stay" are examples of such female Gothic written by Munro. Another story, "Meneseteung," shows how madness, which was the Victorian woman's response to their role in society, could be overcome, and how imagination could be used as a means to survive, and how female humour--or the giggle--could replace the Gothic scream. Munro writes a Gothic, which celebrates woman's strength, and is emboldened by the strong alliances between women.

The relation between Munro's art and life is intimate and profound. Miriam Marty Clark comments:

In finely layered, minutely observed stories which she herself calls 'autobiographical in form' (Lives n. page); Munro tracks along recursive passage out of girlhood in small towns along the Ottawa valley of Canada. Marking at every turn the tangled connection between past and present, she plots the bitterness and satisfaction of family love, the inscrutability of private lives, and the stubborn calculus of social relations not only in fictional towns like Jubilee and Hanratty and later in Toronto and Vancouver, in affluent suburbs and middle-class marriages. (Clark 49)

Even though Munro's fiction provides a realistic reading, it further moves into a realm of magical realism as one perceives in stories like "The Albanian Virgin," "The Jack Randa Hotel," "A Wilderness Station," "Space Ships have Landed" etc. She often problematizes the very mode of narration by pursuing the difficult strategy based on the instable worlds of narrative, memory and writing itself. She uses allusions, metaphors and patterns of names, symbols and tropes. She identifies suppressed mental imagery and also explicates the dual nature of language as 'a form of representation'. Through such manifold ways Munro provides the reader

with the final pleasure of recognition, that is, the undiminished presence of life in art.

What makes Alice Munro one of the most revered short fiction writers of Canada is the fact that she gives voice to the inner feelings of the woman. She writes from the point of view of a woman with an essentially domestic surrounding. She discloses a capacity for precise social observation and penetrating psychological insight. She possesses a special capacity for exactly the right expression. Like Jane Austen, who worked upon her few inches of ivory, Munro creates new legends and myths within the limits of her small rural town. Speaking of her small Ontario town, she observes, “in places like Clinton, memory is always preserved in funny anecdotes. Even terrible things are presented as funny, because people have to live with it this way” (Keith 163). This accounts for humour and irony that one locates in the Munrovian arena, which is filled with anecdotes inspired by the people who lived around her place. She even introduces story-telling figures into her fiction modelled on real-life pictures that she had seen. She views the community as a whole that creates a corporate story-telling function, when she discusses her interest in “the whole business of how life is made into a story by the people who live it and then / the whole town sort of makes its own story” (Struthers 103-104).

The distinction between author and narrator is sometimes absent in Munro's stories. She acknowledges the traditional origins of her art by telling stories about her neighbours and relatives as rural people always do. She consciously alters and distorts the material she receives to suit her purposes. She is Alice looking through the magician's looking glass, which reflects distorted images of human beings. Here, one may be reminded of Lukac's comment, "if literature is to be an authentic criticism of such a society, then literature must have a concept of the normal if it is to place distortion correctly; that is to say, to see it as distortive" (Deer 33). This difference in Munro's outlook of the world was visible at the age of fourteen, when Alice began writing her stories. Alice Ann Laidlaw, like her character Del of *Lives of Girls and Women*, felt out of things. She began writing stories of adventures in the fashion of medieval romances. She indulged in daydreams, picturing herself in heroic roles like Janet of "Boys and Girls." But later the true writer, Alice, realised that it was the impulse to imitate that characterised a potential writer. She tried making stories in imitation of Hans Anderson's "The Little Mermaid" and, later, those like *Wuthering Heights*. These early stories cannot be ignored simply as daydream stories because they too possess an idea of what fiction writing is. Her dedication to her work was a great source of confidence during that period. She had a remarkable ability to translate a kind of rupture that everybody feels and she knew how to expose it.

The first published story by Alice Laidlaw (Munro), “The Dimensions of a Shadow” that appeared in the ‘*Folio*’ a student’s literary magazine raised the expectations of a future novelist among the readers. ‘*Folio*’ published two other stories, “Story for Sunday” and “The Widower”. Alice, who was forced to leave the University because of financial pressures, married James Munro and settled in Victoria. This period in her life was one of darkness because she felt a loss of faith in her own artistic powers. She did not find the place and people as interesting as it was in Huron County. One may perceive this period as a phase of transition in the life of Alice Munro, the artist. Her husband recognised her powers and encouraged her. Even though her output in the fifties and sixties was slow due to the stay in Vancouver, her first collection of stories came out in 1968. Her stories appeared in Journals such as *The Canadian Forum*, *Tamarach Review*, *Queens Quarterly*, *The Montrealer* and *The Chatelaine*. She is the first recipient of the Canada - Australia Literary Prize (1997). She won the prestigious Governor-General’s award in 1968 for *Dance of the Happy Shades*, in 1978 for *Who Do You Think You Are?* and in 1986 for *The Progress of Love*. In 1983, *The Moons of Jupiter* was nominated for the award. *Dance of the Happy Shades* also won the Great Lakes Colleges’ Association’s New Writers’ Award. *Lives of Girls and Women*, her collection of inter-connected stories, received the Canadian

Book Seller's Award. In 1995, she received the W.H. Smith Literary Award for her collection *Open Secrets*. In 1977, Alice Munro was awarded the Canada - Australia Literary prize and in 1986, the Marian Engel award. A regular contributor to the *New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Grand Street*, *Mademoiselle*, and *The Paris Review*, her works are highly coveted by magazines in Canada and the United States and translated in various languages. Her latest collections of short stories bear the title *Selected Stories* (1996), *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998) that gained the Giller Prize in 1998, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001), *No Love Lost* (2003), *Vintage Munro* (2004) and *Runaway* (2004) that won the Giller Prize in 2004. These collections are published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Her fictional world ranges across the breadth of Canada from Ontario to British Columbia.

Munro's sensitive awareness of social history and psychology is evident in her description of the fading world of the Universal North American town of the forties and fifties, of the childhood experiences and adolescent pain attached to this time and place. The central female characters of her earlier collections originate from Wingham, a small town of her past. They pass through a phase of challenging social norms and conventions which they try to shirk. They also fight back against the stifling aspects of conventional sexual roles in order to achieve

independence and maturity in the existing context. Her female characters from *The Moons of Jupiter* to “The Children Stay” undergo gradual ripening through experience as young women growing into middle age and then into old age based on life in the city of Vancouver. Literary art is necessarily an interpretation of life, which is exactly, what Munro does. She pursues the truth about women, which turns out to be a remarkable feature of her work.

Most of her stories are set in Ontario. This is because Alice Munro realised, “what propelled her to write about ‘her own material’ was the distance between Vancouver and Huron County” (Martin 128-129). The difference between the rural and the urban situation is a major point of discussion. Munro, in her interview with Graeme Gibson, observes that the part of the country she came from was absolutely Gothic. She continues that she had been much influenced by the American South and that her writing about the region has much in common with that of the American South.

There were several features of the American South that attracted Munro. One was the decay of an order that Alan Tate describes as, “the conflict between modernism and fundamentalism (which) is chiefly the impact of the new middle-class civilization upon the rural society” (Struthers 121). An almost religious belief in the land and in the old verities

and the humanistic values, which it symbolised, also attracted Munro. A respect for family allegiances, a concern for manners and commitment to a code of honour, a pride in race, religion and class, a deep religious belief marked by a sense of sin and a profound awareness of the Bible, a fusion of religious belief and social and political practice, a distinct sensitivity to the bizarre and the grotesque and a strong sense of the past and the viability of tradition are other features of American South that influenced the writings of Alice Munro.

The Southern writers who influenced Munro are James Agee, Eudora Welty and Reynolds Price. This influence seems to have gone into the shaping of her earlier characters but not into the creation of a character like Pauline of "Children Stay" where she transcends these codes and beliefs, which are embedded in the cultural scenario of the American South. One can even say that the characters of earlier stories were restrained by the above-mentioned cultural codes and beliefs, which actually stifled the growth of woman as an independent personality. The first deviation or protest to this constraining situation arises in *Lives of Girls and Women*, develops through *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Friend of My Youth* to the fully independent woman of "The Children Stay," who is aware of her position in the world in relation to her husband, her husband's family, her children and, on the whole, to the society. There one finds an

unflinching, satisfied, conscious being not a dependent, regretful, remorseful creature trapped in a bewildering Gothic situation.

Some other features that shape Munro into a post-modernist-feminist writer of metafiction is her use of different narrative techniques like defamiliarization, intertextuality, Time - and Space-shift, different voices, unreliable narrators, etc.. Even great romantic writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge have discussed concepts of defamiliarization or estrangement. Wordsworth made the unfamiliar seem familiar and Coleridge made the familiar seem unfamiliar. Defamiliarization is the usual English translation of *Ostranie* (literally “making strange”). According to the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky, the aim of literature is to foreground its linguistic medium through estrangement or defamiliarization. This is achieved by disrupting the modes of ordinary linguistic discourse whereby the world of everyday perception is made strange and the reader’s capacity for new sensation is renewed. He states:

‘Habitualization’ devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war.... And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stony ‘stony.’ The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. (Lodge 53)

Munro, with her extraordinary eye for surface detail, for colours, shapes and textures, transform ordinariness into something beyond the ordinary. Examples can be seen in her depiction of the two worlds of the town and its suburbs in *Lives of Girls and Women*, "Meneseteung," etc.. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the Flats Road is a marker between the city and the suburbs and the different people who live along the Flats Road may seem irksome to ordinary people, but Munro, with a sympathetic heart, removes them from their real setting and places them in the realm of art. And one recognises with the narrator of "Material" that they have passed into art like Fern Dogherty. In "Meneseteung," the house of Almeda Roth is a separation between the sophisticated life of the city and the poverty- stricken life of the slums. Here also, the mad woman passes into art along with the Victorian poetess Almeda Joynt Roth. Thus, through defamiliarization, Munro presents the other side of dailiness, two realities which exist in the same, everyday world.

Intertextuality occurs when one text becomes referential to the others that follow. In the case of Munro, most of her stories refer to earlier ones because there is a thread of ideas that gradually develop from the early stories to the latest ones. Not all the stories but most of them have a sort of continuum of ideas, especially ideas pertaining to women imbricated in the world of domesticity--sex, love, marriage--problems which Munro

calls 'domestic disasters.' Another way of reference is by parody, pastiche, echo, allusion, direct quotation, structural parallelism, etc.. Munro often parodies other master narratives, eludes to earlier works like *The Bible*, echoes fairy tales especially those of Hans Anderson, and re-evaluates texts and anecdotes that have gone before. Stories like "Peace of Utrecht," "Princess Ida," "Meneseteung," "The Children Stay" and others are good examples of intertextual play.

The simplest way to tell a story is to begin at the beginning. But, the effect is increased by deviating from chronology. Munro's earlier stories are temporally linear. A slight variation is seen in the "Shining Houses" where the story is related by Mrs Fullerton concerning her past. This can be considered as a basic change in Munro's narrative technique. The six stories of this phase are related by single narrators but in "Shining Houses," one finds a doubling of voice in the form of Mrs Fullerton's gossips and Mary's appropriation of them. From "Peace of Utrecht" one finds the retrospective technique widely used. John Orange comments on Munro's technique thus:

The way Alice Munro tells her stories has evolved over the years from a relatively conventional and straight-forward narration by a first person narrator to a much more complicated, subtle, and experimental narrative technique,

often involving a third-person limited narrator, as in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*, *Who Do You Think You Are?* and half of the stories in *The Moons Of Jupiter*. Besides gradually creating a distance between author and narrator, Munro has also increasingly manipulated her use of narrative time as a structural device in the telling of the stories. Her shift over to the use of a third-person narrator is related to her disruption of narrative time, and it is useful to explore how changing her use of both these techniques frees Munro from the limitation of first-person narration, so that she can explore a different set of themes without losing touch with her basic strengths and concerns as writer. (Mackendric 83)

Such shifts in time and space and links among memories and thoughts in the character's mind give one the impression that experience cannot be understood, that any pattern of meaning and significance in human action can only be partial, temporary and probably illusory.

Munro's stories are rightly called memories, confessions and meditations. The urge to tell one's own story is strong in her. Most of her stories are in the first person narrative voice. But changes are made according to what the story is about, why it is told and how it ends. The first collections like *Dance of the Happy Shades*, *Lives of Girls and Women*,

and *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* may be characterised as memories. *The Progress of Love* and *Friend of My Youth* may be called confessions because when the emotion that charges the memories becomes stronger, it becomes a confession. In these collections, the narrators are speakers with a confiding voice. Out of an inner necessity, the narrator appeals for understanding, shares a burden with the listener and perhaps wants absolution or reconciliation with the past.

The next set of stories *Open Secrets* discloses a daring challenge to society. It is meditation, or a desire for truth and self-knowledge on the part of the narrator. Here, thoughts or words are instigated by the narrator's own need for clarity and are usually aimed at herself or at an imaginary reader. It can be seen that as Munro matures as a writer, her use of voice in her first person narratives show more verity and her narrators become more self-conscious. Munro herself explains the form of memoir used in *Dance of Happy Shades* as being "done in the form of a Memoir more or less as a matter of convenience" (Mackendric 63). She further states that "The 'I' of the story is a masquerade, she is a little middle-class girl I never was, an attempt to see the story through the eyes of the relative who told it to me" (Mackendric 63). Margaret Gail Osachoff states, "when Munro talks about the 'form of a memoir,' she is alerting us to the idea that it is the narrator's memories of the past that are being used, that it is

fiction we are reading rather than autobiography” (Mackendric 63). One clearly realises that Munro perceives childhood and adolescence from an experienced and mature perspective.

When one reflects over the issue of unreliable narrators, one realises that they are invented characters who are part of the stories they tell. The point of using unreliable narrator is indeed to disclose in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter. Such unreliable narrator-characters can be seen in Munro’s stories, which analyse the process of story-telling. Del of *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Fame in The Progress of Love*, the narrator of “Material,” The Aunt in “Stone in the Field,” etc., belong to this category. “Meneseteung” also has such a narrator. Since many of Munro’s stories probe into a concealed part of reality, since it is a search into the other side of dailiness and an attempt to expose the falsities of the society, the technique of using such narrator-characters is justified. Munro continuously asserts the mysteriousness and complexity of the so-called ‘ordinary life’ blending the gothic with the humdrum of real life situations. She balances the ‘then’ and the ‘nowadays,’ that is, an oppressive but ordered past against a permissive but chaotic present which brings out her skill as a metafiction writer.

Munro seems to be never at ease with the facile intellectual theories about things, and this sense of dissatisfaction goes into the creation of narrators who always react against a whole approach to life. Her literature, even though one of protest, has its origin in a very conventional female mind. This itself proves that even though women, especially conventional women, seem to be different on the surface, their minds bear the force of a tumultuous reaction which often remains silenced due to the highly oppressive situation in the male dominated society. And Munro, by expressing the innermost feelings that women have towards men and society in general, gives voice to the ever-muted female mind. For this, she does not use the whole world as a canvas but sticks to her hometown, Wingham, and evaluates life more closely in a domestic setting with elaborate descriptions of domestic interiors whereby women define their personalities. She emphasises that story-telling is essentially a female talent by introducing women characters who tell stories to other women, especially the mother or aunt or grandmother narrating stories to their young daughters or nieces. By this act, she recognises and demonstrates to the world that though marginalised, women have a significant part to play in the formation of a new, young generation which would, in future, continue the process of transforming and transferring knowledge.

These characteristic features bring Alice Munro in line with other Canadian short story writers like Thomas McCulloch, Thomas Chandler Halliburton, Stephen Leacock, Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, Earnest Thompson Seton, William Alexander Frazer, Edward William Thomson, Gilbert Parker, Isabella Valency Crawford, Susie Francis Harrison, Duncan Campbell Scott and Sara Jeannette Duncan. Canada, the vast landscape stretching over 3,000 miles, with its virgin, uninhabitable, northern land is the second largest country with low population. The absence of a closely knit society had made literary or cultural activity impossible in the early times. The pioneers who were practical-minded were not altogether interested in extending their talents toward creative writing. The wilderness and silence also posed hurdles in producing a loyal reading public. Reading became a costly part-time because works could be published only through outside agencies.

Until after the First World War, Canada had produced only a few isolated fictions. The earliest works in the genre of fiction were novels like *The History of Emily Montague* (Frances Brookes 1769), *Wacousta* (John Richardson 1832), its sequel *The Canadian Brothers* (1840), *The Golden Dog* (William Kerby 1877) etc.. Those novels dealt with themes of morality, religion, love, conventions of courtship, the unrepresentable nature of Canadian landscape, chasing of wild women, White/Indian

antagonism, etc. Since historical documentation was blended with fantasy and social satire, most of them lacked compactness and stylistic artistry. It was only during the twentieth century that the Canadian writers began to employ short fiction form as an established genre. “Pierre and His People” (Gilbert Parker 1892), “Old Man’s Savarin” (E.W. Thompson 1895), “In the Village of Viger” (D.C. Scott 1896), etc., are examples of nineteenth century short fiction. Some of these earlier works employed thrilling and sentimental plots, but D.C. Scott’s stories are different, since they create a convincing sense of a particular communal life with recurring characters, a consistent background and an emotional atmosphere. During this time, Charles D.G. Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton focussed on the portrayal of animal themes. This was due to an awareness that the animal world of forest and wilderness was an area uncharted and unchronicled in literature. Thus, the ancient woods, the wilderness and the silence became themes of short fiction of the early twentieth century. Modern Canada notwithstanding its urban, modern face, still holds the wilderness as an abiding presence in its literature. Personal memories challenging the behavioural norms of Victorian womanhood appeared as the theme of “The Imperialist” written by Sara Jeannette Duncan in 1904. Canadian short fiction has attained maturity in its vision of life and character-portrayal, guided by ideas of feminism and post-modernism.

The progress of Canadian short story from Thomas Mc Culloch to Munro is a steady growth from humorous sketches containing narrative, dialogue and sustaining characters, through the naturalistic story and the local colour story to stories which question the process of narration itself. Munro uses humour to subvert the existing notions; she uses a narrative which gradually unfolds the connection between art and life; she uses dialogue to unravel the myriad shades of life; she uses local themes because that is the material she knows best; she is capable of transforming local experience into myth. Helen, the narrator in "Peace of Utrecht," says about her mother, "I realize that she became one of the town's possessions and oddities, its brief legends" (Munro 1968 194). Munro's storytelling emphasises the relationship between fiction and post-modern society by presenting characters taking up social roles and reacting to social attitudes. All her characters are ordinary women in the role of child, young woman, mother, aunt, or old maid and surrogate mother--women in different social roles, reaching, in their own fashion, to the dominant social attitudes. The idea generally accepted is, "to know the literature of a society is to know what sort of stories please them, and also, more significantly, to find in this mirror a reliable image of a number of hard social facts" (Rockwell 20). Munro does not try to please the public but she tries to lay bare a reliable image of a number of hard social facts for the reader to ponder. Since

literature has no “ideological errands” Munro does not strive to convey a moral or ideology to her readers (Rockwell 21). “No lessons/No lessons ever,” was the verdict pronounced in an interview in 1982 (Hancock 222-23). “No preaching for any particular morality or politics,” was her response to Allan Twigg (Keith 156). So without a beginning or end or a definite moral, Alice Munro tells her touching stories like an eternal story teller.

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I

**ALICE MUNRO:
DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE FROM
THE TRADITIONAL TO METAFICTIONAL**

P.K. PRABHA

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Chapter II

Techniques--Conventional and Post-modern

Story-telling involves technique or narrative strategy, which the writer uses in order to impress or hold the attention of the readers. Readers are familiar with the Ancient Mariner who fixed the listeners with his eyes. Similarly, the writer fixes the attention of the reader and leads him to the realm of imaginative play through different techniques. Introduction of comic characters, use of irony, elegy as a trope, autobiography, conveying moral ideas, gossip as frame work, use of summary, use of accidents, change in the mode of narrative, fairy tale technique, hero-heroine-villain plots, history, geography and private fictional space, fragmentation, narrative voices etc., are techniques that have been employed in story-telling down the centuries. These changes in technique have occurred in accordance with the changes in time, perspective, social pattern and the psychological realm. This chapter is an analysis of some of the techniques that prevail in the field of fiction and those that are adopted or manipulated by Alice Munro in her short story collections.

Comedy has its origin in Greek literature, especially the plays of Aristophanes. For him, a comic hero was, "a low character who sweeps the world before him, who dominates all society, and sometimes the gods

themselves” (Torrance vii). In Canadian literature, one finds such a hero who sweeps the world before him, in Nanabush or Crow or Mink. It is a spirit that pervades the whole Canadian space. It sets about to correct the evils of the society and the follies of individual persons. Aristotelian poetics, the poetics of Augustine, the poetics of the medieval church, of ‘the one language of truth’ and the Cartesian poetics of neo-classicism serve to insist upon centralising and unifying the European languages, says Bakhtin.

During this period:

[O]n the lower levels, on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all ‘languages’ and dialects; there developed the literature of the fabliaux and Schwanke of street songs, folk sayings, anecdotes, where there was no language-center at all, where there was to be found a lively play with the ‘languages’ of poets, scholars, monks, knights and others, where all ‘languages’ were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic incontestable face.

(Bakhtin 273)

Munro uses both the mainstream language as well as the language of the marginalised, hitherto unknown beings of the world. Examples can be cited from *Lives of Girls and Women* where Del is situated at the “end

of Flats Road” providing her a peep into the lives of the people on the Flats Road as well as the city (Munro 1971 6). The language, the lifestyle, the behaviour--everything differs when one moves from the Flats Road to the City. Del’s mother does not like to live on the Flats Road. So, “as soon as her feet touched the town side walk and she raised her head, grateful for town shade after Flats Road sun, a sense of relief, a new sense of consequence flowed from her” (Munro 1971 6). This is because she detests drunkenness, sexual looseness, dirty language, haphazard lives and contended ignorance. She cannot tolerate Mitch Pilm and Potter Boys who are bootleggers and the two idiots among whom Frankie Hall is very “fat and pale like something carved out of ivory soap” (Munro 1971 6). The other one is Irene Pollox who is not so gentle or idiotic but will chase children on the road and hang over her gate crowing and flapping like a drunken rooster. Though Munro posits the bootleggers, idiots and Del’s mother in a comic vein, it pierces deep into the heart of middle class hypocrisy which tries to shun poverty and depression. In the ancient days, the comic was a deviation from the normal accepted pattern of human behaviour. But in Munro’s stories, the normal accepted behaviour is dissected to unleash the darkness and hypocrisy behind such behaviour. In “Connections,” a story from the collection *The Moons of Jupiter*, Munro portrays the figure of Grandfather who makes fun of women for their bad

grammar. Though he claims to be a drop out from the Oxford University, he was only a butcher. The people, especially the men folk in the 'Kula' of "Albanian Virgin" are portrayed in such a way as to bring out the double-faced attitude of the dominant group in the society.

Northrop Frye explains comedy as something that, "remains suspended between satire and romance which resemble each in depreciating, if not excluding, heroic choice--and its protagonist is typically an ironical figure whom the dramatist tends to play down and make... rather neutral and unformed in character" (Torrance viii). In Munro's stories, the protagonists are not comic figures but mature women or children with keen, callous observation into the ways of the world. All her heroines are critical observers of life, and this critical perspective of the protagonist provides the comic realm for the readers. The characters that Munro's protagonists examine critically are not deformed for the sake of making others laugh, but are used as a contrast to highlight and expose the hidden arena of society, thereby expressing, "the elementary strains and resolutions of animate nature, the delight men take in his special mental gifts that make him the lord of creation" (Torrance 10).

The character called Milton Homer in *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a parody or a subversion of Milton and Homer, the great poets. Giving the name Milton Homer to the comic character is an act of resistance

against the great canons in literature. This character has public functions to perform. He goes about each house, wishing good luck to new babies in imitation of the baptizing ceremony. He also appears at parades like “the Orange Walk, on the Twelfth of July: the High School Cadet Parade, in May: the school Children’s Empire Day Parades, the Santa Claus Parade, the Lions Club Old-Timer’s Parade, etc.” (Munro 1978 256). What Milton Homer does is participating in the parade as a clown. He has freedom to step behind any serious personality attending the parade and could “pull a dour face, and hold his head as if a top hat was riding on it; behind the ladies he wiggled his hips and didled an imaginary sunshade” (Munro 1978 257). Rose exclaims, “He was a mimic of ferocious gifts and terrible energy. He could take the step dancers tidy show and turn it into an idiot’s prance, and still keep the beat” (Munro 1978 257). This comment is a signifier, which leads to the fact that though people are prone to laughing at Milton Homer, his presence in the serious parade itself mocks the paraders. Here, Milton Homer’s contribution is always negative, designed to make the parade foolish.

In addition to Milton Homer, Rose’s mother and the idiots who provide comic effect, one finds Uncle Benny, who read only odd pieces of newspaper, and his wife, who is such a strange character that later Rose and her mother came to believe that this woman is just an imaginary creation

of Uncle Benny, as characters that add comedy to life situation. Other characters that fit into this category are Miss Marsalles and her retarded children of “Dance of the Happy Shades” and Eva of “Labor Day Dinner.” Miss Marsalles trying to form an orchestra with the retarded children seems ludicrous to the normal society but the performance, the music, moves their hearts so much that the readers of the story may find the truth that even discarded people have their own gifts. Roberta of “Labor Day Dinner,” analysing the character of her two daughters, feel, “the real danger is not to Angela, who would find a way to welcome insult, would be ready to reap some advantage (Roberta has read parts of the journal). It is Eva with her claims of understanding, her hopes of all-round conciliation, who could be smashed and crushed” (Munro 1982 152). The anxiety is confirmed later, while the discussion on relics took place. The elders are seriously involved in discussion when at a point Ruth retorts “In some way we are already. Relics” (Munro 1982 157). Eva is aroused by this comment and in a loud, stern voice, declares, “I am not a relic” (Munro 1982 157). The veil is pulled down over one eye and her make-up runs down the boundaries, making her whole face a patchy flower and the elders cannot withhold their laughter.

“A character is comic not primarily because he is laughed at but because--in the root sense of *kômōs*--he celebrates life, of body and

mind” (Torrance 274). This is true of Ralph Gillespie who imitated Milton Homer in *Who Do You Think You Are?* When Rose meets him later in her life, she finds in him the same personality she has known in her school days--celebrating life in his own style. Munro’s Rose finds that even at a very old age, celebration is possible. At the old age home, where Flo was put, Rose sees, “crouched in her crib, diapered, dark as a nut, with three tufts of hair like dandelion floss sprouting from her head, an old woman...” (Munro 1978 248). The only signs of life are the letters she spells. Whenever the nurse speaks a word, the old woman spells it with great difficulty. It seemed to Rose:

[S]he had the thinnest thread to follow, meandering through that emptiness or confusion that nobody on this side can do more than guess at. But she didn’t lose it, she followed it through to the end, however tricky the word might be, or cumbersome. Finished. Then she was sitting, waiting; waiting in the middle of her sightless eventless day, till up from somewhere popped another word. She would encompass it; bend all her energy to master it. Rose wondered what the words were like, when she held them in her mind. Did they carry their usual meaning or any meaning at all? Were they like words in dreams or in the minds of young children,

each one marvellous and distinct and alive as a new animal? This one limp and clear, like a jellyfish, that one hard and mean and secretive like a horned snail. They could be austere and comical as top hats, or smooth and lively and flattering like ribbons. A parade of private visitors, not over yet. (Munro 1978 248)

This description moves the heart of any reader unfolding the ability of Munro to express the unknown, enigmatic arena of the human psyche.

According to Giovanni Trissino, the Italian critic, comedy is a trope that “teaches through scorn and censure of the bad and the ugly” (Torrance 3). The comic writer not only mocks but also turns his mockery to a correctional end. Laughter is also seen as a sort of catharsis, purging the mind of the reader. In the case of Munro ‘the ugly and the bad’ are treated with sympathy, not with scorn. Examples can be found in her treatment of the idiots on the Flats Road in *Lives of Girls and Women*; the grandmother in “Thanks for a Ride;” the hysteric woman of “Meneseteung” etc. But there are characters like Mr Malley in “Office;” the grandfather of “Connections;” Mr. Stanley of “Dulse;” the people of the *Kula* in “Albanian Virgin;” the characters in “Vandals,” etc., who are treated with scorn so as to expose their duality of nature, their hypocrisy. These characters evade fixity of every kind by adopting whatever posture suits

their ends. Mr Malley pretends to be a good friend, but later turns out to be a nuisance and still later, a dominating patriarch, trying to abuse the protagonist by hooking-up stories about her. The Grandfather of “Connections” is one who claims that he has run away from Oxford and always scorns the illiterate women commenting on their bad grammar. But later, the protagonist learns that he has really been an apprentice to a butcher. The people of the *Kula* in “Albanian Virgin” have absurd ideas about womanhood. Lottar, the heroine, is faced with a crucial situation where she accidentally reaches this strange land. She has only two options--one is to allow herself to be married to a Muslim (it is, in a way, selling a woman) and the other is to remain a virgin. It is not easy. She has to swear in front of witnesses by the stone and by the cross. She has to cut her hair and wear men’s clothes and never enter into relationship with men. In “Vandals,” the characters are people who are interested in breaking houses simply for the pleasure of destroying things.

In presenting her comic characters, Munro uses the trope of Irony, which capacitates the writer to address the dominant culture from within, while retaining a position of difference. Irony has two functions to perform: one is deconstructive and the other, constructive. The comic characters first deconstruct the so-called ‘normal’ aspects of society to construct a better perspective of what normal and abnormal really are. The

deconstructive function, according to Linda Hutcheon, is “a kind of critical stance that works to distance, undermine, unmask, relativize, destabilize” what one thinks to be real or normal (1992 30). This function is basically a form of critique which at times borders on the defensive, but which is always concerned with internally oppositional position. Here, marginality becomes the model of internal subversion of that which is considered to be central . Most of Munro’s characters speak from the margins, displacing the normal perspective of life one gets from the centre, thereby opening up new spaces, literally between opposing meanings where new things can happen. Munro uses irony “to deconstruct, to subvert, to undermine the existing conception of normalcy and reality” (Kanne 46). Subvert means to overthrow, demolish or overturn a State, law or set of ideas. In Latin ‘vert’ means, ‘to change the direction of’ and sub ‘under.’ From this, it can be derived that ‘subvert’ means to change the direction of the world from below, from the great well of the subconscious, from the depths of our hearts, from the bottom of the heap of the hierarchical power structure--a kind of grassroots movement.

Del and her mother engaging in a discussion on the concept of burden; the Man-Woman theme in “Friend of My Youth;” misconceptions that led Marietta in “The Progress of Love;” and the concept of relationships outside marriage in “The Children Stay”-- these are samples of subversive

activities. Del is having a discussion with her mother on the changes that are visiting the lives of girls and women, when mother says, “But I hope you will use your brains. Use your brains--don’t be distracted. Once you make that mistake, of being, distracted, over a man, your life will never be your own. You will get the burden, a woman always does” (Munro 1971 147). Del bluntly replies that there are devices for birth control and her mother is really shocked by this reply, “That is not enough, though, of course, it was a big boon and religion is the enemy of it as it is of everything that might ease the pangs of life on earth. It is self-respect I am really speaking of self-respect” (Munro 1971 147). Del realises, “it was not so different from all the other advice handed out to women, to girls, advice that assumed that being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and fake on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn’t want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same” (Munro 1971 147). Munro renders the arguments of the mother in a feeble vein so as to expose the defects in mother’s perspective. She also assigns strong and clear-cut ideas to Del so as to bring out the difference in the thought process of two generations.

In "Friend of My Youth" Munro narrates the story of Flora, Ellie and Robert. To the mother, Flora is an angel figure--patient and suffering and sacrificing; Ellie with her sharp tongue and playfulness receives her due punishment. And there is utter silence about Robert--what he says or does is left out without comment from the stories of mother. But the daughter is shrewder. She becomes aware of a personal danger-- the anxiety of influence. She remarks, "I felt a fog of platitudes and pieties lurking, an incontestable crippled - mother power, which could capture and choke me. There would be no end to it. I had to keep myself sharp-tongued and cynical, arguing and deflating. Eventually I gave up even that recognition and opposed her in silence" (Munro 1990 20). She is able to see through the tactics of her mother and to think ironically about the character Robert, who, she feels, is the most mysterious one. She reasons, "He never has a word to say. He gets engaged to Flora. He is walking beside her along the river when Ellie leaps out at them. He finds Ellie's thistles in his bed. He does the carpentry made necessary by his and Ellie's marriage. He/listens or does not listen while Flora reads. Finally he sits scrunched up in the school desk while his flashy bride dances by with all the men" (Munro 1990 21-22). In this story, through an ironic positioning of words, Munro explicates the villainy of Robert whose actions were cleverly silenced in the process of narration by Mother.

In “The Progress of Love” Munro unleashes her irony on the subject of ‘faith.’ Fame, the protagonist describes how her mother, “was saved at a camp meeting when she was fourteen” (Munro 1980 4). She continues, “That was the same summer that her own mother--her grandmother--died. For a few years, my mother went to meetings with a lot of other people who’d been saved, some who’d been saved over and over again, enthusiastic old sinners” (Munro 1986 4). The phrase ‘enthusiastic old sinners’ is a sarcastic remark against the vainglorious attitude of the so-called believers. Here, again, she explains her thought about her mother, “But I had a sense of her all the time, and would be reminded of her by the most unlikely things--an upright piano, or a tall white loaf of bread” (Munro 1986 9). She knew it was ridiculous, but it was true for her.

In “The Children Stay,” Munro’s protagonist Pauline deconstructs the notion of ‘real life.’ She realises that she is “fenced in, in what anybody would call her real life” (New Yorker 99). In her discussion about the play she is acting in, she tells Brain that the story of Orpheus and Euridyce is not like that of Romeo and Juliet in which the characters were victims of circumstance. She says, here, “It’s on purpose. So they don’t have to go on with life and get married and have kids and buy an old house and fix it up and...” (Munro 1997 98). Pauline is striking at the four walls of the establishment that is ‘marriage’ and trying to negate the hierarchical

superiority of her husband Brain and his nagging father. In these stories, the protagonists are fighting against one or the other forces of society that cripple the life of girls and women. They are changing their own directions--Del has decided not to fall into her mother's trap by accepting her advice. In "Friend of My Youth" also the protagonist shakes herself away from the influence of her mother. Again in "The Progress of Love," Fame escapes the pinning constraints of religion, and Pauline in "The Children Stay" escapes from the snare of a patriarch--her husband. In their different ways they are attempting to change the world from beneath the heap of the hierarchical power structure--a kind of grassroots, movement. Thus, Munro uses irony as a strategic discursive device both to inscribe and subvert her targets.

Irony helps the narrator of Munro to escape victimisation and be detached from the actual experience. It helps the narrators to shift position from that of a victim to that of an observer. Examples can be found in stories like "An Ounce of Cure," "Office," "Children Stay," "Carried Away," etc.. Munro comments about a character in "An Ounce of Cure," "When the girl's circumstances become hopelessly messy, when nothing is going to go right for her, she gets out of it by looking at the way things happen--by changing from a participant to an observer. This... is what a writer does... I made the glorious leap from being a victim of my own

ineptness and self-conscious miseries to being a god-like arranger of patterns and destinies, even if they were all in my head” (Smythe 111).

Conventional storywriters created comic characters and invested in them the duty of making the tense situation milder through their creation of artificial laughter. They protruded from the story like a sixth finger. But in Munro, we do not see a single flat character that is assigned the job of tickling the reader into laughter. Munro makes one laugh at the follies of men, not in the Shakespearean way of laughing at the puritans. She does it by the technique of irony and subversion, by contrast and by giving facts by way of letters, photographs and such ordinary things that may evoke in the mind of a reader a comic situation that provokes laughter. This is a technique adopted by the post-modern metafiction writers of today. After having received a letter from England the narrator of “Connections” asks, “Do men who do not succeed in Cambridge become apprentices to butchers?” (Munro 1982 10). Here both the grandfather and the high esteem he was given by her Aunts, are subverted.

Presenting comic characters as a vehicle of irony, which tends to subvert the existing order of society, Munro explicates the problem of women writers who encounter, “the split between the requirements of the public, male centred discourse and female desire” (Brandt 76). “This doubleness, argues Irvine, echoing Lacan, implies a split within the self,

an unavoidable duplicity in the female speaking subject. Irvine envisions the split as a dynamic and subversive force in women's fiction able to break open conventional ways of seeing and knowing" (Brandt 76). Julia Kristeva and Alice Miller have similarly demonstrated that "female desire, and the female imaginary, when taken seriously as the existential, and cultural ground of women's experience, becomes a site of healing, both for the split female subject and for the structures that support it" (Brandt 76). Such healing does not occur "without great internal conflict, leading to separation and/ or transformation; sometimes it can lead to death. Kristeva talks about the borderline of psychosis that must be risked and negotiated in order for the suffering subject to reclaim her experience from the 'void' of the unnameable" (Brandt 76). In her attempt to heal the wound that arises out of the inner conflict, Munro tries to reclaim her experience from the 'void' of the unnameable, by controlling the enigma of death and getting transformed to a new person with a fresh awareness of oneself. For this, she utilises the elegiac trope in fiction, which has gained significance in the twentieth century. "Elegy is a verbal presentation or staging of emotion, wherein the detached speaker engages the audience with the intent of achieving some form of cathartic consolation" (Smythe 3).

Munro's characters consistently confront the significance of death. A parent is often mourned as in "Peace of Utrecht," "Images," "Walker

Brother's Cowboy," "Ottawa Valley," etc. Lost loves are frequently lamented and for this Munro presents emotion verbally, keeping herself detached from the actual scene, with the intention of achieving cathartic consolation. Munro's elegiac fiction may also be defined by Edward Engelberg's words as that which manifests a, "modern sense of personal loss and dispossession and of a special kind of sadness that validates the belief that one's life has been a series of missed opportunities" (Smythe 5).

It is also reconciliation with the past, a 'knowing' a quest for knowledge and self-identity, which is accomplished by remembering the past and then telling it in a narrativised work of mourning. In the "Peace of Utrecht" which can rightly be termed as a cornerstone in the narrative process of Munro, we see the process of healing employed skilfully. Munro mentions how Helen and Maddy, the two sisters who, at heart reject each other, spend their evenings with Fred Powell, the lover of Maddy, presenting to him their childhood which is "safely preserved in anecdote, as in a kind of mental cellophane" (Munro 1968 193). When the people of the town spoke about her mother in a gentle and ceremonious way, Helen realises that her mother had become "one of the town's possessions and oddities, its brief legends" (Munro 1968 194). She also recognises the fact that if they had let the town have her, it would have treated her better. This cognition is in a way a reconciliation with her past. Helen has

come back to her house with her children who seem disappointed at the sight of their mother's house. While she leads her children upstairs, Helen paused, one foot on the bottom step, and turned to greet, in a matter of fact way "the reflection of a thin, tanned, habitually watchful woman recognizably a young/Mother, whose hair, pulled into a knot on top of her head, exposed a jaw line no longer softly fleshed, a brown neck rising with a look of tension from the little sharp knobs of the collar bone" (Munro 1968 197-198). This is the hall mirror that had shown her, last time she looked, "a common-place pretty girl, with a face as smooth and insensitive as an apple, no matter panic and disorder lay behind it (Munro 1968 197-198).

This looking back is a revisioning of her past, thinking, analysing and evaluating how she had behaved to her mother when she was alive. In this attempt, Helen brings her mother back to life violating the notion that a story should end with the death of a person. Helen says:

I realized that I must have been waiting for my mother to call, from her couch in the dining room, where she lay with the blinds down in the summer heat, drinking cups of tea which she never finished eating--she had dispensed altogether with mealtimes like a sickly child--little bowls of preserved fruit and crumbings of cake. It seemed to me that I could

not close the door behind me without hearing my mother's ruined voice call out to me, and feeling myself go heavy as I prepared to answer it. Calling *who's there?* (Munro 1968 198)

Here Munro, through Helen gives a face to that which is absent and the reader is made conscious about a 'double voice' in the story, the voice of the absent as well as the voice of the survivor, thereby employing the trope of autobiography to mourn the death of 'the mother'.

As far as Ronald Schleifer the author of *Rhetoric and Death*, is concerned, "Mourning is a well-structured psychological process that people experiences in a pattern of ordered stages of behaviour" (Smythe 7). Munro illustrates this psychological process through the words of Helen, "As I talked to my children I was thinking...of my mother's state of mind when she called out who's there? ...The cry for help--undisguised, or shamefully undisguised and raw and supplicating--that sounded in her voice. A cry repeated so often and things begin as they were, so uselessly, that Maddy and I recognized it only as one of those household sounds which must be dealt with so that worse may not follow. *You go and deal with Mother, we would say to each other, or I'll be out in a minute, I have to deal with Mother*" (Munro 1968 198). When pity is denied mother is in tears and they turn into parodies of love. But gradually, they grew cunning, unflinching in cold solicitude, they took away from her their anger

and impatience and disgust, took all emotions away from their dealings with her, as one takes away “meat from a prisoner to weaken him, till he died” (Munro 1968 199). Helen has often heard her mother say that everything had been taken away from her and now she understands that, without this “egotism feeding stubbornly even on disaster she might have sunk rapidly into some dim vegetable life” (Munro 1968 199). Munro brings home the fact that it may have been a struggle to keep herself as much in the world as she can by restlessly wandering through the house and into the streets of Jubilee, an act which, Helen and Maddy have deemed shameful in their incapacity as children to understand their mother. When she climbs the step and looks back, Helen can imagine how her mother may have struggled in that house of stone, the Old-Age Home where she is put in the last days of her life. Helen also remembers how when sickness is on the wane, Mother indulges in household work as though making up for the lost time. But at the end of this strenuous period, she collapses and the feeling of hysteria, which Maddy and Helen had earlier drowned in a great deal of brutal laughter, now seems partly imaginary and Helen begins to feel “the beginning of a secret, guilty estrangement” (Munro 1968 201).

Helen’s visit to Aunt Annie and Aunt Lou confirms her guilt. Aunt Annie shows her some of mother’s clothes and says, “But after she went in there she felt she would die, everything kind of closed in around her,

and she went down so fast” (Munro 1968 207). Yet another shocking revelation is made by Aunt Annie about mother trying to escape from the hospital, “It was at night when they haven’t so many nurses to watch them. She got her dressing gown and slippers on, the first time she ever got anything on herself for years, and she went out and there it was January, snowing, but she didn’t go back in. She was away down the street when they caught her. After that they put the board across her bed” (Munro 1968 208). Helen reflects on the picture of the snow, the dressing gown, the slippers and the board across the bed. It is a picture she is much inclined to resist. But she cannot resist, because she realises that it is true. At this point of the story, the reader becomes aware of many voices--the voice of the absent mother, Helen, Maddy and Aunt Annie. This technique of including multiple voices, or heteroglossia, to borrow the term from Bakhtin, when incorporated in the technique of elegy, “results in a certain self-reflexivity, since the presence of the distinctive ‘mode’ draws attention to the form of the text” (Smythe 6).

Munro’s narrative activity may be explained in the words of Julia Kristeva, “modern elegy demonstrates an attempt to find a frame work for verbal expression for grief by using methods of psycho narration” (Smythe 10). This work of mourning performs a quest for form, one that is inscribed in fiction- elegy by a story- within the-story or *mise-en-abyme*

narrative structure. The *mise-en-abyme*, “opens a spiral of infinite regression in representation. Representation can never come to an end” (Diane 27). The reader is implicated in the *mise-en-abyme* of stories, and the elegist uses the temporal disruption as a counter-pointing strategy against closure, against confronting the metaphoric ‘end.’ Munro embeds story within story, leading the reader to ‘truth’ at the labyrinthine core. The connection between knowledge and story telling, between truth and perspective, is put into question. As in “Peace of Utrecht,” this narrative stance is employed in “The Progress of Love” where the protagonist, through the act of peeling the wallpaper in the farmhouse of her childhood, exposes layers and layers of meaning inherent in life. “Goodness and Mercy” also presents story within story. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the comparison between the childhood memories of Bill and Addie surprises Del. She cannot believe, “that was in the same house. The same house where my mother used to find the fire out and her mother at prayer and where she (Addie) took milk and cucumber in the hope of getting to heaven” (Munro 1971 75). Such variation on a single story recurs in Munro’s later stories. “The partially autobiographical narrative act... also allows her to use memory to gain a kind of self-knowledge in that it usually progresses towards another elegiac trope: anagnorisis, which is variously translated as recognition, revelation, discovery, or disclosure” (Smythe 11).

This can be seen in Munro's stories like "Images," "Winter Wind," "The Peace of Utrecht," "Friend of My Youth," etc., where the recurring image of Mother afflicted by Parkinson's disease is presented.

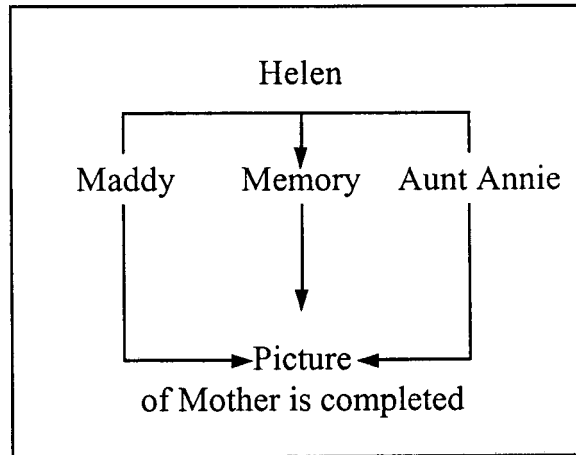
In Munro's fiction-elegies, memory is thematised and performed, and "queer bright moments" are produced that, though significant, remain unexplained to the reader (Smythe 11). However, the position and context of the moments indicate that they hold significance beyond that which the text explicates for the reader; it is the very unresolvability of these moments that mark their meaning. Munro's narrator cum character elegists never use memory to escape from the past but to light upon such queer bright moments, which enlighten them. The picture of mother running away from the old age home with only a night gown and slippers in the cold wintry wind is an eye opener to Helen. It makes her sense of guilt stronger.

Again, Lottar's experience in her imaginary land makes her feel that homeland was the safest place for her. Miss Marsalles' music concert makes Helen realise the meaning of life--that every individual born into this world has some function to perform, that no one is to be ignored as retarded or freak or vagabond. In "Friend of My Youth," the narrator reads through the mother's narration to unravel the bleakness of Robert's action and the frigidity of Flora, which were cunningly concealed by mother. Munro creates revelatory moments often by demonstrating the

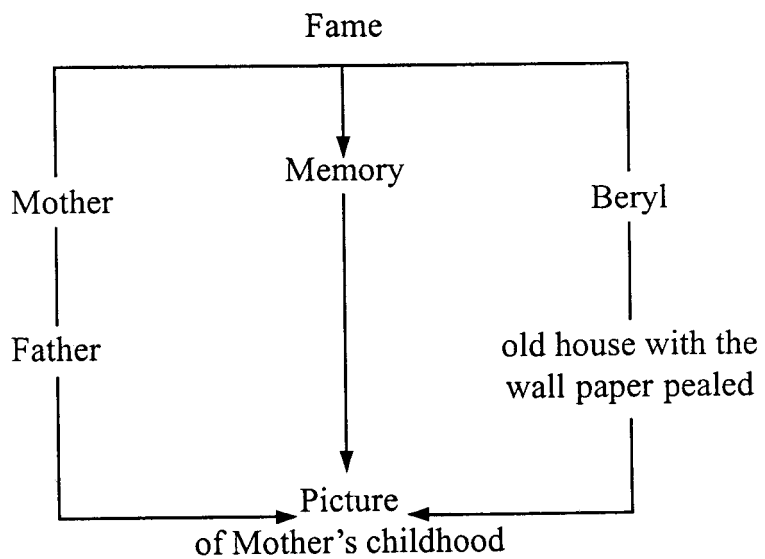
process of unravelling judgments made in error by relatively perspective characters and narrators. These queer, bright moments possess a 'shock' value in that they surprise the character as well as the reader and provide heightened awareness. They are bright because they invite positive response and the queerness arises from the juxtaposition of unexpected, surprising phrases or ideas, which results in a de-familiarisation of the ordinary. Answering Alan Twigg's question, Munro remarks, "My writing has become a way of dealing with life, hanging on to it by re[-]creation. That's important. But it's also a way of getting on top of experience. We all have life rushing in on us. A writer pretends, by writing about it, to have control. Of course a writer has no more control than anybody else" (Smythe 106). Munro believes that something unresolved can become permanent or in other words, that the only permanent thing in life is irresoluteness.

The presence of a story-teller within Munro's fictions self-consciously points to the elegiac convention of communal commiseration, wherein "narration is an effort in effect to create a community of readers who share variously 'the work of mourning'" (Smythe 10).

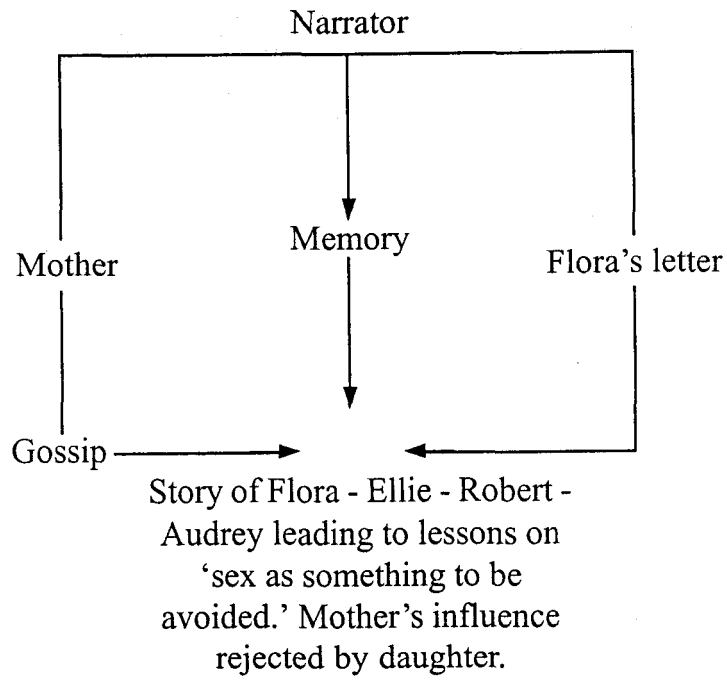
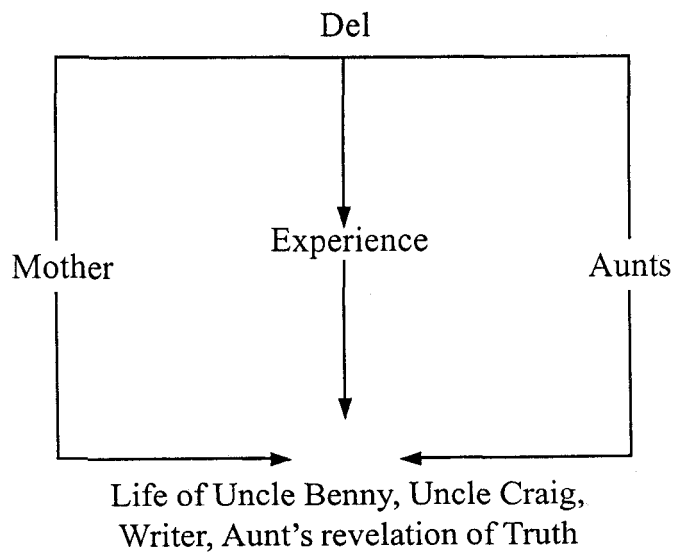
1. In "Peace of Utrecht"



2. "The Progress of Love"



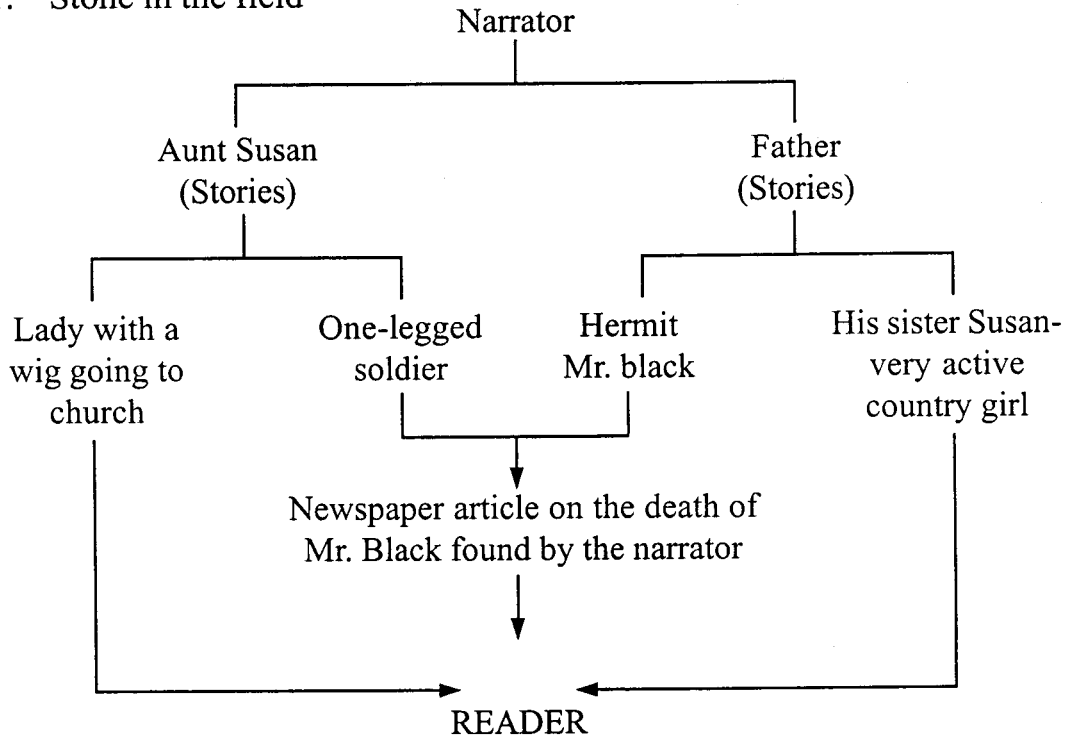
3. "Friend of My Youth"

4. *Lives of Girls and Women.*

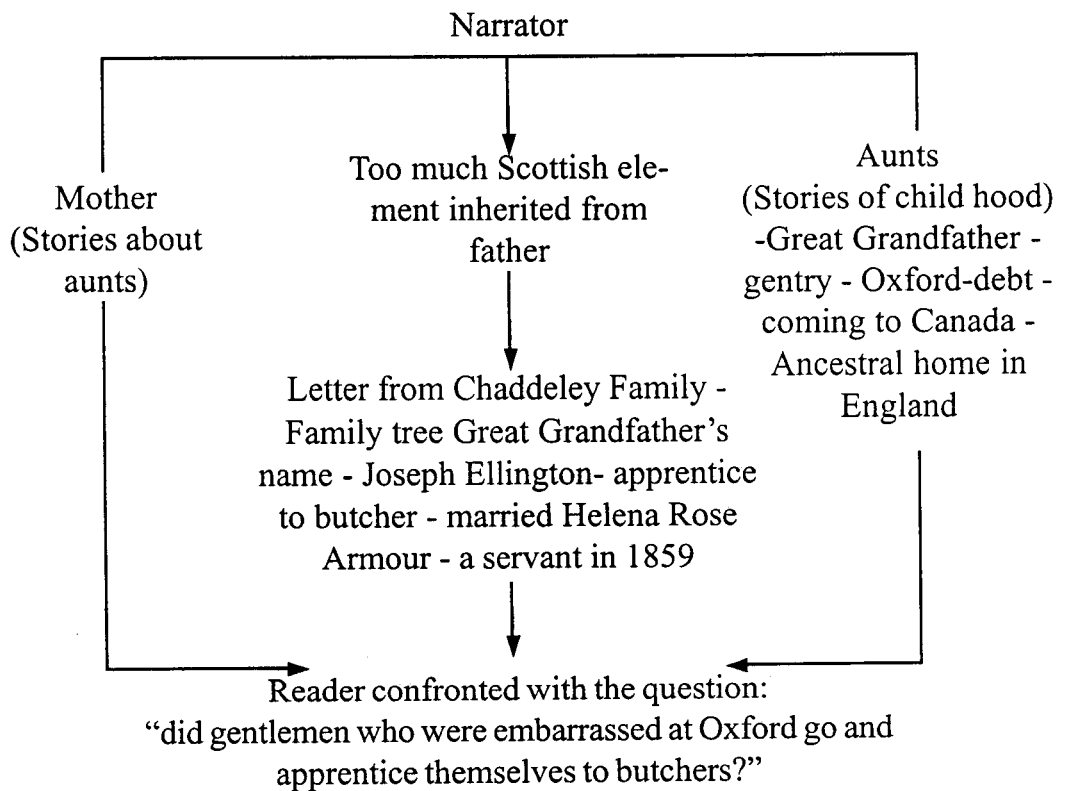
Alan W. Friedman describes this relationship between mourning and aesthetics, and states that grief is both “experienced and recreated in the social form of the telling” (Smythe 10).

Robert Liddel, in his book entitled *Some Principles in Fiction*, observe that the device of a ‘tale within a tale’ is a disaster. Jane Austen has made fun of this device in her comic synopsis of a novel, designed to suit the tastes in fiction of the Prince Regent’s librarians thus, “Book to open with father and daughter conversing in long speeches, elegant language, and a tone of high, serious sentiment. The father, induced, at his daughter’s earnest request, to relate to her the past events of his life” (Liddel 55). But in Munro, this device is never a disaster. She uses it as a trope without artificiality. It does not stand apart. It is so natural that the reader never realises the story shifting from the mouth of one narrator to the other. The major voice remains dominant, and that is the voice of the protagonist. All other voices cohere and add flavour to the main voice. And the reader is able to enjoy and analyse what is being read. It flows like lyric into the heart of the reader, creating new rhythms there. And this makes it a perfect post-modern metafiction. The pattern of the story may be graphed thus:

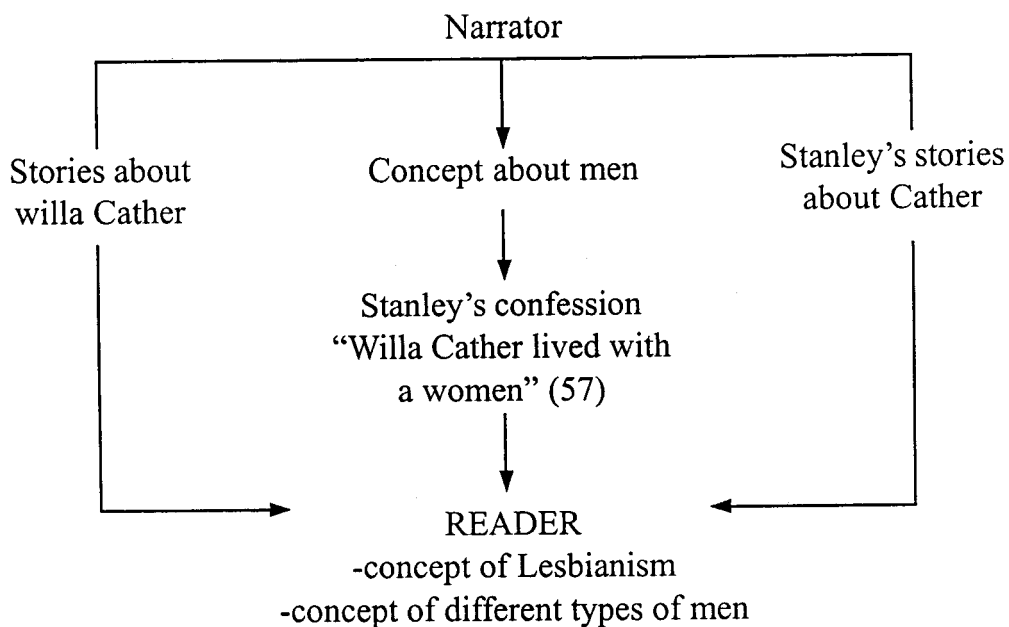
1. "Stone in the field"



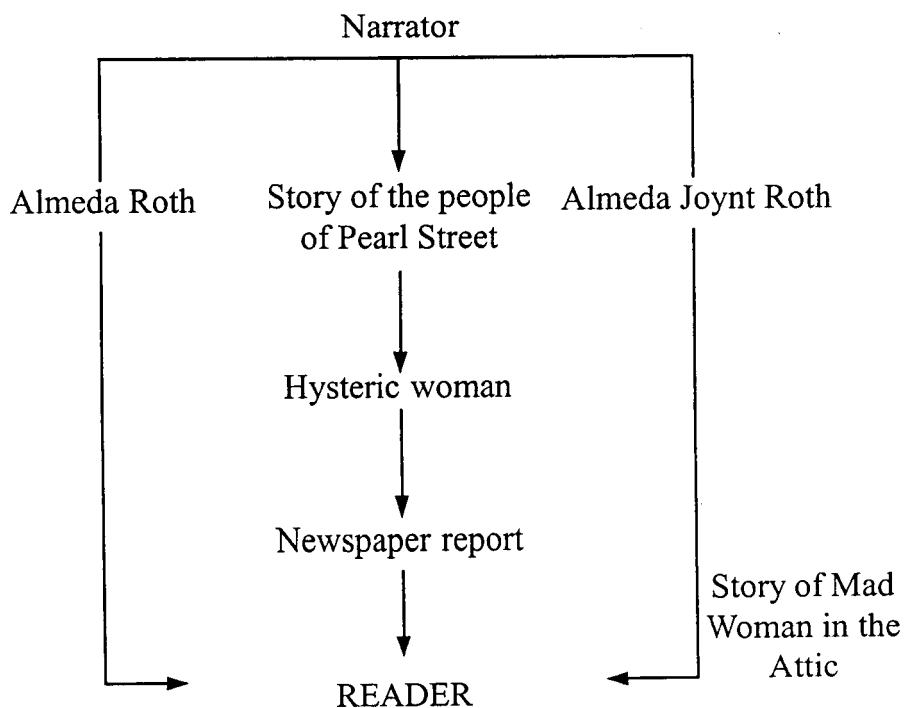
2. "Chaddeleys and Flemmings - Connection"



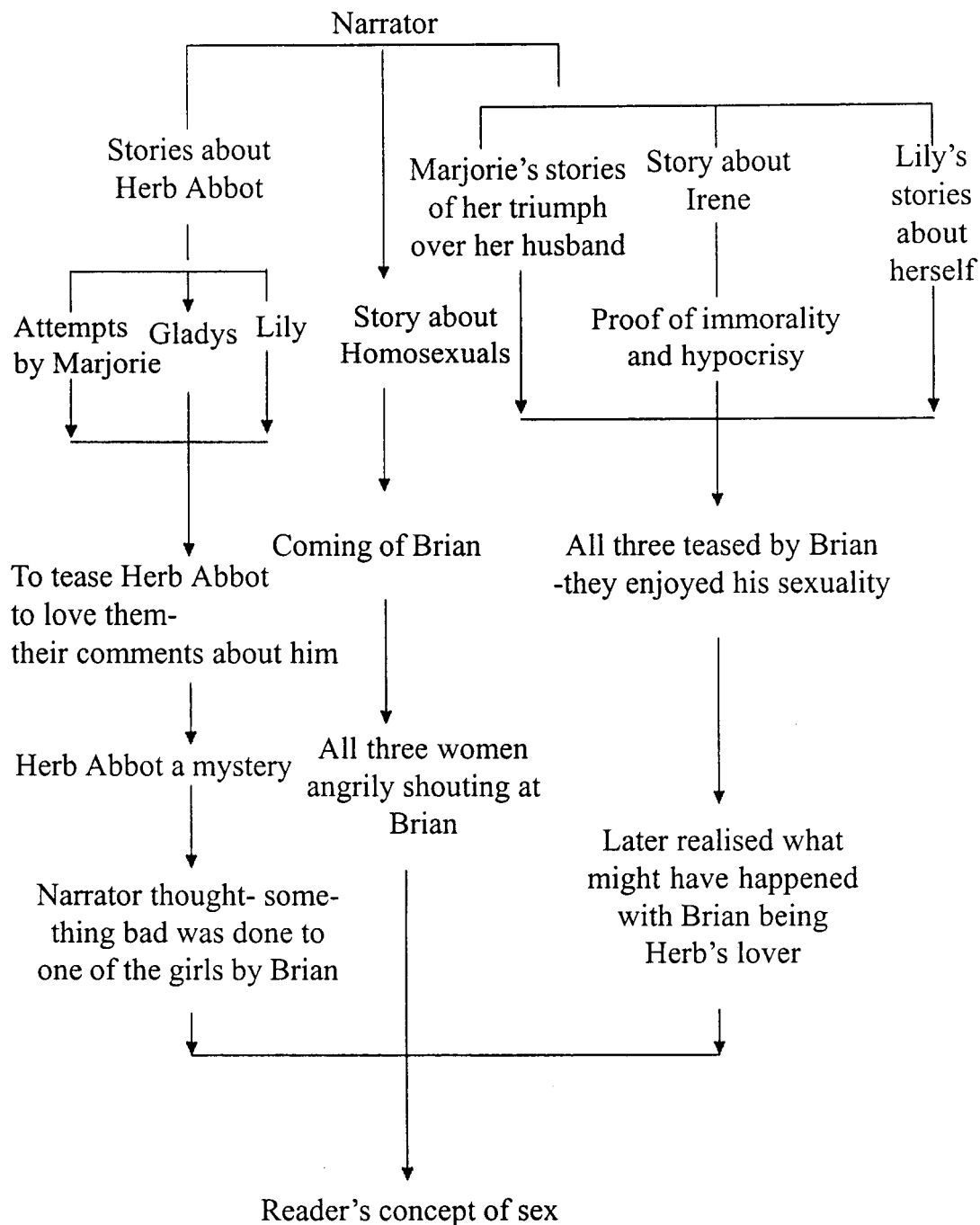
3. "Dulse"



4. "Meneseteung"



5. "The Turkey Season"



Munro has stated that “every final draft, every published story, is still only an attempt, an approach to story” (Smythe 110). Her fiction-elegies do invite a readerly response that contributes to the production of meaning in the reconstructive act--an act that is another ‘attempt’ to write the still unfinished story, in Munro’s terms. Fame, the narrator of “The Progress of Love,” narrator of “Friend of my youth,” narrator of “Carried Away,” Lottar of “Albanian Virgin,” etc. tells unfinished stories. This call for reader response was not in vogue since the time of the itinerant travellers who narrated to his audience in his own free style. At one time, people used to be annoyed at things being left to their own imagination. Everything, every detail was to be provided by the author. Even a shifting of eyebrow was to be detailed by him or her so that the idle reader could read without mental exertion. But, the post-modern writer, like the post-modern painter, only suggests and the reader, especially the informed reader, is free to use his or her imagination in the interpretation of a work of art. So, interpretation varies from person to person and there are different versions of the same work of art, thereby making it open-ended, which is quite contrary to the earlier methods of interpretation, where the reader as critic confines his or her view to a fixed structure based on the intention of the author.

Now the reader, the informed one, is free to assess a work according to his/her own whims and fancies, free from the authorial intention, free from the original text, which serves as the background. In the "Peace of Utrecht" the protagonist receives two versions about the death of her mother --one from her sister Maddy, the other from Aunt Annie. The comments of the townsfolk and the presence of Fred Powell add spice for thought. All these facts, along with the protagonist's version of her mother, are placed before the reader to be blended according to his/her taste, to facilitate a new reading of it. The same process can be found in stories like "Images," "Carried Away," *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Who Do You Think You Are?* etc.. Thus, Munro allows "characters and the reader to ponder ambiguities without pronouncing final judgment" (Smythe 111). This technique of Munro forces the reader into an 'ethics of seeing,' as Susan Sontag remarks. Munro's work leads us to a condition that, "feels like knowledge," while this knowledge of reality is questioned both from within the story by the narrator and from outside by the reader (Smythe 111).

Earlier moral ideals have undergone a complete change in the present-day world. Eighteenth and nineteenth century writers had to preserve a sort of moral reserve in their writings. But, twentieth century writers put aside all such reserves. One finds Eliot's parody of Goldsmith

as a proof of the complete change in outlook. According to Goldsmith, when pretty women stoops to folly, nobody can soothe her melancholy. But in Eliot's time, she smoothes her hair with an automatic hand and puts a record on the gramophone as though nothing has happened. But, too much sex discussed by modern writers like D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer etc., seems to have created a sense of contempt towards sex. Here, it would be worth having a look at what Betty Friedan says:

Despite his professional approval of the "permissive" attitude towards sex compared to its previous hypocritical denial, the psychologist was moved to speculate: 'Descriptions of sex organs... are so frequent in modern novels that one wonders they have become requisite for sending a work of fiction into the best selling lists. Since the old, mild depictions of intercourse have seemingly lost their ability to excite, and even sex deviations have now become commonplace in modern fiction, the current logical step seem to be detailed descriptions of the sex organs themselves. It is difficult to imagine what the next step in salaciousness will be. (Friedan 230)

Friedan further traces how this lust, luridness and lasciviousness which was not a healthy attitude, become stereotyped into the images of

males lusting after females, and gradually get converted into the image of females lusting after males which takes one to the earlier image of the female spider which devours its male counterpart immediately after intercourse. But, the writing of Munro has succeeded in creating a different sensibility as far as sex is concerned. She discusses it freely, in an impersonal tone in stories like “Dulse,” “Turkey Season,” etc.. In *Lives of Girls and Women* Del, the narrator, in her attempt to understand female desire, discovers man’s obsession. To her, the penis is funny. She retorts:

Raw and blunt, ugly coloured as a wound, it looked to me vulnerable, playful and naïve, like some strong-snouted animal whose grotesque simple looks are some sort of guarantee of goodwill. (The opposite of what beauty usually is.) It did not bring back any of my excitement, though. It did not seem to have anything to do with me. (Munro 1971 141)

When she later discovers its power to control women, she is appalled, “It seemed to me impossible that he should not understand that all the powers I granted him were in play” (Munro 1971 197). This critical observation is an attack against the description of the female sexual organs, presented by writers like Henry Miller and Norman Mailer.

Alice Munro proves herself to be in the good company of several contemporary female authors writing about sexual relations, “unlike male

authors who tend to focus almost exhaustively on sexuality as physical encounters, she, like Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood interprets sexuality and sexual experience broadly, including the psychological and social forces that shape sexual impulses” (Rasporich 86). She makes the reader aware that sex is not something to be kept a secret, or to be shunned as deformity, but something that is natural to human beings. This awareness of sex will, surely provide a better outlook for the present generation. By doing this, she tears away the mask of the earlier generation, the hypocrisy, the duplicity of minds, which hesitated to accept sex as natural bodily instinct, but at the same time gave way to sexual oppression and subjugation. This way of presenting sex is one of the methods of fighting against the one-sided conventional systems and taboos of patriarchal society. Every accusation that is pelted upon women by the patriarchal society has been borne patiently, to be thrown back with increased force at the authorities that created it. And her writing suggests a new awareness for both male and female sex.

“Visitors” is the story of a middle-aged woman, Mildred, who has to lie down to sleep in the same bed with Wilfred, a middle- aged man since there are visitors and the house is too small. The diversion the story takes defies any possibility of the reader taking a vulgar point of view. W.J. Keith notes, “Munro’s refusal, at least explicitly, to influence our

moral response to her characters forces us as readers to relate their action to our own ethical principles” (Smythe 110). Reading Munro is, therefore, an act of ‘reconstructionism’--it involves the reader’s response in terms of reconstructing Munro’s fictive world as well as our own responses in and to the real world. W.R. Martin, in his book *Alice Munro: Paradox and Parallel*, writes that her art, in its final effect, is just rising above all the snobberies of fashion, class and intellect.

Intellectual snobbishness demarcates gossip as derogatory. But in story-telling, gossip is an important ingredient. One can gossip effectively only about people whom one knows well, or people about whom one knows a great deal of. Gossip and leisurely gossipy letter-writing is the best breeding ground of a storywriter. Gossip is local, and it is not great travellers who have been the best letter-writers, it is people who have stayed at home, and have talked about their neighbours. Alice Munro’s stories, which are truly feminine, have this nature of gossip--gossip appropriated by the creative mind to disclose truth through subversion, which is an important technique of the post-modern metafiction writers. Mrs. Fullerton, in “Shining Houses,” and Mary MacQuade, in “Images,” belong to this group of gossipy characters.

At the beginning of the “Shining Houses,” “Mary sat on the back steps of Mrs. Fullerton’s house, talking--or really listening--to Mrs

Fullerton, who sold her eggs” (Munro 1968 19). Thus, Mary finds herself exploring her neighbour’s life as she had once explored the lives of grandmothers and aunts--by pretending to know less than she did, asking for some story she has heard before. In this way, “remembered episodes emerged each time with slight differences of content, meaning, colours, yet with a pure reality that usually attaches to things which are at least past legend” (Munro 1968 19). Munro thus explicates the duality, hypocrisy and vanity of the so-called ‘Elite’ class of people in society, and tries to reach at a better truth.

In “Images,” the narrator complains that her sick mother has forgotten all her stories--stories about Princes in the Tower and a queen getting her head chopped off, while a little dog was hiding under her dress, the story about a queen sucking poison out of her husband’s wound; and also about her own childhood, a period as “legendary” to the child as any other story (Munro 1968 33). Mary MacQuade’s story about Ben Jordan and the story told by Joe himself, the visit to Joe’s house beneath the ground, etc., help the narrator to see things differently and her attitude of fear for Joe and MacQuade changes to a feeling of sympathy and recognition of their real strength and quality. In “Lives of Girls and Women” we have a number of story-tellers. Del, the protagonist herself, tells the story of uncle Benny and she remarks:

So lying alongside our world was uncle Benny's world like a troubling distorted reflection, the same but never at all the same. In that world people would go down in quick sand, be vanquished by ghosts or terrible ordinary cities; luck and wickedness were gigantic and unpredictable and nothing was deserved, anything might happen; defects were met with crazy satisfaction. It was his triumph that he couldn't know about, to make us see. (Munro 1971 22)

Aunt Elspeth and Aunt Grace told stories. Del says, "It did not seem as if they were telling them to me, to entertain me, but as if they would have told them anyway, for their own pleasure, even if they had been alone" (Munro 1971 28). Del's mother is also a good story-teller. She tells stories about Aunt Moira and Uncle Bobby Oliphant and about Potterfield, which is not a dry town like Jubilee. She leads Del to the days of her own childhood through stories. She also recounts stories told by the people about Fern Dogherty and Mr Chamberlain.

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* one finds the greatest gossipper and storyteller in Flo: Flo who inspires Rose to be theatrical, which later moulds her into an actress. It is Flo who teaches her lessons of life through her innumerable stories. As a child, Rose listens to Flo's stories and plays with imagination. Later when Rose goes to school, she comes home to

Flo with a number of stories. When Rose goes alone to the University, Flo tells her stories about white slaves, to protect her from being deceived. Again, in the story "Meneseteung," the stories about the people of Pearl Street, the stories about Almeda Joynt Roth, the nineteenth century poetess, and the narrator's experience as woman and writer create a new awareness in the narrator as well as the reader.

In "Carried Away" from the collection *Open Secrets*, Louisa receives a letter from Jack Agnew saying that he has been a frequent visitor to the library in which Louisa worked. She replied and more letters came. Later, Louisa meets Grace Horne, who is "a shy but a resolute- looking girl, nineteen years old, with a broad/ face, thin lips... She had been engaged to Jack Agnew before he went overseas, but they had agreed not to say anything about it" (Munro 1994 12-13). At one stage, Louisa tells Jim Frarey, a fellow at the hotel, about Jack Agnew, the soldier, who is writing letters to her. After the war Louisa waits for Jack but only receives a slip of paper which says that he has been engaged before he went overseas. Later, she reads the news of his marriage to Grace Horne. While she narrates this story, Jim Frarey thinks, "Women, after they have told one story on themselves, cannot stop from telling another" (Munro 1994 19). She has confided in him once before, that she has been a patient at the sanatorium and that she has been in love with a doctor.

In the next part, the narrator gives a vivid account of the accident that befell Jack Agnew and her own experience thereafter. Louisa reads the news of this accident a week later from the newspaper. After the accident, some books are returned to the library and it is found that they are not issued, but have been pilfered. Louisa speaks to Arthur Doud, the owner of the factory, about Jack Agnew but can know nothing about him. Years later, when she is in London for a check-up, she just turns through the pages of a local newspaper which reports that Local Martyrs are to be honoured that day. The news said, “the chief speakers were to be one of the local ministers, and Mr John (Jack) Agnew, a union spokesman from Toronto” (Munro 1994 42).

After the meeting a man comes to Louisa introducing himself as Jack Agnew and tells her everything about Grace and her daughter Lillian who is married but still teaching mathematics in a school. Louisa is perplexed, “Could she say, No, your wife Grace got married again during the war, she married a farmer, a widower. Before that she used to come in and clean our house once a week. Mrs Feare had got too old. And Lillian never finished high school, how could she be a high school teacher?” (Munro 1994 46). But she did not say all this to him. Later, she discloses that she has married Arthur Doud. At the end of the conversation, the man gets up and moves away, and she realises that it is not Jack, but Jim

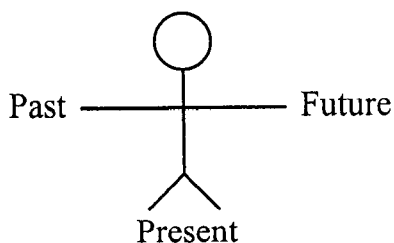
Frarey. This makes Louisa think, “What kind of a trick was being played on her, or what kind of a trick was she playing on herself” (Munro 1994 49). Here, the reader too feels that he/she has been tricked by the author who puts the beginning of the story at the end, elevating it to the plane of magical realism.

The ‘text’ or summary is that part of the novel in which the storywriter says that things are happening, or that they have happened and sometimes include prophetic summaries about things that may happen. Virginia Woolf contrived to use the text to mark the passage of time, and to make pauses in her narrative. This way of using text is compared to the use of the chorus in Greek Tragedy--a suspension of time in timeless poetry, not altogether remote from the feelings and thoughts of the play. Even Somerset Maugham has reportedly used the device of synopsis writing. Henry James has been of the opinion that summary was not a necessity. He has observed, “Processes, periods, intervals, stages, degrees, connections may be easily enough and barely enough named, may be unconvincingly stated, in fiction, to the deep discredit of the writer” (Liddel 44).

Lack of summary too was considered as a deficiency because writings without summary seemed to lack an effective way of incorporating time. But the post-modern metafiction writers show how unimportant the text is. In the writings of Alice Munro we find the appropriation of a text

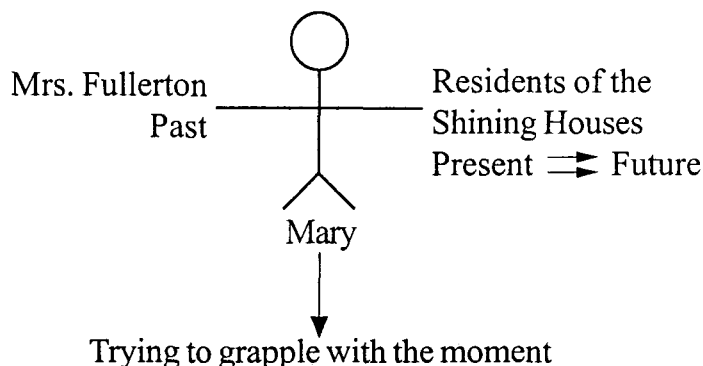
by different types of people and by doing so the original text is paled into insignificance. It also discloses a balancing in time. The life of the present is more important than that of the past or the future. So, a descriptive text of the past or a prophetic text about the future becomes irrelevant. It is today-- this particular moment--that the characters have to overcome. For that, she has to find a place of her own, a perspective of her own. And Munro negates the earlier idea that dialogue should not be used for purposes of summary. She gives the summary through the dialogues of different characters.

A good illustration of this device is the story “Connections” which is included in Munro’s collection *The Moons of Jupiter*, “But there was also the possibility, she said, that it was French, it was originally Champ de Laide which means the field of Sedge. In that case the family had probably come to England with William the Conqueror” (Munro 1982 7). This is a piece of dialogue between the Aunts recollected by the narrator, Janet. It points to her past that she had once hated.

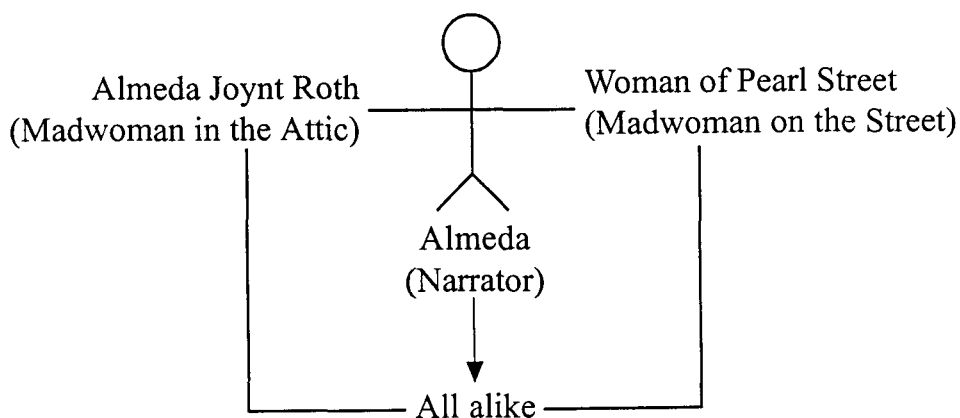


By going back into the past the narrator tries to grapple with the present to emerge into the future with fresh awareness.

In “Shining Houses” from the collection *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Mrs. Fullerton says to Mary the narrator, “What’s in a man’s mind even when you are living with him you will never know” (Munro 1968 21). One fine morning, Mrs Fullerton’s husband goes off, and she is unperturbed. When she is asked to move out of the house so as to beautify the new colony, she retorts, “Husbands may be come and go, but a place you’ve lived fifty years is something” (Munro 1968 21). But the residents in the new subdivision refer to her house as a “shack, eyesore, filthy, property, value” (Munro 1968 27). One of the businessmen cleverly plans to apply for a lane to their house, which will force Mrs Fullerton out of their sight. The government will look after it; they decide to submit a petition to the authorities. But Mary refuses. She says, “Oh, wasn’t it strange, how your voice rang, people started, abashed, but in real life they all smiled in rather a special way and when you saw that what you had really done was serve yourself up as a conventional delight for the next coffee party” (Munro 1968 28). Here, Munro places Mary between Mrs Fullerton (Past) and Residents of the subdivision (Present yearning towards future).



In “Meneseteung” from the collection *Friend of My Youth*, the narrator, Almeda, is placed in between Almeda Joynt Roth, the nineteenth century poetess (whose collection of poems she comes across one day), and the hysteric woman in Pearl Street, which lay at the back of her house. Almeda herself is, a writer, she is experiencing physical discomforts which led to a sort of mental tension that helped her understand perfectly the two women--Almeda Joynt Roth, the poetess whom Almeda connects with the metaphor of the ‘Mad Woman in the Attic’ as Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert name it, and the poor woman beaten up by the husband running out of her house frantically and collapsing on the street:



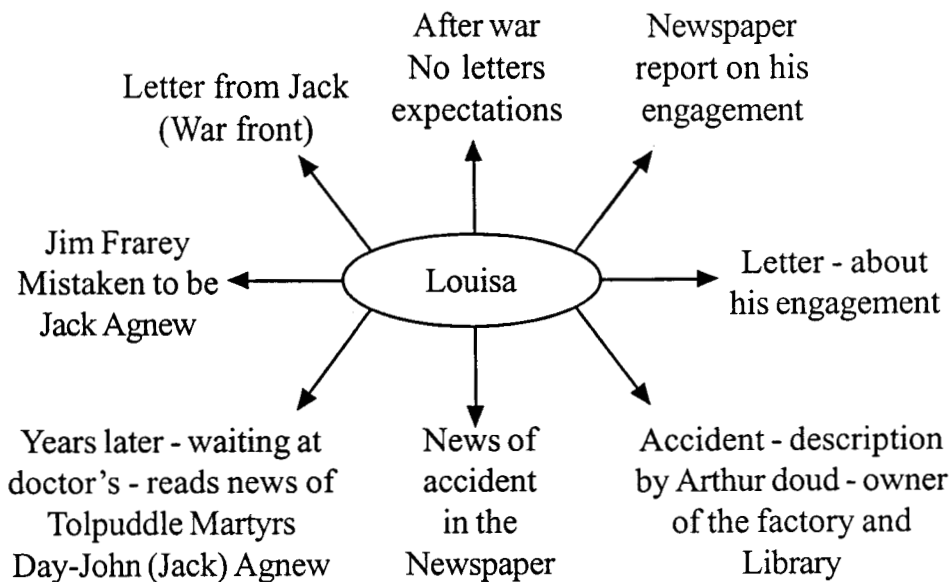
Accidents are used as a device to remove an unwanted character or to put an end to a story. But Munro uses it as a device to analyse the unseen corners of the human mind and to explore new vistas of narrative. And more important is Munro's concentration upon domestic disasters than the blood-freezing accidents of the world. "Accident" is the title of a Munro story in the collection *The Moons of Jupiter*. Here, the death of the Makkavala boy explicates the duplicity of Ted Makkavala. He had earlier indulged in sex with Frances, the narrator. But, when Ted heard of the accident which almost took his son's life, he ran to the hospital and there:

He watched Greta's heavy white face, her pale eyes, as she applied herself devoutly, perhaps hopefully, to the food. She ate to keep her panic down, just as he thought about Queen Victoria and St. Joseph. He was just going to excuse himself, and get up, when he received the idea that if he went to phone Frances, his son would die. By not phoning her, by not even thinking about her, by willing her to stop existing in his life, he could increase Bobby's chances, hold off his death. (Munro 1982 88)

At this point, Munro explains, "What a flood of nonsense this was, what a superstition, coming over him when he didn't expect it" (Munro 1982 88). It was easy to discard Frances to save his son by arriving at an equation - Innocence: corruption = Bobby: Frances. "Labor Day Dinner"

of the same collection concludes with an accident from which Roberta and her family escape miraculously. This experience becomes an eye-opener for Roberta, disclosing to her the transient nature of life. Roberta, who has been fed up with her life, begins to realise that life is still beautiful.

In “Carried Away,” an accident is described--the accident that kills Jack Agnew. The story of Jack begins with his letter to Louisa, the librarian of Carstairs. Louisa is the central character through whom the story unravels. Here, the vision is doubly distanced and multiple narrative voices bring out the whole story:



Here, death is not only a device for explication of life's mystery and complexity of human mind but also a strategic quest for a narrative structure which tends to divert from the linear to the shape of a wheel with Louisa at the centre and the various sources of knowledge about Jack Agnew as

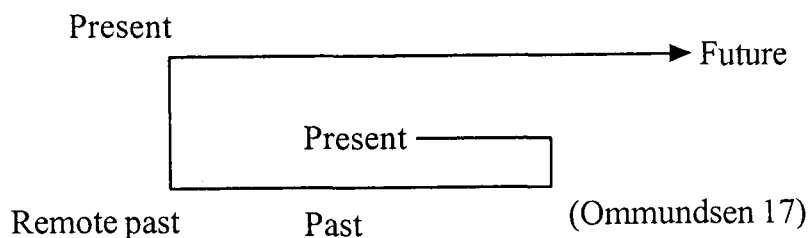
the spokes of the wheel, which is the third step in the progress of Munro's narrative structure.

In many of Munro's works, the narrators are themselves writers who eventually become the resistant readers of the earlier texts. As literary innovators, they often enter into an intertextual competition to deal with the influence of literary ancestors, "To subvert the value of the past or to be heard in the ongoing cultural conversation, they can try to change the written rhetoric or denounce the authority, discursive practices, or rhetoric of past writers" (Deer 6). Glenn Deer quotes Harold Bloom, who presents this situation in a rather practical and a nostalgic tone in his work, "The Anxiety of Influence," thus:

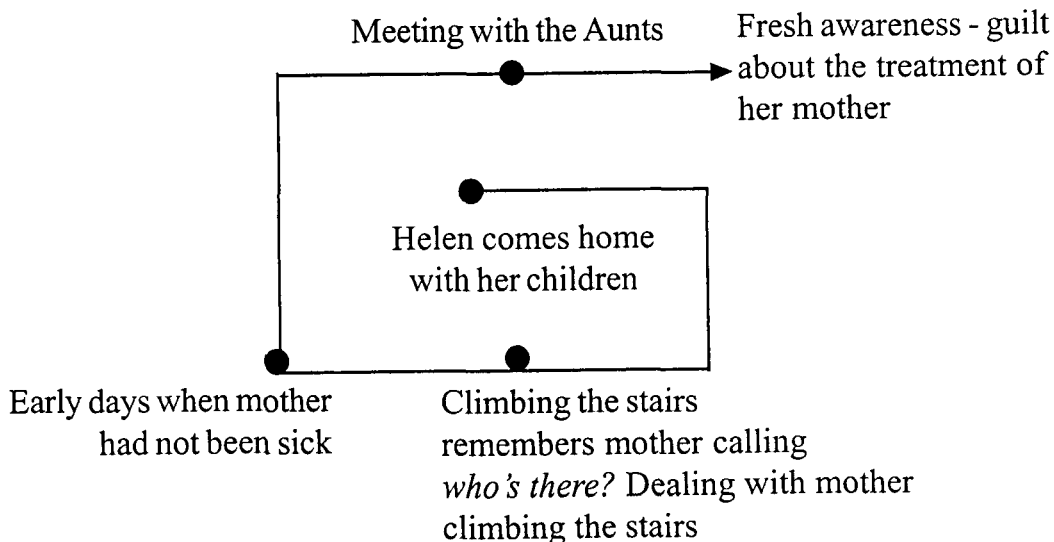
Strong writers who are highly conscious of their indebtedness to precursors will compete with canonical authors--'father' figures who can control the range of their son's development and struggle to establish an original imaginative space for their writing. Experiments in form are a necessary part of the rhetorical struggle to cope with the pressures of influence, to be original, and to establish a distinct identity. (Deer 6)

Munro is surely a strong writer who is aware of the influence of the precursors. She competes with the canonical "father" figures by creating a counter-tradition with mother figures as the focus of her work. She

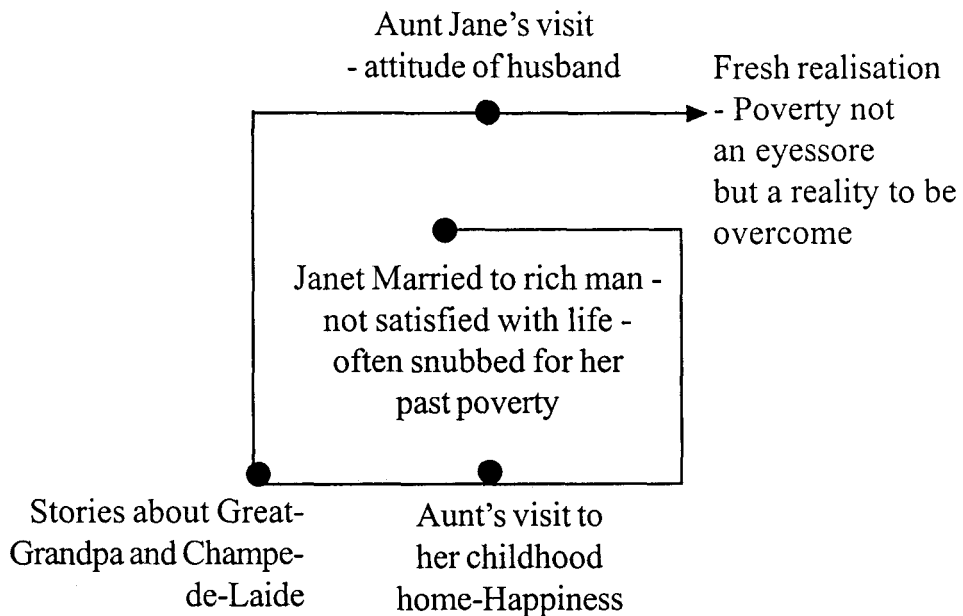
creates her own space from where she indulges in “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Hutcheon 1992 116). The act of looking back makes the difference, which makes Munro’s works different and original. Here, Robert Siegle’s diagram that denotes the process of turning back and again leaping into the future is relevant.



In “Peace of Utrecht”



And “Connections”



One comes to know how Munro cleverly makes use of this device of turning back which marks a significant development in her narrative process.

Coral Ann Howells says, “Canadian women’s stories are about resistance and the need for revision. Though in none of them is tradition fiercely rejected, they are all problematised by their author’s sense of history and their knowledge that they are writing within the very tradition they are determinedly resisting” (1991 108). Munro never rejects tradition. She always claims to be a traditional woman. But, from within the walls that restrict her, she tries to resist and protest mildly against the very constraints and tries to go beyond, leaving the reader also with the power to go beyond imagination into a world of knowledge. Munro criticises the male-dominated literature and the sexist academic institutions of criticism grown

up around it in stories like “Materials,” “Carried Away,” “Dulse” and “Meneseteung.” In these stories, Munro deals with the world of male-centred academic exercises in a way that makes readers feel that she, like Gayatri Chakraborthi Spivak, argues that “women must avoid the seduction of ‘hystero-centric’ (which is simply the mirror image of the ‘phallogentric’) discourse, and should instead work from within her position of displacement to produce a parodic discourse which will undo the presence of phallogentric order” (Waugh 1989 183). This phallogentric order, that is, the symbiotic relationship between androcentric canons and models of reading, is explained thus:

In so far as we are taught to read, what we engage are not texts, but paradigms... In so far as literature is itself a social institution, so, too, reading is a highly socialized- or learned- activity. We read well, and with pleasure, what we already know how to read; and what we know how to read is to a large extent dependent on what we have already read [works from which we have developed our expectation and learned our interpretive strategies]. What we then choose to read- and, by extension teach and thereby ‘canonize,’ - usually follows upon our previous reading. (Waugh 1989 77)

Munro's stories are a contradiction to this. The detached way of analysing earlier male texts by Munro's narrators is proof of resistance on the part of women who desire to change the existing modes of writing and reading. By reading earlier texts from her perspective, Munro tries to change things from the way they are, without violence. This is the expression of the power of the writer to produce shifts in desire.

On thinking about the narrators of fictions, one realises that a reliable narrator is "one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it, the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth" (Kennan 100). In fiction, until the end of nineteenth century, one finds reliable narrators whose telling of the story was considered authoritative, and most of the narrators were the authors themselves who took to the third person omniscient narrative point of view. But twentieth century has been an era of great change as far as fiction is concerned and unreliable narrators, that is, "one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reason to suspect" (Kennan 100). The main success of unreliability, according to Kennan and Shlomith Rimmon are the narrator's limited knowledge, his/her personal involvement, and his/her problematic value-scheme. This is further explained thus: 1. "A young narrator would be a clear case of limited knowledge (and understanding). 2. An idiot narrator. 3. Adult and mentally normal would often tell things they do not

fully know. 4. Colouring of the narrator's account by a questionable value scheme. 5. Contrast and incongruities in the narrator's language, alert us to a possible unreliability in the narrator's evaluations, though not necessarily in his reporting of facts" (Kennon 100). Munro's narrators are young girls who critically examine anecdotes or different versions of the same event by different persons, trying to see through the aspect of unreliability in such anecdotes. The innumerable stories told by Flo (who is uneducated) are taken and dissected by the educated Rose who is more aware of the way of the world. This process of piercing into the reliability of narrators is just a mixing of traditional wisdom with shrewd, intellectual criteria of modern life. This happens in the case of Del, Fame and the other girl characters that pervade the Munroian world of writing. It provides a firm ground for the young girls to push down and leap forward into the future. It is a vantage point from where they can view their life more carefully and decisively so that they could move into the future with greater clarity of vision. But, in "Progress of Love" one finds the narrator, Fame, standing between narratives, utterly baffled. The story she herself has been narrating to her friends about an event she has witnessed and her mother's version of the same event makes her apprehensive. She says, "I have stopped telling the story...I didn't stop just because it wasn't, strictly speaking, true. I stopped because I saw that I had to give up expecting

people to see it the way I did. I had to give up expecting them to approve of any part of what was done. How could I even say that I approved of it myself?" (Munro 1986 30). Here, the reader is also confused as to who the unreliable narrator is: whether there is ever such a phenomenon as a reliable narrator which leads the reader to the fact that a writer cannot pinpoint that this is the truth. He or she can only show the reader one part of it because to tell everything would be impossible. It will make necessary a volume a day to enumerate the crowds of mundane incidents that fill our existence. So the writer is forced to pick and choose and this again is linked with Derrida's theory that ultimate truth is deferred indefinitely.

At this stage a questioning glance may be perceived as to why such a change. The answer is that in fairy tales, events most often go against one's notions of what is likely or even possible, as when a frog turns into a prince on being kissed by a beautiful princess. The beginning of a fairy tale may provide some basic information about its characters and setting. If it is a fairy tale, for example, the story "Connections" may have an opening like this: "Once upon a time, there was a woman living in Vancouver. When she was a child, she lived in a rural area with her mother, father and sister..." But Munro refuses to be so formal and, instead, begins, "Cousin Iris from Philadelphia..." (Munro 1982 1). And the reader is gradually made to understand who Cousin Iris is. "Walker Brothers

Cowboy” begins, “After supper my father says, ‘want to go down and see if the lake’s still there’” (Munro 1968 1). “The Moons of Jupiter” begins with, “I found my father in the heart wing, on the eighth floor of Toronto General Hospital” (Munro 1982 217). All her stories start off with the central characters as if the reader already knows them.

According to Vladimir Propp, “1. Functions of the characters serve as a stable, constant element in a tale, regardless of how and by whom they are fulfilled. 2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited. 3. The sequence of function is always identical. 4. All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure.” (Kennan 21). This cannot remain so in the post-modern context, because the post-modern age has seen fragmentation in all fields of life. The spiritual and moral disintegration in the wake of twentieth century, represented mainly in the works of T.S Eliot; the two world wars; the economic depression; use of nuclear bombs which shattered countries and lives; a sense of total annihilation etc. have resulted in a totally different vision of life--a fragmented one. These experiences reflect in literature also. The characters can never be stable or constant elements in a tale because the fast-changing world calls for dynamic variations. In earlier days, a fixed character has been very important for the forward movement of the story, but in the twentieth century scenario, a fixed character will be a failure because most of the

present-day human beings are those who have lost their identity. Fragmentation of identity can be found in *Lives of Girls and Women* where one perceives the picture of Miss Farris, Del's public school teacher, drowned in the Wawanash River, being remembered by Del:

Miss Farris, in her velvet skating costume, her jaunty fur hat bobbing among the skaters, always marking her out. Miss Farris Conbno. Miss Farris painting faces in the council chambers. Miss Farris floating face down, unprotesting in the Wawanash River, six days before she was found. Though there is no plausible way of hanging those pictures together- if the last one is true then must it not alter others? They are going to have to stay together now. (Struthers 144)

The photographer in the Epilogue of *Lives of Girls and Women* is described as follows:

He had no name in the book. He was always called 'The Photographer.' He drove around the country in a high square car whose top was of flapping black cloth. The pictures he took turned to be unusual, even frightening. People say that in his pictures they had aged twenty or thirty years. Middle-aged people saw in their features the terrible, growing, inescapable likeness of their dead parents; young and fresh

girls and men showed what gaunt and dulled stupid faces they would have when they are fifty. Brides looked pregnant, children adenoidal. (Munro 1971 205)

Uncle Benny had curious types of newspapers coming in. It was not the *Family Herald* or *The Saturday Evening Post*.

His paper came once a week and was printed badly on rough paper with headlines three inches high. It was his only source of information about the outside world, since he seldom had a radio that was working. This was a world unlike the one my parents read about in the paper, or heard about in the daily news. The headlines had nothing to do with the war, which had started by that time, or elections, or heat waves, or accidents but were as follows:

FATHER FEEDS TWIN DAUGHTERS TO
HOGS WOMAN GIVES BIRTH TO HUMAN
MONKEY VIRGIN RAPED ON CROSS BY
CRAZED MONKS SENDS HUSBAND'S
TORSO. (Munro 1971 4)

This world of Uncle Benny is a peculiar one, disclosing the estrangement of this character who serves as a contrast to the normal life.

Dorrie, the neighbour of Millicent in the story "Real Life," is one who shows enjoyment in house cleaning except in her own, where there is no furniture at all. There are other things, like Dorrie's traps and guns and boards for stretching rabbit and muskrat skins, that made the rooms lose their designations and made the idea of cleaning seem frivolous. Munro describes, "Once, in a summer Millicent saw a pile of dog dirt at the head of the stairs. She didn't see it while it was fresh enough to seem an offence. Through the summer it changed, from brown to grey. It became stony, dignified, stable - and strangely, Millicent herself found less and less need to see it as anything but something that had a right to be there" (Munro 1994 54). In the story "Open Secrets," Munro portrays the house of Mr Siddicup where:

Women's clothes, underwear--old and frayed slips and brassieres and worn-out underpants and nubby stockings, hanging from the back of stairs or from a line above the heater, or just in a heap on the table. All these things must have belonged to his wife, of course, and at first it looked as if he might be washing and drying them and sorting them out, prior to getting rid of them. But they were there week after week, and the women started to wonder: Did he leave them lying around to suggest things? Did he put them on himself next to his skin? Was he a pervert? (Munro 1994 52)

When the world has many such strange, peculiar, pervert beings around, it is impossible for a writer to create a steady and fixed character, since it would not be true to the reality the writer is trying to represent. This accounts for a change in trope resorted, to by the fiction writers of post-modern era. Here, Munro's writings differ greatly from that of the eighteenth or nineteenth century writers because there are no more Lords and Ladies, Princes and Princesses, Dukes and Duchesses and Manorial Mansions but ordinary men, women and children who struggle to overcome complexities like poverty and psychic disorders. Providing multiple narrative viewpoints and different conflicts and judgment by different narrators, Munro ascertains that there is nothing beyond this world--everything is here, inside this mundane reality of life. The Victorian concepts of good vs. evil, heaven vs. hell, etc., are, according to Munro, here, in this world itself. They lie side by side, like two pieces of land on either side of a barrier. For Munro, there is no heaven beyond and no hell beneath this world, but only the present-day world, with its trying to bring the past and the future into one's present reality. She asserts the inescapable nature of reality. She realises that even when one writes about reality in the aim of controlling or transforming it, having completed writing, one will find that the reality is still there--intact, as Del perceived it. This metonymic vision of Munro seems to deny the possibility of transcendence or even of ordinary

understanding of reality, which differentiates her from her Victorian ancestors.

Another way of story-telling, that features a hero and heroine in love, troublesome villain and a climax seems to be absurd to the modern reader, because there cannot be a private life unaffected by a wider public life. The changing conditions of the world surely influence the life of ordinary people. So, even if the writer wants to say that the boy and girl lived happily ever after, it is difficult for the modern reader, who is always aware of wars and the insecurity of life, to believe it. One cannot write truthfully about characters living in this age without showing that many of them live in perpetual fear of total annihilation. There are other changes that affect the narrative perspective. With mechanisation, life of working people has become dull. Both men and women drag along, with their drudgery; the dominant feeling is a sense of contempt and futility. The social obstacles in the way of love, the class distinction in choosing a profession, and even the so-called organic community has ceased to exist. Among the wilderness of concrete buildings, people are forced to create artificial gardens for enjoyment. So, post-modern writers, especially women, have created spaces of their own or 'rooms of their own' to paraphrase Virginia Woolf. Canadian writers like Margaret Lawrence and Munro herself have succeeded in this endeavour. These spaces are

inhabited not by immigrants who do not know how and why they are in Canada, but with people whose lives have depth and continuity. Most of the Canadians are immigrants who have no common childhood experiences to share with. Life is impoverished by this rootlessness or lack of tradition.

In the early days, Canada's organic community also posed obstacles in social life. The wilderness, the prairies, the mountains and the extreme climates hindered free social movement. Canadian scholar Jancy James observes, "Margaret Lawrence's *Manawaka* and Alice Munro's *Jubilee* are private kingdoms that the Canadian feminist sensibility has erected to counter the expulsion from the patriarchal national empire" (Kudchetkar 103). Jancy James continues:

Munro's South West Ontario towns of Jubilee and Hanratty are private worlds created by the writer to counter the wilderness myth with the concreteness of enclosed private spaces. These little social enclosures save the female selfhood from being lost in the invisibility of the imposing wilderness that symbolizes the vague yet pervasive domineering male world of power. In *Lives Of Girls and women* and *The Diviners* the same strategy of constructing 'mosaics of secret alternative worlds' to counter and update the myth and metaphor of wilderness figures like a recurrent motif. (Kudchetkar 104)

Meditation on 'wilderness' leads one, to the special problem that Canadians face--"The odd but persistent belief that Canada is somehow lacking in history" (Bayard 102). Sometimes it is just that they find Canadian history uneventful or, in contrast to the volatile U.S, uninteresting. But, quite often it means "history is overwhelmed by geography, by Canada's physical immensity" (Bayard 102). Andre' Siegfried warns that in Canada "...geography has triumphed over history" (quoted in Eagleton 157), and Roy Daniells says, "our history is largely geographic" ("Poetry and the Novel" 6). But Munro's Jubilee and Hanratty are spaces which share memory and childhood experience; they are spaces that evolve history shared by the people; they are spaces that provide an identity to the people. Even the Flats Road is a space that confers identity even though of a negative type. When Del's mother says that she lives at the end of Flats Road she is trying to prove her identity, to define herself as somebody entirely different from those who live on the Flats Road. In "Meneseteung" the 'Dufferin Street' and the 'Pearl Street Swamp' have different definition of space that define two different types of people. Munro describes:

Almeda Roth's house faces on Dufferin Street, which is a street of considerable respectability. On this street, merchants, a mill owner, an operator of salt wells have their houses. But Pearl Street, which her back windows overlook and her back

gate opens on to, is another story. Workmen's houses are adjacent to hers.' Small but decent row houses--that is all right. Things deteriorate towards the end of the block, and the next, last one becomes dismal. Nobody but the poorest people, the unrespectable and undeserving poor, would live there at the edge of a log hole (drained since then), called the Pearl Street Swamp. (Munro 1990 55)

In "Friend of My Youth," Munro locates the Grieves' family in Ottawa Valley, where something peculiar happened. The Mother describes this phenomenon to the daughter.

When wood weathers in Ottawa valley, my mother said, I do not know why this is, but it never turns grey, it turns black. There must be something in the air, she said. She often spoke of Ottawa valley, which was her home--she had grown up about twenty miles away from Grieves School--in a dogmatic, mystified way, emphasizing things about it that distinguished it from any other place on earth. Houses turn black, maple syrup has a taste no maple syrup produced elsewhere can equal, bears amble within sight of farm houses. (Munro 1990 4)

From this valley, the mother weaves the story of the 'Angel' Flora Grieves and her sister Ellie Grieves. Creating spaces, creating myth, is what Munro's

story-telling character does. This process is analysed by the young protagonist of the story.

Del says about Jubilee, "People's lives in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable--deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum," and further states that it has never occurred to her that one day, she will be "so greedy for Jubilee" (Munro 1971 210). And the description of Bobby Sheriff's drawing room exposes the truth that Jubilee has its own history and tradition. "On the table was something like a china mug, or vase with no flowers in it, but a tiny red ensign, and a Union Jack. It was one of those souvenirs that had been sold when the king and queen visited Canada in 1939; there were their youthful, royal faces, shedding kind light, as at the front of the Grade Eight classroom in the public school" (Munro 1971 208).

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* Munro tells us stories and stories and stories about the people of West Hanratty through the voices of Flo and Rose. It turns out to be a saga of a big country because it is flooded with anecdotes. Flo tells Rose about the death of her mother, "She said to Rose's father during the afternoon, I have a feeling that is so hard to describe. It's like a boiled egg in my chest, with the shell left on. She died before night, she had a blood clot in her lung" (Munro 1978 2). On the bench outside Flo's store, several old men from the neighbourhood

assembled, gossiping and drowsing in the warm weather. From their stories Rose came to know about the war and “the foundry disease” (Munro 1978 4). The place where Rose lived was West Hanratty. She says, “There was Hanratty and West Hanratty, with the river flowing between them. This was West Hanratty. In Hanratty the social structure ran from doctors and dentists and lawyers down to foundry workers and factory workers and draymen; In West Hanratty it ran from factory workers and foundry workers down to large improvident families of casual bootleggers and prostitutes and unsuccessful thieves” (Munro 1978 5). Rose always wishes that her family is “straddling the river, belonging to nowhere, but West Hanratty was where the store was and they were, on the straggling tail of the main street” (Munro 1978 6). Here the river defines two entirely different worlds as in “Meneseteung.” Now sitting by the window of Flo’s store Rose watches the people who goes by.

Through Rose’s childhood memory, the reader comes into contact with Becky Tide who laughed “like an engine bearing down on you,” her brother Robert who ran the butcher shop, about Becky’s polio-stricken childhood and the cruelty of her father (Munro 1978 7). Most of the story or history is told by Flo to Rose. “Flo telling a story--and this was not the only one, or even the most lurid one, she knew--would incline her head and let her face go soft and thoughtful, tantalizing, warning” (Munro

1978 9). Flo continues her story about Becky's father being punished by three young gentlemen of the town and Rose wonders:

Present time and the past, the shady melodramatic past of Flo's stories, were quite separate, at least for Rose. Present people could not be fitted into the past. Becky herself, town oddity and public pet, harmless and malicious, could never match the butcher's prisoner, the cripple daughter, a white streak at the window: mute, beaten, impregnated. As with the house only a formal connection could be made. (Munro 1978 10)

Here, the listener, Rose, is evaluating and being apprehensive of the truth of the story that Flo, the efficient teller of tales, lay before her. Flo had a very easy way of putting an end to her stories. She would say, "that was all," as though putting "a lid on the story as if she was sick of it" (Munro 1978 12). The reader is again taken to another story which was the story of Flo before she married Rose's father. Rose returns to her own childhood and narrates the encounter between her father and herself, which she describes as Royal Beatings. From here, Rose learns the art of storytelling which, she realises is like "telling the grossest sort of lies, twisting everything to suit herself" (Munro 1978 20). She tells the reader innumerable stories about herself, her mother, her father, her stepmother and all the

people who lived in West Hanratty--her schoolmates, her friends at the university and the wide world outside Hanratty. In this collection, Munro creates a space, a private space, for Rose the protagonist to experience, learn and grow to be a future artist crossing the boundary of that very private space.

Munro does not leave 'geography' to triumph over 'history'. She manipulates geography in order to unravel the mysterious world of the human psyche. In "Walker Brothers Cowboy," the child narrator describes the unfamiliar aspect of her father's life thus, "I feel my father's life flowing back from our car in the last afternoon, darkening and turning strange, like a landscape that has an enchantment on it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers and distances you cannot imagine" (Munro 1968 18). Here Munro, by exposing the changes that come to people, expresses the ambiguity or uncertainty of what might happen to human beings in particular situations: She further says that "when we get closer to Tupper town the sky becomes gently overcast" (Munro 1968 18) which is but a reflection of the life of the protagonist's family--the harshness of the realities that made her mother. It is poverty that makes the sky of Tupper town overcast. In the story "The Shining Houses," Munro uses the metaphor of the "Wilderness City" to differentiate between the new subdivision of

the new elite people and the old city where Mrs Fullerton lived (Munro 1968 24). She remarks:

It had to be called a city because there were tramlines running into the woods, the houses had numbers and there were all the public buildings of a city, down by the water. But houses like Mrs Fullerton's had been separated from each other by uncut forest and a jungle of wild blackberry and salmonberry bushes; these surviving houses, with thick smoke coming out of their chimney, walls unpainted and patched and showing different degrees of age and darkening, rough sheds and stacked wood and compost heaps and grey board fences around them--every so often among the large new houses of Mimosa and Marigold and Heather Drive--dark, enclosed, expressing something like savagery in their disorder, and the steep unmatched angles of roofs and lean-tos; not possible on these streets, but there. (Munro 1968 24)

Here, the writer, through these words, expresses the dark and savage attitude of the new elite class. To describe unknown characteristics in the character Mary MacQuade, Munro uses the metaphor of an 'iceberg' which hides more than it shows.

E.D. Blodgett comments upon 'the house' as metaphor in Munro's works. It is very interesting to note the development of this aspect.

According to Blodgett, “The Western Canadian novel employs the house, as a socio- economic motif. It is a sign for status” (Blodgett 66). While the house is one of the more recurrent means of situating action in Munro, she seems to excel at evoking houses of hopes long ago abandoned. Such are the situations in “A Trip to the Coast,” and part of the background of “Thanks for the Ride.” One of Munro’s keywords is ‘linoleum.’ In “The Shining Houses,” the house is used as a means of double focus. Here, it is more distinct because the problems of the house had become a problem of the protagonist whose thoughts mediate the old and the new, the rich and the poor, which are common themes. Here, the protagonist becomes a pivot for the double perspective levelled upon the house.

This sort of technique is used in “The Idyllic Summer,” “The Time of Death” and “Winter Wind.” By means of contrast, Munro manipulates the ‘house’ to bring about double-exposures. As the narrator indicates in “The Shining Houses,” “under the structure of this new subdivision, there was something else to be seen” (Munro 1968 24). The house, for Munro, is not something to explore the character, but is a problem and a process that are to be analysed by the protagonist. She uses the metaphor to explore the problem of time and change. Munro’s houses are always run down by time; they lead to new discoveries, just as in the case of the little girl in “Images” who discovers Joe Phippen’s situation after entering his

house beneath the ground, awakening to see her own house from a different perspective with fresh awareness. Del also thinks of Uncle Craig's house as "a puzzle whose significance she has no desire to decode" (Munro 1971 42).

In "The Peace of Utrecht," Munro employs the motif of return to the family house. The return provides Helen ample scope of exploration into her own past. The pattern of return is characterised by back-tracking, as if the narrator were working through a maze. The vision of the house is a metaphor for the subtle but fragmentary relation that exists between sisters, mothers, daughters and aunts. It also focuses the ambiguous problem of time. She looks in the mirror, "to greet, matter-of-factly, the reflection of a thin, tanned, habitually watchful woman" (Munro 1968 197). The previous time, the mirror had shown her as a "commonplace pretty girl with a face insensitive as an apple" (Munro 1968 198). This kind of double vision, which one may see elsewhere in Munro, suggests that the function of the mirror is not metonymical, but rather metaphorical, even if the order of identity is of a simple kind. The mirror further provides a temporal shift so that the narrator sees herself again as a child waiting for her mother's voice and by a process of analogy, aligns herself with her mother: "As I talked to my children I was thinking...of my mother's state of mind when she called out who's there?" (Munro 1968 198). The

adjectives she uses to connect the mother and the house produce sinking feelings--the house has “an air of substantial decoration and an ‘impoverished look’ (Munro 1968 197), while the mother has a “ruined voice” (Munro 1968 199) and “debilitating surges of tears” (Munro 1968 199), etc. An interesting aspect one notices in her fictional world is that the extensive description of nature found in the earlier stories gradually moves on to cryptic remarks like a “jaundiced leaf” (Munro 1982 136) or “a gibbous moon” (Munro 1982 158).

In her stories, Munro is more concerned about the behaviour of women placed in complex situations. She delves more into the intricacies of women’s psyche. This severs the umbilical cord that binds any woman with the ‘nature’ and ‘the house.’ The association or comparison of woman with ‘nature’ or ‘the house’ are images of patriarchal oppression. By moving away from her obsession with nature and description of each and every household item, by moving beyond metonymy or metaphor, Munro crosses the bounds of tradition not only in perspective but in style. Thus, like most of the new Canadian writers, Munro also takes “process, discontinuity and organic shape as its values rather than the humanistic ideal of the ‘well-wrought urn’” (Bayard 219). Her aim is not to retreat from the world of experience “to hide behind ‘nature’ or confine herself into the ‘attic’ but to portray--to embody--life and thus make it intelligible

to her readers--its rapidly increasing variety, fragmentation, non-linearity and unpredictability” (Bayard 219).

Munro’s works may be called experiments with variety, comparable to the different varieties of cakes placed on the same tray. The fourth collection of short stories called *The Moons of Jupiter* and the eighth collection *Open Secrets* are proof of this. Experimental writing is a sort of competition, a struggle or general conflict. In the nineteenth century, Zola opposed the subjective fantasies of the idealists and their purely imaginary works. He wanted the novel to be a tool for social and psychological analysis and argued that the novelist should be regarded as “an observer and an experimentalist [who] sets his characters going in a certain story so as to show that the succession of the facts will be such as the requirements of the determinism of the phenomena under examination call for” (Deer 8). Munro sets her characters going in their own directions and allows them to unravel, analyse and assess objective realities. She never curbs the freedom of her characters by “putting a lid on the story” (Munro 1978 12) or by “slamming a board down on” (Munro 1997 104) them. She gives them liberty to go backward and forward in time and space. She makes them critically examine not only the world outside but also the world inside. She places her characters between two worlds and provides scope for a critical evaluation of both the worlds. Thus, Munro’s characters are

independent; objective realities flow in a natural sequence, not in the style of a well-wrought urn. Early twentieth century modernists like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson resorted to non-linear narratives with metaphorical rendering of psychological states. Munro's early narratives are linear, but "The Peace of Utrecht" signals a change in form. From there, her stories move forward and backward in time. In the collection *Open Secrets*, one finds a different type of movement which resembles the pivot, and the spokes of a wheel. Louisa is at the centre, the pivot, and the story of Jack Agnew as disclosed through his letter, the newspaper reports, the report by Doud and the facts that Louisa realises are set like the spokes of a wheel.

"The very meaning of experimentalism, innovation, or the idea of the *avante-garde* in art has anti-authoritarian implications," (1994 8) says Glenn Deer. Renato Poggioli in *The Theory of the Avante Garde* says, "the present experimental vanguard always becomes an institution against which future generation must argue and struggle in order to establish their own originality and novelty" (Deer 80). Hence, the technique used by Munro may, in future, be contested for the evolvment of a new genre of writing. The techniques employed by experimental writers are discontinuous forms, self-reflexivity, linguistic play and anti-mimetic elements. Munro makes use of all these devices as, she proceeds from an imitation of Fairy

Tales to post-modern fictions. Herbert Marcuse, in his work *The Aesthetic Dimension*, states, “discontinuous forms and fragmentations are aesthetic resistances to the role and power of ‘the whole;’ of the administered unification of man which saps his subjectivity--collage and multi-media effects are not a reflection of reality but a resistance to homogeneity” (Deer 10). Analysing the statement, Glenn Deer finds that Marcuse’s theory, in which the values of individuality, subjectivity and personal freedom are equated with non-linear, disrupted aesthetic forms, is similar to the theories connecting the open form of liberal politics advanced by Canadian defenders of radical experiments in art in the inaugural 1970s period of Canadian Post-modernism. This defence of disordering and polyphony is especially apparent in the early critical statements of Frank Davey, George Bowering, and Robert Kroetsch. It is interesting to note that Alice Munro’s first collection, which was published in 1968, itself, shows signs of changing trends in Canadian writing. Her story, “Peace of Utrecht,” makes use of elegiac trope through which she re-reads and re-visions her own past, the life she has actually experienced through, and attempts a re-organisation of the events and experiences of her own childhood. This process of re-reading and re-interpreting what has gone earlier is itself an act of self-reflexivity which leads to a corrective end--a sort of realisation of what life is like--an anagnorisis, to use the Aristotelian idea. Munro, like other

contemporary experimental novelists, can be seen to be preoccupied with the writing process, with the various dimensions of self-reflexive narrative, with the linguistic pattern of the text, and sometimes with the genre's game-like feature.

Experimental writing is said to be in conformity with the restlessness, discontent with the past, and a hostility to the "conservative" authority, beliefs, values and conventions which are clearly presented by Munro through her stories like *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, "Friend of My Youth," "Progress of Love" and *Something I've been Meaning to Tell You*. Here, one comes upon five dominant features of experimental fiction: 1. Opposition of idealistic, fantastic fantasies as in the story "Boys and Girls," "An Ounce of Cure," "Thanks for a Ride," etc.. 2. Experiment with non-linear narrative and metaphorical rendering of psychological states as in the collections *Moons of Jupiter* and *Open Secrets*. 3. Anti- authoritarianism which rings throughout Munro's works. 4. Pre-occupation with the writing process as in *Lives of Girls and Women*, "Material" etc.. 5. Discontent with the past and hostility to conservative beliefs, values and conventions, found in almost all works of Munro. Munro deals with all the above mentioned problems and succeeds in transcending them to a state of reconciliation--'a knowing'--an acceptance of the past and the present life as it is.

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I

**ALICE MUNRO:
DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE FROM
THE TRADITIONAL TO METAFICTIONAL**

P.K. PRABHA

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Chapter III

Shifting Space and Time--Deconstructing Reality

“Narratology is etymologically, the science of narrative” (Onega 1). Since the term was popularised by structuralists like Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince and others in the 1970s, the definition of narratology has been restricted to structural analysis of narrative. Now, in its etymological sense, narratology is a multi-disciplinary study of narrative which negotiates and incorporates the insights of many other critical discourses that involve narrative forms of representation. This research analyses the development of Alice Munro’s narrative placing her in the historical context of post-modernism, and feminism, probing into various themes that lead to a development in the mode of her narrative.

According to critics, the very definition of narrative as ‘the representation of a series of events’ assumes that narratives are composite entities in a number of senses, and that a narrative can be analysed as events that compose it, and that these events can be studied according to their position with respect to one another. Hence the position of events in the series may be at the beginning, middle or end and it may have a linear structure of time and action that the structuralists define as a horizontal approach or syntagmatic approach to literature. A few of the stories in the

first collection by Munro may be analysed from this point of view. But the rest violate the horizontality of time and action. According to the structuralist critic Mieke Bal, “A narrative text is a text in which an agent relates a story” (Omega 6). In the case of Munro’s stories, a single agent does not narrate the story. Several agents narrate and contribute to the story, and only an active participation of the reader makes it possible to complete the stories. But different readers may interpret and complete the narration in their own different ways as her stories do not provide a closure. Her stories do not adhere to the strict positioning of events in the order of beginning, middle or end. They are presented in the manner of surrealistic paintings, giving the reader a sense of disarray on the surface level. Only a person going deeper into the structure of her stories may perceive the craft and range of her creativity. Temporal, spatial, pathological and psychological dimensions are exploited to the maximum by Munro. She presents characters that move through Time and Space to realise that pathological changes are in no way a hindrance to a creative and active mind and takes them to the heights of freedom--a freedom of the mind. Her characters fight against temporal, spatial, and physical changes and ultimately realise that real freedom is the freeing of mind from the manacles put on it by centuries of convention.

Two steps in the *Dance of the Happy Shades* can be detected as one reads the collection of short stories. It is a dance, a performance accompanied by music held in households on specific occasions. The happy shades are dancing to the music of Miss Marsalles. The title suggests a dance of light and darkness which holds in its shadow many objects that usually go unnoticed. People are in the shade, between light and darkness. This light and darkness in the Munroian space becomes reality and illusion. Human beings caught between reality and illusion, enshrouded by the 'shade,' are the performers. The first step in the dance include the first written seven stories of which "The Time of Death" and "Day of the Butterfly" are the earliest. The others are "An Ounce of Cure," "Thanks for the Ride," "Sunday Afternoon," "Shining Houses" and "Trip to the Coast." Written between 1953 and 1959, these seven stories are purely conventional. The step is a conventional one, moving forward in a linear fashion. The heroines, Patricia, Myra Sayla, Helen, Alva, Lois, the nameless heroine of "An Ounce of Cure," all dance in the conventional style. But stories written after the "Peace of Utrecht" have a different performance. It is a step backward moving spirally from a definite point in the life of the performers. Many voices sing to the tune of the main singer accompanying the dance. It is not a dance performed by a single person but by a group of persons. "The Peace of Utrecht," "The Office," "Images," "Post Card"

and “Dance of the Happy Shades” belong to the second phase of the ‘dance.’ Interesting and notable changes occur in the style of narration of these stories.

The first set of stories evolves in a definite linear fashion, with an initial incident to open the story, an interesting development that reaches a climax to fall back to the normal course. The death of Benny which brings Patricia, the gentle motherly girl, to the stonehenge of accusation and the climax arising with the appearance of Brandon, the scissors- man, to take Patricia back to the former state in the eyes of the public, specialise “Time of Death.” Myra Sayla’s occupation of the school’s backyard, her disappearance, her illness, the birthday party and her glorification become the linear order in the “Day of the Butterfly.”

Chastity and adherence to conventional rules of society become a major problem in the conventionally written stories “An Ounce of Cure” and “Thanks for the Ride.” The narrator of “An Ounce of Cure,” frustrated in love consumes whisky to overcome grief. The stories that spread about this incident are all against this adolescent girl while the boy who is responsible, lives on in his usual casual manner. “Thanks for a Ride” is a story written by Munro from the male point of view. It explores the feeling of Dick wondering at the change that has come in the lives of girls. “A Trip to the Coast” reminds one of the imprisoned virginity that is found in

stories like “Cinderella and Rapunzel.” The 11 year old girl May, whose desire for freedom is endless, is kept under the strong custody of her seventy eight year old grandmother who never allows her to move in the company of friends.

Another feature of the early stories is that they move forward in time. A slight variation to this is found only in the “Shining Houses,” in which the stories are related by Mrs Fullerton concerning her past. This can be considered as a basic change in Munro’s narrative technique. The six stories of this phase are narrated by single narrators while in “Shining Houses,” one finds a doubling of voice in the form of Mrs Fullerton’s gossips and Mary’s appropriation of them. Another peculiarity of this short story is that it problematises a moral by contrasting Mrs Fullerton with the whole people of the new subdivision. This is a singular case in Munro’s stories because she herself has observed in an interview with Geoff Hancock in 1982, “No lessons. No lessons ever” (Hancock 222) and to Allen Twig, “No preaching for any particular morality or politics” (Keith 156). W.J. Keith in “A Sense of Style” observes, “A moral problem is raised and debated... This is an effective story in its own right, but within Munro’s work it is a decided anomaly” (Keith 1934 152). Here, one has to disagree because this cannot be considered as an anomaly but only as a step in the development of Munro’s narrative. Just as she discusses

the problem of 'the teenage disaster' in "An Ounce of Cure" and 'imprisoned virginity' in "A Trip to the Coast," she has taken up a social problem that arose in the changing condition of the countryside in the story "Shining Houses." The author provides a discussion on the old and the new and the rich and the poor by means of double perspective, pivoted on the house. This double vision and the element of gossip, presented in the anecdotes of Mrs Fullerton, are stepping stones of Munro's later adopted metafictional narrative strategy.

These stories portray an evolution from illusion to reality. The accused Patricia is proved to be innocent; the earlier outcast, poor Myra Sayla, becomes the butterfly of the day, the stories of the townsfolk helps the narrator of "An Ounce of Cure" to overcome illusion and understand truth. "Thanks for a Ride" opens Dick's eyes towards a truth about women, Mr Vance's kiss brings Alva to a world of reality, Mrs Fullerton's stories and the discussions at Mrs Edith's house opened up a new awareness for Mary. And like the characters, the readers are made aware of a 'reality' that often evades human cognition.

The endings of these stories are also significant. They are meaningful and emphatic. The conclusion of "The Day of the Butterfly" goes, "her brown carved face immune to treachery, her offering perhaps already forgotten, prepared to set apart for legendary uses, as she was even in the

back porch at the school” (Munro 1968 110). The narrator of “An Ounce of Cure” has grown into a woman who “had had a glimpse of the shameless, shattering absurdity with which the plots of life, though not fiction, are improvised” (Munro 1968 87-88). Dick and George are pulling away when they hear the female voice calling after them, “the loud, crude, female voice, abusive and forlorn ‘Thanks for the Ride!’ It was not Adelaide calling; it was Lois” (Munro 1968 58). Alva in the “Sunday afternoon” lulled back to reality by the kiss of Mr Vance feels, “But things always come together; there was something she would explore yet--a tender spot, a new and still mysterious humiliation” (Munro 1968 171). Mary, the narrator of “Shining Houses,” who refuses to sign the petition against Mrs Fullerton, says, “There is nothing you can do at present but put your hands in your pocket and keep a disaffected heart” (Munro 1968 29). “A Trip to the Coast” concludes with the sense of freedom May gets when her grandmother died:

She sat with her legs folded under her looking out at the road where she might walk now in any direction she liked, and the world which lay flat and accessible and full of silence in front of her. She sat and waited for that moment to come when she could not wait any longer, when she would have

to get up and go into the store where it was darker than ever now on account of the rain and where her grandmother lay fallen across the counter dead, and what was more, victorious.

(Munro 1968 189)

These stories of the early phase are “exercise stories... the work of a beginning writer” in the words of John Metcalf who interviewed Alice Munro (Keith 167).

Munro’s first recorded change of direction in writing led to a renunciation of extreme Gothic effects. In his 1972 interview, John Metcalf reminded Munro how she had once told him that a lot of her earlier work “was concerned with the most violent and romantic events... abortions, rapes...” and Munro replied, “Yes. It was all very very sordid. I only became commonplace later on” (Keith 167). In summer 1959, Munro wrote “The Peace of Utrecht.” She was prompted to write this story when one of her aunts showed her the dress of her mother who died after a long bout of Parkinson’s disease. The sense of guilt that chilled her heart compelled her to transform ‘this personal subject’ into a short story which was a turning point in the career of Alice Munro as a writer. Most of the stories written after “The Peace of Utrecht” are based on actual experience. “Boys and Girls” recall the modest expectations (“She’s Only a Girl”) reserved for girls in Huron County. “Red Dress 1946” reflects the

competing temptations of social acceptance and independent womanhood. “Walker Brothers Cowboy” fictionalises the social and economic decline of the Laidlaw family and also draws on a specific occurrence.

The stories written after “Peace of Utrecht” are characterised by a movement back from reality to illusion and the narrator is left in a confusion as to whether what she perceives is the real or not. Munro seeks ‘truth’ in the reality of things through her stories. In her childhood, Helen thinks that her mother is always demanding and creating disturbance for them. But after her death, the aunt tells her how her mother used to feel miserable when she was put in the nursing home and how, out of her love for life, she attempted to run away from there. And Helen cognises that what she deems to be real is not actually real, but only a superficial appearance. “The Office” again explains how realities become unreal. The narrator, who longs for a place to sit and write peacefully, understands from her experience with Mr Malley, the owner of the office room, that it is not easy for a woman writer to operate in a male dominated world.

“In Boys and Girls,” the child narrator who desires to share her father’s world, on growing into adolescence instinctively retreats from the world she has inhabited until then, where killing is accepted as an economic fact of existence on a fox farm. In the story “Red Dress,” Munro portrays the confusion of a shy, young girl who “could not hit the ball in

volleyball,” because “being called upon to perform an action in front of others made all her reflexes come undone” (Munro 1968 150). But later, her classmate Raymond Bolting dances with her accompanies her home and kisses her while parting. This makes her aware of her charms, the lack of which has seemed to her as something real before the dance.

“Walker Brothers Cowboy” is a journey into the unknown past of the narrator’s father. The narrator who thinks her father to be a serious man at home is surprised to see the transformation that comes upon him in the presence of Nora, his former lover. She felt her father’s life “flowing back” from their car “in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange” (Munro 1968 18). “Images” also have a similar pattern. The child protagonist who has heard of the man with the axe who frequents the precincts of her grandmother’s house is transfixed at the sight of the man coming down the path. But her experience at the underground house of Joe alters her notion of reality and she is able to see even ferocious looking Mary MacQuade in a different light. Helen, the protagonist of “Post Card,” formerly thought that she is loved by Clare, a wealthy young man. But on finding that he has married another lady, she is enraged. She creates a scene in front of Clare’s house, and Clare, without giving her any explanation, asks her to go home. Buddy Shields takes her home and tries to console her on the way. But she cannot understand why, she feels

like reaching out her hands to 'touch' Clare, when he stands as though nothing has happened. "Dance of the Happy Shades" discloses yet another form of this. The narrator's idea about the attitude of Miss Marsalles towards music and children is completely overturned with the concert given by the retarded girl. The girl's talent, though useless, is appreciated and understood by Miss Marsalles and the narrator wonders, "why is that we are unable to say--as we must have expected to say--*Poor Miss Marsalles?*" and feels that the 'other world' of music in which Miss Marsalles lives is something that she cannot comprehend (Munro 1968 224).

Double vision is yet another aspect that gives charm to these second set of stories. This double vision is closely related to the dual nature of reality which has been discussed in the earlier part of this chapter. "Walker Brothers Cowboy" provides a dual vision of the mind of the father--his behaviour at home in the presence of the sick mother and his behaviour in Nora's house. Double vision in "Images" is found in the stories of Mary MacQuade about Joe and the actual stories related by Joe. In "Office," the stories told by Mr Malley about the former occupants of the room and her own experience with Mr Malley help the narrator to realise truth. The experience of seeing a horse being killed and the earlier expectation of the child are conflicting aspects discussed in "Boys and Girls." "Post Card"

pictures the real life of ordinary women in contrast to the life of the wealthy people. "Red Dress" displays two types of lives--one, the ordinary way all girls behave, and the other the life opted by Mary, the sports star, avoiding the company of man. "Peace of Utrecht" lays open two versions upon the death of the protagonist's mother. One story told by Maddy, her sister and the other told by Aunt Annie. The last story which forms the title of the collection presents two faces of Miss Marsalles: one, the poor Miss Marsalles and two, Miss Marsalles inhabiting the other world of music. "The essential tension between two sets of values, two ways of seeing, two worlds, is always apparent, as central in her last book as her first" (Macdonald 365). The mothers who are called upon to witness the concert of the retarded children think that, "everything was always as expected" (Munro 1968 214). They feel assured that their attendance is part of a socially approved ritual of safe and unknown value. They also think that "to Miss Marsalles, such a thing is acceptable, but to other people, people who live in the world, it is not" (Munro 1968 223).

Here lies the key to much of the dynamic in Alice Munro's vision says MacDonald and Rae McCarthy. There are those of "'the world;' of society, of the accepted norms, and those 'from the other country'" (Munro 1968 224). One may assume that it is around this division of "the world" and "non-world" or "other country" that Munro's interest and irony centres.

Munro, through these second set of stories, seems to ask the question: Who are the real handicapped? The portrayal of the mothers who have never “expected music,” leaving Miss Marsalles, House, hurrying back to the safety of their social routines provide the answer (Munro 1968 222). The reader is made to understand that the retardation of the children who are “not all there” have been just a symbolic externalisation of the hidden, but ultimately more serious, retardation of those smug social survivors, the nervous mothers and the normal children (Munro Dance 221). Thus, double vision, which becomes a recurrent technique in Munro, begins with the second set of stories in *Dance of the Happy Shades*. It differs from the double vision technique used by Emile Bronte in respect of the object of focus and on the critical analysis of human minds to which it leads.

Stories from the “Peace of Utrecht” to the “Dance of the Happy Shades” disclose a backward movement in time. The stories are in the form of recollected past experiences. The “Peace of Utrecht” is about the death of the narrator’s mother after which she returns to her rural home in the village to hear about her mother’s life. The “Images,” “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” “Boys and Girls” and “Red Dress” are all recollections of childhood days of the respective narrators. “Office” and “Dance of the Happy Shades” also attempt a portrayal of the past. In the backward

movement, Munro paints many 'peculiar people,' meaning peculiar to the ordinary people of the society. Characters like Miss Marsalles, Nora, Mary MacQuade, Mr Malley, etc., promote a thought provoking atmosphere for the readers.

The beginnings of these stories are very casual, "After supper my father says, 'want to go down and see if the lake's still there?'" (Munro 1968 1). This is the beginning of "Walker Brothers Cowboy" that raises questions in the mind of the reader: Whose father? Which lake? etc.. These questions are answered in the course of the narrative. "Now that Mary MacQuade has come, I pretended not to remember her," opens the story "Images" as though one knew all about the narrator and Mary MacQuade."

To have a look at the endings of some of the stories is important in this context. No heavy emphatic sentences crammed with meaning can be found. Instead, "I went around the kitchen looking for a broom because I seemed to have forgotten where it was kept and she said, 'But why can't I, Helen, Why can't I,'" is the concluding part of the story "Peace of Utrecht" which does not tell the reader what happens to the characters (Munro 1968 219). Whether Maddy married Fred Powel, no one knows. "But when I saw the waiting kitchen, and my mother in her faded, fuzzy, paisley kimono, with her sleepy but doggedly expectant face, I understood what a mysterious and oppressive obligation I had, to be happy, and how

I had almost failed it, and would be likely to fail it, every time, and she would not know” ends the story of the “Red Dress 1946” and the reader is left to decide whether the narrator opened her heart to her mother who has been anxiously waiting to know how she fared at the dance (Munro 1968 160).

The next set of stories that come together are those in *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* These two collections have many of the qualities of a novel but are never classified as novels. They are called collected stories that lie before the reader like pictures in galleries that may be seen one after the other. The same raw materials--a family, a street, a community or a small town are repeated in all the stories in such a way as to connect the stories and the protagonists. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the central character is Del Jordan and in *Who Do You Think You Are?* it is Rose. Both these characters begin from childhood memories, stopping at each point to analyse each and every one of their experiences.

Two voices are evident. One is of the mature narrator and the other of the narrator who is growing up in a community from which she herself feels alienated. Both the mature narrators are creative artists. Del is a writer and Rose, an actress. Munro depicts the experience of Del and Rose who are forced by the manifold institutions of the society [family, school, religion, marriage, etc.], to deal with life on a practical level. But Del and

Rose have different views of the world, which help them to escape the snare of such crippling institutions. This infusion of autobiography is a special trait of Munro which makes ordinary things unfamiliar and strange ones familiar to the readers. The difference that can be seen among these two collections is that Del's story is in the first- person narrative and Rose's, in the third-person. The first person narrator accepts the language of the prevailing educational system imposed upon her. While doing so, she dissociates herself from it in an ironic manner and opposes the system as though she is an outsider. She looks at it as an alien object or a culture that she has never been able to adjust with. To overcome this dilemma, she takes to writing a novel about life. After completing the novel, she goes back to Jubilee, her hometown. She was really puzzled to see that the reality over which she has been trying to gain control still existed unmarred.

The third person point of view in *Who Do You Think You Are?* combines the features of omniscient narration and character focalisation. Here, this technique provides the text with a double distancing perspective for narrating the experiences of the female character. Munro practises this device in *Who Do You Think You Are?* by placing Flo, the step-mother, between the protagonist Rose and the realities and anecdotes of her hometown. She moves a step further taking Rose away from her small

hometown to a wider world where she gains more experience than Del Jordan whose story begins and ends in Jubilee.

Munro problematises the process of writing and new technical devices emerge. In the stories of *Who Do You Think You Are?* with its third person narration, the invisible narrator achieves a cool, slightly condescending, tone. The reader is compelled to contemplate the story of a woman struggling to control her passion. Rose, the protagonist expresses the passions that have been hitherto kept safely locked within the hearts of women in the name of modesty. Rose strikes at the falsity of human beings with regard to the expression of desire. The first person narration of *Lives of Girls and Women* solve the problem of distancing “by using a narrator who is a writer and who therefore appears able to structure experience aesthetically, rather than personally” and Del is even able to offer technical commentary on her predicament (Irvine 110).

[I]n her first person stories, Munro’s ‘I,’ through a manipulation of narrative time, ‘is split between the participant’ and the ‘observing, retrospective’ narrator (7); in her third- person stories, there is the additional split between the protagonist and the omniscient narrator. The narrative strategies become more complicated with the addition of a psychological component: the narrator not only watches

herself but sometimes also classifies other characters as those who watch themselves or do not. The internal division created by her self-watching is sometimes externally objectified by her observing her mirrored reflections. In later stories, she acquires an imaginary alter ego, and later still, an actual one, a separate character and a second narrator who mirrors her. (Messenger 32)

Munro's connected story collections may also be called hybrid constructions because they form "an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological systems" (Bakhtin 304). In Munro's retrospective narration one listens to the narrator's voice as a child and as a grown up. Bakhtin further explains such a process thus, "...retelling a text in one's own words is to a certain extent a double voice--narration of another's words, for indeed 'one's own words' must not completely dilute the quality that makes another's words unique" (34).

[B]y developing a double set of conflicts between two kinds of language, these stories repeatedly reveal the humiliations of language(s) which may be some of the possible sources

of Munro's self-deprecating ambivalence about exercising the medium of the writer's control. The first conflict is between the uneducated and educated languages of the character's original community, as illustrated by the uneducated and educated mothers, the later characters rendered especially painful by their frequent resemblance to Munro's tragically afflicted teacher-mother. The second conflict is between the language acceptable in this narrow community and the language expected in the much wider and very different outside world into which the adult characters move full of 'guilt and alienation for...having skipped out.' (Messenger 29-30)

Textually self-conscious metafiction calls attention not only to its ontological status as fiction but also to the complex nature of reading. It perplexes the readers since they are made aware of the linguistic and fictive nature of what is being read and at the same time defamiliarised on the level of character or plot. Post-modernist metafiction thus makes the reader aware of both its production and reception of cultural products. Both *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* belong to this genre of self-conscious metafiction because the fictional narrators stop at

every point to discuss their apprehensions about the use of words and also about the genuineness of the events and experiences.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the child narrator analyses what has been told and what she has experienced, she questions stories and creates her own vision of the reality around her and shapes it into a novel and on her return to Jubilee finds the reality still 'there' untouched. In *Who Do You Think You Are?* the narrator ponders over the words Royal Beatings and the 'last war' which was actually the first World War. She is apprehensive and analytical about the stories Flo narrates. She sets out to create a reality of her own, an identity of her own but is appalled at the complexity of human mind--the vanity and hatred of Patrick, the magnanimity and softness of the former town fool Ralph Gillespie and in the end the struggle of the old woman at the Home groping in the void in search of words.

Narrative time also acquires significance in both these collections. Both begin from the point of view of a child narrator leading the story in a chronological line till the end of the book where one finds the mature narrator placing herself comfortably in the present and looking back at the past. This method of movement forward and backward in time has been made use of in the later stories like "Differently" of *Friend of My Youth* and "The Children Stay." In "Differently," all the major events occur

in flash back, and when it is completed and the friendship between Georgia and Maya has ended, the narrative moves back to the present for three brief scenes. The first focus on Raymond's dialogue, "I did all I could do," is to be noted (Cruise 241). Georgia's judgment of this statement is noticeably absent. She is absent from the entire section. The reader makes the judgement on Raymond's dialogue comparing his statements to the previous flashbacks. "I don't scoot off and leave her, like her Prince of Fantasy Land," Raymond concludes (Cruise 241). It is left to the reader to decide how much she believes such pronouncements made by Raymond.

From the story "Peace of Utrecht" through *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Munro uses framing, somewhat similar to stacking in that it involves radical time shifts. Because of this framing technique, the narrative is free to move between present and past, generating a kind of friction in juxtaposition. Munro places her techniques solidly in situation, and the idea of closure does not involve moving forward but returning. The surrealism of photography in *Lives of Girls and women* and the mocking, doubling strategies of *Who Do You Think You Are?* are ways by which the stories begin to question their own form. One of the central aspects of photographic vision is that Munro's characters "witness both the familiar and prosaic becoming unfamiliar, even threatening and reverse process as well" (York 50). The process takes place not only in

her earlier stories like “Ottawa Valley” or “Day of the Butterfly” but in *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* as well. Distortion of the common place is identified with photographic art and in the epilogue to *Lives of Girls and Women*, entitled “The Photographer” Del explains the terrific impact of the photographs taken by the photographer of Jubilee.

This signifies the self- reflexive form of Munro’s stories. The description of the photographer’s art and Del’s actual meeting with Bobby Sheriff whose distorted picture she has given earlier, exposes the nature of her art. Rose, musing about the other side of dailiness, comments, “There is a sort of treachery... sets down in print” (Munro 1971 16). Exotic becoming familiar is more bewildering in Munro’s stories like “Images” where Ben Jordan and Mary who are pictured as fierce and aggressive, are just ordinary victims of brutal society. Ralph Gillespie who fictionalises Milton-Homer, is himself transformed into fiction at the end of *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Photography is said to be a meeting place of the known and the unknown, a meeting place of motion and stillness in human experience. *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* function on the borderline of motion and stasis. Rose is prevented from turning a letter from Flo into a public storytelling exhibition by “a fresh and overwhelming realisation” of the ‘Gulf’ which lies between her and her past (Munro 1978 250). But later she realises through Ralph

Gillespie that the gulf is also a living link. Susan Sontag describes Munro's craft as similar to the photographer's art:

[P]hotography which has so many narcissistic uses is also a powerful instrument for depersonalising our relation to the world; and the two uses are complementary. Like a pair of binoculars with no right or wrong end, the camera makes the exotic things near, intimate; and familiar things small, abstract, strange, much further away. It offers, in one easy, habit forming activity, both participation and alienation in our own lives and in those of the other. (York 59)

Del and Rose are looking at their life in their respective hometowns borderlined by poverty and harsh conventions and beliefs, viewing from different angles both as participant and alien.

One may identify with another person to know the other's identity. One may also use the technique of distancing to have an overview. This reveals not only the other person's individuality but also one's own particularity. Munro uses this technique in three ways: 1) Viewing from the position of different persons. 2) Same person viewing different persons or different views. 3) Appropriation of historical fact and tradition. She makes use of this device in "Shining Houses," *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, "Carried Away," etc. The short story

collection *Something I've been Meaning to Tell You* published between *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* contain thirteen stories that bear the seed to her future stories retaining some of the qualities of her earlier ones.

Saul Bellow, in his essay "Where do We Go From Here, the Future of Fiction," remarks that he is unable to "see what people say and do with the simplifying eye of habit and custom. Everything falls to pieces, the pieces to pieces again, and nothing can be comprehended anymore with the help of customary notions" (Kumar 5). When one proceeds from the earlier stories of Munro to the stories in *Something I've been Meaning to Tell You*, it becomes clear that Munro also is unable to see the people, their action and speech in the way earlier writers seemed to have viewed. Her characters are face to face with life itself "without the comforts of community, without metaphysical certainty, without the power to distinguish the virtuous from the wicked man, surrounded by dubious realities and discovering dubious selves" (Kumar 6). In Munro's stories, one may fail to distinguish the virtuous from the wicked but all human beings presented appear to have both qualities when looked at from different perspectives. What Munro does is to present each individual in his or her true nature without trying to impose upon the reader her judgement based on the dichotomy of human lives.

In the stories of *Something I've been Meaning to Tell You* "the outer limits of clock-time is melted and diffused just as the outermost boundaries of people and things vanish, losing their own identity within the relativism of the all-embracing self" (Kumar 20). So the one-after-anotherness of outer time imbricated in earlier narratives by the use of a definite beginning, middle and an end also does not exist in this collection. Every story begins somewhere in time and moves forward and backward easily as the narrator wills. The passage of time unravels during the process of reading. The reader is challenged to connect and comprehend the story according to his/her taste. Many of the stories in this collection resonate with themes and structural patterns of some of the stories included in her earlier collection *Dance of the Happy Shades* and some stories are precursors of her later collection *The Moons of Jupiter*. Hence it can be said that in her stories, as in life "yesterdays are never lost, just as tomorrows are always imbedded in the seeds of today" (Kumar 20). This collection forms a sort of link between her earlier stories and later ones.

Of the thirteen stories in the collection, eight are in the first person narrative point of view and five in the third person, omniscient view. The first person stories like "Forgiveness in Families," "Winter Wind" and the "Ottawa Valley" is a reworking on the autobiographical material, particularly the "Mother," whom Munro as a child and adolescent and

young woman found very difficult to comprehend. She views the mother in these stories from different angles and gives the impression of a failed attempt at grasping the reality, just as she admits her failure in coping with the 'Father' in "Walker Brothers Cowboy" and the 'Locale' in *Lives of Girls and Women*.

In the story "Something I've been meaning to Tell You," the title itself suggests that something has not been told. There is something for the reader to seek. Written with the World War II as its backdrop, it probes into the complexities of the human mind that weaves stories. Blaikie Noble's character is analysed by the omniscient narrator from the point of view of a female set against patriarchy. His stories are deconstructed through the dialogues of Et, who is contrasted with her beautiful sister Char, the sick Arthur's wife. Et looks at an old photograph and realises: "that the qualities of legend were real, that they surfaced where and when you least expected. She had almost thought that beautiful women were a fictional invention" (Munro 1974 5). The story of the haunted house narrated to silly women travellers by Blaikie the tourist guide foregrounds the life situation of Char, the charming lady, who mysteriously tries to commit suicide twice. Et is the keen observer who, by deconstructing the story of Blaikie, exposes to the readers her apprehension of authenticity of fiction. Through her remarks on Arthur who "knew about history but

not about what went on, in front of his eyes, in his house, anywhere,” she comments upon the unreality even of individuals who are very intimate (Munro 1974 11). She discerns the hidden realities, though not fully but in a better way than Blaikie, Char or Arthur. From Blaikie’s story about the haunted house, through the King Arthur story which comes out as a game, and the story of the drowned boy (who was the brother of Et and Char), the narrative moves on to the stories Et and Char made about, and for, Blaikie. A span of thirty years lapses after the first scene in which Char describes how deceptive Blaikie Noble is.

While moving from one story to the other, the social history is unravelled. Parks and hotels changed into sunshine camps for children; TB sanatorium, barracks and RAF training camps for the pilots set up during the First World War, people who could not afford hotels, “working men, shop clerks and factory girls from the city, stayed in a row of tiny cottages, joined by lattice work that hid their garbage pails and communal outhouses, stretching far up the beach” (Munro 1974 6-7). Each story is deconstructed and problematised by Et who probes into the mystery of Char’s relationship with Blaikie Noble, her attempt to commit suicide, her active participation in the Amateur Dramatic Society and the Ontario Society which culminated in her marriage with Arthur and her death.

The narrator, hearing the story of Blaikie's marriage comments: "The question often crossed Et's mind in later years--what she did mean to do about this story when Blaikie got back" (Munro 1974 17). She goes on to present a number of stories from which the reader can pick and choose. Et as a creative designer of dress knows fully well the complexity and subtlety of creation, "It takes more brains to cut and fit, if you do it right, than to teach the people about the war of 1812. Because, once you learn that, it's learned and it isn't going to change you. Where as every article of clothing you make is an entirely new proportion" (Munro 1974 14). So also each story that is created in society has an entirely new proportion. Here, History and male narratives are set against the mystery of human psyche and the female art of story telling.

"Material" is a story that explicates the false image that male writers impose upon the minds of the reading public. Here too, the first person narrator is very critical about the silly women who make much of such people. She also criticises the hypocrisy of the so-called 'academics.' The former wife of Hugo, the writer, is the narrator of the story. It differs greatly from traditional stories in the selection of a housewife as a critic of the mainstream writer. In traditional story telling, the protagonist would have been Hugo with his aura of great intelligence and charisma with women and his solitary life by the side of the mountains. But Munro

chooses an insider who knows Hugo more than the people at the academy or the reading public. She also has intimate knowledge about Dotty's life that provided the material for Hugo's latest book. Knowing Hugo and Dotty, she can easily see through the unreliable narration made by Hugo. She is aware of disguises in life and writing. She remarks, "I have noticed anyway, everybody must have noticed as we go further into middle age, how shop worn and simple, really, are the disguises, the identities if you like, that people take up. In fiction, in Hugo's business, such disguises would not do, but in life they are all we seem to want, all anybody can manage. Look at Hugo's picture, look at the undershirt, listen to what it says about him" (Munro 1974 24). Calling attention to the picture of Hugo on the cover page of his work, she raises questions about Hugo's second wife and children. Nothing is written about them. She analyses the statement, "He lives on the side of a mountain above Vancouver" and proceeds with the remark, "lies, half lies and absurdities" (Munro 1974 24). She attacks the false image Hugo had created for himself "Look at you, Hugo, your image is not only fake but out-of-date" (Munro 1974 24).

Dotty's life has been nothing to Hugo. But the narrator is greatly concerned about the "harlot- in- residence" and she shares it with Hugo (Munro 1974 28). She has never believed that Hugo will become a writer,

publishing a book with Dotty as his heroine. She has been more at ease with Dotty than with Hugo; so she does not like to repeat what Dotty has confessed to her. And here is Hugo, the uninterested person, presenting Dotty as a character in fiction. She is relieved to think that Dotty's life has become transformed into fiction and also that she and Hugo share the same memory bank about their past. She is happy that the useless baggage of information has become a big investment for Hugo. She wishes to write a few good words about Hugo but knowing Dotty better she can only remark, "This is not enough, Hugo; you think it is, but it isn't. You are mistaken, Hugo" (Munro 1974 36).

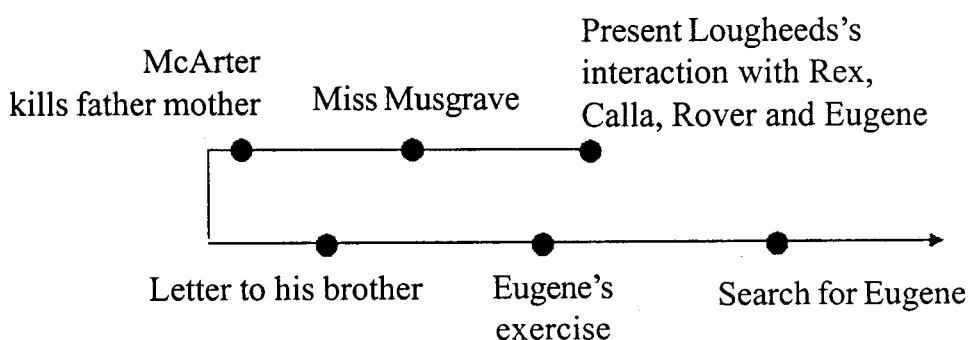
The third story "How I Met My Husband" resonates with the theme of the story "An Ounce of Cure" of her first collection. The earlier theme is presented in a different manner. While the protagonist of "An Ounce of Cure" tries to behave like traditional women who find too late that men betray, the protagonist in "How I Met My Husband" reacts differently. She waits for her lover and her waiting for his letter brings her in contact with the postman who later marries the girl. Both stories present innocent teenage situation with an emphasis on the notion of love and sexuality that adolescent children possess. The first person narrative unfolds within its frame work four other stories. The first is the crash landing of a plane; the second tells about Loretta Bird and her children; third the life of Peebles; Fourth is Loretta's story about landing of the plane.

Gradually, Edie herself becomes a good storyteller. She analyses her experience with Chris Waters and then presents the story of Chris. At this juncture, a new character intervenes in her story. The new character Alice Kelling was in love with Chris and had come in search of him. Here, Munro presents two types of women Alice, a mature woman, and Edie, a young adolescent, vis-à-vis the trickster Chris. Edie, like a character in romantic tales, waits for Chris' letters, "Till it came to me one day there were women doing this with there lives, all over. There were women just waiting and waiting by mailboxes for one letter or another. I imagined me making this journey day by day and year after year, and my hair starting to go grey, and I thought, I was never made to go on like that" (Munro 1974 53).

Here, Edie can identify herself with Alice Kelly and all other women of the world waiting endlessly for a word from their lovers. From a state of ignorance, through experience, she lights upon a phase of realisation, a sort of anagnorisis that she was "never made to go on like that" (Munro 1974 53). She grew practical, married the postman who offered to marry her, led a normal life and mused on her past as a leisure time joke. There is a forward and backward movement in time. The story begins from a point of time in the past and, shortly afterwards, moves to the present with "I was fifteen and away from home for the first time" (Munro 1974 38). After this, it continues the former progression in time till Edie's marriage and in the last sentence again comes back to the present with,

“He always tells the children the story of how I went after him by sitting by the mailbox everyday, and naturally I laugh and let him, because I like to let people to think what pleases them and makes them happy” (Munro 1974 53).

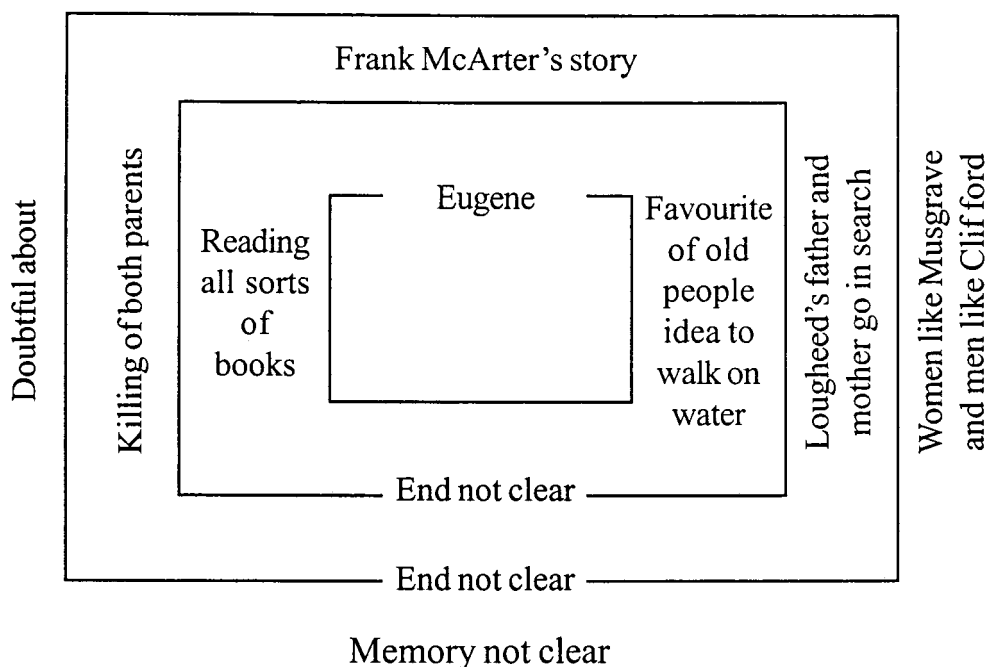
“Walking on Water” is a story dealing with dream and reality or rather fantasy and reality. Here, Mr Lougheed is posited against Rex, Calla, Rover and also Eugene. Difference in the attitudes of two generations is set forth through this story which is framed with a dream presenting the story of a mad boy named McArter. McArter is supposed to have killed his father and mother with a shovel and a knife. A mixed use of tense in the narration of the dream shows the confusion in the teller. The third person narrator comments, “There was a hole in his memory at that point” (Munro 1974 66). And another aspect that confused him was “the difference between that time and now” (Munro 1974 66). Munro as in *Who Do You Think You Are?* questions the notion of time which is an enigma like death.



Eugene's proposal to walk on water is the seed of this story. The imaginative accounts of the middle-aged people like Mrs Clifford, Morey, etc.; Eugene's claim that the world's realities respond more to methods of control quoting from *Road to Emmaus*; and the final disappearance of Eugene under water culminates in an ambiguous ending as to what happened to Eugene. Lougheed is always suspicious about the ways of the young people. His contact with Rex, Calla and Rover forces him to comment, "What he objected to in this generation, if that was what it was, was that they could not do a thing without showing off" (Munro 1974 57). He appreciated Eugene because he saw a lot of books ranging from Heidegger to Kant in Eugene's room.

Eugene is also interested in reading books on magic, supernatural powers and psychic experiences. Though Lougheed suspects Eugene's seriousness about walking on water, he is silenced by Eugene's reference to the Bible. Lougheed cannot also digest the fact that Miss Musgrove is the source of inspiration. Just as the story of Frank McArter, gets mixed up in his memory, the end of Eugene's attempt to walk on water is blurred. Frank McArter's story is used as a frame for representing the story of Eugene. In the use of the technique of story within the story, fusion of fantasy and reality and the use of memory to frame, this story is the forerunner of the collection, *The Moons of Jupiter*, published in 1978.

Lougheed-nervous-Worried about what happened to McArter & Eugene



“Forgiveness in Families” explores the mystery of human relationship within the family positing The Mother, Daughter and Son. The son is named Cain after the prodigal son of the Biblical story. The daughter is highly sensitive and concerned about her mother. The mother always protects the son, whatever wrong he does to the family. Cain is a teller of stories--stories to impress the mother. Through the story of Cain, Munro presents the strange ways of hippie cult which is viewed by ordinary people as an abnormality. In the story, Cain and his friends perform a hippie dance in the hospital when mother is seriously ill. He has never bothered to look after her before or after she is put in hospital. But mother believes that it is her son and his friends who have saved her life. Even

when Cain loses faith in this cult, the mother continues to believe in it. The sensitive narrator remarks, "Forgiveness in families is a mystery to me, how it comes or how it lasts" (Munro 1974 85).

"Tell Me Yes or No" narrated from a first person narrative point of view moves from the present to the past and back again. In this process, a comparison of the situation of women in the past and present is made "At the age when young girls nowadays are growing their hair to their waists, travelling through Afghanistan, moving--it seems to me--as smoothly as eels among their varied and innocent and transitory loves, ...dream of sleep" (Munro 1974 86). Munro uses death as a key to open the door of imagination, whereby she ponders about the unnamed lover and about the theme of love. The narrator comments on love, "And how often talking to both men and women I hear myself in witty and rueful pursuit of this theme--how women build their castles on foundations hardly strong enough to support a night's shelter; how women deceive themselves and uselessly suffer, being exploitable because of the emptiness of their lives and some deep--but indefinable, and not final!--flaw in themselves" (Munro 1974 95). And she remembers her friend's remark about life that "since pain was only possible if you looked backward to the past or forward to the future she had eliminated the whole problem by living every moment by itself; every moment, . . . , was filled with absolute silence" (Munro 1974 95).

This philosophy of ‘grasping the moment’ is common in Munro’s stories belonging to *The Moons of Jupiter*. From this philosophy, she leads the reader of “Tell Me Yes or No,” to a discussion on books that claim to achieve success and happiness. The narrator, looking at the books in the store, says, “These books seem to me all the same--happiness--and--peace one and the magic wonders--they don’t look like separate books at all, that is why I cannot touch them. They are all flowing together around the store like some varicoloured marvellous stream, or wide river, I can really no more understand what is inside them than I can breath under water” (Munro 1974 97). The narrator begins the story of the unnamed lover from the heading of ‘The Globe and Mail’ which was brought to her department by a colleague as packing for her cake. She remembers how she had perceived this man in the past and then introduces the wife who brings letters from a girl called Patricia who is supposed to have been in love with this unknown man. The theme of the unnamed lover is dealt with in “Bardon Bus” of *The Moons of Jupiter* and the ‘waiting for the mail’ theme was earlier used in “How I Met My Husband” and the ‘visiting of an unknown place through imagination’ is dealt with in “Jack Randa Hotel” of *Open Secrets*. The use of death as a device of control is there in “Peace of Utrecht.” Munro also introduces the alienation technique in short story. Just have a look at the ending of this story:

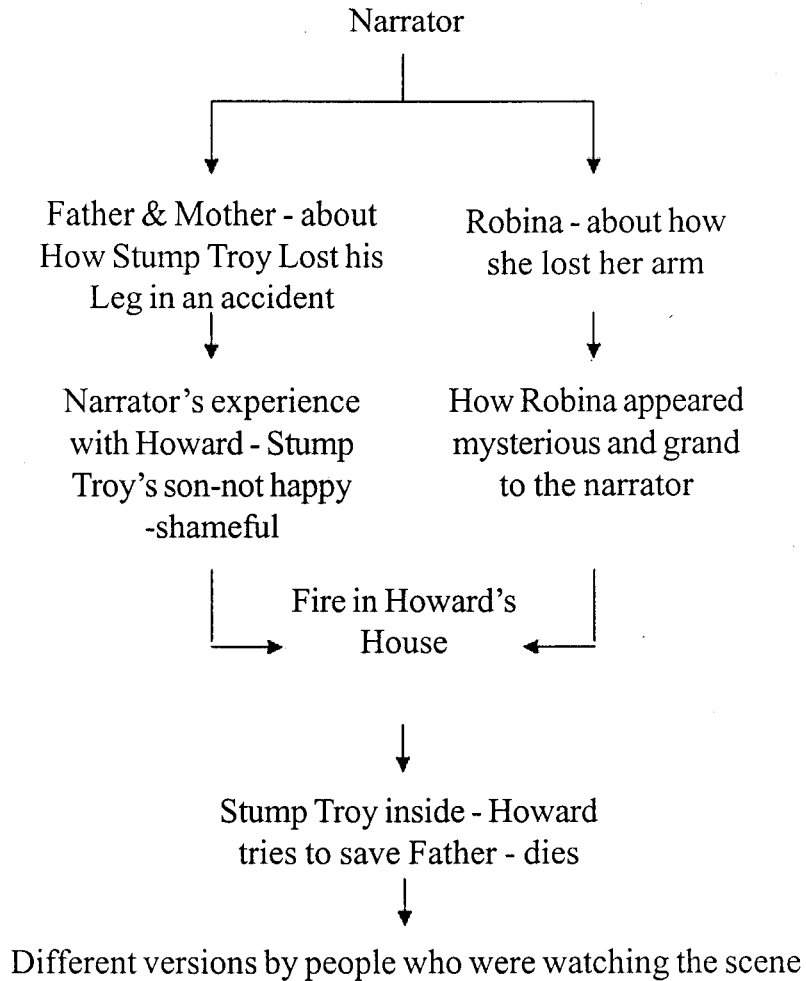
But you were the one, I keep forgetting, *you were the one who said it first*. How are we to understand you? Never mind. I invented her. I invented you, as far as my purposes go. I invented loving you and I invented your death. I have my tricks and my trap doors, too. I don't understand their workings at the present moment, but I have to be careful, I won't speak against them. (Munro 1974 101)

Here, she calls attention to the unreliability of narration. The concept of the 'Author' and the 'Authenticity' of work, are contested and the 'tricks and the trap doors' of a writer's imagination laid bare for the reader to weave new stories and meanings into it.

"The Found Boat" deals with the theme of difference with regards to boys and girls. This theme has been dealt by Munro in great detail in *Lives of Girls and Women* and continues in "Boys and Girls" a story in the collection *The Moons of Jupiter*. The third-person omniscient narrator tells the story of Eve and Carol, two adolescent girls who set out on an adventure with the boys of the locality in a boat retrieved from flood. The imagination of adolescent children is figured through the presentation of these two girls who at first think that the boys were silly but later realise that "something was happening to them different from anything that had happened before, and it had to do with the boat, the water, the sunlight, the dark ruined station, and each other" (Munro 1974 110).

In *Lives of Girls and Women* the protagonist is angry at the differentiation between boys and girls. She refuses to accept the notion that the girl is to be blamed. In “The Found Boat” the girls are becoming aware that patriarchal norms are so strong and crippling. And in “Boys and Girls,” the narrator, after some protest, resigns to her predicament of a girl living in a patriarchal society.

“Executioners” is a story that has a number of stories imbricated in the first person narrative of the child protagonist. In addition to the protagonist, one finds her father and mother and her friend telling stories. Father and mother talk about Stump Troy. Robina explains her own life in anecdotes, simple and mysterious to the protagonist. The two strands of stories culminate in the child’s own experience with Howard Troy and the final experience of the fire which takes Howard’s life which again leads to a number of other stories. This story has the structure of a *mise-en-abyme* or story within the story which goes on adding stories. Munro portrays the theme of shame--how poverty and disability are treated as a shame and how the affected people try to overcome it by making stories out of it. The protagonist comments, “In those days it was expected, even necessary, that people should stay as they were and not be improved or changed” (Munro 1974 114). The story may be mapped thus:



As in *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* Munro discusses the nuances of a word. In “Boys and Girls” also she takes up the word ‘girl’ and ponders over it in detail. Here it is the word ‘fuck’ that she takes up. Helena, the protagonist thought this word to be a disgrace. But she is appalled at the casual manner in which people used the word. She says:

I hear young children saying lazily, “What the fuck?” as they ride past on their bicycles. I hear a father yelling, “Getting

the fucking lawn mower off the drive!” It used to be a word that could be thrown against you, that could bring you to an absolute stop. Humiliation was promised, but was perhaps already there, was contained in the hearing, the being stopped, having to acknowledge. Shame could choke you. I mean that. Not at the moment when the whole point was to keep safe and get past but later, what quantities of greasy shame, what indigestible bad secrets. The vulnerability which is in itself a shame. We are shamefully made. (Munro 1974 115)

Munro also criticises the attitude of society towards disaster. They simply weave stories about every calamity that comes to them. When Stump Troy’s house was ablaze they eagerly watch the scene and comment: “The roof’ll go next!” and “Lucky there’s no wind” (Munro 1974 121). At this point Munro’s keen protagonist retorts, “I did not understand why it was lucky, or what would be lucky now” (Munro 1974 121). She observes:

The house which I had never quite dared or wanted to look at turned out to be as simple as a house in a drawing--the door in the middle and a narrow window on either side: a dormer widow over the door. Both downstairs windows had

been smashed by Howard Troy trying to get inside. Men had pulled him back. Now he was sitting on the ground in front of the burning house. He was reduced, apparently powerless, just as he had been in school. (Munro 1974 121)

Here, Munro's photographic vision imbues not only the scenic effect, but also the lost feeling of Howard Troy who has always been a negative figure in society. She captures even the sound effect as in a movie, "The sound the fire made was surprising. It was like something scraping, like boards, or a lawn mower being dragged over concrete. I had never thought a fire would sound like that. A harsh, busy noise, the sort people call a racket. Inside the racket was Stump Troy yelling, the fire was too loud for him, nobody could hear" (Munro 1974 122). Later, people went on with their debate as to whether Howard had set fire or whether he had actually sacrificed his life to save his father. But at the moment they were in no position to explain. The horror was so intense that they could not discern whether it was real or not. The protagonist explains, "Some of the time I believed that I had answered, just as in a light sleep you will keep telling yourself you must do something--shut a window, turn off a light--and so convince yourself, in your sleep, that you have actually done it. And after such a sleep you can never be sure at all what has happened, what has really been said, and what you have dreamed" (Munro 1974 124).

Here is an interplay of reality and dream. This technique is used by Munro extensively in her collection *The Moons of Jupiter* and *Open Secrets*, with the fusion of tales told by father, mother and Robina (the child had not experienced); the experience of Helena; and the tales by the people (child's own experience) actually the protagonist is moving from illusion to reality, but reality is more absurd and difficult to believe, that she enters into a state of dream-like experience. This pendulum-like movement from illusion to reality and back is the hallmark of her later stories. With "Peace of Utrecht," Munro begins exploring the possibility of managing story time within the actual time and with "Executioners" she begins exploring the scope of movement of a consciousness between reality and dream.

In "Marrakesh," Munro provides two perspectives of life through the portrayal of Dorothy and her granddaughter Jeanette as a person saddened by awareness. The story begins with, "Dorothy was sitting in a straight-backed chair on the side porch, eating nut" (Munro 1974 126). She had become "a fixed star in many, many, shifting, changing, ongoing lives" (Munro 1974 127). This description of Dorothy, the old school teacher, expresses the passivity of a generation. Munro once again takes up the subject of 'hippy life' as in "Forgiveness in Families," but here the person involved is a girl, her granddaughter, Jeanette. Jeanette is presented

as a person aware of the encroachment of technology into the social and cultural life of people. She is seen to be worried about “technology and progress destroying the quality of life” (Munro 1974 130).

Here, Munro ponders over the phrase “quality of life” and through Dorothy makes the statement, “Anything would do for her to look at, beautiful or ugly ceased to matter, because there was in everything something to be discovered” (Munro 1974 131). Munro discusses the hippy life as something queer, “It used to be that young boys and girls would try to look like grown men and women, often with ridiculous results. Now there were grown men and women who would try to look like teenagers until, presumably, they woke up on the brink of old age” (Munro 1974 129). Here also, there are different stories presented.

Story I - Life of Dorothy as a school teacher.

Story II - Blair King and his wife Nancy King (She looked like a college girl of fifteen).

Story III- Life of the hippies (Hippies also gave up adulthood).

Story IV- Nancy King--a cancer patient.

Story V- Relationship between Blair King and Jeanette.

At this point, the protagonist ponders, “What is there here that is not being told?, thought Dorothy. She had had a great deal of experience listening to the voices of children who were leaving things out. Maybe she

slept with the blue-eyed Arab when she got him back to the hotel. Maybe she slept with both of them in the Arab house. Something more than that. Maybe she loved him. May be the whole story is made-up” (Munro 1974 138). But, witnessing Jeanette’s relationship with Blair King, she feels that “they seemed strange and familiar” (Munro 1974 140). Munro is toying with the idea of reality in fiction with the result that even real people seem to be both ‘strange and familiar.’ This theme has been dealt with in “Walker Brother’s Cowboy,” *Lives of Girls and women* and “Forgiveness in Families.”

Munro continues her discussion of illusion and reality through “The Spanish Lady.” This story is in the first person narrative presenting ideas and concepts by letters to an imaginary couple Margaret and Hugh. In one of her letters, the protagonist says about reality, “It is terrible when you find out that your idea of reality is not the reality” (Munro 1974 141). Pondering over life, she realises that “life is not like a daytime serial on television. The banality will make you weep as much as anything else” (Munro 1974 142). She comments on her relatives whom she had been visiting, “These are people to whom I feel bound by irritable, almost inexpressible, bonds of sympathy, and whose deaths I dread nearly as much as my own” (Munro 1974 144). During the journey, she ponders over her own life in the past. Her life with Hugh has not been satisfactory. She has always tried to show off and be cynical but it is Margaret’s ways

that are more attractive to Hugh. He pretends to be critical and scornful of Margaret. The protagonist feels that she is very different from Margaret--that she is more flexible in her ways. But she needs the help of a psychiatrist to know herself.

Here, Munro presents a woman whose marital life is not altogether happy. This theme is discussed in stories of *The Moons of Jupiter* also. Here is another shift--a shift in the way of perceiving life. In *Dance of the Happy Shades*, one finds the child perceiving life. In *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who do You think You are?*, the child growing through adolescence to youth perceives life in a different way. Now, it is the married woman, the frustrated woman, who struggles with life.

In *The Moons of Jupiter*, *The Progress of Love* and *Friend of My Youth*, there are stories that deal with marriages, break-ups and struggles. But in "The Children Stay," the story published in *New Yorker*, one finds a middle-aged woman passing into old age, musing over life. These shifts emphasise the intervention of Munro's real life into her fictional life. This maturing of perception is the maturing of Munro as a writer. Autobiography and fiction mix and mingle to attribute new shapes and colours to the life presented by Munro. The story, "The Spanish Lady," also calls attention to the artifact of a writer that makes imagined things seem real and absurdity of real life that makes real things strange as in fiction. The protagonist observes about the cry of the dying man:

By that cry Hugh, and Margaret and the Rosicrucian, and I, everybody alive is pushed back. What we say and feel no longer rings true, it is slightly beside the point. As if we were all wound up a long time ago and were spinning out of control, whirring, making noises, but at a touch could stop, and see each other for the first time, harmless and still. This is a message; I really believe it is; but I don't see how I can deliver it. (Munro 1974 153)

In "Winter Wind" and "Ottawa Valley" she focusses on Grandmother, Mother and Aunt. In "Winter Wind," as in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Munro portrays the life in a nursing home. The protagonist's mother, grandmother and at last Aunt Madge were moved to the old age home. She says that Aunt Madge "lives yet, lives on and on, unrecognisable, unrecognising, completely divested of herself, dried up like a little monkey, past all memory and may be past bewilderment, free" (Munro 1974 154). The mother is portrayed as a sick person as in "Images" and "Peace of Utrecht." The protagonist thinks of sickness to be a shame. So she tries hard to cover it up. The mother too is trying hard to be "in" the world. At this stage, the girl is presented as one who is influenced by a false sense of order and cleanliness. She also feels deprived of normal life because she is not able to participate in the activities of the town. She

comments, “From most of these activities we were barred by age or sex or lack of money” (Munro 1974 158).

Most of Munro’s stories that depict Mother as an enigma are also connected to the time of the Great Depression. History and Autobiography are merged into fiction in these stories. As in *Lives of Girls and Women* she discusses the theme of adolescent desire, concept of an ideal wife and the reality that the girl confronted in her life. Munro celebrates storytelling as a female talent in all the mother-daughter stories. She also celebrates the sisterhood of women--the grandmother, the mother and aunts. She celebrates the compassion and understanding they exhibited regarding the sick person. Story telling as an art has been practised by the protagonist’s Mother and Aunt Madge in private and the protagonist was trying to do it in public. She says, “Even in the close-mouthed place, stories were being made. People carried their stories around with them. My grandmother carried hers, and nobody ever spoke of it to her face” (Munro 1974 161). The girl also realises the fact that to become an old woman whom “people deceived and placated and were anxious to get away from,” is a pitiable condition (Munro 1974 165).

In “Ottawa Valley,” Munro is concerned about the double set of values that exist in society. She pursues the discussion on storytelling as a female art. Mother and Aunt Dodie are story telling characters. Both give

different versions about the foiled marriage of Aunt Dodie. Aunt Madge's story about her own sick mother and the protagonist's experience with her mother who was afflicted by Parkinson's disease are presented side by side. The child feels that her mother is stubborn and trying to put her to shame. She is not able to understand the illness or her mother. The narrator describes an event of poetry recital in which Mother, Aunt Dodie and Uncle James were participants and goes on to observe, "If I had been making proper story out of this, I would have ended it, I think, with my mother not answering and going ahead of me across the pasture. That would have done. I didn't stop there, I suppose, because I wanted to find out more, remember more. I wanted to bring back all I could" (Munro 1974 197). This reflexivity on the process of story-telling and the inclusion of different stories in one frame have been developed by Munro in her later collections like *The Moons of Jupiter*, *The Progress of Love*, *Friend of My Youth* and *Open Secrets*. But however much she tries The 'Mother' remains an enigma, "The problem, the only problem is my mother. And she is the one of course I am trying to get; it is to reach her that this whole journey has been undertaken," but she is not sure why she is trying so hard to get at this enigma (Munro 1974 197). She continues:

[W]ith what purpose? To mark her off, to describe, to illumine, to celebrate, to *get rid* of, her; and it did not work,

for she looms too close, just as she always did. She is heavy as always, she weighs everything down, and yet she is indistinct, her edges melt and flow. Which means she has stuck to me as close as ever and refused to fall away, and I could go on, and on, applying what skills I have, using what tricks I know, and it would always be the same. (Munro 1974 197)

Here, as at the end of the collection *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro is baffled by the incapacity or helplessness of a writer to come to grips with reality, with life.

“Memorial” is a third person narrative dealing with accident and death, another enigma that Munro tries to deal with in her life as writer. She presents the attitude of different people towards death. She describes how the man is able to forget or evade the truth by an involvement in sexual activity while the woman, the mother needed a sort of derangement of the mind to cope with the situation. At one point, Eileen thinks, “Illness and accidents they ought to be respected, not explained. Words are all shameful. They ought to crumble in shame” (Munro 1974 177). The concern with words, with language and with the text as a whole is a recurrent motif in Munro. This self - reflexivity is closely connected with intertextuality, since “no text exists as an autonomous and self-sufficient

whole: the writer's and the reader's experience of other texts conditions its form and interpretation" (Onega 32).

Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You is a collection that pronounces this fact. Because the women, the patriarchs, the mother, grandmother, aunt, madmen, idiots, hippies, Rosicrucian, etc. are carried over from the earlier collections and again passed on to her later one's. In some stories, the obviously defective people seem better off and freer than those who have found acceptance in a 'normal' world. For example the Sheriff's son in *Lives of Girls and Women*, the Grandma in "Thanks for a Ride," Margot in "Wigtime," etc. The vision of human existence divided sharply into two countries where, people suffer for lack of the world on the other side of the barrier, is also a recurrent motif. Ida, the mother in *Lives of Girls and Women* is never satisfied with the part of the city she lives and so she says that she lives at the *end* of the Flats Road. In "Meneseteung" (*Friend of My Youth*) the house of Almeda is situated between the Pearl Street where the elite reside and the Dufferin Street where the outcasts stay.

Intertextuality is a term introduced by Julia Kristeva in her presentation of Bakhtin in the later 1960's. It becomes a catchphrase because non-hierarchical and democratically inclusive notions of text in a vast mosaic of other texts were prioritised by the idea. It directly questions

and challenges pre- 1968 ideologies. It also provides for the 20th century infinity of new cultural possibility through the endless connectivity of a world of 'super text.' This concept is grounded firmly in the French intellectual scene with Saussurian linguistics, semiotics, post-structuralism and the Tel Quel group of intellectuals. It is Barthes, who, in the *Encyclopedie Universalis*, gave a definition to intertextuality. He states:

The text is productivity. Not in the sense that it is a product of being worked (as narrative technique or the mastery of style would demand), but as the very theatre of a production where the producer of the text and the reader come together: The text 'works' whenever and however it is taken up: even in written fixed form, the text does not stop working, or undertaking a process of production. The text deconstructs the language of communication, representation of expression [...] and reconstructs another language [...]. Every text is an intertext. Other texts are present within it to varying degrees and in more or less recognisable forms. [...]. Every text is a new tissue of recycled citations. Fragments of codes, formulae, model rhythms, bits of social discourse pass into text and are redistributed within it. [...] the intertext is a field of anonymous formulae whose origin is rarely recoverable,

of unconscious or automatic citations without speech marks.

(Orr 33)

In the fourth chapter of *Semeiotike*, published in Paris in 1969, Julia Kristeva states that intertextuality is “a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Orr 21). Intertextuality gradually elided with Barthesian notion of the ‘death of the author’ and into the Derridean concept of *différance*. Thus intertextuality was ‘the big bang,’ the deconstruction of ‘Text’ into texts and intertexts where these two terms ultimately become synonymous. This involves an active participation of the reader for whom it is not a half-sleep but a struggle. The reader needs to be alert and deconstruct and reconstruct a text for one’s self.

Munro’s stories are rich in intertextual reference and calls for the play of imagination on the part of the reader in order to connect the fragmented parts of the work. Munro presents pain, dissatisfaction and disillusionment as inevitable aspects of human experience which are to be overcome in a person’s life. She also presents characters who try to wrest enjoyment from even the most unsatisfactory aspects as in “Images,” “Turkey Season,” “The Spanish Lady,” etc. In “The Spanish Lady,” the narrator exclaims, “I can’t think what to do with this man except to make him into a story for Hugh, a curiosity, a joke for Hugh” (Munro 1974

150). She continues, "If we make jokes we can survive" (Munro 1974 150). Jokes are in a way a protective shield against the pain that life offers.

Munro's story-telling females--Grandmother, Mother, Aunts, Father, Uncles, ordinary Women, etc. seem to participate in fiction with a kind of pleasure. This process has its origin in the functional necessities of small-scale societies. It is the excitement of sharing in the enforcement of taboo, and in the repetition of history of the clan which are an essential part of the social bond, cementing ties of identity with the group and enforcing self-identity. Munro's protagonists, especially the child protagonists learn life, society and its taboos through her innumerable storytellers like Mother Ida, Flo, Aunt Elspeth, Aunt Jane, Mary, etc.. It is a sharing. It is a repetition of 'history' of womanhood, it is a social bond--the sisterhood, and it is an assurance of group and individual identity as well.

Intertextual reference and framing are part of Munro's style of writing. Her early stories are framed in the form of Hans Anderson's fairy tales, with the protagonist growing from disgrace and ignorance to respectability and knowledge. In the story "Something I've been Meaning to Tell You," the Second World War and King Arthur story forms the backdrop. Just as King Arthur and his Knights went in search of the Holy Grail, the protagonist Et is in search of truth--truth in stories told by Blaikie and the

truth of her sister's life. "Forgiveness in Families" reminds the reader of the Biblical Myth of The Prodigal Son.

In "The Found Boat" looking at the flooded county the omniscient narrator says, "Suppose it was the sea, thought Eva. She thought of drowned cities and countries. Atlantis. Suppose they were riding in a Viking boat--Viking boats on the Atlantic were more frail and narrow than this log on The Flood--and they had miles of clear sea beneath them, then a spiral city, intact as a jewel irretrievable on the ocean floor" (Munro 1974 103). The artistic vision of the child which sees the object close to it as strong and big and the object at a great distance as small and frail is at work here. The Viking boats of the Byzantine Empire are strong war ships. But for the child, it is only a far-off story and she feels that they are more frail and narrow than this log on 'The Flood.' The use of the definite article and the capital's T and F stress the word referring to the great deluge of the Biblical times or the flood that drowned many ancient cities like Pompey.

This reference to the Viking Boat frames the story with its underlying meaning of strength, power and destruction. In the story, towards the end of the adventure, the boy Clayton "shook his head violently, as if he wanted to bang something out of it, then bent over and took a mouthful of river water. He stood up with his cheeks full and made a tight hole in his mouth

and shot the water at her as if it was coming out of a hose, hitting her exactly, first on one breast and then the other. Water from his mouth ran down her body. He hooted to see it, a loud self--conscious sound that nobody would have expected, from him” (Munro 1974 111). The Viking Ships have been loaded with a combustible material called Greek fire used to set fire to enemy ships. As the composition of Greek fire is improved, tubes shaped into mouths of savage monsters were placed in the bows of war galleys and the flaming substance which water merely spread is hurled on the enemy. Here, Clayton is like the monster-shaped equipment of the Viking Boat, hurling Greek fire at the enemy. Munro very deftly signifies how, innocent childhood gives way to the adult world of enmity between the sexes.

Jupiter’s moons keep on changing. “When you look at it with the naked eye it appears like a brilliant and beautiful spectacle. Astronomers find a constantly changing ‘show’ when they look at Jupiter through the telescope. It has dark streaks, or belts separated by bright spaces called the zones. One of the strange things about Jupiter is that it often displays striking colours on its surface” (Leokum 18). This is true of Jupiter the mythical character too. Jupiter, the handsome, omnipotent god, is the outward expression. With lust and pride, he is reckless with women. Even the mother who questioned him is not spared. She is tied into a hundred

knots and dumped in a corner. His wife, who tries to subdue him, is punished. She is hung upside down between Heaven and Earth. Any beautiful woman who comes within his sight is not spared. She has to surrender and move in the orbit specified by Zeus the Jupiter. If she attempts to escape, she will be destroyed.

This orbit, the conventional path drawn for woman to revolve, is a binding from which there is no escape. An escape is deemed as total destruction. But Munro's characters of *The Moons of Jupiter* overcome this obsession that binds; the sexual tie that imprisons them and attains a state of bliss with their awareness of the 'self.' The interaction of different ideas helps them attain this position. It provides the reader with a hermeneutical whole, the truth created out of fact and fantasy. The blots of black holes in the ring of reality are patched up by dreams of fantasies to make it a whole. For this patching up, the interplay of pre-written texts often lend a helping hand to enable the reader understand and analyse the characters of Munro. These characters, mainly women passing from youth to middle age, become aware that Jupiter, behind his glamorous show of bright colours, hides dark streaks within. The myth of Jupiter foregrounds the discussion of patriarchy and the evolution of the female finding a place and identity of her own.

In *Dance of Happy Shades*, it is a movement from illusion/fantasy to reality and in *Something I've been Meaning to Tell You*, it is a movement from reality to the blurred world of fantasy. In *The Moons of Jupiter*, Munro achieves a new sensibility by displacing the dark streaks with fantasy and dream. This fusion of fantasy and reality with intertextuality for support places Munro's stories beyond the orbit of conventionality. The stories like "The Stone in the Field," "Accident," "Labour Day Dinner" and "Dulse" are examples of a change in the perspective of Munro. The protagonist of "Bardon Bus" is trying to cope with the loss of her lover. She lives on dreams. She dreams of being an old maid in an old generation. 'Bardon Bus No. 144' is a code which means a lot for her because it signifies all her experiences with 'X,' her lover.

Beverly Jean Rasporich, in his Book *Dances of the Sexes*, explains the significance of the mark 'X'. The mark 'X' represents the signature of an illiterate person, most probably a woman because she has no language of her own. 'X' is the symbol of a kiss, suggesting physical love. 'X' is an unknown number which suggests the inaccessibility of the man. 'X' represents Christ or Christian, which has to be read in connection with the narrator's concept of love and its Christian connection, introduced in the hymn--"He is the Lily of the Valley/The Bright and Morning Star/He's the Fairest of Ten Thousand to My Soul" (Munro 1982 111). 'X' also

means to delete, to cancel--to obliterate. All of Him and His language and His love are wiped out by the narrator and by Munro in a single coded stroke. Here is a negation of the masculine world and its language.

Another male character is Dennis, a traveller who always speaks of the last place he has seen. He tries to evade the present. He lives in his immediate past and is very much identical with the narrator who thrives upon dreams and fancies. Dennis introduces a concept of renewal--a means to rise above despair. The narrator realises that it is not the artificial external makeup that can renew her but an inner revival, which is, the revival of her self. And she comforts herself in her white dream of angelic soul, light and sweet. Here, the narrator is influenced by the Christian ideals of purity of the soul, it also brings to the reader's mind of a journey undertaken to purify the soul. Instead of penance, the woman fantasises to overcome her passing moods and reaches a state of sublime. Even in a post-modern world devoid of God, an ordinary woman pinned down by patriarchal norms is provided a scope to realise that emotion, frustration and the like are just passing phases in human life.

“Hard Luck Stories” is foregrounded by John Donne’s lines, “But we by a love, so much refined/Inter-assured of the mind/Carelesse, eyes, lips and hands to misse” (Pickering 1982 559). These lines suggest separation and sorrow. The protagonist, whose old lover, Douglas has

rejected her in order to accept Julie, her friend and the new lover, Martin, who speaks unfeelingly about her, is consoled by the poem of Donne. Even though separation creates grief, the protagonist is able to overcome her illusion about Douglas's love and is able to reconcile with her situation in a mild and peaceful way as Donne advises.

The first four collections present protagonists who critically observe and analyse society, people and their relationships. They move from childish wonder and confusion to a sort of bitter criticism and an indifferent attitude to the norms and conditions of society. But in *The Moons of Jupiter*, she presents women in familial situation with problems and confusion of all kinds trying to cope with particular moments in their lives, especially breaking up of marriage. Most of these characters are moving towards middle age as Lydia in "Dulse" and Janet of "Connections." In her 1997 story "The Children Stay," she pursues this theme of love and marriage, and its break up. The Mother leaves the family and goes out into the open world freeing herself from her husband who declares that he will keep the children, believing that it will be a blow to her. Munro brings it to a closure saying that children do adjust and understand such situations and keep contact with The Mother even long after their separation.

The frailties of old age are carefully examined in "Mrs Cross and Mrs Kidd." Both of them know each other from childhood but are never

friends. And now, in a nursing home for the old people, Mrs Cross and Mrs Kidd are forced to create a thread of artificial intimacy. But Mrs Cross still wants to ‘take care’ of somebody or something. She decides to take care of Jack, a man who has lost his speech. She shows him an Atlas and tries to find out the place he came from. At last, she can touch the right place ‘Red Deer.’ And both Jack and Mrs Cross are fascinated, “Oh! If everything was in pictures like that, we could have a lot of fun!”(Munro 1982 170). Mrs Cross tries to talk to the doctor to leave Jack in her custody so that she can make an attempt to bring back his speech.

This reminds the reader of the chapter “Spelling” of Munro’s previous collection *Who Do You Think You Are?* In “Spelling,” Rose visits a home for the aged where she meets an old woman whose only participation in life is to spell out loud, words supplied by others. Munro here chooses words charged with vitality which becomes curiously static:

Forest F – O – R – E – S – T

Celebrate C – L – E – B – E – R – A – T – E . (Munro 1978 183)

Rose is presented as a character who was always concerned about the limitations of language. Munro comes close to the Lacanian theory that thought is structured like language. Thought is what keeps us in touch with life. The Cartesian concept that existence is rooted in thought is

brought to mind while reading these stories. Here, the alphabets strung together by the old woman are actually a link between the poor woman and life. Rose says, “Waiting, in the middle of her sightless eventless day, till up from somewhere popped another word” (Munro 1978 187-88). Here, all other faculties that keep a human being in this world are lacking and what remains is a memory strewn with a few words.

The connection between the title story and the other stories in the collection is interesting to observe. The first story “Connections,” the second “The Stone in the Field” and the last “The Moons of Jupiter” are narrated by the same person, Janet. Janet’s father who was in the Heart Wing of the hospital tells her about the Planetarium, the planets and Moons of Jupiter:

Io and Europa, they were girl friends of Jupiter’s, weren’t they? Ganymede was a boy. A shepherd? I don’t know what Callisto was.

I think she was a girlfriend, too, I said.

Jupiter’s wife – Jove’s wife – Changed her into a bear and stuck her up in the sky. Great Bear! and little Bear. Little Bear was her baby...

... Ganymede wasn’t any shepherd. He was Jove’s cupbearer.

(Munro 1982 232-33)

By 1982, the details of the 16 moons that surround the planet Jupiter were made known. The moons are designated from J I to J XVI in order of their discovery and have been given names relating to the classical figures associated with the God Jupiter, that is, Zeus. Four of the moons--Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto--are commonly referred to as the Galilean satellites because these have been telescopically discovered by Galileo and Simon Marius, first. There are the scientific details about Jupiter and its moons.

A probe into Greek mythology opens up a magic casement of wonders. Zeus, God Jupiter has received the powerful weapon of lightning from the Cyclopes for defeating Cronus. To Olympians, he is the dictator of heaven and earth, whom none dared to disobey. But he is reckless in sexual behaviour. When mother warns him of the consequences he binds her into a thousand knots and puts her in a corner. Thus, he dismisses the Mother Figure. His wife, Hera, fed up with his behaviour, calls upon her brothers to bind him up. For a short time, she enjoys immense freedom. But Zeus is liberated by his friend. Immediately, Hera is punished. She is hung upside down between Heaven and Earth upon an anvil. Thus he does away with his 'wife.'

Europa is Cadmus' sister carried away by Zeus who goes to her in the disguise of a bull. This bears significance to the reference in

“Connections” about the ‘Cows baloney’ and ‘bulls’ in the stories of the Aunts who had strange experiences on their way to Janet’s house. Io the beautiful daughter of Titus is cursed by Aphrodite for seeing her in her husband’s bedroom. She is doomed to go after young (male) mortals. She once steals Ganymede and Tros, two handsome young men. But Zeus, on finding them, takes them away and Io desperately pleads that he returns at least one of them. Ganymede dies. He is later made Zeus’ cupbearer. Tros, made immortal, is given back to Io. But poor Io has forgotten to request youthfulness for Tros. Tros changed rapidly, day by day, from youth to old age. In the morning Tros would wake up young and gradually by evening grow old and weak. Thus, Io is also trapped by Zeus, the omnipotent.

Zeus, the patriarch, and his victims are suggested through the title of the collection. The book is a discussion on patriarchal society, dissatisfied love, passion, woman, the victim recovering herself from patriarchal bondage to a new awareness of her ‘self.’ Lydia, Marjorie, the unnamed narrator of “Bardon Bus,” Prue, Frances, narrator of “Hard Luck Stories,” are all presented as victims desiring to break away from this knot but are restrained by fear of destruction. Munro introduces the Bible, Christianity, architecture, history, psychoanalysis, literature and Greek mythology as pretexts to be analysed and subverted or appropriated by the heroines of

her stories enabling them to come to a realisation of their own 'self.' Through this realisation, they understand that the female who is victimised or abused by the dominant sex are capable of achieving a positive view of self--assuredness and control.

The Progress of Love contains 11 stories of which "The Progress of Love," "Miles City, Montana" and "Jesse and Meribeth" are written from the first person point of view. The other eight stories are related in the third person omniscient perspective. The first story "The Progress of love" discusses Mother-Daughter relationship using the technique of storytelling as a female art. Marietta the mother tells stories to Fame the daughter, who critically analyses and appropriates them for her convenience. Fame makes use of the different versions of the same story related by Marietta and Beryl and gets a clearer view of life. Later Fame herself begins telling stories but realises that each narration falsifies the event narrated. Munro ends the story with a comment "Moments of kindness and reconciliation are worth having, even if the parting has to come sooner or later" (Munro 1986 31). When the reader moves from *Lives of Girls and Women* through *Who do You Think You Are?* and come to *The Moons of Jupiter* an interesting aspect of Munro surfaces. The female characters, while moving from childhood and adolescence to married middle-age, seem to rebel less against their past. The sharpness or

bitterness that can be found in her criticism of her previous generation has been eased, lessened, mellowed in Janet of "Connections" and Fame of "The Progress of Love." Munro too, moving through these phases in her life, may have come to the realisation that moments of kindness and reconciliation are worth having. She is also so much preoccupied with the theme of separation or parting--parting with the parents, parting with the lover, husband, children, etc.

"Lichen" is a story about Man-Woman relationship asserting the vitality and potential of women even in middle age and the stuntedness of Man who is caught up in the maze of sexuality--not able to go beyond. Stella, who has been separated from David after twenty one years of marriage, leads a busy, chaotic life. She is a writer too. "Alone in this house, in this community, Stella leads a busy and sometimes chaotic life" (Munro 1986 35). On the other hand, David is running after women, creating weird stories about them. Stella finds out that David's portrayal of Catherine was false. So she is not worried about the daughter whom David mentioned as trollop because "the delicious old fashioned word "trollop," which he uses to describe her, doesn't apply to her, really--has no more to do with her than "hippie" had to do with Catherine, a person he cannot now bear to think about" (Munro 1986 49). In this story, Munro discusses old age as well. Usually, she talks about old women, but here, it

is David's father whom Stella visits occasionally. Munro portrays the old man as having a "narrow, elongated, bluish, post-human face" (Munro 1986 51). She remarks, "Even here on the bluffs above Lake Huron at the very end of life, certain shifts had registered, certain changes had been understood, by a man who couldn't grasp or see" (Munro 1986 52). His condition is similar to that of the old woman in the cribs trying to grasp at the spelling of Celebrate in *Who Do You Think You Are?* His efforts to remember the name of a car is analysed by David thus, "He's reached the stage where that's his big recreation--fixing up the past so anything he wishes had happened did happen" (Munro 1986 52).

The third story with a French title is about school children. Here, Munro depicts an event in which Colin, a sensitive boy, grabs a gun from Ross, the pretender. Accidentally, the shot goes off and Ross pretends to fall down dead. All, including Colin, feel that Ross is dead. But Ross comes out victorious, thinking that he had made a good joke on the whole town. By the time others realised the truth that Ross is not dead, Colin is so confused that he cannot take in the reality. So, in order to escape the responses of the people, he runs on to the top of the bridge. His deranged mind is portrayed thus:

He wasn't glad or sorry. Such feelings were so puny and personal. They did not apply. Later on, he found out that

most people, and apparently his mother, believed he had climbed up here because he was in a frenzy of remorse and was contemplating throwing himself into the Tipaldy River. That never occurred to him. In a way, he had forgotten the river was there. He had forgotten that a bridge was a structure over a river and that his mother was a person who could order him to do. (Munro 1986 82)

“Miles City, Montana” is a first person account of a pleasure trip undertaken by the narrator and her family. This story is framed with the story from the narrator’s childhood when she sees her father bringing the body of the boy who is drowned. She suspects her memory. “I don’t think so. I don’t think I really saw all this. Perhaps I saw my father carrying him, and the other men following along, and the dogs, but I would not have been allowed to get close enough to see something like mud in his nostril. I must have heard someone talking about that and imagined that I saw it” (Munro 1986 84). This story provides a discussion of man -woman relationship which the narrator defines as a love-hate relationship. She goes on to state that ‘Home’ means different places for wife and husband. The narrator as a child was attracted by the “hard, repetitive, appalling work, in which the body is finally worn out, the mind sunk,” that pertained to the, the father’s world--the outside world as of the narrator in “Boys

and girls” (Munro 1986 94). Here also, Munro discusses old age as a period in life that makes people crave for recognition and love but are actually duped by parodies of love by the younger generation. The narrator, analysing the purpose of their journey, says, “What are we doing this for, I thought, and the answer came--to show off. To give Andrew’s mother and my father the pleasure of seeing their grandchildren. That was our duty” (Munro 1986 97).

During the trip, Meg drowns in a swimming pool but she manages to swim and so escape death. This incident brings a total change in their lives. Andrew and the protagonist speak softly of luck and try to imagine how it would have been if it had ended the other way, “How could this be borne all at once, how did people bear it?” (Munro 1986 103). The themes of the inevitability of death and the relief of escape as in “Labour Day dinner” are discussed here, “Andrews saying ‘on the way back’ was a surprising pleasure to me. Of course, I had believed that we would be coming back, with our car and our lives and our family intact, having covered all the distance, having dealt somehow with those loyalties and problems, held ourselves up for inspection in such a foolhardy way. But it was a relief to hear him say it” (Munro 1986 104). Munro emphasises constantly that all the flash and sham of life is laid waste at the face of imminent death. The story, with its journey motif--life as a journey to be

undertaken--ends without a closure, "So we went on, with the two in the back seat trusting us, because of no choice, and we ourselves trusting to be forgiven, in time, for everything that had first to be seen and condemned by those children: whatever was flippant, arbitrary, careless, callous--all our natural, particular, mistakes" (Munro 1986 105). Here, Munro portrays how her characters reach an anagnorisis or recognition and the state of peripetia when they start loving their life with more vigour. It is the thought of death that makes them cling to life.

"The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink" is a good example of mixing of narrative Time and story Time and Tense. Munro uses tense in such a way as to create layers of time which exist in relation to each other. The story begins in the present with the meeting of Callie and Sam at Callie's Confectionary, after a lapse of fifty years. Then it shifts to the past, to the life at Miss Kernaghan's boarding house and the history of Sam and Edgar who were cousins. Again the narrative shifts to the present when "Sam thought of himself and Edgar practising in that vacant lot--it was now part of Canadian Tire parking space" (Munro 1986 136). Here, the past tense is used to signify a present in the narrative by the use of "Sam thought" and "it was now part of," etc. Further on, it reminds us that there is a different 'now' implied within this narrative--the 'now' of narration--the time at which the narrator speaks, or writes. So here, one

finds the now of narration and a 'now' of the narrated event. In addition to the play of tenses, the story presents different versions about the birth of Callie, the maid at Miss Kernaghan's house. It is a story written from the third person omniscient narrative point of view.

The sixth story "Fits" is about the death of the Weebles who are in their sixties and living in the neighbourhood of Peg. It is narrated from the third person point of view and is foregrounded by a reference to 'Yucatan' about which Mrs Weebles has talked to Peg. Mrs Weeble's version of the Yucatan is that "it looked like a well--where virgins are supposed to have been flung down, in the hope of good harvests" (Munro 1986 106). This dialogue does not cohere with the events that follow but it provides a possible version regarding the death of the Weebles.

Probing into the history of Yucatan which is connected with Mayan culture of Mexico, one finds that this society was a highly civilised one, with many positive aspects to its credit but their treatment of captives of war was brutal. Usually, they were tortured, mutilated and sacrificed to the Mayan Gods. They believed that if this was not done it would result in chaos and disorder. The drawing of human blood was thought to nourish the gods and was thus necessary to achieve contact with them. So the Mayan rulers, as the intermediaries between the Mayan people and the gods, had to undergo ritual bloodletting and self- torture.

With the Yucatan history as a backdrop, Munro pursues the events after the death of the Weebles through the male narrator Robert. It is Peg, Robert's wife, who first sees the corpse and reports to the police. Robert collects stories from Peg, Karen, the policeman and the people of the town. In Gilmore, he always has "the sense of walking onto an informal stage, where a rambling, agreeable play was in progress" (Munro 1986 117). The blood on Peg's coat, the policeman's report of the shotgun and the blood spread everywhere around the house and the silence of Peg add to the mysterious nature of the death. Robert listening to the talk of the town states, "Talk run backward from the events of the morning" (Munro 1986 118). Here also, one identifies the discrepancy between actual time and narrative time.

The talk is about their life before death and the reasons for their death. Money, health, man- woman relationship, infidelity and all reasons were possible but Peg's silence was a problem. Robert constructs an imaginary Mrs Weeble with legs like a nun and combines it with the talk of virginity and an earlier conversation with Peg. Here, the omniscient narrator intervenes, "Robert was right about the reasons. In Gilmore, everything become known, sooner or later. Secrecy and confidentiality are seen to be against public interest. There is a public interest. There is a network of people who work in the offices where all the records are kept"

(Munro 1986 121). This brings to the mind the picture of Jubilee where every person becomes part of its anecdotes and again reminds one of Munro's reference to the hometown where the whole town weaves stories into its structure.

Another version of the death of the Weebles comes from the United Church Minister who speaks about the lack of faith which results from the tension in modern life. Yet another version is that "it's like an earthquake or a volcano. It's that kind of happening. It's a kind of fit. Such as people have, married people have" (Munro 1986 126). This vision of Peg does not satisfy the reader who is foregrounded by the signification of the Mayan myth of blood letting to appease the gods. No person in the town knew the Weebles intimately. They do not know the reason of death as well. But they weave story after story concerning this event. The omniscient narrator by suggesting Yucatan, forces the reader to put all the pieces together and realise that it was a sacrifice. Robert, in pursuit of truth, is appalled at deception that senses provide, "How close he had to get before he saw what amazed him and bewildered him so was nothing but old wrecks, and how he then felt disappointed, but also like laughing" (Munro 1986 131).

"Jesse and Meribeth" is an interesting story pursuing the theme of adolescence set against the adult world. The story, in the first person

narrative, begins, “In high school, I had a tender, loyal, boring friendship with a girl named Marybeth Croker” (Munro 1986 163). The adolescent narrator Jesse encounters poverty and tries to idealise it in the form of Aunt Ena who is described as ‘the cleaning lady’ in the town rather as a doctor or a music teacher in a family. Marybeth’s true tragic story of her mother’s death was to be countered by Jesse. She tried hard to squeeze out a story from Floris, Aunt Ena’s daughter. In the end, she fantasises about Mr Cryderman to Meribeth and keeps on her pretension for a long time until Meribeth stops believing her. Jesse’s feigned love towards him is prevented by Mr Cryderman who in a very painful way tries to make her realise her fault.

In discussing the story of Jesse, Munro makes use of history to bring to light the difference between constructed reality and fact. Mrs Cryderman’s account of Mr Cryderman as a hero who participated in Burmese war and the sufferings he had before he reached Canada is deconstructed by the narrator, “years later, may be a quarter of a century later, I read about the walk that General Stilwell led out of Burma into India, through the pass above Tamu and down the Chin win River. In the party were some British Commandos dirty and half starved. Eric Cryderman might have been one of them” (Munro 1986 173). Mrs Cryderman’s idealisation of her husband and the knowledge that Jesse

gained later are presented by Munro to make clear the disparity between what is told and what actually happened.

In the first story of this collection, Munro makes Fame, the protagonist, say, “But I have stopped telling the story” (Munro 1986 30) and the protagonist of “Miles City, Montana” also feels suspicious of what she had seen in her childhood. This mistrust about the credibility of narrative, rings throughout Munro’s works. Apprehension about the process of narration, a self consciousness is a mark of the stories of Munro. Here, she makes use of Australian history during the Second World War and the American novel *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell and also the history of Russia during the time of Peter the Great and his successor Catherine the Great, in order to deconstruct given narratives and lead the reader’s attention to the process of weaving stories as “arranging and rearranging things, then fit them into place by means of the bits of information I chose to give out” (Munro 1986 178). The words ‘bits of information *I chose* to give out’ is crucial. It suggests editing on the part of the narrator who gives out only as much information as He or She chooses to.

Mrs Cryderman’s story is scrutinised keenly to disclose certain blind spots like the terrible heat in the Himalayas, The British Army being defeated by the Japanese and the soldiers and coloured maids, all being

Christians. These errors are directed and exposed so as to make a clear distinction between fact and fiction. The adolescent girl who is highly imaginative and educated manipulates reality to suit her purpose eyewashing Meribeth. But the fantasising becomes so true that the girl at a point feels that it is true. She comes to a realisation of her fault only after the bitter advice given to her by Mr Cryderman at the outhouse. The story ends without a closure. It gives the feeling of a movement onwards as in “Miles City, Montana.” Jesse expounds, “I saw Marybeth shut in, with her treats and her typewriter, growing sweeter and fatter and the Crydermans fixed, far away, in their everlasting negotiations, but myself shedding dreams and lies and vows and errors, unaccountable. I didn’t see that I was the same one, embracing, repudiating. I thought I could turn myself inside out, over and over again, and tumble through the world scotfree” (Munro 1986 188). The ending suggests the emergence of a mature woman who has shed the cocoon of adolescent dreams and lies.

“Eskimo” is a story that begins with what Dr Streeter may say about Mary Jo’s trip to Tahiti and it ends with the statement, “This is the beginning of her holiday,” confusing the reader as to where the story begins or ends (Munro 1986 207). Dr. Streeter, his daughter and Mary Jo are introduced. Munro discusses the variety of people ranging from the Indians to the Eskimo. The story is a mixing of real-life characters drawn

into fantasy slipping into a dream, raising it to the level of surrealistic experience. Munro presents the situation of the Japanese--as businessmen who look down on Canadian Whites as aliens. She presents the Eskimo or the Inuit, the Métis and the Khan of Afghanistan as the exotic 'other' that directs the reader's mind to the point raised by Edward Said in his famous book *Orientalism*. Introducing the term orientalism Said writes, "The orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences"(1978 1).

Munro also focuses on the psychological problem of Mary Jo who has a connection with Dr. Streeter, an aged doctor of reputation. Mary Jo is projecting her own self on to the Eskimo girl while fantasising on the state of that Eskimo girl and later the dream in which Jo kills the girl. When one analyses this excerpt on the basis of Freudian interpretation of dreams, it would be interesting to see how through projection of personality, Mary Jo is trying to get control over herself by killing the part that she dislikes about her.

"A Queer Streak," is a story in two parts, presenting the lives of women in three generations. The pivotal character is Violet, who belongs to the second generation. She is the link between the first generation and the third generation. It is through her memory that the whole story of Aunt Ivie, Violet's mother is revealed. It is Violet who narrates the life of Aunt

Ivie who is Tomboyish and King Billy, her father who is presented as an exotic figure, her sister Dawn Rose who has certain violent psychological problems connected with puberty and the life of Bonnie Hope's daughter who has a curiosity for family history. A play on words is evident, with Munro toying with the meaning of the word 'lost':

'Lost' meant that somebody died; 'she lost them' meant they died. Violet knew that. Nevertheless she imagined. Aunt Ivie--her mother--wandering into a swampy field, which was the waste ground on the far side of the barn, a twilight place full of coarse grass and alder bushes. There Aunt Ivie, in the mournful light, mislaid her baby children. Violet would slip down the edge of the barnyard to the waste ground, then cautiously enter it. She would stand hidden by the red-stemmed alder and nameless thorn bushes (it always seemed to be some damp, desolate time of year when she did this--late fall or early spring), and she would let the cold water cover the toes of her rubber boots. She would contemplate getting lost. Lost babies. The water welled up through the tough grass./Farther in there were ponds and sink holes. She had been warned. She shuffled on, watching the water creep upon her boots. She never told them. They never knew where she went. Lost. (Munro 1986 208-209)

Here is a gothic presentation, whereby the word 'lost' is exorcised by the consciousness of the girl Violet. This loss rings throughout the story. The loss of her lover was the first bitter experience for Violet and later, the loss of the documents which the young girl comes in search of. The portrayal of Aunt Ivie and that of the young daughter of Bonnie Hope seem to signify a pattern being repeated, in behaviour and style of dressing.

A concern with water, boat, sea and framed pictures dominate the stories of this collection. An allusion to history is also evident in naming her father King Billy Thomas. It takes the reader to the carnival situation of the parade connected with the Orange Walk mentioned in *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Here, life seems to flow both ways--backward into the life of her parents and forward into the life of the future generation. The first vision comes from that of the child's encounter with the adult world and the second from the old woman's encounter with the new generation moving towards a lesbian society.

Caught in between these two generations is the life of Violet set in a Victorian Gothic milieu. The life of her father is presented through anecdotes: 1. The parade 2. When he worked on a train up north (signified by the expression 'at one time in his life') 3. Dance on the Snow Road (signified by the expression 'further back in his life'). Aunt Ivie is also presented as an anecdote. She introduces a butcher episode, "Out of the

blue and for her own amusement, as far as she could recall later on when she made things into stories” (Munro 1986 212).

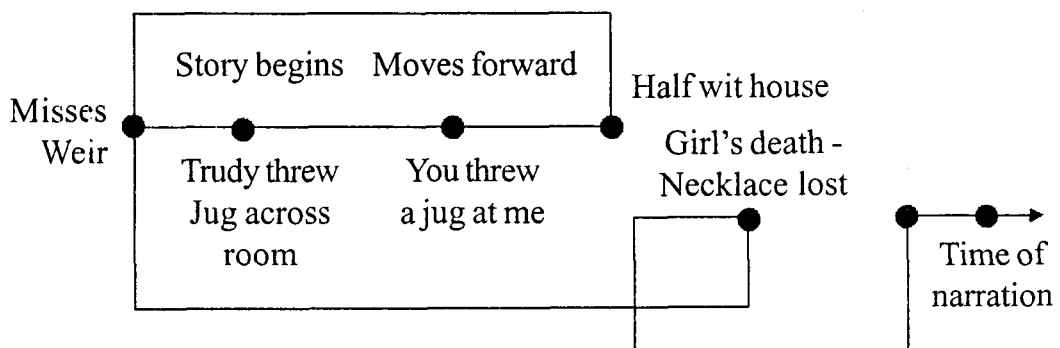
In part II of the story the narrative shifts from Violet to Dane, the son of Dawn Rose. It is from the perspective of Dane that Violet’s later life is sketched, “Dane believes that he has one memory of Violet--his mother’s sister - from a time before his mother died” (Munro 1986 234). He also remembers his grandmother who “wore a black hat, and called the hens in what sounded exactly like their own language, a tireless crooning and chucking” (Munro 1986 235). Matching this memory with the memory of Violet tramping in the snow and calling out “pudding, pudding, here pudding!” brings out the semblance of Violet and Ivie even though the omniscient narrator at the beginning of the story presents Ivie and Violet as contradictory natures (Munro 1986 235). But Dane’s “memory protects Violet from any sense of repetition, there’s no way that long-ago Violet can be diminished” (Munro 1986 236). Here, Munro calls attention to the earlier mentioned fact about the narrator’s manipulation of narrative.

Dane describes Violet in her old age as one who is unconquerable, “Nothing in her wanted to be overtaken by a helpless and distracted, dull and stubborn old woman, with a memory or imagination out of control bulging at random through the present scene” (Munro 1986 244). Once

again, Munro takes up her exotic idea about Mexico where Heather and her friend had lived on what is called the “Isle of Women” (Munro 1986 246). She presents Violet as a storyteller who uses tricks and traps to deviate from the story line only to leave them incomplete. Through Violet, Munro is expressing her own technique of story-telling. Memory is a device made use of in this story.

“Circle of Prayer” is an interesting story divided into sections. Different aspects of life are presented in this story through a loose and disorganised structure. On the one hand, Munro presents the family life of Trudy and Dan and their daughter Robin; on the other, she presents the inmates at a Home for the Handicapped, and again, the death of a teenage girl. These three strands are scattered through the story like beads of different colours but together, they give a meaning to the text. The main problem in the story is the loss of a necklace given to Trudy by her husband’s mother. The story begins with the statement, “Trudy threw a jug across the room,” which does not give the reader any idea of what the story might be (Munro 1986 254). The manipulation of Time sequence as a device to create a sort of disarrangement in the whole narrative is explicit in this sentence. The time past and the moment of narrating (implied present) are both included in the simple statement.

Robin's later version presented in the second page of the story is worth examining. "You threw a jug at me that time. You could have killed me." "Not at you. I didn't throw it at you." "You could have killed me." (Munro 1986 255). 'That time' clearly implies the pastness of the beginning statement and the present of this statement and yet another present of the time of narrating. In Trudy's remembrance of Misses Weir, "[w]ho must have served iced tea and read library books, or played croquet, whatever people did then," the use of *then* implies a remote past, not the time of the story or the present time of narration (Munro 1986 256). This technique, along with the seemingly disorganised presentation of the different episodes, is another development in the narrative technique of Munro.



The surface belies a well organised scheme of ideas which the reader is able to complete with the exercise of his/her power of imagination. Trudy's memory of "The Misses Weir's House," her first meeting with Dan and her memory of Dan's mother playing piano provides the theme

of marriage and woman-man relationship. The death of the teenage girl and the ritualistic performance of the girls going in a circle praying and dropping ornaments and Trudy's realisation that the necklace is lost are to be pieced together with the circle of prayer suggested by Janet to retrieve the necklace. Munro presents the attitude of three generations:

Misses Weir	}	Trudy and Janet	}	Robin & her friends
Dan's mother	}	Dan	}	

The middle generation is caught between the other two--with a sensational nostalgia for things lost and an anxiety about the future of the new generation--helpless in bringing together these two worlds--a schizophrenic experience as suggested by the description of the inmates of the Half Wit House. The experience is described by Munro very impressively through the omniscient narrator's statement:

Why Trudy does now remember this moment? She sees her young self looking in the window at the old woman playing the piano. The dim room with its oversize beams and fireplace and the lonely leather chair. The clattering, faltering, persistent piano music. Trudy remembers that so clearly and it seems she stood outside her own body, which arched then from the punishing pleasures of love. She stood outside her own

happiness in a tide of sadness. And the opposite thing happened the morning Dan left. Then she stood outside her own unhappiness in a tide of what seemed unreasonably like love. But it was the same thing, really, when you got outside. What are those times that stand out, clear patches in your life --What do they have to do with it? They aren't exactly promises. Breathing spaces. Is that all? (Munro 1986 273)

To be in happiness or out of happiness, to be in between two generations with entirely different conventions and ethics, to be in between the so-called 'normal world' and the world of the Half Wit House are all schizophrenic experiences that trouble the mind of middle-aged women moving quickly towards old age.

"White Dump" presents a family atmosphere with the Father, stepmother and the children. The Mother and the Grandmother are recreated through the memory of the daughter Denise. It provides a discussion on poverty, politics, tax, etc.. Isabel, the mother of Denise, belonged to a poor family but she was treated with love by Sophie, the grandmother. Denise remembers Sophie as a sportive character and Isabel, the housewife as one who "saw her day as hurdles got through" (Munro 1986 303). The theme of extra marital love is also discussed openly in this story. The middle-aged woman Isabel caught up in the humdrum of

routine was alarmed at the sign of confirmation she received from the pilot. The narrator describes Isabel's experience, "the promise hit her like lightning, split her like lightning, though she moved on smoothly, intact. Oh, Certainly. All of that. But it isn't like lightning, it isn't a blow from outside. We only pretend that it is" (Munro 1986 305).

Here, Munro strikes a blow at the hypocrisy that reigns the society. A traditional representation of the experience is presented through the first statement and the third one undermines and exposes the hidden agenda within each action of human beings. It is not a lightning from outside but a desire from within. It is what every woman of her situation, or her experience desires, but never expresses openly. This, again, is a speciality of Munro, the story-teller. She hits the nail at the right spot and lays bare the fact that every desire is couched within certain expressions acceptable to the society. It is this fear of society that cripples the freedom of women, pushing them into the mire of pretence and duplicity. Here, Isabel "couldn't believe it would happen. In spite of her reading, her fantasies, the confidences of certain friends, she couldn't believe that people sent and got messages everyday and acted on them, making their perilous plans, moving into illicit territory (which would turn out to be shockingly like, and unlike home)" (Munro 1986 307). This 'fear of treading into illicit territory' is a dominant theme discussed in her stories from *Lives of Girls and Women*

through *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *The Progress of Love*, *Friend of My Youth*, etc., to the “Children Stay.” Even in *Friend of My Youth*, it is discussed within the restricted norms of a conservative society but reaches a full and free handling in “The Children Stay.”

This collection provides the reader with varied experiences of women especially Mothers who struggle to free themselves from the snare of marriage, society, patriarchy, anarchy, and so on. The Shamanic manipulation of Time and Story Structure are stepping stones in the onward movement of Alice Munro’s greatness as a writer capable of capturing the exact emotions and thoughts of girls and women in different stages of life. Hitherto unvalued human emotions and desire are given priority over the accepted, established norms of society. Munro’s stories remind each woman that pretence is no solution to her problems. It is a freeing of the mind from the shackles of oppression that would lead to the liberation of the woman and the society in general.

Friend of My Youth, the collection dedicated to Munro’s Mother was published in 1990. Of the ten stories in the collection, only two are first-person narratives. The first story, “Friend of My Youth,” is an intimate recollection and re-vision of her mother. But “Meneseteung” is a story with an impersonal tone and one comes to realise that it is a first person narrative only from the last part where the narrator says, “I looked for

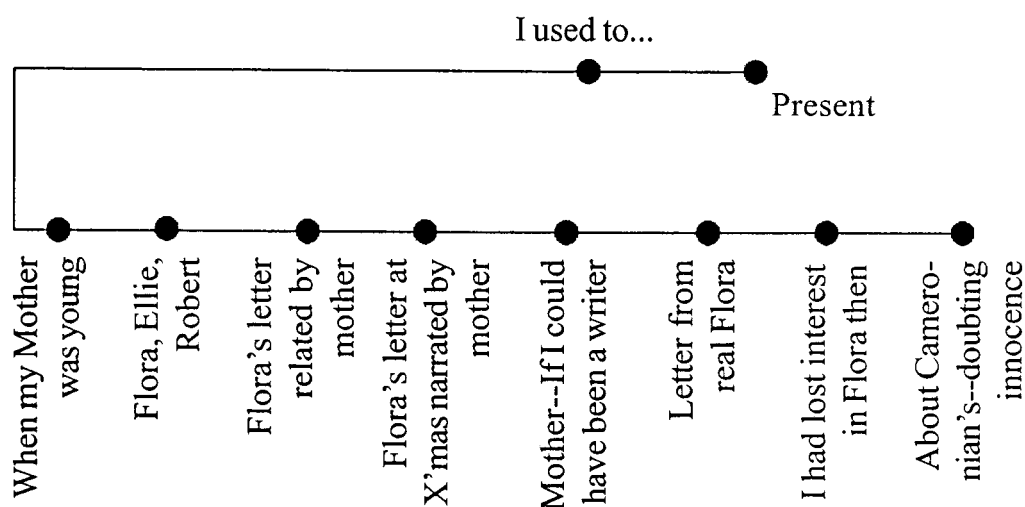
Almeda Roth in the graveyard” (Munro 1990 72). All the other stories are narrated from a third person point of view.

This collection posits both male and female side by side and analyses critically their concerns and motives. In the first story the male character, Robert was submerged by the story telling mother, but the narrator unearths him, dissects his intentions and exposes his villainy. “Five Points,” the second story expresses how Neil Bauer manipulates the story of Maria. “Meneseteung” poses female vs. male; emotion vs. money. The same theme is pursued in “Pictures of Ice.”

The male is placed in the female position, that is, in the role of a suspicious husband rather than a suspicious wife in “Oranges and Apples.” In “Goodness and Mercy” an alternate reading of the western narrative mode, where mother is absent and the son is left with the father, is provided. Here, the father is absent and the mother and the daughter are focussed. “Oh! What Avails” presents extramarital relationship in spite of a happy, satisfied married life.

Munro presents the possible ways in which female desire works. She also presents a great concern about the process of ageing. “Differently” is a recreation of the absent female to analyse and expose the complexities of female behaviour. “Wigtime” posits two female characters side by side with two ways of life and provides the reader an opportunity to ponder about who among the two have been successful in life.

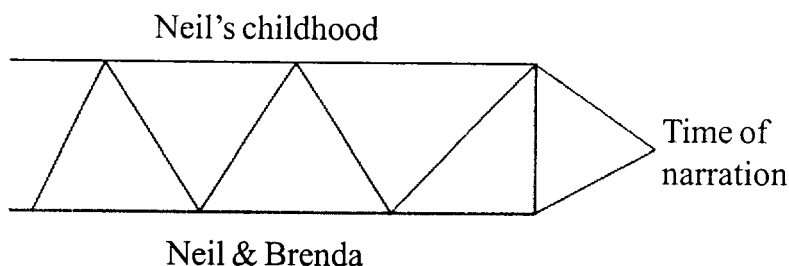
“Friend of My Youth,” the title story, begins with, “I used to dream about my mother...” (Munro 1990 3). The usage ‘used to’ invokes the past and at the same time implies a narrative present. In the next section, Munro makes the narrator say, “When my mother was a young woman...” (Munro 1990 4), in the usual past form of narration. The story time moves like this:



The story is interwoven with letters, narrative and dream. Here is a diversion in the theme of Munro stories. A Victorian-minded mother and an apprehensive daughter are presented. The narrator (daughter) says, “The odd thing is that my mother’s ideas were in line with some progressive notions of her times,/and mine echoed the notions that were favoured in my time” (Munro 1990 23). This story is yet another recreation of the Mother figure--a re-visiting of the past by the narrator-daughter with a new turn of attitude, “I felt slightly cheated. Yes. Offended, tricked, cheated by this welcome turn around, this reprieve. My mother moving rather

carelessly out of her old prison, showing options and powers I never dreamed she had, changes more than herself. She changes the bitter lump of love I have carried all this time into a phantom--something useless and uncalled for, like a phantom pregnancy” (Munro 1990 26). History is made use of to frame the story by reference to the Cameronians or Reformed Presbyterians whom the narrator describes as “Some freak religion from Scotland”(Munro 1990 26).

The story “Five Points” is divided into different sections moving from the present to the past and back again. It also moves between two narratives--one about the Croatians, Maria and Lisa; the other about Brenda and her affair with Neil. The story begins with the expression, “While they drink vodka and orange juice in the trailer park on the cliffs above lake Huron, Neil Bauer tells Brenda a story” (Munro 1990 27). The story moves from “When Neil was in public school” (Munro 1990 27) to “Brenda and her husband also run a business” (Munro 1990 29), then to “since early last spring...” (Munro 1990 30) and again back to “By the time Neil was an older teenager...” (Munro 1990 32); then again to Brenda and back to Maria. This movement in time and story may be represented like this:



Munro explains the tension experienced by a woman who is in search of love outside the realm of marriage, “The night before they are to meet--last night, for instance--she should be feeling happy and expectant” (Munro 1990 31). Here, the use of the phrase ‘last night’ is ambiguous. One may assume that it is the night before the day of meeting or that the meeting is equal to death. Again, she uses the Modal auxiliary ‘should be’ that makes the reader feel that the meeting was not an auspicious one. Munro rightly describes how difficult it was for the woman in such a situation:

To be so close, then have to do without. Yet she doesn’t feel any physical craving during that last torturing hour: oiling and perfuming--don’t arouse her. She stays numb, harassed by details, lies arrangements, until the last moment when she actually sees Neil’s car. The fear that she won’t be able to get away is succeeded, during the fifteen minutes drive, by the fear that he won’t show up, in that lonely, dead-end spot in the swamp, which is their meeting place. What she is looking forward to, during those last hours, gets to be less of a

A photograph is introduced in the second section and from this photograph Almeda's house and surroundings are recreated. The life of people in those pioneering days is brought into the present with the statement "I read about the life in the *Vidette*" (Munro 1990 54). Jarvis Poulter who came for oil in the 1950's is a male character introduced in the third section by the narrator. The comment about a salty gentleman and a literary lady strolling home is the base of this creation. Many possibilities about the relationship between Poulter and Almeda are presented. Section four portrays Almeda's sickness. She is given medicine for her insomnia. She keeps herself more active to ward off illness. But one night she awakens to witness a fight in the street and misconceives that the woman in the street is dead.

In part five, Almeda's confused mental state and her refusal of Jarvis Poulter are fused into the poem 'Meneseteung'--a river. In part six the death of Almeda in 1903 and that of Jarvis Poulter in 1904 are given. All the six sections begin with a poem of Almeda Joynt Roth from which the narrator derives excerpts of the life of the poetess that is brought to a closure with a news item from *Vidette*. The conclusion of the story undermines the tower of narrative by an interesting statement, "they may get it wrong, after all. I may have got it wrong. I don't know if she ever took laudanum. Many ladies did. I don't know if she ever made grape

jelly.” (Munro 1990 73). It brings to the fore the nature of narrative as a constructive self-conscious act on the part of the narrator and Munro.

“Hold Me Fast, Don’t Let Me Pass” begins with a quotation. Hazel the middle-aged protagonist is writing, not “to prevent the rise of panic” or to overcome any problem with money or routine life, but “It had to do with the falling off of purpose, and the question why am I here?” (Munro 1990 75). This story in the third person narrative form moves between the memory of Hazel’s husband, and her childhood days and her present arrival at a Hotel in Scotland. She has heard that her husband used to live there. Jack had given her a version of his visit to his cousin in Scotland when, he had met a girl named Antoinette who was the innkeeper’s daughter. Hazel is trying to get the information, she has received from Jack, confirmed. Jack had also given her a picture of his wartime experience and had occasionally become vexed with the falsified images presented by the media. Hazel analyses Jack’s stories and realises that when he was young his war stories were funny and not heroic. But as he became older, he became more imaginative and longwinded in description. An active discussion on Philiphaugh and Covenanters is introduced along with the discussion of World War and attempts to prove that history is also used as construct. Each individual looks at history from his viewpoint and creates a version of it which defies any notion of absolute reality. The characters

whom Hazel meets in Scotland have only very little connection with the story Jack had narrated to her. She is confused by the recital of Miss Dobie and the presence of Judy and Jania. This story also proves that sometimes reality is stranger than fiction.

The fifth story "Oranges and Apples" has its focus on the male character Murray. The theme of the story again is extra-marital relationship- -but from the point of view of the male character not the female one. A reference to the salt mine is presented as in "Meneseteung." Walley is a childhood memory in "Hold Me Fast Don't Let me Pass." Here also it is Walley. The violent changes in society are portrayed here as in "Friend of My Youth," "Five Points," "Meneseteung" and "Hold Me Fast Don't Let Me Pass." In this collection Male Characters are portrayed more vividly in stories like "Five Points" where Neil talks about his childhood; "Meneseteung" where Jarvis Poulter is given the same place as Almeda Joynt Roth; "Hold Me Fast Don't Let Me Pass" where Jack is the pivotal Point; "Oranges and Apples," a story that moves through Murray's perspective. Again, in the sixth story the male character seventyfive year old Austin, the former minister of church, is given prime importance.

The story is about the confusion created by the news that Austin was to get married and had an intention of going to Hawaii on a honeymoon trip. Austin says, "Well my son is worried about my finances and my

daughter is worried about my mental state. My mental--emotional state. The male and female way of looking at things. The male and female way of expressing their anxiety. Underneath it's the same thing. The old order changeth, yielding place to new" (Munro 1990 149). This is a key concept of this collection--the changing old order and the new order coming up; the male and female way of looking at things; the same truth underlying all.

"Goodness and Mercy" is a story of Averill, an expert in weaving stories in her mind. She is a keen observer of people. While travelling in the ship with her mother, she walks around and listens to people talking. She presumes that sea voyages are an escape, a getting away from life. But in all the conversations she overhears, people are doing just the opposite. "They were establishing themselves--telling about their job and their children and their gardens and their living rooms" (Munro 1990 161). All these conversations ended up in "I said. I did. I always believe. Well, I don't know about you, but I" (Munro 1990 161).

Averill's mother Bugs was old and sick and had contempt for professors. As usual, with Munro one finds the play of words, "That last was the professor, imagining that he could put Bugs in her place. And why did he say he was afraid?" (Munro 1990 161). Munro is criticising people for using words in inappropriate places. There is nothing to be afraid of in not seeing an opera. But the professor speaks in a formal

fashion and for the sake of politeness he uses the word 'afraid.' It is such pretentious use of language that Munro often criticises.

The story begins with "Bugs said so long to the disappearing land..." (Munro 1990 156) and at the end of the section says, "This was happening on a Norwegian passenger-carrying freighter, in the late seventies in the month of July" (Munro 1990 157). This technique makes the reader get a feel of real happening. The reader is taken through the imaginary story woven by Averill about the captain telling the story of two sisters which she later claims to be her own, "Averill believed that she knew the rest of it. How could she help knowing! It was her story" (Munro 1990 177). The reader unknowingly moves from Averill to the captain and comes back to the story of Averill and Bugs only to get trapped in the mise-en-abyme of narrative. When the narrator pronounces that "In some versions of the story, that was all he did, that was enough. In other versions, he was not so easily satisfied nor was she," the reader gets confused to the maximum as to who was actually narrating or altering the story (Munro 1990 177). At another point the omniscient narrator remarks:

The captain had told it as if the mother and the daughter were sisters and he had transported the boat to the South Atlantic and he had left off the finale--as well as supplying various details of his own--but Averill believed that it was her

story he had told. It was the story that she had been telling to herself night after night on the deck, her perfectly secret story, delivered back to her. She had made it, and he had taken it and told it, safely. (Munro 1990 178)

She proceeds with Bug's life that continued for a long time after the voyage.

"Oh, What Avails" tells the story of a woman leaving her husband and children for the sake of love outside marriage. Joan the character who was leaving her family feels, "all so easily, flawlessly deceived. And she feels compunction, certainly. She is smitten by their innocence; she recognises an inseparable tear in her life. This is genuine, and they'll never altogether vanish. But they won't get in her way, either. She is more than glad; She feels that she has no choice but to be going" (Munro 1990 207). There was no other choice but get going, but 12 years after her divorce, "On these weekends, Joan goes to see her children, who are grown up and forgiven her" (Munro 1990 207) And she thinks of her "own history of love with no regret but some amazement. It's as if she had once gone in for sky diving" (Munro 1990 207). This attitude is a new one, quite different from the guilty attitude of Brenda in "Five points." But here a new theme of anxiety is presented through Joan:

She is aware of a new danger, a threat that she could not have imagined when she was younger. She couldn't have

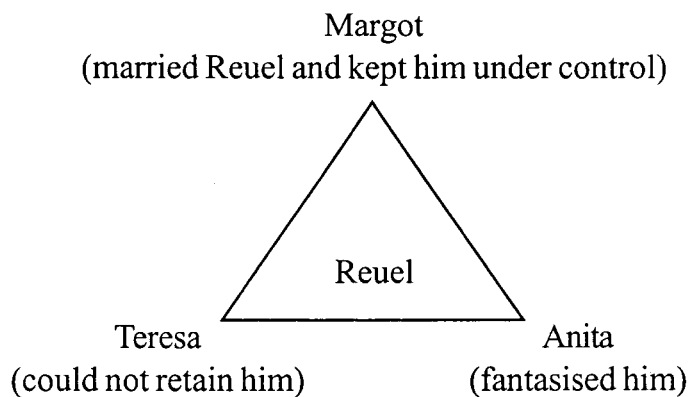
imagined it even if somebody described it to her. And it's hard to describe. The threat is of a change, but it's not the sort of change one has been warned about. It's just this--that suddenly, without warning, Joan is apt to think: Rubble. Rubble. You can look down a street, you can see the shadows, the light, the brick walls, the truck parked under a tree, the dog lying on the sidewalk, the dark summer awning, or the greyed snow drift--you can see all these things in their temporary separateness, all connected underneath in such a troubling satisfying, necessary, indescribable way. Or you can see rubble. Passing states, a useless variety of passing states. Rubble. (Munro 1990 208)

Here, Munro presents the irritation at the thought of growing old, as she has depicted the passage from childhood to adolescence. She also makes a remark that "Joan shouldn't be so surprised, so taken aback. People change. They disappear, and they don't all die to do it" (Munro 1990 209). Through this story, Munro expresses clearly her attitude to such passing states.

"Differently" is yet another story that recalls the past by re-visioning and re-creating the life of Maya--the absent wife. Maya had commented about the story-like nature of the life of Ben and Raymond during their

school days. But now she herself has become a story. Maya and Georgia has discussed about their husbands and has reached the conclusion that “It was the innocence of these husbands--the hearty, decent, firm, contended innocence. That is a wearying and finally discouraging thing. It makes intimacy a core” (Munro 1990 229). Georgia herself analyses Maya’s life by comparing it to her own life. While thinking about Maya’s relationship with the pianist and Harvey, Georgia discloses her own relationship with Miles, “The map of the city that she had held in her mind up till now . . . , was overlaid with another map of circuitous routes followed in fear (not shame) and the excitement . . .”(Munro 1990 233). And while doing her daily chores at home or out shopping she felt that she contained within herself “another woman, who only a few hours before was whimpering and tussling in the ferns, on the sand, on the bare ground, or, during a rain storm in her own car--who had been driven hard and gloriously out of her mind and drifted loose and gathered her wits and made her way home again” (Munro 1990 233). She also wonders, “was this a common story?” (Munro 1990 233). Maya, who is dissatisfied with her life, goes on pursuing life with different men but ends up in early death. Georgia who felt that she was freeing herself comments, “People make momentous shifts, but not the changes they imagine” (Munro 1990 242). This pursuit of illusion is further exemplified in the last story of the collection “Wigtime”.

In “Wigtime” the story of three women Teresa, Margot and Anita are presented as revolving around Reuel.



This story also criticises the double-standards of the society as regards men and women. Reuel’s advice to Anita and Margot is a good example of this, “I hope I’m going to have a couple of ladies in my bus and not like yesterday. A girl saying certain things is not a man saying them. Same thing as a woman getting drunk. A girl gets drunk or talks dirty, first thing you know she’s in trouble. Give that same thought” (Munro 1990 258). This story also presents the bondage between Mother and Daughter. Anita had come home to look after her mother who felt that “Life...” is “Down the drain” (Munro 1990 256). She is extremely happy to have a daughter like Anita. On the other hand, Margot, who has dealt with life on more practical lines seems to be ‘The House’ as Anita remarks, “It looked as if all her care, all her vanity, went into the house” (Munro 1990 246). There is a shift in time from the present to the past and then again to the present and to the past and so on...

Now, as the reader proceeds from *Dance of The Happy Shades* to *Friend of My Youth* there is a gradual dwindling in the number of first person narratives. In the *Open Secrets* there is only one story in the first person narrative. “As a consequence of post-structuralist and postmodernist theories that calls into question the notions of stable identity and transcendent truth, the boundary between autobiography and fiction has become increasingly blurred. If truth is contingent and subjectivity is constructed, and both are the product of language and discourse, it follows that there is no difference between fact and fiction” (Rishoi 109). A gradual decrease in the first person narrative of Munro puts the reader in rigmarole as to whether she has discarded autobiography or she has brought about a fusion of fact and fiction as described by Rishoi.

Munro, surmising on human life through her various characters, expresses her sense of confusion as to what reality is. In her early stories, she presents a struggle to cope with life and reality only to realise that the reality could not be represented or understood as such. But at the later stage one finds Munro pondering upon the possibility of reality being stranger than fiction. Reality is presented as dots to be joined by the reader so as to get a clear picture of what it is. Munro places it before the reader like a surrealist painting that proposes not “apparently contradictory states like dream and waking life, but at their resolution into a state of sur-reality

(beyond reality)” (Ades 134). They deconstruct the traditional notion of story telling and also change the sensibility of the reader. Death or disappearance of character is a recurring theme in all the stories set in Walley and Carstairs and the Doud family is portrayed in all the eight stories in *Open Secrets*, making them in a way connected stories.

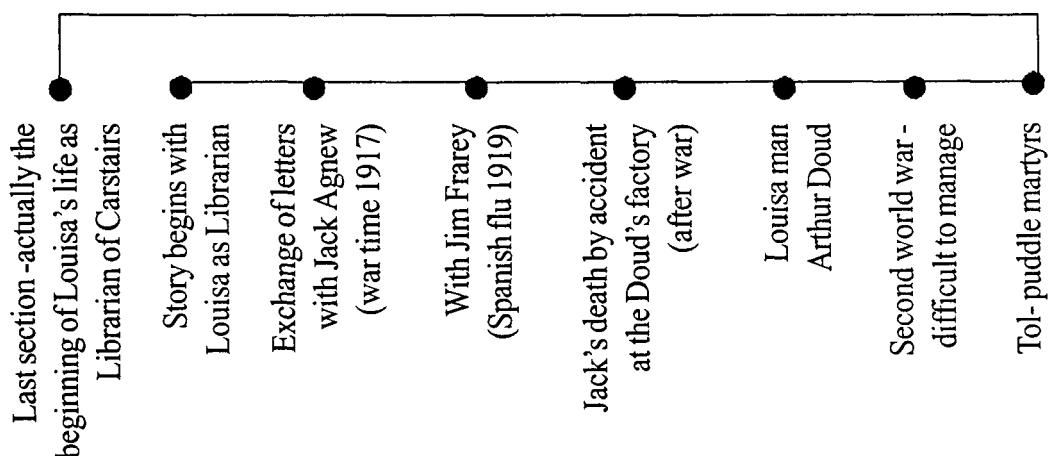
The first story of the collection *Open secrets* is titled “Carried Away.” On reading the story, the reader feels at times carried away by tricks played in the narration of the story. The story is in the third person mode and begins with a description of Louisa, the new librarian at Carstairs Library. The story is divided into different sections that seem to be chronologically arranged until one reaches the last section which is actually the beginning of the story sequence. Louisa’s story is unravelled by way of letters written to Jack Agnew, a man writing to Louisa from warfront. The letters are not demarcated by detail of introduction but placed one after the other. From the words in the letter the reader has to identify whether it was by Jack or Louisa. Louisa is actually carried away by the letters of Jack and she shows great interest in war and later keeps the library open even during the Spanish Flu epidemic so as not to miss an opportunity of meeting him.

The second section tells of Louisa revealing her disappointment with Jack to Jim Frarey, a traveller. But the third section begins with Arthur

Doud and proceeds with the story of the accident in which Jack Agnew has died. The omniscient narrator now shifts the gaze from Louisa to Arthur Doud and through the eyes of Arthur Doud begins to evaluate Louisa. The following sentences mark the shift, “The Librarian was perturbed” (Munro 1994 27). “Arthur remembered years ago some matter brought up at the Council Meeting about buying sixty-watt bulbs instead of forty. This Librarian was the one who requested that, and they had done it” (Munro 1994 28). This impersonal double-distancing technique is again shifted back with a direct focus on Louisa during the last two sections.

The history of the town Carstairs, which was once determined by the Doud family and their factories, is portrayed through various changes that occur in the life of small town people because of the two world wars. During father Doud’s period, he has been able to persuade the workers to go home when their service has not been necessary, but the First World War has brought in scarcity of workers and has imparted a new sense of dignity and importance to the workers. The Second World War has completely destroyed the factory and it has become impossible to maintain it. The history of a number of people in Carstairs town is compressed into short fiction. Munro compresses the time from the old days of Father Doud through the First World War, the Spanish flu of 1919 to the Second World War and after, into a small space of fifty pages.

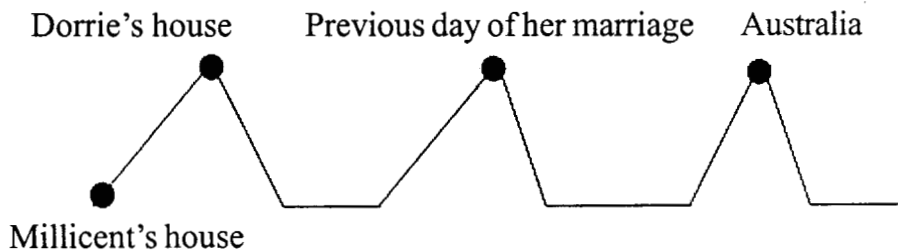
The beginning of the last section of the story goes, “On the day of Miss Tamblyn’s death it happened that Louisa was staying in the Commercial Hotel” and continues to describe how Louisa gets her job as Librarian of the small town of Carstairs which marks the actual beginning of the story (Munro 1994 50). The comment that “So much that lay open now would be concealed” is actually a clue to her narrative technique (Munro 1994 51). The graph of the story sequence is as follows:



The story moves in a linear fashion for a long time and suddenly leaps back to a very early point of time. Accident and death of Jack Agnew is a very crucial aspect of the story. It is foregrounded by the war and the Spanish Flu. It is used by Munro as a point from which to weave the life of Louisa, Arthur Doud, Jim Frarey, Jack's Father, Grace Horne, Lillian, Jane Farlene etc... A number of characters and a number of incidents are deftly inserted into the small space of a short fiction proving Munro's mastery over the compressed tale.

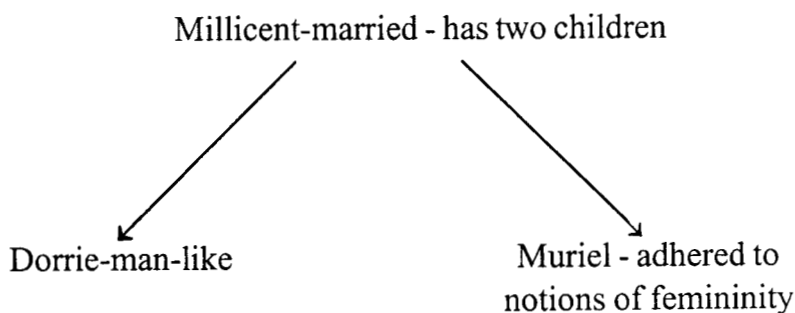
11. Dorrie decides to marry--arrangements.
12. Marriage.
13. Letter from Australia--photograph.
14. Dorrie's life in Australia.
15. Dorrie's death.
16. Muriel's marriage
17. Millicent's life goes on even after Porter's death.

In Space



Millicent is the character through whom the other two women--Dorrie

Beck and Muriel Snow are presented:



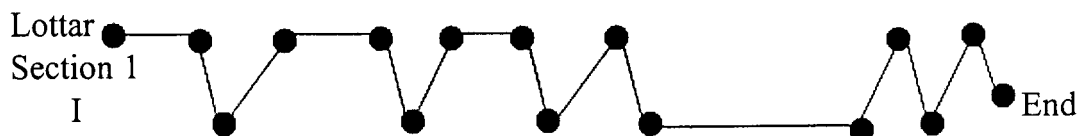
Millicent is placed between the two to evaluate and describe two types of women--the marginalised and the socially accepted. Dorrie defies all

conventional notions of femininity in her form, her way of life and her house. Munro describes her, “she was a big, firm woman with heavy legs, chestnut brown hair, a broad bashful face, and dark freckles like dots of velvet. A man in the area had named a horse after her” (Munro 1994 54). But Muriel is ‘feminine’ in every way. She is so conscious of her body and wears a suitable blue dress and “It suited brown hair and brown eyes, which were hers as well. She never skimped on clothes--it was a mistake to. Her finger nails were always painted--a rich and distracting colour, apricot or blood--ruby or even gold. She was small and round, she did exercises to keep her waistline. She had a dark mole on the front of her neck, like a jewel on an invisible chain, and another like a tear at the corner of one eye” (Munro 1994 58). The descriptions of these two persons differ even in the use of language.

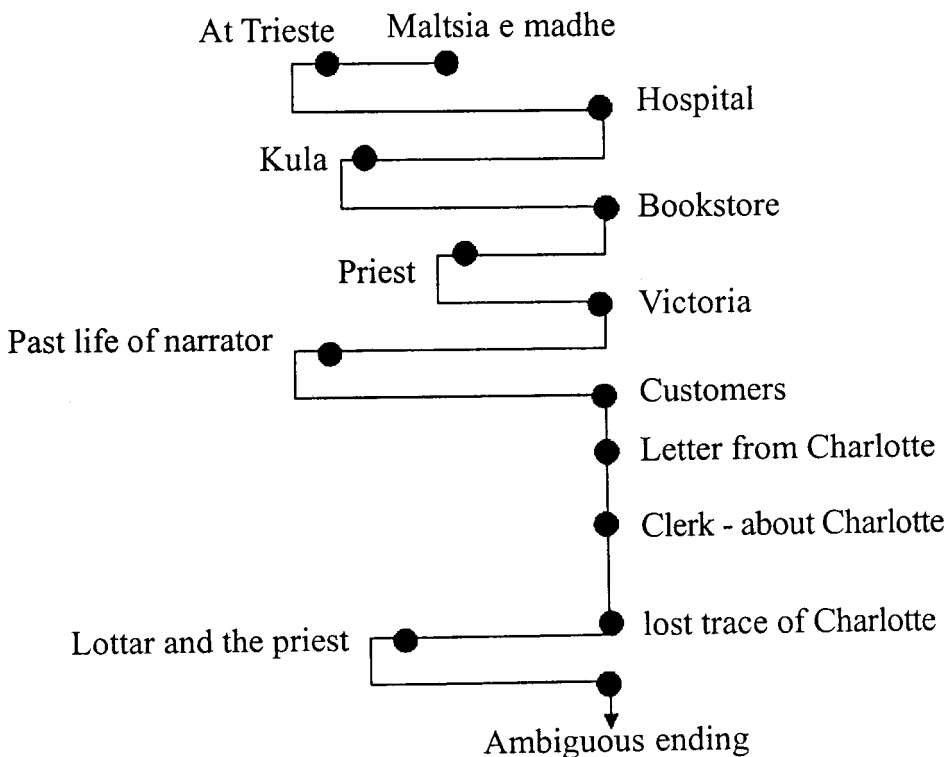
The description of Dorrie as a person whose name has been given to a horse (not a mare) by a man and the heavy legs and chestnut brown hair, broad bashful face etc. are masculine to its core while the description of Muriel is too feminine in its choice of exact colours like blue, apricot, blood-ruby and gold and the dark mole like a jewel, etc. The linguistic difference seen in the description of two characters in the text throws light on how a text gains its gender as different from the gender of its writer. This manipulation of gender in the text proves how Munro has been able to move beyond gender through her techniques in narrative and use of

language. Such stories are proof of how Munro transcends time, space and gender in a lucid and relaxed manner.

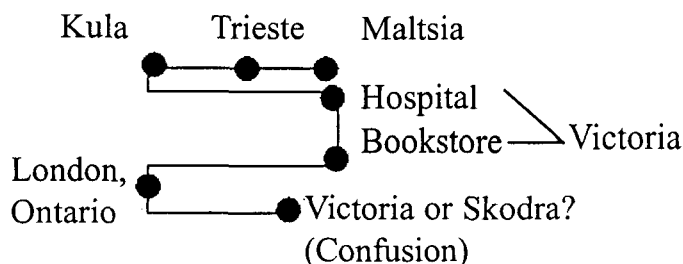
“The Albanian Virgin” moves between a dream world and real world; between Lottar and the first person Narrator; between the mountains of Maltsia e madhe and Victoria; between third person narrative and first person narrative. It begins with the experience of Charlotte or Lottar at *Kula* in Maltsia e madhe and only in the third section does the reader understand that it was a story within a story. The story sequence moves in the following manner.



The movement in time is:



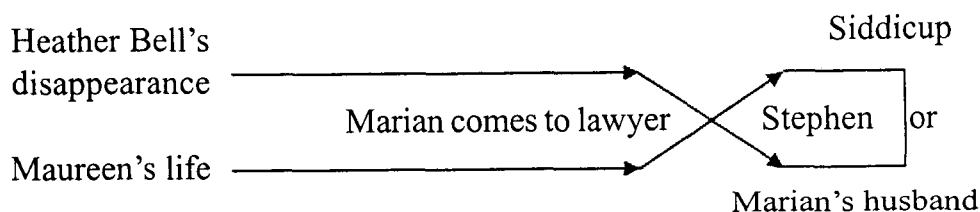
The movement of the story in space is



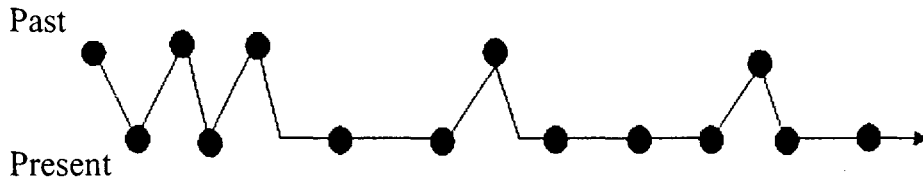
Here, Munro provides an ambiguous ending. The narrator's life history is framed by the story narrated by Charlotte who seems to be an unreliable narrator, who was sick and in hospital. The clerk's comment on Charlotte and her disappearance adds to the ambiguity. The response of the narrator to each episode of the story related by Charlotte is close to her own life. By the end of the story her life gets mixed up with Charlotte's narrative challenging the reader to find an appropriate ending.

"Open Secrets" also tells about disappearance--the disappearance of Heather Bell, a young girl. Maureen is the central character of the story. She and Frances discuss about the hike that Miss Johnstone conducted and about the disappearance of Heather Bell. Later, she hears different versions about this incident. Still later her old friend Marian came to her house and related her version of the story and the peculiar behaviour of Mr Siddicup. People had heard "a cry, a scream, in the middle of the afternoon" (Munro 1994 40). Maureen's knowledge of the event tallies to a certain extent with the narration of Marian but there is a certain ambiguity

about the predicament of the girl. Marian's story seems to divest the attention onto Mr Siddicup, who is reputed as a crazy, perverted man. But Maureen's perception goes beyond this conclusion to the thick-fingered hands that press Marian's hand as they sit on the fence opposite to Maureen's house. But nobody could say what the truth is. Maureen concludes that Mr Siddicup knew something about it. But he is unable to express it. She imagines that Heather Bell's photo might be published, Siddicup might not be able to reveal his secret, and letters from Mary Johnstone might appear in the newspaper until Heather Bell becomes old news. Maureen, is still young and is likely to marry to a far off unknown place after the death of her husband. But she feels that it will not "reveal to her this moment when she seems to be looking into an open secret, something not startling until you think of trying to tell it" (Munro 1994 160). The story moves in a parallel form with the story of Heather Bell on one side and Maureen's real life on the other until they converge at a point where Marian, Maureen's old friend describes her knowledge of Heather Bell Episode and again moves on to an ambiguous conclusion, like this:



The time sequence also moves from past to present and back in an oscillating fashion:



(The dots are the events in the story)

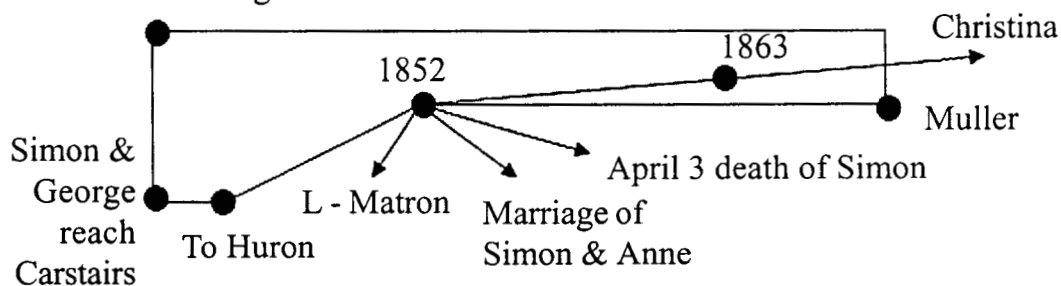
“The Jack Randa Hotel,” the fifth story in the collection is the story of Gail pursuing her husband who had gone to Australia with a young student. It begins with a description of the flight landing at Honolulu, then goes back to the time when Will had left her and further back to the time when she used to sit with Cleata, Will’s mother who talked about the books she had read. Then Munro goes with Gail’s arrival in Walley during the seventies--her meeting with Will--his admiration for her--her place in the family until the new student Sandra came into their lives. The story moves forward again to mention that “Gail has landed in Brisbane” (Munro 1994 169). The rest of the story is embedded with letters to and from Miss Thornaby. Gail, who camouflages herself as an Australian lady finds a letter written by Will to one Mrs Thornaby and she assumes that title to write letters to Mr Will. The letters are quite interesting and engaging, till the whole thing turns upside down by a revelation that Will has understood

her game. Gail is said to be in a hurry to leave Australia. This interesting game is undermined with the memory of Gail, “On that day, Cleata had already begun to die and Will had already met Sandy. This dream had already begun--Gail’s journey and her deceits, then the words she imagined--believed--that she heard shouted through the door” (Munro 1994 189). When at this point the reader starts believing that it was all a dream conjured up by Gail there comes the last statement “Now it’s up to you to follow me,” leaving the reader in a confusion as to whether the direction is for Will or for the Reader (Munro 1994 189). Dream, reality and illusion are intertwined in such a way as to challenge the thread of story the reader is likely to follow, leading to a deconstruction of the traditional concepts of story telling.

“A Wilderness Station” also begins with a letter. The story of Old Annie or Annie Mckillop is unravelled by way of letters from different persons like the Matron of the House of Industry, Reverend Walter McBain, Mr James Muller, Mrs Christina Muller, etc., and also through the recollections of Mr George Herron published in the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of Carstairs *Argus*. The story is about Simon and George the two brothers who come to Carstairs to make a living. Simon wanted a wife. He writes to the Matron and she suggests the name of Annie. Annie becomes Simon’s wife and they do not lead a happy life. Simon’s death

and the strange behaviour of Annie and George's version of his brother's death create suspense which reaches a climax when Annie presents herself at the goal to confess a murder. The story is not narrated by the author or a single persona, but unravelled like the blooming of a flower one petal first and then the other, and so on, through the device of multiple narrative voices. The reader has to assemble the bits and form a whole story. The reader's capacity to dismantle the various episodes and to assemble them to form a coherent whole has an important role to play in the unravelling of the story. It moves in space between Toronto, Carstairs and Walley. Time is specified by giving the year, month and date on which the letters were written. But it moves in the following fashion:

Childhood of George



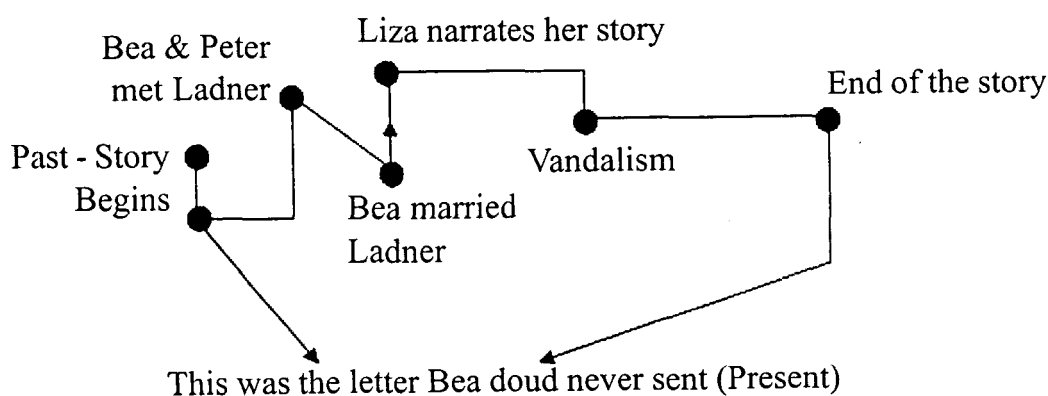
“Spaceships Have Landed” begins with a story indicating the legendary nature of human life. It is a story of ‘disappearance’ with Carstairs as its milieu. Eunie Morgan is the character who disappeared and appeared after sometime. The stories that went around the town about this event; Rhea’s childhood memories about Eunie; Rhea’s personal life which was very different from that of Eunie’s; Billy Doud’s proposal;

Rhea's marriage to Wayne; are all part of the story. Here, Eunie is presented as a peculiar character in the description of her childhood and this peculiar nature leads to the reasons for her disappearance. Eunie's version is that she has been led to a spaceship by three small children in white dress. Rhea, remembering Eunie as her childhood friend, remarks, "Was it real or was it a play" (Munro 1994 239).

It is the same ambiguity that surrounds the disappearance of Eunie Morgan at the age of nineteen. This story also presents a movement in space from Carstairs to Calgary and back. It also exposes the crude fashion in which freakish expressions develop into real events. The story told by Eunie is developed by Aunt Muriel and there are reports in the newspaper about the landing of spaceships. It also depicts the changes that had occurred in Carstairs since Rhea's move to Calgary, "The river house all gone. The Morgan's house, the Monks house--everything gone of that first mistaken settlement" (Munro 1994 259). It also describes the changes that came into the lives of people who belonged to Carstairs. In the "Wilderness Station" also one finds a vivid description of the change of Carstairs, from a wilderness station to a big town.

The story "Vandals" begin with a letter to Liza. Only when the reader arrives at the fourth page would he/she confront the statement, "This was a letter Bea Doud never sent and in fact never finished" (Munro 1994 264). Bea Doud is a character who has already been introduced in

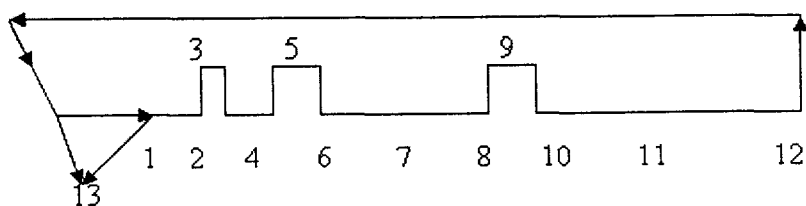
the last part of the story “Spaceships have Landed” This story is centred on the death of Ladner which provides a point of digression to Bea Doud who drifts into the past and describes her meeting and life with Ladner. Liza narrates to her husband about her connection with Bea and Ladner and engages in an act of vandalism instead of tending to the house in which Ladner had his stuffed animals and birds. Through all the stories in this collection Munro presents the vicious nature of the human psyche and the mystery enshrouding death and disappearance. All through Munro’s collection of stories from the *Dance of the Happy Shades* to *Open Secrets*, she pursues the theme of death from different perspectives trying hard to comprehend this Enigma which constantly derides free access. Her stories confirm the fact that there can be no valid conclusion for life or reality or the episodes narrated by human beings. This accounts for the open-ended nature of Munro’s fiction that violates the linear progression in space, time and story sequence. The last story of *Open Secrets* moves in time like this:



The story of Pauline published in the *New Yorker*, in 1997 is framed with the Eurydice -Orpheus story to express vividly the conflict in Pauline's mind regarding her carnal desire and her family. She chooses to be Eurydice and goes off with her Orphee. Brain, her husband the true patriarch, denies her the care of her children. She is bold enough to walk out of the establishment of the House--out into the wider world for fulfilling her selfhood. While describing Orphee, Pauline says, "Orphee will not put up with anything less than perfection. He wants a love that is outside of ordinary life. He wants a perfect Eurydice" (Munro 1997 96) but Eurydice was more practical. In the story, Brain is for perfection and Eurydice for practical day-to-day issues. She feels that the action of Orpheus and Eurydice was purposeful. "They don't have to go on with life and get married and have kids and buy an old house and fix it up and..." thought Pauline (Munro 1997 98). A different perspective about the life of a woman is presented here. The married woman frees herself from the system to pursue her desire. She later regains links with her children who have been kept away from her by Brain.

Munro concludes the story with a description of the attitudes of the children towards their mother, "They don't hate her" (Munro 1997 103). This is an important insight into the power of mother-child relationship which was hitherto used as weapon to subdue women and to prevent her

from living her own life. The undermining of traditional notions about family and extramarital relationships is a bold step taken by Munro, imbricating the life of Pauline within the Orpheus-Eurydice Myth. The mixing of stream of consciousness and intertextuality, to the events of life of ordinary people provides the story with a wider dimension of narrative. Pauline the protagonist is a middle-aged woman reviewing and analysing the past and so this story may be classified as Reifungsromane. The title of the story “Children Stay” is supported by another statement “Reckless, irresponsible, irresponsible--or luck?” (Munro 1997 91). This question is thrown to the reader even before the story begins so as to provide ample time and direction to come to a conclusion of his/her own. The story time and the time of narration are presented vividly:

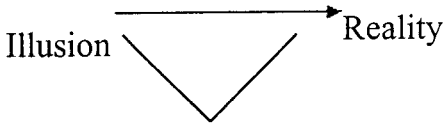
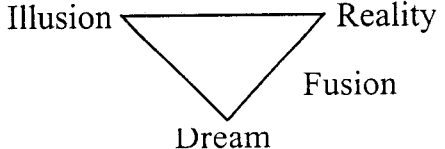


1. Begins the story with “Thirty years ago...” an event of the past implying the present.
2. The play she was going to act.
3. Jeffrey Toom & the play Eurydice by Jean Anouilh.
4. Holiday resort.
5. Rehearsals.

6. Come for a holiday.
7. Family discusses the play.
8. Brain's story.
9. Orpheus myth.
10. Daily chores of life--looking after children.
11. The beach--call from Jeffrey.
12. Pauline's elopement with Jeffrey--Brian's reaction.
13. Her children had grown up--they do not hate her.

Coming to a conclusion based on the above observations on stories of Munro ranging from *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) to *Open Secrets* (1995) and "The Children Stay" is interesting. There is a gradual development in content with regard to the theme of illusion, reality and dream.

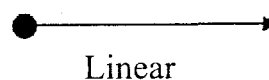
It may be illustrated thus:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Early stories in <i>Dance of the Happy Shades</i> . | Illusion \longrightarrow Reality |
| 2. From "Peace of Utrecht" to <i>Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You</i> . | Illusion \longleftarrow Reality |
| 3. <i>Lives of Girls and Women & Who Do You Think You Are?</i> |  <p style="text-align: center;">Oscillation between the two</p> |
| 4. <i>The Moons of Jupiter, Friend of My Youth & The Progress of Love</i> . |  <p style="text-align: center;">Dream</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fusion</p> |

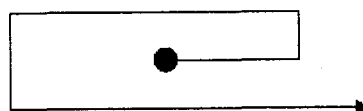
Through these shifts, Munro vivifies the difference between fantasy and reality. She drives home the fact that often reality can be stranger than fiction.

There is an emphatic shift in the use of time also.

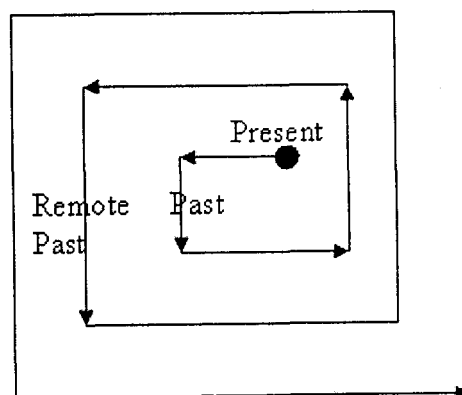
1. Earlier stories



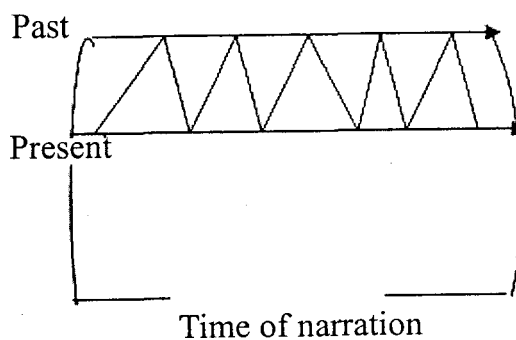
2. From "Peace of Utrecht" to *Who Do You Think You are?*



3. From *The Moons of Jupiter* to *The Progress of Love*



4. *Friend of My Youth*, *Open Secrets* & "The Children stay."



Here there is double operation upon time, a parallel movement controlled by the time of narration putting time into motion and suspending it at the same time.

In her early stories, the author focuses on the outer world as envisioned by a female child who is wonderstruck, puzzled, and finding life hard to comprehend. In the second set of stories one finds the female narrator struggling with reality of the outer world like an adolescent moving towards youth. The third set of stories presents women in familial situation. Here, the woman-man pattern, including problems of marriage, divorce, escalating or stagnating careers, economic survival, husband's illness or retirement or death, bravado of new single identity, unadmitted loneliness and the dreariness of sexual adventure are all discussed from the perspective of women moving towards middle-age. Another set of stories depicts the female out of familial bondage, exploring new horizons of female desire. Extramarital relationships still framed by conventional society are presented in detail. The fifth type of stories presents the free female. Here, there is an inward movement. Munro is concerned about what the female believes or desires. The women are presented as individuals who are not afraid of the conventional society or its ethical standards.

There are first-person narratives and third person omniscient narratives. The omniscient narrators are not authoritative; they just present

certain characters in certain situations without passing a final judgment. The structural, technical and thematic changes brought about by positioning and presenting them in a particular manner prove that Munro is a post-modern writer. Moreover, her works belong to the post-sixties when post-modernism and feminism gained impetus. She writes not about mainstream figures like the heroes or heroines of the past but about ordinary women living on the fringes of the society. She posits the marginality as a vantage point from where it is possible to perceive both worlds. She abandons the rich heritage of classical topics in favour of the local and the vernacular. In short, the whole set of Munrovian works from *Dance of the Happy Shades* to *Open secrets* and "Children Stay" may be seen as a progression-a growth. Her works in toto become a *Kunstlerroman*. They place the reader in a situation which he/she imitates and transforms. They also help to develop in the reader a better capacity for perception and action.

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I

**ALICE MUNRO:
DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE FROM
THE TRADITIONAL TO METAFICTIONAL**

P.K. PRABHA

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for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English Literature
to the University of Calicut*

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UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
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Chapter IV

Munrovia Horizon -- The Female Spectrum

In that dawn when Wordsworth declared that it was bliss to be alive and heaven to be young; when all attention was diverted to reform--reform in France, reform in the English Parliament and reform in the English electorate--when attention was given to the rights of man, a voice rose in favour of women's rights. Not that there has been any dearth of works suggesting the reform of female manners and education until then; but they all created a double-standard of excellence--one for male and one for female, relegating women. The Puritan reformers of the Eighteenth century vouched for submissiveness and passivity in women and labelled them 'weaker vessel.' The Cavalier court of Charles II replaced this attitude with licentiousness--a thorough-going contempt and sexual exploitation of females. The trade guilds restricted the training of women and, for centuries, maintained them as a cheap pool of surplus labour. The reason was the mental and physical inferiority ordained divinely upon women.

Adam says in Genesis, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man" (Wollstonecraft 31). Corinthian elaborates a little, "For the man is

not of the woman, but woman for the man. Neither was the man created for woman but the woman for the man” (Wollstonecraft 31). St. Paul says plainly, “Wives submit to your husbands” (Wollstonecraft 31). Mary Wollstonecraft could not agree to these declarations and she insisted that these attitudes and principles should first be weeded out before a real change in women’s condition could be gained. She was aware that as early as 1517 Daniel Defoe, who had read Mary Astell, had proposed equal education for women in the *Essay on Projects*, but at the same time, criticised the new style of female manners. The boarding schools that arose only helped to teach girls how to while away elegantly the leisure hours until and after marriage. Serious subjects like History, Philosophy and the classical languages were considered hard for women. *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, and *The Guardian* in the Eighteenth century deplored the vanity of the ‘accomplished young girl.’ But, Wollstonecraft, on close scrutiny, understood that they were much better than their Augustan contemporaries like Swift and Pope who scorned female manners. Swift comments on women:

A set of phrases learnt by rote;

A passion for a scarlet-coat;

When at a play to laugh, or cry,

Yet cannot tell the Reason why:

Never to hold her tongue a Minute;

While all she prates has nothing in it. (Wollstonecraft 36)

This was the general attitude of men before and during the age in which Mary Wollstonecraft lived. But women intellectuals of the group called Blue-Stockings--Elizabeth Carter, the classical scholar; Fanny Burney, author of the widely read and respected *Evelina*; Mrs Elizabeth Montagu, Mrs Thrab, Mrs Barbauld, writer of children's stories and Hanna More, who wrote religious and conservative political tracts for the poor--also did not accept Wollstonecraft's principles and were careful not to be contaminated by the idea of feminism. Wollstonecraft sharply criticised Rousseau's idea of the charming nature of the feminine coquette. She was enraged at the realisation that women themselves were, to a certain extent, responsible for their subjugation. She agreed that mothering was important in the ongoing process of perfecting civilisation and also accepted the fatalistic truth that excellence and successful family life would not go hand in hand. She was also deeply concerned about the rehabilitation of middle-class women steeped in the drudgery of mundane lives.

Even as the condition of married women improved through legislation, many of them chose not to join hands with the respectably married fellow feminists if their work threatened notions of female delicacy.

The first women's right's convention at Seneca Falls, New York in 1849, the right to divorce, which reversed the concept of women in marriage, the right to be educated at Cambridge, gained by the end of the nineteenth century; entry into various professions; gaining of the right to vote in 1927, etc., were all stepping stones in the progress of feminism, but the married woman's life was still pinned down by domesticity.

Working class women were doubly exploited. To have professional ambitions, to desire to enter the male sphere of active life in the community, was simply to acknowledge that a woman yearns, in fact, to be a man. Then here appeared another group of oppressors, quite different from the earlier religious and puritanical groups, the psychoanalysts, a twentieth century phenomenon. They considered feminism a deep illness and condemned Mary Wollstonecraft as a hater of man. Here, it would be useful to take a look at Pauline Butling's opinion, "the Freudian metanarrative which has dominated twentieth century thought is perhaps even more damaging to women for its direct attack on the mother than the Christian ideal of passivity and serenity. Not only is the mother rendered powerless in the patriarchal order by her lack of a penis, but she is also an object to be attacked, displaced and overcome by the child in the process of ego formation" (Brandt 15).

Feminist thinkers like Betty Friedan exposed the ensnaring danger of the feminine mystique which was propagated by the various feminine magazines and the advertisements which held women prey to a negative attitude towards their own body and life. She introduced feminism into the suburbs, where the pretty, passive, underachieving woman ceased to be a wholly satisfactory representative of her sex. Later, more revolutionary feminists like Germaine Greer, Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone called upon women to hone their faculties in order to effect a revolution in female manners, to restore their lost dignity, to make them part of the human species, to reform themselves to reform the world. They realised, “the key strategy of liberation lies in exposing the situation, and the simplest way to do it is to outrage pundits and the experts by sheer impudence of speech and gesture, the exploitation of the cliché ‘feminine logic’ to expose masculine pomposity, absurdity and injustice. Women’s weapons are traditionally their tongues and the principal revolutionary tactic has always been the spread of information” (Greer 328).

Greer also exposed the reality of why women who form the majority of the population were not able to strike at the root of misery. She explains, “their very oppression stands in the way of their combining the form of any kind of solid group which can challenge the masters” (Greer 329).

She called upon the older sisters to teach what they found out, and declared that women at all times learn from each other's experience, thereby creating a sister-hood which might provide emancipation "from helplessness and need" and be able to walk freely upon the earth that was one's birth right (Greer 329). She also proclaimed:

To refuse hobbies and deformity and take possession of your body and glory in its power, accepting its own laws of loneliness. To have something to desire, something to make, something to achieve, and at last something to give. To be freed from guilt and shame and the tireless self-discipline of women. To stop pretending and dissembling, cajoling and manipulating, and begin to control and sympathize. To claim the masculine virtues of magnanimity and generosity and courage. (Greer 330)

This is a step further than equal pay for equal work, for it should revolutionise the conditions of work completely. To materialise this, Firestone puts forth a dream action, "a smile boycott, at which declaration all women would instantly abandon their 'pleasing' smiles, henceforth smiling only when something pleased them" (Firestone 89).

This call for raising of consciousness has been made in different places by different groups labelled feminists. The term, coined near the

end of the nineteenth century, has an inseparably dual character, involving both theory and practice. Feminism is both a way of thinking about the world and a way of acting in it. Feminism is a perspective that views gender as one of the most important bases of the structure and organisation of the social world. There are liberal, socialist, radical, multicultural feminisms spread all over the world. Whatever the number and quality of those feminisms, all of them have the same goal, the emancipation of women, emancipation based on the realisation of the 'self,' the essential woman.

It is here that Munro can be placed as one who writes about women --women in search of this identity--their 'selves.' She writes about women who critically examine the attitudes and ways of the society, which is exclusively patriarchal in nature. She exposes the duality in the treatment of women by the society. She compares and contrasts women of different groups, of different generations and of different caliber, and also compares and contrasts women with men. It is a sort of friction aesthetics, which emanates sparks of new awareness that illuminates everything that she touches.

Virginia Woolf's critical observation that "wherever one looked men thought about women and thought differently" (Woolf 32) is right as far as Munro's characters are concerned. The girl protagonist Janet in "Boys

and Girls” hates her mother’s world and harbours distrust towards her mother. She thinks that she will be the one assisting her father when she grows up. But her mother constantly reminds her of her femininity. Janet is going through a phase of transition when changes are happening both within her and without. She understands that she is trapped by a rigid code of appearance and behavior defined by prohibitions. She no longer felt safe. She observes:

It seemed that in the minds of the people around me there was a steady under current of thought, not to be deflected on this subject. The word ‘girl’ had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened, like the word ‘child;’ now it appeared it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what it was; it was what I had to become. It was a definition always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. Also it was a joke on me.

(Munro 1968 199)

This situation conforms to Simone de Beauvoir’s comment, “You are not born a woman. You become one” (1972 484). This is one of the leading ideas that Beauvoir stresses in her revolutionary book *Second Sex* where she explains that genetic, glandular and anatomical differences are not adequate definitions of femininity and derives a corollary to it.

She says, "You are not born a male, you become one" (Beauvoir 1972 484), which is true of Laird who is as weak as Janet in childhood. But Laird is growing up. Janet too is growing. And still it is difficult for her to comprehend the difference. Her grandmother, who comes to stay with them, is used to saying, "girls don't slam doors like that. Girls keep their knees together when they sit down" (Munro 1968 199). The worst thing happens when she is put down by an abrupt "that's none of girl's business" (Munro 1968 199). This reminds one of Kamala Das' girl protagonist of her poem "Nani," where the child's inquisitiveness about the death of the maid servant is sharply put down by the grandmother who cannot tell her little granddaughter that Nani is impregnated by a member of her own household. Janet continues to slam the doors and sit as awkwardly as possible, thinking that by such measures, she can keep herself free.

The real awareness of Janet's weakness comes when she, incapable of letting the mare die, lets it free. She identifies herself with the mare--two helpless creatures in the clutches of male culture. Gradually and unknowingly, she begins to accept that boys and girls are different. When Laird scolds her for having let the mare free, she cries and her father just says, "She is only a girl" (Munro 1968 127). Janet, unable to protest, accepts her predicament with resignation. Psychoanalysts may describe this mental state of the female child, the young girl, "as incited to

identification with the mother and father, torn between ‘viriloid’ and feminine tendencies” (Beauvour 1988 83). But Beauvour identifies this as “hesitating between the role of object, other which is offered her, and the assertion of her liberty” (1988 83).

The protagonist of “An Ounce of Cure” is both dazzled and scared of man. She is infatuated by a boy named Martin Collingwood who has played the part of Mr Darcy at a drama in school, because Darcy and Prince Charming are figures that she dreams of. She dreams in order to “accommodate the contrary feeling she bore towards him, so as to dissociate the male in him that frightens her and the bright divinity whom she piously adores” (Beauvour 1988 370). But soon, the girl realises that she is no match for Martin and to get over her depression took a cup full of liquor from the store at the Berryman’s house where she goes baby-sitting. She becomes sick, she calls her friends and the Berryman’s family discovers her half dressed and surrounded by boys. All this leads to the circulation of a number of stories all over the town and the girl is put to mental torture for a long while. It is the girl’s narcissistic fantasies that leads her to such a plight.

The most terrible and fascinating reality of her disaster is the way things happened. All the stories are detrimental to the girl while the boy luxuriates in all his glory. This duality stung the little heart, leading to “a

conflict between her narcissism and the experiences to which she is destined by her sexuality” (Beauvoir 1988 373). But unlike Janet, she is able to “get a glimpse of the shameless, marvelous, shattering absurdity/with which the plots of life, though not of fiction,” are improvised (Munro 1968 87-88). So, in order to meet the fact that she is poorly integrated in society, she tries to pass beyond her limited horizon, by ignoring Martin’s reminiscent smile, passing a gentle uncomprehending look in return, thinking “I am a grown up woman now; let him bury his own catastrophes” (Munro 1968 87-88). Through this character, Munro presents a girl who can give weight to the revolt that set her against the world but rises above her limits to “put in question official optimism, ready-made values, hypocritical and cheerful morality” (Beauvoir 1988 383).

One finds a more powerful exposure of the difference between boys and girls in the chapter “Changes and Ceremonies” of *Lives of Girls and Women*. It begins, “Boys’ hate was dangerous, it was keen and bright, a miraculous birthright, like Arthur’s sword snatched out of the stone in the Grade Seven Reader. Girls hate, in comparison, seemed muddled and tearful, sourly defensive” (Munro 1971 98). This attitude of describing girls as ‘typically female’ is a “depersonalizing stereotype of patriarchy” (Valdes 167). The feminophobia is expressed by Del, “The things they said stripped freedom to be what you wanted, reduced it to what it was

they saw, and that, plainly, was enough to make them gag” (Munro 1971 98). Del’s observation agrees with Maria Elena de Valdes’ words that, “the implication of weakness, dependence, cowardice as opposed to strength, independence and courage are sexist attitude towards women” (Valdes 167).

Munro discusses the problem of gender and sex as understood by the ordinary woman, Naomi, Del’s friend, who retorts, “My mother says it’s the girl’s fault. It’s the girl who is responsible because our sex organs are on the inside and theirs are on the outside and we can control the urges better than they can. A boy can’t help himself” (Munro 1971 99). This conferring of the whole blame on the girl and excusing and protecting the male is yet another form of the sexist attitude shared by women in a patriarchal society.

Munro creates Del in such a way that this sort of explanation does not satisfy her. She strives for better knowledge and her search through Mr Chamberlain, Clive and Garnet French, helps her to form a better view of herself and gain strength to go ahead. Catherine McKinnon agrees, “Gender socialisation is a process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings that exists for men. It is that process through which women internalise (make their own) a male image of their sexuality and their identity as women. It is not just an illusion” (Waugh 1989 150).

Del shatters this illusion. She refuses to look at herself through the eyes of the male and refuses again to become a sexual object for the male.

The stories in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* also sharpen one's sense of difference by the juxtaposition of two ways of life or two ways of being in the world: past and present; old and young; town and city; male and female; and in almost every story, outcasts and those who, to quote the narrator of "Executioners," "succeed with luck and good management, in turning out to seem like anybody else" (Ross 301). "The Found Boat" of the same collection exposes the web of sexism which manacles even the minds of children who play together. For stealing the boat and having a ride and playing, the girls Eva and Carol are equal partners with the boys of the locality. But in the exhilarating moment when they all unbutton their dress, Clayton, one among the boys, "stood up with his cheeks full and made a tight hole in his mouth and shot the water at her as if it was coming out of a hose, hitting her exactly, first one breast and the other. Water from his mouth ran down her body. He hooted to see it, a loud self-conscious sound that nobody would have expected from him" (Munro 1974 110). The retreat or fleeing of the girls cannot be counted as a defect or escape from reality but a movement backward, into their inner selves in order to leap forward with more force and to attack patriarchal society indirectly throwing the remark, "Who cares? We'll say

it's all a lie" (Munro 1974 110). She proves the statement that by "withdrawing she establishes the fact that a woman can lead a life without conforming to these stereotypes and can express her displeasure at such unfair demands by patriarchy" (Jeena 16).

The above illustration explains how the ideology of patriarchy enters as something natural and universal and overpowers the lives of girls. Munro's heroines, though awed at first, learn how to overcome this evil influence that chips their heart and intellect depriving them of the freedom to live like human beings. Though sexist attitude confers weakness, dependence and cowardice upon women, Munroviian characters resist and emerge as strong independent and courageous women. They shun the oppressive domination of males, which always keeps on assuring women that they were not inferior but just different.

In the Eighteenth century, Dr. James Fordyce, in his two volumes of *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), tried to assert, "Instead of power a woman has a special feminine influence which she can exert to moderate masculine behavior" (Spencer 15). Women are told from their infancy and taught by the examples of their mothers, "that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, 'outward' obedience and a scrupulous attention towards a puerile kind of property, will obtain for them the protection of man" (Greer 22). But Munro's characters like

Del of *Lives*, Rose of *Who*, Lydia in “Dulse,” the unnamed protagonist of “Bardon Bus,” Stella of “Lichen,” Pauline of “The Children Stay” are examples of women who have decided not to deceive themselves. They realise the truth that “the character of a woman is continually corroded as she tries to mimic these unnatural manners. She cannot submit, dissimulate or flatter without finally doing harm to the moral imperative to seek reason and justice with which she was born” (Wollstonecraft 54).

Catherine McKinnon states, “Socially femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness which means sexual availability on male terms” (Waugh 50). Del and Rose the two young heroines refuse to be ‘available’ for men. They indulge in sex not as a sacrifice but for their own physical satisfaction. Del dallies with Mr Chamberlain in the hope that something great may happen some day because such are the stories that go around about the mysterious love affair between Fern Dogherty and Mr Chamberlain. She allows Mr Chamberlain purposely to fondle her breasts, and once she goes on a ride with Mr Chamberlain just to be disappointed. She realises that Chamberlain is only a perverse sort of man. But Del is never guilty of her feelings. One is reminded of Wollstonecraft’s quotation of Mary Astell, “Women are from very infancy debarred those advantages with want of which they are afterwards reproached and nursed up in those vices which will hereafter be upbraided to them,” when one reaches that

point in the story when Del's mother advises her not to be distracted over man and be burdened, and also to use her brain and preserve self-respect (Wollstonecraft 32). But Del, unlike ordinary girls, refuses this advice which she thinks equally debarring, "that it was not so different from all other advice handed out to women, to girls, advice that assumed being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud" (Munro 1971 147). Without even thinking about it Del decides to do the same.

Rose, who is making a trip to Toronto, is warned by her stepmother Flo about the white slave people, especially the ones who pretend to be the ministers. On the way, in the train, Rose actually has the experience of meeting a man who, pretending to be asleep, touched her between her legs. Rose does not pull away but waits with "a curiosity. More constant, more imperious, than any lust. A lust in itself, that will make you draw back and wait, wait too long, risk almost everything, just to see what will happen. To see what will happen" (Munro 1978 83-84). She actually experiences pleasure under the stumpy fingers of that man. She is not making herself a prey but is pursuing pleasure for herself. But she scorns the man, saying, "This was a disgrace, this was beggary" (Munro 1978

83), and asserts her freedom, "But what harm in that, we say to ourselves at such moments, what/harm in anything" (Munro 1978 83-84). Here, one finds that like Iris Murdoch's protagonists who "are usually artist, magician/trickster figures who manipulate other people into conformity," Del becomes a writer and Rose becomes an actress, thereby getting out of their own limited sphere defined by sexuality (Waugh 81).

These are just young adolescent girls learning their lives. It is interesting to note what happens if a married woman wants to love for her own sake. The children will be held hostages--as obstruction--in her path to self-satisfaction. But, Munro's 1997 story, "The Children Stay," declares that children are not so much an obstacle as the men who manipulate them. Frank Birbalsingh, in an essay on women characters of Munro, remarks that, "Women feel particularly inhibited, and many of Munro's women characters lead life entirely confined by a routine of domestic chores which they perform as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers" (Birbalsingh 124).

Pauline the young wife, a loving mother, who is always nagged by the father-in-law and forced by her husband to adjust, one fine day takes off on her own with a man she loved. She decides that she will no longer be confined to domestic chores. She abandons her husband, children and her house for the sake of love. Patricia Waugh remarks, "A woman must

continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself... she has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others and ultimately how she appears to men is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life.” (1989 43). Pauline is a character who decided to believe “she will never again care about what rooms she lives in and what sort of clothes she puts on. She will not be looking for that sort of help to give anybody an idea of who she is, what she is like. Not even give herself an idea. What she has done will be enough, it will be the whole thing” (Munro 1997 100). Here, she defies and shatters the usual image of an ordinary woman by refusing to look at herself through other’s eyes. Pauline is different even from Munro’s earlier women who are forced “to grasp whatever straws of satisfaction they can within a world order unjust, cruel or arbitrary” (Birbalsingh 129).

Pauline sympathises and empathises with Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary who are adulterers in the eyes of society. Pauline thinks them to be lucky because, “The sex they were having in the parked cars or the long grass or in each other’s sullied marriage beds or most likely in motels like this one must surely have been splendid” (Munro 1997 102). She continues, “otherwise they would never have got such a yearning for each other’s company at all costs or such a faith that their shared future would

be altogether better and different in kind from what they had in the past” (Munro 1997 102).

Here, one does not see a sacrificing Nora. She is of course, pained when Brain speaks the words, “children stay” (Munro 1997 103). It is like “slamming a board down on her a heavy, formal, righteous threat” (Munro 1997 103). It is there like a “round cold stone in her gullet, like a cannon ball” (Munro 1997 103). Still, she decides not to go back and receive “the sack over her head” (Munro 1997 103). She too, like Simone de Beauvoir, ponders over the question of love, “What is worth of love and human pledges? Is it foolish or generous to believe and to love?,” thereby questioning the very meaning of life (1988 275). Finally, as a passionate and thoughtful woman, she decides to revise the established values of the time. Beauvoir’s comment on such a situation, which puts women in constant danger of indeterminacy, “She can win or lose all in an instant,” is true of Pauline (1988 275). She finally reaches the conclusion, “You lose them anyway. They grow up. For a mother there’s always waiting this private, slightly ridiculous desolation. They’ll forget this time, in one way or another they’ll disown you or hang around till you don’t know what to do about them, the way Brain has” (Munro 1997 103).

She further realises that the pain will become something familiar when it becomes the past that one is grieving for and no longer any possible present. She is right. Her children grow up and do not hate her. This character of Pauline is far advanced from the Janet of "Boys and girls" written in 1968. A lapse of nearly twenty years has marked a sea-change in the attitude of women towards life, though the male society has not changed much. Tracing the development from Janet through Del and Rose to Pauline, one finds a development from the submissive surrender to one's fate, through an act of avoidance of pretenses, into a strong-willed personality capable of deciding what one's own life should be.

There are other women characters that society may deem to be weaklings or lesser characters pushed out into the margins of society. Such women also find an important place in the Munrovia landscape. They are posited as contrasts to the middle class, married and respectable women who were weighed down by the "mind-numbing routine of domestic drudgery" (Wollstonecraft 43). They are "the domestic aunts, grandmothers and spinsters who inhabit the Gothic milieu of the Victorian small town and their primitive sisters on the edge of civilization" (Rasporich 33).

"Walker Brother's Cowboy" presents Nora, the old maid living alone with her blind mother in the countryside. Nora's buoyant life provides

the girl protagonist a double vision of her father, of her mother and of life in general. Nora attracts the attention of the girl because she appears to be “a vibrant flash of color in her soft brilliant dress” (Dance 17). The girl can evaluate the different behavior of the father at home and in the company of Nora. She realises that her father is a good singer and dancer and is capable of enjoying life. But her mother cannot appreciate or admire her father or provide inspiration like Nora because the manacle of domestic drudgery fastened her. She appears to be a “nagging, prematurely aged woman, which was but an outward sign of misery” (Greer 274). Germaine Greer states, “The ignorance and isolation of most women mean that they are incapable of making conversation: most of their communication with their spouses is a continuation of the power struggle” (Greer 286). Here, the protagonist’s mother is isolated by domesticity and illness and her conversation with her spouse is not inspiring or healthy. Munro views it not as a continuation of the power struggle. She looks at this situation with an eye full of sympathy for the miserable woman pining for love and consideration from her husband.

Ben Jordan, the protagonist’s father refuses Nora’s offer for a dance, which exposes the earlier refusal of Nora, and he is unable to do justice to his wife also. Two women are at the same time being jilted by the same man. Here, another important difference between Nora and her mother is

that Nora, who is unmarried has escaped the male trap and so she is free, spirited and full of warmth. But she too is in a way lonely. And Munro, in several of her stories ponders over this question of loneliness of women, and concludes how disgusting, how helpless, how unpleasant it is to be lonely.

Another character is Mary MacQuade who is described formerly as a powerful and ferocious old maid in the short story "Images." She seems to exercise great power and the child protagonist feels that Mary MacQuade has "let her power loose in the house. If she had never come my mother would never have taken to her bed" (Munro 1968 33). At this point, one may examine the opinion of Patricia Waugh, "Sensibility plus power is seen to equal an irrational will to triumph. Images of romantic desire are easily transposed into those of paranoia, a woman, once the source of freedom and unity, become explicitly that other which entraps and threatens" (1989 29). The girl protagonist who has the will to triumph, who has sensibility and power, views Mary MacQuade as one who has the will to triumph, who has the sensibility and power. But she is viewed by the girl's father in a different way. He obeys her orders, accepts any kind of food she prepares and, at the same time, teases the old woman about the man who might come to marry her, thus derogating her to the position of a paranoid. But the girl protagonist's experience with a real

paranoid, Joe, who built his house under the ground imagining that the Silases are always trying to destroy his house, changes her view of her house and of Mary MacQuade. She realises how Mary, who has once been a source of freedom and unity, now gets transformed into that 'other' which entraps and threatens. She also realises that Mary is ferocious and powerful because of the way she is treated in Ben Jordan's family "where all the aunts and cousins and uncles had grown tremendously hardened to any sort of personal cruelty, reckless, even proud, it seemed, of a failure or deformity that could make for general laughter" (Munro 1968 35). At the same time, the protagonist is able to understand that Mary is a poor, lonely being, thereby, unveiling the mystery of the 'iceberg,' that is Mary.

In "Connections," one finds the four Aunts, gaudy in their dress, singing, dancing and believing that they were capable of getting on in this world. They believe that "life is but a dream" (Munro 1982 4). These aunts, who are fond of telling stories, are also eager to trace their tradition back to England, thereby making a myth of their great grandfather. These aunts, when viewed in a casual way by the protagonist seemed to be pretentious, absurd and out of date. Their ideas about men are absurd. They have no proper insight into the worldly life of men and women. But, in the later part of the story, when Aunt Iris has been dismissed by Richard as a "Pathetic old Tart" (Munro 1982 17), she contradicts the

indictment through an ironic recognition of her social status, "I'm with a tour dear, did I tell you? Nine old maids and seven widows and three widowers. Not one married couple. But as I say, you never know the trip's not over yet" (Munro 1982 15). This brings to the reader's mind De Beauvoir's vision of a society in which the negative concept of old age would all but vanish because each individual will participate in communal life and "be an active, useful citizen at every age" (Waxman 1).

The "Stone in the field" also provides the picture of four aunts who were entirely different from the Chaddeleys. The Chaddeleys are all well-educated and have their own identities as working-women. The four Fleming sisters seem to be pinched by "the pain of human contact" (Munro 1982 12). They are completely cut off from the bubbling life of the external world. They conform to the description given by the protagonist of "Bardon Bus" another Munro story, "I think of being an old maid in another generation" (Munro 1982 110). They can make "a little go a long way. A piece of Chinese silk folded in a drawer, worn by touch of fingers in the dark, or the one letter, hidden under maidenly garment, never needing to be opened or read because every word is known by heart, and a touch communicates the whole" (Munro 1982 110). It is enough to have "a life-long secret, a life-long dream-life" (Munro 1982 110). Such a secret is the possession of Aunt Susan. The Aunts seem to be self-composed. But

the protagonist can easily pick up the under tones of being lonely, of the barrenness of their lives, “they were left-overs, really, my mother said so; they belonged to another generation” (Munro 1982 22). But all these defects are nullified when one realises how Munro presents inter-generational knowledge which “includes the recognition of the limits of the purely reproductive function of women and the importance of related activities, such as artistic self-expression and healing, which sustain the reproduction process and the women who are keepers in it” (Brandt 100).

The aunts of the Chaddeleys and Flemings belong to the first generation. The protagonist’s mother belongs to the second generation and the protagonist, to the third. The Chaddeleys are active professionals, the Flemings active as housekeepers; The mother is a professional who ran a business of antique articles, and the girl is learning her lessons of life from them. Aunt Iris teaches her how to overcome the dilemma of her life by placing her in her right position, thereby helping her to accept her role, which she has earlier condemned. Her experience with Aunt Iris is an awakening of her self-hood, which helps her to leap forward into her future with a strong will. Thus, the healing process revitalises the life of the protagonist. Both the Chaddeleys and the Flemings are good storytellers who give wings to the child protagonist’s fancy and promotes her capacity for artistic self-expression.

Nora, Mary, Iris, Susan... the endless names of old maids alienated from the mainstream are found in the stories of Munro. These women are not accepted by the society as normal human beings. Society shuns and puts to mockery such females. Some, like the Chaddeleys, live on in a dream world. They are looked down upon as 'old tarts.' Others, like the Flemings, live isolated and are equated with antiques like the streamed-lined pine furniture. Some are bluntly refused like Nora and others are put to bitter sarcasm like Mary MacQuade. Munro's perception enlivens the sensibility of the readers to the capacity, the vivacity and usefulness of such trifling characters whose lives are further marginalised from the lives of ordinary middle class women.

With this perception, Munro moves a step ahead in her story "Friend of My Youth." Here, her protagonist is a girl who is suspicious of her mother's stories. The mother, who belongs to a generation which cherishes ideas of chastity and purity of character, relates the story of Flora Grieves whom she wishes to name 'The Maiden Lady.' But the girl's vision is clearer; she says, "I could see into my mother's mind. I could see what she would do with Flora, what she had already done. She would make her into a noble figure, one who accepts defection, treachery, who forgives and stands aside, not once but twice. Never a moment of/complaint" (Munro 1999 19-20). So, she decides to alter the story, making it suitable

to the progressive ideas of her time. She wishes to picture Flora as black, “Rejoicing in the bad turns done to her and in her own forgiveness, spying on the shambles of her sister’s life. A Presbyterian witch, reading out of poisonous book” (Munro 1990 20).

The character that troubles the narrator is the silent male figure Robert. He never has a voice in the whole story. But he is indulging in sex with Flora’s sister even when engaged to Flora. So, in the eyes of the narrator, Flora becomes dark because she has turned away from sex. And the story of the angelic Flora explicates the shrewdness of the mother who is trying to advise the daughter to abstain from sex, very much like Del’s mother. She feels that “It’s as if tendencies that seem most deeply rooted in our minds, most private and singular, have come in as spores on the prevailing wind, looking for any likely place to land, any welcome” (Munro 1990 23). The narrator is not ready to welcome the “spores” of such negative ideas, which may pull her back into the abyss of the past.

There are lesser characters like Marjorie and Lily in “The Turkey Season” and Flo in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, “who are folk women, quick, primitive and ironic in seizing advantage and power particularly in the battle of sexes” (Rasporich 73). Marjorie and Lily refuse to take male order “lying down,” and with a black glee characteristic of Munro’s folk types, Marjorie reveals to her female companions that she has threatened

to castrate her son when he wets his bed. One may examine Munro's characters in the light of the earlier concepts about beautiful women of forty, which says:

'[I]t must be full of spider webs inside.' And in truth, cellars and attics, no longer entered, of no use, became full of unseemly mystery; phantoms will likely haunt them; abandoned by people, houses become the abode of spirits. Unless feminine virginity has been dedicated to a God, one easily believes that it implies some kind of marriage with the demon. Virgins unsubdued by man, old women who have escaped his power, are more easily than others regarded as sorceresses; for the lot of woman being bondage to another if she escapes the yoke of man she is ready to accept that of the devil. (Beauvour 187)

The strong characters of Munro prove these ideas, wrong. None of the above characters are sorceresses, but mere human beings made of flesh and blood with feelings either repressed or thwarted like Nora and Mary MacQuade. Munro, with her sympathetic eye, perceives that these hitherto neglected lives are useful to man and society in their own way. Mary is of great help to the protagonist's sick mother; the Aunts provide a connection with the past which gives strength to the protagonist. These

characters receive a definite shape and are deemed primitive ancestral sources of power who, as older sisters, should guide the lives of the future generation. Thus, these women become the crux of the subtext in the Munroian heaven of female goddesses.

Christianity and church have played a great role in the subjugation of women. Churchmen have called women “an occasion of sin to man” (Spencer 15). It was Christianity, says Beauvoir, “which invested woman with a new fighting prestige: fear of other sex is one of the forms assumed by the anguish of man’s uneasy conscience” (Beauvoir 199). All Christian literature strives to enhance the disgust that man can feel for woman. The separate women’s sphere of Victorian times has received much attention, and the evangelical movement has been shown to influence the glorification of woman’s mission in the home during the period 1780-1830. Separation of ‘home’ from ‘work place’ is another concept which asserts that women are special creatures. This view replaces the older view of the sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, when sexual differences are perceived in hierarchical terms, woman being considered essentially similar to men but inferior. The Eighteenth century witnessed a growing interest in defining woman as an individual entity.

Munro fiercely attacks the imposition of feminine ideology through the church. She presents several of her female protagonists as individuals

who resist the notion that this ideology is something omnipresent. One such character is Del Jordan of *Lives of Girls and Women*. She is a girl who has decided to say yes to any experience that comes her way. So she has sexual experience with the perverse and middle-aged Mr Art Chamberlain, her old club acquaintance Jerry, her classmate Clive and then with Garnet French, who belonged to the Baptist church. It is with Garnet French she actually experiences the pleasure of making love. She has never thought of marriage but her lover wants to marry her and have a baby. When she agrees, the true colour of Garnet French is disclosed. He says, "You have to join the church first, you have to be baptized" (Munro 1971 196). Despite resistance, she is pushed under the water, an act in lieu of baptizing. This develops into a deep struggle. When she comes out of the water, she felt amazement, not that she was fighting with Garnet but "that anybody could have made such a mistake, to think he had real power over" her (Munro 1971 197).

Through Del's life, Munro creates a discourse of power--power exercised by man over woman on the pretext of the two major establishments, the Church and Marriage. While making love or, in other words, consuming a woman's body, Garnet French never feels the need of the Church or its rites. But to enter into marriage, a woman has to submit to such powers. By portraying Del as a girl unafraid of the dire

consequences of a relationship with Garnet, Munro places her ahead of the male character.

In the "Visitors," Munro enters into a discussion on the Pentecostal Church, where Mildred, the protagonist, has heard that, "the people spoke in tongues" (Munro 1982 202). Ignorant of the happenings in the Church, she tries to understand things from Grace and Vera. They tell her that it is the voice of God. Mildred, who has been watching the two sisters very closely, recognises that their world is so constricted that they feel frightened when questioned about anything. They are not used to being happy. This is what church has done to them. All restrictions and false notions about life are so well-expressed in every sinew of their life. They appear similar wearing dresses with loose pleats over their flat chests and cardigans in summer. They obviously neglect their own body. Their postures take a regular pattern and they always sit crocheting, as though that is their only mission in life.

Fame in "Progress of Love" describes her mother who prays on her knees at midday, at night, and in the morning. Every day opens up to her to have God's will done. Fame's mother is supposed to have been "saved at a camp meeting when she was fourteen" (Munro 1986 4). Munro, through Fame, sarcastically remarks that her mother goes to church with others who are saved, "some who'd been saved over and over again, enthusiastic old sinners" (Munro 1986 4).

Fame's father too had old church ideas. He remarks, "The lord never intended for people to tear around the country on motor bikes and snow mobiles" (Munro 1986 5). He further says that the Lord "never intended for nurse's uniforms to be pants" (Munro 1986 6). Here, Munro shows how man distorts everything in the name of God and posits a threat to the 'development' and progress of human beings in the modern age. The comment on the nurse's dress is a sense of disgust at the realisation that she is no more an attractive object of male fantasy. Fame's mother teaches her that hatred is always a sin while she herself bears spiteful hatred against her own father. Here, Munro tears the mask worn by people who pretend to be good and obedient and angelic as the Church or the Lord willed it. They preach one thing and practise another. This duality is threatening and dangerous to the personality of individuals, especially women, who are always forced by the male system to be one and behave like another.

Fame experiences the rashness of God when she gets the results of the entrance examination, which provokes her mother to reply, "God didn't care. God isn't interested in what kind of job or what kind of education/ anybody has" (Munro 1986 8-9). This is the first time Fame understands how God can become a real opponent. Earlier, she thinks of God as a kind of nuisance and, at times, she feels that the concept of God is only a

large decoration. Del, Mildred and Fame look upon ideas like chastity, legitimacy and moral codes of behavior as sharp-edged poisonous weapons which are driven into the minds of people through the very forceful civil apparatus of the Church, giving the semblance of something natural and eternal. Munro's characters are capable of critically examining such suppressive ideologies. They prove to be different in that they ward off its tantalising power.

It is not only girls or old maids or housewives who encounter patriarchy as a powerful social construct, but also women who are engaged in different professions. Whether a teacher like Frances of "Accident," a nurse like Mary MacQuade of "Images," a shopkeeper like Gail of "The Jack Randa Hotel," a traveller like Lottar of the "Albanian Virgin," or writers like Lydia of "Dulse," Janet of "Office," Del of "Lives of Girls and Women," protagonist of "Friend of My Youth," etc., they experience oppression in various ways. The most severely attacked are the female writers. "I didn't let that worry me, though I have heard things about writers and artists and that type of person that didn't strike me as very encouraging. You know the sort of thing I mean," says Malley (Munro 1968 69). What sort of thing? Is it about the Duchess of New Castle who is crazy of Fame? Or of Aphra Behn who earns money by writing, sacrificing certain agreeable qualities like chastity? Or Eliza Hay Wood,

the “Juno of majestic size/ with cow like udders, and with ox-like eyes?” (Spencer 5). No. It is not something about the writer as female in sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century, but about a writer in 1968. Mr Malley, an interesting character of Munro’s “Office,” accuses the writer protagonist Janet thus, “And your own attitude, that hasn’t helped to put my mind at ease. Locking yourself in and refusing to answer your door./That’s not a normal way for a person to behave. Not if they got anything to hide. No more than it’s normal for a young woman, says she has a husband and kids, to spend her time rattling away on a typewriter” (Munro 1968 69-70). And Janet suddenly comes to realise that she is not behaving in the ‘normal way’ and, like Virginia Woolf, “thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out,” and “how it is worse perhaps to be/locked in” (Woolf 1928 25-26).

Janet has locked herself away from Malley’s (or male’s?) intrusion. Malley is the owner of the office room rented by Janet. The whole story is woven upon the “Office,” the idea that occurs to her while performing domestic duties. One might doubt why this lady, a rich woman with plenty of space in her house, required an office. Is it because she agrees with Woolf that a woman who can write needs in addition to vote and money a room of her own--a private space? The answer is yes. She “may be claiming a private space in which to experiment with style, to test perception, to

play with fantasies” (Stimpson 1983 119). And here is an important discourse about woman and familial space, about man and woman in relation to the house. Janet is aware of her position as a wife and mother. She knows that the family recognises and accepts that for a man, the work ‘exists.’ She knows how the whole house rearranges itself around him and how he is not troubled with the daily affairs of life, like answering the telephone, finding things or seeing why the children are crying. He can easily shut the door and concentrate on his work. But the case of a mother is different. It is really unbearable--the thought of a mother shutting the door and children knowing that she is behind it. Janet remembers that such women are considered as an offence to nature because she is the house, inseparable. Here props up the concept of woman as the ‘angel’-- “the selfless, self-denying, sacrificing, complaint angel--a symbol of purity and beauty” (Pandya 42).

“The angel in the house” is “an obstacle, immensely powerful, in the way of a woman’s creative quest,” according to Virginia Woolf (1979 12). Elaine Showalter adds, “To borrow her own murderous imagery, a woman writer must kill the angel in the house, that phantom of female perfections who stand in the way of freedom” (Eagleton 1991 26). But, G.D. Leavis observes, “I feel bound to disagree with Mrs Woolf’s assumption that running a house and unaided necessarily hinders or

weakens thinking. One's own kitchen and nursery, and not the drawing room and dinner table where tired professional men relax among the ladies (thus Mrs Woolf) is the realm where living takes place, and I see no profit in letting our servants live for us" (Eagleton 1991 35). Munro's Janet thinks exactly like Woolf and decides to rent a room in which she can sit and write peacefully. She feels that "the solution" of her "life occurred" to her (Munro 1968 59). She seeks her husband's permission, goes to the next street where she has seen the board 'to let' on top of a building. She gets the room quite easily for a monthly rent of twentyfive dollars. But it does not prove to be the solution to her life. Mr Malley a very malicious house owner, interrupts her work frequently with gifts and talks to her frequently using the words 'bad feelings,' 'offended,' 'apologize,' etc. with extra emphasis.

Here, it would be interesting to ask the question, who is being offended--Malley or Janet? An Offender always pretends that he is himself a victim of offenders. Such is the case of Mr Malley. The very first time he intrudes upon the world of Janet, he tells her stories of how every other human in this world has cheated him, kicked him down to the ground and then tread upon his broken heart and has gone away. It is obvious that Malley intends to get a sympathetic tolerance from Janet and he succeeds. Janet is taken in by the potted plant, which Munro presents as a symbol of

the friendship Malley wants to grow between Janet and himself. It is a potted plant; it is artificial like the friendship of Malley towards Janet. It will survive only if tended with extreme care and that Malley does by bringing more gifts to her. But on the day, when Janet realised the duplicity of Malley. When she suffers his first shower of abuse, “that day I saw the earth was dry around the roots of the plant; I let it alone” clearly manifests the barrenness that occurs in their relationship (Munro 1968 69). The mind lights upon the simple equation, “Men’s (poems) stories = masculine stereotype: false, women’s (poems) stories = female experience: true,” proving how different and false are the stories of Malley and how true is the story of Janet which is in reality the female experience (Montefiore 15).

Female experience is what Munro describes in “Office” which is the larger story that serves as a frame encompassing three other stories: 1. The story of a series of calamities and back-pinching that Malley experiences. 2. The story about the dentist who made the room sound-proof so that Malley will not know of his illegal practices. 3. The story about voices in Janet’s room, her friendship with the men at the coffee house. This is a mature phase of her return to her own space--the familial space--where she can as well fly off into her creative world if she can keep aside sentiments and detach herself or impersonate herself during the process of writing. The door of convictions and prejudices of a female

writer is to be shut and the mind's door opened to receive, accept and reconcile with the mundane realities. Like Cervantes' "venture into a world devoid of the supreme judge" (Kundera 6), Munro's Janet provides an image of a woman deprived of the house, "I have opened the windows and felt the house shrink back into wood and/plaster and those humble elements of which it is made, and the life in it subside, leaving me exposed, empty handed but feeling a fierce and lawless quiver of freedom, of loneliness too harsh and perfect for me to bear," which shows the anxiety of a writer as female (Munro 1968 60-61).

The anxiety, "The lawless quiver of freedom," again is one of the concerns of feminism (Munro 1968 61). Freedom! For what? Is it freedom from family or from the society, with its male chauvinism? The answer is negative. While examining the story, one finds that the writer protagonist is not free. She has a sentimental attachment to the house, the husband and the children. She makes a cowardly escape into an 'office,' which is the room that becomes the breeding ground of many stories like Janet creating trouble to Malley's wife, whiskey bottle in the garbage and, finally the drawings and comments on the wall of the washroom done with lipstick. Janet realises that these stories of Malley are, "invoked for symbolic purposes" (Munro 1968 71). The first two are stories related by Malley to Janet and the last is her own experience, which awakens herself into the

complexity, duplicity and treachery of Mr Malley's mind capable of inventing legends. She can picture it well in her mind though she has never seen it in reality, "Mr Malley with his rags and brushes and a pail of soapy water, scrubbing in his own clumsy way, his deliberately clumsy way at the toilet walls, stooping with difficulty, breathing sorrowfully, arranging in his mind the bizarre but somehow never quite satisfactory narrative of yet another betrayal of trust" (Munro 1982 74). Janet packs off her things in her car and begins her journey.

The journey serves as an important phase in the development of Janet as a female writer. First is her journey into the open world prompted by an unquenching desire to stay away from family. She feels that the family is an obstacle, which signifies the feminist phase of the early twentieth century. The second is that of the writer as woman coming face to face with reality and arriving at a realisation of her 'self' as detached from the male-dominated world, which, is the ultimate end for the feminist quest for identity. And the third is the liberation of her mind. But she cannot be free and ultimately has to flee. Munro does not specify whether she goes out into the wilderness of the world, wearing the "shirt of Nessus," without any apprehension of what is to be, which, in turn signifies the period of indeterminacy concerning the feminine (Shakespeare 169).

This indeterminacy takes several turns before it reaches its goal, as Elaine Showalter rightly observes, “First, then is a prolonged phase of imitation of the modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally there is a phase of self-discovery a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity” (Eagleton 13). Correspondingly, one finds Janet imitating the tradition of her notion of the ‘office’ or the ‘private space’ that usually men possess. Then she moves on by internalising the different standards and values by trying to adjust with Mr Malley, and goes through the second phase of protest and advocacy for woman’s rights and values, by locking the room from within and refusing to hear the knock and not answering the notes stuck on the door by Mr Malley. This in a sense, is her way of confirming that it is right to be alone. Thirdly, she comes to self-discovery by realising the treachery of Malley and the fact that her idea of a peaceful private space is impossible with such people as Malley existing in the world. And thus, through this story, Munro draws the graph of the development of feminism that Elaine Showalter terms as the “Feminine, feminist and female” (Eagleton 13).

The following features of feminist theories are worthy to be mentioned. Joan Scott believes that feminist history will become “not the recounting of great deeds performed by women but the exposure of the often silent and hidden operation of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organization of most societies” (Brandt 38). Munro is not recounting the great deeds performed by Janet but exposing the silent and hidden operation of gender through the actions of Malley showing how they define the forces in the organisation of the society. Thus, Munro, conforming to Joan Scott confronts the politics of existing histories that are, Mr Malley’s story about himself and the dentist who has formerly inhabited the room, and begins to rewrite history from a different perspective provided by the real experience of Janet.

One naturally begins to wonder about the solution to life while discussing the issues of male conviction of the female tradition, private space, the family, the atrocious nature of male world, journey as motif, the freedom, indeterminacy and rewriting of history through the story “Office.” Here, one sees Catherine. R. Stimpson, in her essay “Feminism and Feminist” showing an alternative, “feminist writers are now publishing utopian narratives that provide material for the political imagination. They offer a number of models for a new community: all female societies; genuinely egalitarian cultures” (Stimpson 119). Are these models suitable

and sufficient for a woman writer? Or will it suffice if the female writer breaks the familial fetters and move on to face the world single-handedly? That Munro does not accept all female societies is evident in her portrayal of Lydia, the writer-narrator, of "Dulse," as opposed to the lesbian writer, Willa Cather. She subverts the esteem Lydia possesses for Willa Cather by the explication of the mind of Mr. Stanley who has become an impassé. Neither does she accept all male societies, as depicted in her story "Turkey Season" where she portrays homosexuals as considered harmless by women. Androgyny, as Woolf advocates, has also not been accepted by later feminists and Munro too. She strictly adheres to the reality of being female. She is not ready to escape the bash-trap through easy means. Instead, she posits writer characters like Del and Rose who understand, rebel and fight back powerfully and carefully, climbing one step after another towards character evolution. Egalitarian culture may be more suitable for Munro because she presents an array of diverse types of women.

Munro, through her stories about Janet, Del, Rose, Lydia, Almeda Roth, and Fame, shows how a female writer can cultivate and gain maturity and vision through the mundane realities. Del hears and experiences a lot of things in her life and she "saw that the only thing to do with my life was to write a novel" (Munro 1971 203). For that she gets rid of certain

characters because she thinks “three tragic destinies were too much even for a book, and certainly more than I could handle” (Munro 1971 204). In the process of writing, “the reasons for things happening I seemed regularly to know, but I could not explain; I expected all that would come clear later. The main thing was that it seemed true to me, not real but true, as if I had discovered, not made up, such people and such a story, as if that town was lying close behind the one I walked through everyday,” just as her mother used to say that she lived at the end of the Flats Road (Munro 1971 206). But what surprises Del is the shocking nature of reality. She exclaims, “when you have dealt so cunningly, powerfully, with reality, to come back and find it still there” (Munro 1971 209). She also becomes aware that “People’s lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable--deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum” (Munro 1971 210).

Kitchen linoleum is a reality so much connected with women. For Munro, the house, the kitchen, the washing, working, stitching, etc. are a source of experience as “a thought to Donne was an experience” (Enright and Chickera 307) to quote T.S Eliot. In the story “Material,” Munro’s narrator says, “the wives of the men on the platform are not in that audience. They are buying groceries or cleaning up messes or having a drink. Their lives are concerned with food or mess and houses and cars and money.

They have to remember to get the snow tires on and go to the bank and get back the beer bottles, because their husbands are such brilliant, such talented incapable men, who must be looked after for the words that will come from them”(Munro 1974 20). This sardonic remark extends to Gabriel’s remark that “he enjoyed life” (Munro 1974 22). The narrator is embarrassed that he does not say he believes in enjoying it and her remark was, “I never believed people who said such things” (Munro 1974 22).

She further compares and contrasts a male writer and a female writer. She is looking at the picture of her former husband, an intellectual, and a writer whose latest book has been published. She explicates the writing on the cover of the book:

The student wife, it seems, got stuck with all the children, what happened to Mary Frances, did she die, is she liberated, did he drive her crazy? But listen to the lies, the half- lies, the absurdities. He ‘lives on the side of a mountain above Vancouver.’ It sounds as if he lives in a wilderness cabin, and all it means, I am willing to bet, is that he lives in an ordinary comfortable house in North or West Vancouver, which now stretch far up the mountain. He has sporadically affiliated with various academic communities! What does that mean? If it means he taught for years, most of his adult

life, at universities, that teaching at universities has been the only steady well-paid job he has ever had, why doesn't it say so? You would think he came out of the bush now and then to fling them scraps of wisdom, to give them a demonstration of what a real male 'writer' is. (Munro 1974 24)

Munro's narrator here questions the authenticity of this ennobling representation of a male writer different from the portrayal of Eliza Heywood as Juno with cow-like udders or of Mary Wollstonecraft as a hyena in petticoats. She looks at the picture and says, "Look at you, Hugo, your image is not only fake but out-of-date" (Munro 1974 25). She goes into her past memories and comes out with the true colour of Hugo the man. Once, the narrator comments about their bathroom, which was deep orange yellow, "It's like being inside a cheese," an original comment typical of a woman who is concerned with cheese and food and kitchen. But Hugo is ready to take it and distort as "It's like peeing inside a cheese" (Munro 1974 26). The narrator hears the live history of Dotty who is often mentioned as a harlot and she thinks, "This is life fresh from books, classes, essays, discussions" (Munro 1974 27). But Hugo, on the other hand, says, "he could not look at her without thinking of the word lumpen, but he supposed she might be nourishing, like oatmeal porridge" (Munro

1974 28). Here, two ways of looking at women are in conflict wherein a female writer is interested in the life of another woman, but the male writer is interested in her as a dish, as something to be consumed, to be used as a commodity. The narrator has ideas about how a writer should be and Hugo does not conform to these ideas. She believes that “He did not have the authority I thought the writer should have” (Munro 1974 29). But the book then released is written by Hugo. It is about Dotty. But “she has been changed in some unimportant ways and the main incident concerning her has been invented, or grafted on from some other reality” (Munro 1974 35). Leaving aside the real life of Dotty, he has manipulated the surface details.

This example is proof of Munro’s suspicion about representation of woman by male writers. K. K. Ruthven explains, “If you are a man and you decide to take a look at feminist criticism, you may find yourself at risk from feminist mode of cinematic discourse which categorizes ‘looking’ as a morbid activity engaged in by men to the detriment of women, who are reduced consequently to mere objects of voyeuristic attention” (Ruthven 1). Yes, that is what happened here. Hugo is a representative of the patriarchal society and “he simply complies with the rules of a symbolic order of representation which displays women’s ideas in the same way that films and girlie magazines display their bodies, and for the same

purpose: ‘vulgar curiosity and the arousal of desire’” (Ruthven 1). The narrator acknowledges the artfulness of Hugo. She delightfully accepts the fact that Dotty “Has passed into art” which does not happen to everybody (Munro 1974 35). But she is not satisfied with this “fine and lucky benevolence” (Munro 1974 35). She writes to Hugo, “This is not enough, Hugo. You think it is, but it isn’t. You are mistaken, Hugo” (Munro 1974 36).

Thus Munro provides no escape from realities but emphasises through each female character, the necessity to reconcile with the domestic realities rather than seek for a solution that transcends the hazy horizon of truth. The reconciliation cannot be achieved by the female standing aloof from the male world or by willfully submitting to it. Munro explains this in her story “Meneseteung.” She presents the figure of the Victorian poetess Almeda Joynt Roth who, from her earliest years has realised, “My fingers, indeed, were always too clumsy for crochet work, and these dazzling productions of embroidery which one sees often today--the over flowering fruit and flower baskets, the little Dutch boys, the bonneted maidens with their watering cans--have like/wise proved to be beyond my skill” (Munro 1990 51-52). So she decides to spend her leisure in composing “rude posies, ballads, couplets and reflections” (Munro 1990 52). Her house “faces on Dufferin Street, which is a street of considerable respectability.

On this street, merchants, a mill owner, an operator of salt wells have their houses. But Pearl Street, which her back windows overlook and her back windows open onto, is another story. Workmen's houses are adjacent to hers. Small but recent row of houses--that is all right. Things deteriorate towards the end of the block, and the next, last one becomes dismal" (Munro 1990 55).

Munro has "consciously set out to create in Almeda a poet-figure in a small Ontario town out at the edge of Victorian civilization," like Del living at the end of the flats road (McCarthy 1). The narrator is Almeda Roth who tries to understand the nineteenth century poetess Almeda Joynt Roth in connection with the name Meda she discovers in the book of poems. The narrator gradually merges with the character and dreams back to the "nineteenth-century woman in order to dream her forward into her own contemporary consciousness, a consciousness which identifies the other's eccentricity as her mystery and her saving difference" (McCarthy 3). Here, the narrator dissolves into Almeda Joynt Roth and goes through her experience of perceiving the atrocity done to a woman in the back street and realises that the Victorian poetess, stunned by reality flew into the safe refuge of eccentricity. At the same time Almeda, the narrator, looks from the twentieth century to the nineteenth, "as if through the wrong end of a telescope, and seeing a life small and alien, inviting the Gestalt of

stereotype--yet another mad woman in the century's attic, a victim of patriarchal oppression" (McCarthy 3). She also realises that Almeda is capable of looking deep into 'Meneseteung,' which is the river of life and see through the artificiality and artistry of the crocheted roses on the tablecloth. She is happy "she doesn't mistake that for reality, and that is how she knows that she is sane" (Munro 1990 71). Almeda, the narrator, is delighted by this new discovery. For her, "It was a private sort of memorializing, not for the world" (Munro 1990 72). Because to the world Almeda Joynt Roth is a mad woman in the attic. Through the narrator Almeda, Munro revives a creative artist, another one overshadowed by patriarchy like Aphra Behn, Sapho, Eliza Heywood and the like.

The above examples show:

[A]s writers female writers are like male writers. They have the same professional concerns, they have to deal with the same contracts and publishing procedures, they have the same need for solitude to work and the same desire that their work be accurately evaluated by reviewers. There is nothing "male" or "female" about these concerns and needs; they are just attributes of writing as an activity. As biological specimens and as citizens, however, women writers are like other women: subject to the same discriminating laws, encountering

the same demeaning attitudes, burdened with the same good reasons for not walking through the park alone after dark. They too have bodies, the capacity to bear children; they too eat, sleep, bleed and go to bank. (Atwood 261)

Munro's writer characters quite often find themselves at a point of tension being aware that their writing "both challenges the conventional view of what is appropriate for women and encroaches on what some see as a male preserve," as in "Office" (Eagleton 1991 40). They try to question in the line of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar whether "a pen is a metaphorical penis?" (Eagleton 1991 40). They subvert the so-called authority of the male author, the right to create, control and possess as in "Material," and attempt to shatter the concept of male and female styles in writing which Margaret Atwood terms the "Quiller-Couch Syndrome" prevalent in the twentieth century (Eagleton 1991 42).

As she sets out to revivify the status of Almeda Joynt Roth, Munro revisits, re-visions, revives and recreates the lost mothers to reclaim what has been lost--a whole generation that was lost during the Victorian age. "Re-vision' is how Andriene Rich describes women's reading, that act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Godard 112).

Munro's first attempt at this is the story "Peace of Utrecht" in her first collection of short stories *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968). It is a process similar to the Japanese self-observation method called Naikan Therapy, "in which the disciplinant examines and reflects on his past experience, and through the reflection completes the self-reformation" (Muriel 138). Because "adolescence is much more interesting than was in terms of plot, than motherhood, because the maternal, a' la Newman, Freud, Lacan, Jung, is unspeakable, unrepresentable, unconscious, associated with death, double-handed, because in order to tell the mother story in order to make a place for it, you must effectively challenge the master narrative of Western history, which is to say there isn't room for the mother as subject in the Western conception of narrative as it now stands" (Brandt 6).

One can say that Munro challenges Western narrative because she seriously provides a room for the mother's figure and mother is not equivalent to death but a birth--a beginning. In her stories, Munro uses the idea of Death not as an ending but as a beginning--a beginning of her voyage into the unfathomable past, to find not the holy grail, but the shattered shells where pearls of experience are hidden, to accept it in such a way as to realise one's 'self' and move forward into the future life with added strength and wisdom. Using elegy as a trope, Munro breaks the symbiotic hold of relationship to see the woman in the mother.

Munro's earlier heroines of the stories "Walker Brothers Cowboy," "Images," "Red Dress," "Boys and Girls," etc., present adolescent children who, because they are neglected and misunderstood, "seek consolation in narcissistic fancies. They see themselves as romantic heroines of fiction, with self-admiration and self-pity. Quite naturally, they become coquettish and stagey, these defects becoming more at puberty" (Beauvoir 324). In "Walker Brothers Cowboy," the protagonist is a little girl who understands things as they are. She gets an opportunity to meet Nora a country woman who provides scope for a contrast with her mother who is always dull, pessimistic, worried and stuck in the house. Her mother is happy recounting the good old days before depression. She often tries to behave and speak in the manner of a lady that she was in those happy days and the little girl would "pretend to remember/....wary of being trapped into sympathy or any unwanted emotion" (Munro 1968 5-6). In contrast to her mother, who is always worried about her husband and children, she sees Nora, the dazzling maid, who sings and dances and makes them, especially her father, happy. She cannot understand the patriarchal force that binds a wife to the domestic world, which does not pose a hindrance in the case of Nora because she is an old maid. But the child can see vaguely the plight of Nora being refused by her man, her lover and being thrown into the fringes of life to dance alone.

In "Images," the girl has a little more sympathy towards her mother, but still, when her mother talks about herself, "Every time she said mother I felt chilled, and a kind of wretchedness and shame spread through me as it did at the name of Jesus. This 'Mother' that my own real, warm-necked, irascible and comforting human mother set up between us an everlasting wounded phantom, sorrowing like Him over all the wickedness I did not know I would commit" (Munro 1968 33). Her helpless mother, who has forgotten all her fantastic stories about princes and even her own childhood, her dependence on the fierce Mary MacQuade, makes the little girl feel lonesome and incapable to comprehend the situation.

In "Boys and Girls," the girl protagonist who indulges in fantastic narcissistic dreams, is more interested in helping her father with the fox-farming rather than her poor mother who had no time at all with all the fruits ready to be made into jelly and jam and the rest of the household work which seems dull and boring. The girl is eager to get out of that world because she "hated the hot dark kitchen in summer, the green builds and fly papers and the same oil cloth table and wavy mirror and bumpy linoleum" (Munro 1968 117). She feels that "the work in the house was endless, dreary and peculiarly depressing; work done out of doors; and in my father's service, was ritualistically important" (Munro 1968 117). She is disgusted at the dead-quiet, regretful way her mother talks about her

and feels that her mother is not to be trusted because the “real reasons for the things she said and did were not to be known” (Munro 1968 117). She also thinks that mother is plotting to keep her inside the house.

In “Red Dress-1946,” one finds the girl not only disgusted but also angry with her mother. Her mother is fond of making dresses for her but they are done in the Victorian fashion. The girl says, “I had worn these clothes with docility; even pleasure, in the days when I was unaware of the world’s opinion. Now, grown wiser, I wished for dresses like those my friend Lonnie had bought at Beale’s store” (Munro 1968 148). She is also enraged by Lonnie’s airs of a grown-up. On the day of the dance at school, the girl is forced to wear the Red Dress her mother has made. Her inferiority complex, made her keep away from the general enjoyment at the dance. But to her surprise, she is asked to dance with a boy Raymond Bolting who accompanies her to her house and kisses her when they part. Then she enters the house and sees her mother sitting by the kitchen window, “she was sitting with feet on the open oven door, drinking tea out of a cup without saucer, she was just sitting and waiting for me to come home and tell her everything that had happened. And I would not do it, I never would” (Munro 1968 160).

Again, in “Peace of Utrecht,” this strained relationship between daughter and mother is at its peak. As Helen returns home and is climbing

the steps, she feels that she hears her mother's voice call out "*Who's there....the cry for help--undisguised, oh, shamefully undisguised and raw and supplicating--that sounded in her voice*" (Munro 1968 198). Helen and Maddy have recognised it only as part of those household sounds which must be dealt with and they used to say, "You go and deal with mother," or "I'll be out in a minute, I have to deal with mother" (Munro 1968 198). There is never a moment's recognition of the real state of affairs or a glint of pity shown towards her. Then, she would cry and to stop it, they are forced into "parodies of love" (Munro 1968 199). Later they became cunning, unfailing in cold solitude and took away from her all anger and impatience and disgust. They took all emotion away from their dealing with her, as one might take away meat from a prisoner to weaken him, till he died. They used to advise her to listen to music and coax her to be grateful that at least she was not in pain. But mother continued to complain, even to strangers, "Everything has been taken away from me" (Munro 1968 199). The children are never able to understand the plight behind this cry.

On close scrutiny, one would be forced to agree with Marianne Hirsch that "the greatest tragedy that can occur between mother and daughter is when they cease being able to speak and to listen to one another" (Brandt 31). This is a phase of avoidance and discomfort with the maternal,

which Hirsch identifies. She argues that it accounts for the ongoing ambivalence towards the maternal in feminist thought:

1. The perception that motherhood remains a patriarchal construction, that is to say, buying into the idea of mother as a unified subject and ignoring her multiple and divided subjectivity within patriarchy;
 2. Discomfort with the vulnerabilities and dependencies of maternity, which are tied up with the vulnerability/power of the maternal body;
 3. Fear of the body and, especially, the maternity with sexuality; and
 4. Ongoing ambivalence towards power, authority and particularly, anger in feminist discourse.
- (Brandt 47)

Here, Munro brings out the lack of perception, which binds the girl protagonists of the above stories about their mother as a divided subject within patriarchy--she is supposed to be wife, mother, housekeeper and lot more in a house. But for a child, she is only the mother. This narrowness of perception--not being able to see her mother as a woman--natural to a child may be one of the reasons for the friction between mother and daughter. The 'vulnerabilities and dependencies' as in "Images" and "Peace of Utrecht" is also disgusting for the girl child. In the "Images," the mother pleads with Mary MacQuade to do this and that for her. In "Peace

of Utrecht,” she is so demanding and complaining that she shamelessly pleads for love from her children. Another aspect is the question of ‘exercising authority.’ The narrators of “Boys and Girls” and “Red Dress-1946” experience this anxiety of influence most. And their rebellion becomes more violent because the mother has lost her prestige:

She is the one who waits, submits, complains, weeps, makes scenes: an ungrateful role that in daily life leads to no apotheosis, as a victim she is looked down on; as a shrew, detested; her fate seems the prototype of rapid recurrence: life only repeats in her, without going anywhere; firmly set in her role as housekeeper, she puts a stop to the expansion of existence, she becomes obstacle and negation. (Beauvoir 322)

Early Munroian mothers are sick; they wait, submit, complain, weep and make scenes. They limit themselves to the house, not going anywhere as in “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” “Boys and Girls,” “Red Dress-1946,” “Peace of Utrecht,” etc.. And daughters like the narrator of “Boys and Girls” hate being like her with “bare lumpy legs, not touched by the sun” or “apron still on and damp across the stomach from the supper dishes” (Munro 1968 116).

The Mother/daughter plot is a new politicised model of narrative, according to Diana Brandt. It is not based on separation and maternal

absence and death, but, rather, on the intimate interaction of the mother with the world around her, and with her child. And Nancy Chodorov sees the inadequate relationship between daughters and mothers in western culture as “the oppression of motherhood as a social situation” (Brandt 23). Andrienne Rich calls it “the great unwritten story,” of western culture (Brandt 49). Diana further remarks that “In denying women, and particularly mothers, social power, in silencing the older maternal voice, which would protest this loss of place and power, and privileging instead the voices of younger women who exist in a daughterly relation to patriarchy, western culture has inscribed alienation in the mother-daughter relationship” (Brandt 49). The alienation of mother and daughter is well expressed through “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” “Boys and Girls,” “Red Dress- 1946” and especially “Peace of Utrecht.”

But “Peace of Utrecht” is a turning point in Munro’s perception of mother-daughter relationship. In it one finds not the inexperienced child, but a mature woman, Helen herself a mother. She is trying to re-live the past and “connect the buried (the nonsynchronous), the disqualified (the minor) and the yet-to-come (the Utopian, or better, the desired) in concerted cultural practices” (Waugh 35). She goes back into her childhood, analyses her mother’s behaviour towards her and vice-versa; then she comes to new realisations. In this process, she “comes to terms with the repressed,

the feared, and the desired” (Waugh 36). To accelerate the process of transformation, the aunts, the forgotten, neglected, old maids, act as a catalyst, showing Helen the woolen dress her mother used to wear; they tell her how she has tried to run away from the Home where Maddy has put her. Helen begins to feel the guilt, the responsibility for having failed to understand her mother. And “the feeling of loss and need to seek reparation” is strengthened in Helen (Waugh 80).

Patricia Waugh explains, “In formal aesthetic terms, breaking down boundaries, loosening distinct outlines, merging the individual with the collective, and exploring the ambiguity of identity at the interface of subject and object are likely to be strong in women writers” (Waugh 80). It is true in the case of Munro. She describes Jubilee in “Peace of Utrecht” thus, “The rhythm of life in Jubilee is primitively seasonal. Deaths occur in the winter; marriages are celebrated in summer” (Munro 1968 194). Death is a catastrophe to be dealt with--with great difficulty. Helen hears about her mother’s funeral from the people who says ‘your mother,’ which she feels as a “knowing cunning blow,” at her pride (Munro 1968 194). Now she listens to them speak so gently and ceremoniously about mother and Helen realises, “she has become one of the town’s possessions and oddities, its brief legends” (Munro 1968 194). It is this legend that is explicated through the memory of Helen spurred by Aunt Annie’s words.

An alternative reading of the mother is provided here, which shows how much she loves life. All her complaints, her pleas, are to come back to life. Her interest in ordinary new dress is only a projection of her wish to be in the world to escape from leading a vegetable existence. The picture of mother running away from the Home, down the street, in that cold winter morning haunts Helen and asserts the fact that she has loved life so much. She is fleeing from death. She has not wished to die. She has not satisfied her desires in life. She is not ready to submit to death so early. It is her depressed condition that makes her complain that everything has been taken away from her. Yes, early illness and death deprive woman of all pleasures of life.

Munro, with her added awareness, moves further, introducing a new narrative in which the mother and daughter talk to one another, “where daughters learn from the struggle with their daughters” (Brandt 49). The reader is introduced into the book *Lives of Girls and Women* where Del learns from her mother to perceive life in a different way. The life of Uncle Benny that Del used to look at with surprise is tilted upside down by mother’s remark, “Uncle Benny could have made up the beatings and took that for comfort; how was he to be trusted? Madeleine herself was like something he might have made up” (Munro 1971 23). This suspicion about truth is shared by Del who gains a critical style of observation.

The story of Mary Agnes, her mother tells, has taught her that nakedness is shameful and “that some degradation was possible, if ever you were persuaded to go off with boys” (Munro 1971 36). At that age, it is a revelation and the girl felt outraged, even frantic when the doctor pulls down her pants to vaccinate against smallpox. But as she grows up, she learns more about her own body as well as the male body. Even then, her mother advises her not to get the burden that usually girls fall prey to. Here, Del casually remarks that there are birth control measures to avoid that. But again mother insists that a girl is to safeguard her self-respect and Del thinks it is the usual advice, which emphasises that there is something so damaging in woman’s sexuality. She decides to abandon such ideas and take what experience life may provide. But the spirit of independence is something she gains from her mother whom she describes as Princess Ida. On the subject of marriage, Del accepts her mother’s notion that a girl is not someone to be pinned down by such ceremonies to a particular place or a home, that there are possibilities of development outside Jubilee that a girl may seek for herself. She becomes a writer.

In “Connections,” one finds the mother figure a freer spirit capable of laughter and enjoyment like the Aunts. In “Stone in the Field” also, mother is an educated person who has an antique sales agency. “Progress of Love” explicates the story of Fame’s mother, Marietta. Fame’s own

ideas of her mother and the stories she tells her about her childhood-- about father's tyranny, the mother's attempted suicide and about Aunt Beryl are stored up in Fame's mind. She later gets ideas different from what the earlier experiences have provided. The event in which Marietta burns the money that she receives from her father whom she always hated, is an example. Fame has seen mother throwing the bills into the fire with father standing security to her and watching. But later, when Beryl, a more practical person, asks Fame's father why he did not stop Marietta's foolish sentiments, Marietta declares that father has not been there at all. The opposition between the action and the narration of the action confuses Fame, but it sharpens the sensibility, and she stops telling the story to anyone because she realises that each narration falsifies the actual experience. Here, the relation between Marietta and Fame is one of the storyteller and the listener, the narrator and the narratee. At first, Fame tells stories to her friends about things past. But her experience awakens her awareness and she deterred from the path of story-telling because no story is real. She is doubtful about the authenticity of the narrative. She also disagrees with her mother with regard to ideas about God. Marietta believes in salvation and being saved. But Fame, who realises that Marietta often manipulates God for her own purposes, declines that faith.

“Friend of My Youth” is another story where mother tells stories to her daughter. She says the story of Flora and Ellie the Grieves' sisters.

Flora is engaged to Robert and one fine morning, realises that Ellie is pregnant ; Flora conducts their marriage and withdraws to the backyard. Later, Ellie becomes sick of frequent pregnancies and abortions. Flora is ready to help. When it is known that Ellie is having a growth, a nurse named Atkinson is hired. Later, she becomes the lady of the house by marrying Robert. This story is told by mother in such a fashion that Flora is portrayed as a brilliant lady who sacrifices her worldly life twice for the sake of Robert whom she once loved. Mother has once written a letter to Flora after hearing these stories. “Being removed from the scene, and perhaps in a flurry of importance due to her own newly married state, she may have lost sight of the kind of person she was writing to,” says the intelligent daughter (Munro 1990 19). She is able to see through the gaze of Flora as well as the artifice in the way mother narrated. She cannot digest the ‘noble Flora’ of her mother’s story. She considers Flora as black, “Rejoicing in the bad turns done to her and in her own forgiveness, spying on the shambles of her sister’s life” (Munro 1990 20).

The daughter gets the message her mother is trying to convey: to abstain from sex, because she has grown up in a time and place where sex is a dark understanding for women, “so she honoured the decency, the prudery, the frigidity that might protect” a girl (Munro 1990 22). The daughter grows up in the horror of that very protection, which she refers

to as “dainty tyrannies,” which “extend to all areas of life, to enforce tea parties and white gloves and all other sorts of tinkling inanities,” that belong to the tradition of the ‘Feminine Mystique’ as Betty Friedan would put it (Munro 1990 22). It alerts the girl of a personal danger she, “felt a great fog of platitudes and pieties lurking, an incontestable crippled-mother power, which could capture and choke me. There would be no end to it. I have to keep myself sharp-tongued and cynical, arguing and deflating. Eventually I gave up even that recognition and opposed her in silence” (Munro 1990 20). Here, the girl takes the message, fights back and finds that it is hopeless trying to change her mother and decides to change herself by changing her ideas of life.

In all the above mentioned stories, one finds the Mother figure being treated as a story-teller who does the duty of handing down knowledge personally from mother to daughter. Munro does not restrict this power of story-telling to biological mothers only. She extends this capacity to the notion of mother-hood beyond the partners of biological maternity, to adoptive and surrogate mothers as in *Who do You Think You are?*. Here, Rose, the protagonist, hears the story of her mother’s death from Flo her stepmother. Listening to various stories told by Flo sharpened Rose’s senses . And she used to listen to the men at the coffee house “chucking, drifting into aimless obscenity on the subject of women walking

by, or any young girl on a bicycle” (Munro 1978 4). Before she is old enough to go to school Rose, used to be at the store along with Flo, from whom she hears the story of Becky Tyde. “Present time and past, the shady melodramatic past of Flo’s stories, were quite separate, at least for Rose. Present people could not be fitted into the past” (Munro 1978 10). Then suddenly, she concludes with a “that was all,” and Rose feels that “Flo put the lid down on the story as if she was sick of it” (Munro 1978 12).

Gaining ideas from these stories, Rose begins to imagine Flo’s life before she has married Rose’s father. From Flo, she gains a way of collecting even minute details and when Rose begins to go to school, “Flo and Rose switched roles. Now Rose was the one bringing stories home” (Munro 1978 54). When Rose leaves Hanratty to go for further studies in Toronto, Flo cautioned her through stories about White Slave people. Rose, as an actress, succeeds in life but Flo is always critical of that profession. Despite differences, Rose comes home when she knows that Flo is old and incapable of living alone. She takes Flo to an old age home. Even though her brother Brain is old enough, he does not care to take over the charge of the old mother. Rose, on the other hand, realising the duty of a daughter, looks after Flo. Even though Flo cannot recognise Rose in that role, she tries to make her happy in every way, even by acting ‘Milton-Homer’ as in the days of childhood. This tie between Flo and

Rose does not conform to the traditional Cinderella mode, but is something quite different. And this leads to Susan Knutson's idea of "symbolic mother" which suggests, "that the act of social mentoring between women is maternal (rather than sisterly) activity" a notion that explodes the narrow parameters of maternal subjectivity in western culture (Brandt 16).

The act of social mentoring is also the duty of grandmothers who are more powerful than mothers because they are less preoccupied with the daily responsibilities of child-rearing, and because their age signifies seniority in wisdom and experience. In portraying family, with different generations set side by side, Munro is able to give a sense of the traditional power of the grandmothers, here the Great Aunts, without glossing over the oppression of the mothers in the modern family. In two of her earlier stories namely "A Trip to the Coast" and "Thanks for a Ride" one perceives grandmothers set in the Gothic milieu. In "Thanks for a Ride," the Grandmother is senile and in "Trip to a Coast," she is like a mother-witch guarding over the maidenhood of Rapunzel. Here, the death of the Grandmother leaves the girl free but without the Prince to redeem her as in the fairy tales. She is baffled and awed by the endless path of freedom that lay before her. The girl is free of her grandmother but cannot enter the world, which is full of silence. The girl has no way except take up the path travelled by her grandmother.

The grandmother gradually gives way to Great Aunts in Munro's stories. Aunt Annie and Aunt Lou of "Peace of Utrecht" do not go out anymore. They live in their house, sharing household work. "Their house is very clean, dark and varnished, and it smells of vinegar and apples. They are engaged in some sort of work" (Munro 1968 207). They are both interested in ironies and take a mild delight in pointing out whatever is grotesque about themselves. Their company manners are exceedingly lighthearted. So Helen loves them and visits them when she comes back home long after her mother's death. Then, Aunt Annie shows her a set of dress that belonged to her mother. She also tells her sadly that she died two months after she was put in the hospital. She adds, "after she went in there she felt she would die, everything kind of closed in around her and she went down so fast" (Munro 1968 207). She also confides a truth about mother that shocks Helen, "She didn't want to die, just because it seems to everybody else, they have got no reason to go on living" (Munro 1968 207). She describes how mother has tried to run away from the hospital. The whole story strikes her heart like a fishbone in the throat and Helen wonders, "Is this the last function of old women, beyond making rag rugs and giving five-dollar bills--making sure the haunts we have contracted for are with us, not one gone out?" (Munro 1968 209).

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, one comes across Aunt Elspeth and Aunt Grace. Del observes, "Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace told stories. It did not seem as if they were telling them to me, to entertain me, but as if they would have told them anyway, for their own pleasure, even if they had been alone" (Munro 1971 28). They too are fond of playing jokes. Del observes that they behave differently when they are in their own house. In their own house, they play practical pranks, sing and run about. Del is surprised, "Yet these were the same women who in my mother's house turned sulky, sly, elderly, eager to take offence" (Munro 1971 30). Del also finds out that, "they liked people turning down things that were offered, marriage, position, opportunities, money" (Munro 1971 32).

With the death of Uncle Craig, the two women were left alone and "their house became like tiny sealed-off country, with its own ornate customs and elegantly, ridiculously complicated language, where true news of the outside world was not exactly forbidden, but became more and more impossible to deliver" (Munro 1971 50). Later, they hand over Uncle Craig's manuscript to Del. While she is reading this, they tell her with enough hesitation to rouse her interest and create a surprise, that the manuscript is hers. "And all his old files and news papers will go to you, when we pass on, or before, no need to wait for that!--if you're ready for them. Because we hope--we hope some day that you'll be able to finish it.

We used to think about giving it to Owen, because he's the boy--but you are the one has the knack for writing composition" (Munro 1971 52). As she left, "Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace stood in their doorway, ceremoniously to watch me go, and I felt as if I were a ship with their hopes in it, dropping down over the horizon" (Munro 1971 52).

The great Aunts for Helen and Del had a specific function to perform- transference of knowledge about the mother and about the family. In "Connections" also, one finds Aunt Iris, Isabel, Winifred and Flora, all educated and employed, but unmarried. They try to cope with the world as far as they can. The narrator, as a child, finds them out of date. But when the narrator is married to an advocate who is repulsed by her poverty, Aunt Iris makes a visit to her place. The husband is always out of sight but the narrator knows he is listening. Iris is not offended by the harsh manners of the young man; instead she is happy that at least one member of the family is placed in a good position. Aunt Iris's selfless joy at the prospects of the narrator really moves her heart. After Aunt Iris leaves, the husband comes back and starts calling her an 'old tart' and finds fault with her.

For the protagonist, the Aunt's visit is a revelation, an insight, a journey into her own self. She is able to fix herself in her position, from which she has been trying hard to break off towards the aristocratic needs

of life. She discovers the vanity through which she has passed. Finding herself rooted deep in the genealogy of her family, she is able to resist the chauvinistic attitude of her husband. Here, Aunt Iris and the other Aunts come as a flash into her mind producing a *sphota* or explosion of an awareness of her 'self.' These stories explain the functional importance of Grandmothers or Great Aunts who belong to a past generation. They serve as instruments that indicate the right direction for young girls and women that might help them escape the traumas and dilemmas of their times.

Munro not only reclaims the lost mothers and old aunts but also celebrates old age. Through her story "Mrs Cross and Mrs Kidd," she proclaims "that aging woman's place in the society is not beside a cozy hearth in retirement from life's possibilities, where she experiences and expresses intense feeling with new found candour and where she seeks new commitments, new relationships, and personal authenticity" (Waxman 183). This is contrary to the essays about aging that women's magazines often provide. They at times give a negative message against aging by offering remedies for age spots and sagging muscles, antidotes for graying hair, and camouflages for increasingly shapeless bodies. Munro mentions about such make-up efforts to prevent aging in "Bardon Bus":

[A]ll the old women I see on queens street: the flat women with pink hair; the eighty-year-old with painted-on black

eyebrows; they may all be thinking they haven't gone too far yet, not quite yet. Even the buttercup woman I saw a few days ago on the street car, the little, stout, sixtyish woman in frilly yellow dress well above the knees, a straw hat with yellow ribbons, yellow pumps dyed-to-match on her little fat feet-even she doesn't aim for comedy. She sees a flower in the mirror: the generous petals, the lovely buttery light. (Munro 1982 125)

Mrs Cross and Mrs Kidd, now at the old age home are acquaintances from their kindergarten days. At the Home, they share the same fate but it has not been so in the past. Only they knew what separate them. But Munro says, "the children equalled things out" (Munro 1982 162). Both have been in the Home for the past three years and both have a heart complaint. They move together happily. They are happy that they possess single rooms and that they are segregated from the senile ones. Both received presents from their children, which they put away in their shelves. Mrs Kidd's children send her books, thinking that it will be of interest to her. But she cannot manage to go through them. Still, "she would not admit to her children, but her interest had waned, it has waned considerably" (Munro 1982 163). Waxman says, "Even when faced with deliberating effects of old age and illness that force a dependency on others, the frail elderly do not and need not succumb to mental passivity" (1990 20).

Mrs Cross also receives presents, which reminds her of things at home. It is then that they come across Jack Mac Neil, a man of forty who has had a nervous breakdown. Jack is unable to speak. Then Mrs Cross tries to help him and “That was the beginning of Mrs Cross’s take over of Jack. Mrs Cross felt something stretching in her. Her old managing, watching power, her capacity for strategy, which if properly exercised could never be detected by those it was used on” (Munro 1982 168). This new commitment, self discovery and joyful self affirmation in old age can be identified as a new theme of aging.

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* also one finds a celebration of old age. This way of writing about aging has been termed Reifungsromane, which “Challenge the Golden Pond myth of peaceful, mellow, boring age” (Waxman 183). By taking charge of Jack, Mrs Cross explodes the social norm that expects old women to banish Eros from their lives. She defies “The outmoded social expectation of passive senescence” by taking charge of her own life through her attempt at helping Jack, making changes, a move towards a fuller, more intense life and richer, more philosophical death (Waxman 183). It is an opening up of the lives of the aging heroines who yearn for new roles in life. To be deemed old, useless and unwanted is as bad as premature death by disease.

Women writers of modern times focus attention on aging because it is the older women who have been worse victims in a sexist youth oriented culture. By this attempt, they call upon the younger readers “to acknowledge elders as part of the human community while also acquiring better understanding of and preparation for their own passage into middle age and senescence. Older readers may gain a fuller perspective on what they are experiencing, as well as re-affirmation of their humanity” (Waxman 18). The Grandmothers, Great Aunts and other old women at Homes represented in literature “emerge as extra-ordinary feminists, rethinking their goals, rethinking their social roles, restructuring their lives to be less rigidly proper, less phallogentric, less logo centric, more adventuresome, even more powerful. These literary elders teach younger friends and relatives who interact with them” (Waxman 183).

The readers who become involved in their lives are benefited by their spiritedness, anger, love and a deepening enjoyment of life’s pleasures that prove as guidelines. “The writers who created these aging heroines,” says Waxman, “are also feminists, political and literary iconoclasts,” because of three reasons “(1) for offering middle-aged and old women as protagonists instead of innocent, lovely, talented young professional women, (2) for making these fictional elders fascinating, passionate, and real in their complexity, and (3) for reaffirming the heroine’s femaleness

even in senescence” (1990 184). This remark can be counted as a compliment to Munro because most of Munro’s protagonists are middle-aged. They are the ones who dominate most of the stories in later Munroian collections like *The Moons of Jupiter*, *The Progress of Love*, *Friend of My Youth*, and *Open Secrets* and also the short story “Children Stay.” These middle-aged women are the ones who have experienced the anxiety of influence, anxiety of loss of love, anxiety of indulging in sex within and outside marriage. They are the ones who have mature ideas about love, sex and marriage. They are also the ones who are able to break the manacle of the institution of marriage to experience real love and sex as they desired and willed. Waxman observes:

In Reifungsromane readers of all ages can freely fly through the memories, thoughts and feelings of these aging heroines. There are also insistent, flowing rhythms in much of this discourse, especially in those retrospective passages and glidings of the heroine’s (narrator’s) consciousness in and out of the currents of the present reality, fantasy and memory, rhythms that draw readers beyond phallogentric logic into what Julia Kristeva calls ‘semiotic discourse: ...gestural, rhythmic, pre-referential language.’ Through this language readers feel within themselves, beyond logic, the sensation of women, aging. (1990 186)

Munro's writer-protagonist Lydia of "Dulse" passes in and out of the currents of present reality, fantasy and memory through her consciousness. She has moved to an island as a recluse because she realised that "she has stopped being one sort of woman and had become another" (Munro 1982 36). She had made the trip "with ideas of how she could make a living in some new way cut off from everything she had done before" (Munro 1982 37). Lydia reminds one of Catherine Stimpson's remark, "she wished herself far, distant from all society: a thick gloom spread itself over her mind: but did not make her forget the very beings she wished to fly from" (Stimpson 85).

Lydia is trying to flee from the influence of man but on the island, she finds herself in a maze of men. There is Old Stanley whom she critically observes as an admirer of Willa Cather, the great writer of the American South. The others, she remarks, "are the men women get pregnant by, send desperate letters to, preach their own superior love, take their revenge on it" (Munro 1982 50). This defies and subverts the earlier status of women who "have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (Stimpson 92). Here, Lydia reduces the figure of man to a Lilliputian proportion and reduces them to the status of a looking-glass by which she elevates and grasps her own identity as a middle-aged woman

striving to prove that she has belonged to someone better than these men. She has to make herself and others believe that she is not an aimless traveller because she wants to avoid their sly invitations since, “things had changed for her, she refused adventures. She could have gone to Eugene, and earlier in the evening she could have given a sign to Lawrence. In the past she might have done it. She might, or might not have done it, depending on how she felt. Now it seemed impossible. She felt as if she were muffed up, wrapped in layers and layers of dull knowledge, well protected” (Munro 1982 50).

One finds the picture of Lydia close to the concept of Reifungsromane heroine as Waxman remarks, “Whether or not they are literally travelling, these protagonists usually make an internal journey to their past through dreams and frequent flash backs” (Waxman 17). Lydia often recalls, her life with Duncan her former partner who describes to her about young charming girls, thus making her feel miserably in need of putting up an appearance of brightness. She “bought makeup in tubes off a rack. In the cold and dirty toilet of the gas station she attempted a transformation, slapping buff-coloured liquid on her face and rubbing green paste over her eyelids” (Munro 1982 53). These recollections help her “gradually to come to terms with crucial decisions” she has made when she has been young; “with past experiences, often sexual, that

influenced” her life (Waxman 17). Lydia is a person who cannot adjust with the routine chores of domestic life and has reached a state when she “could not make the connection between herself and things outside herself” (Munro 1982 41). At this point, she decides to escape into a remote place so that she can “try to chart a new course either into or through old age” where she will embark on at the end of her work (Waxman 17). Her experience on the island makes her “revitalized, newly self-knowledgeable, self-confident, and independent” (Waxman 17).

Munro says about middle age, “you are becoming discardable... it’s like adolescence all over again. There are superficial things that bother you and greater power” (Rasporich 17). The protagonist of “Bardon Bus” feels the same when she tries to travel through her memory into her past when she goes around in Australia, in a faded wrap-around cotton skirt and T-shirt,” her legs with lumps of veins showing (Munro 1982 124). She is convinced that a more artful get-up would have made “a more powerful impression, more dramatic clothes might/have made me less discardable” (Munro 1982 124-125). Just like an adolescent girl, she tries to change her appearance. The protagonist says, “I buy deep-red satin blouse, a purple shawl, a dark-blue shirt. I get my hair cut and pluck my eye-brows and try a lilac lipstick, a brownish rouge” (Munro 1982 124). This concrete description of the physical and emotional aspects of aging

for women resembles the description of Lydia of “Dulse” and it also has some connection with the mental activity of the aging woman, something out of order as in the case of W. H. Auden’s Miss Gee. The protagonist of “Bardon Bus” was but independent and cannot stand oppression just for the sake of love. She says, “There is limit for the amount of misery and disarray you will put up with, for love; just there is a limit for the amount of mess you can stand around a house. You can’t know the limit before hand, but you will know when you have reached it” (Munro 1982 127). This tells of the mature, ripened state of mind of the protagonist, ready to accept Dennis who is biased against women. She creates, out of her phantom flights, an ideal lover unnamed but referred to by the alphabet ‘X’. Here, Reifungsromane “holds up a mirror to the aging woman and emphasize the role of gender in her aging” (Waxman 184).

Prue, another strong character of Munro, critically says about the lover. “I think he was afraid I was going to laugh. He doesn’t know why people laugh or throw their overnight bags at him, but he’s noticed they do. He’s such a proper person, really. The lovely dinner. Then she comes and throws her/ overnight bag. And it’s quite reasonable to think of marrying in a few years time, when he gets over being in love” (Munro 1982 132-33). The duplicity of men towards love and woman is exposed here through powerful irony that rings through each word pronounced by Prue. Beverly

Jean Rasporich, in the introduction to his critical work on Munro, states Munro's opinion thus, "What I think is constantly interesting about a woman's situation is just that contradiction. Between the desire for a kind of attachment to a man which has been-because of social causes, you can't tell - more intense than the attachment men feel for women" (Rasporich 19).

This difference in the attitudes of men and women towards the concept of love is exemplified through the story of Prue. She presents her life in anecdotes in which "hopes are dashed, dreams ridiculed, things never turn out as expected, everything altered in a bizarre way and there is no explanation ever, people always felt cheered up after listening to her" (Munro 1982 129). She recovers "women's activity in an oral tradition" (Godard 19). She also creates an "awareness of the possibility of locating her specificity in other semiotic systems which functions outside the literary or even the linguistic sphere, especially in the representation of the body" (Godard 19). Prue sees sex as wholesome, slightly frivolous indulgence, like dancing and nice dinners--something that need not interfere with people's being kind and cheerful to each other. She ironically views sex as a cosmic disaster like the protagonist of "Bardon Bus," who sees a woman in her post-coital state, unconscious and helpless, which she describes as the result of a domestic disaster.

“It is often seen in texts by women writers that a female hero is dissatisfied with the existing reality where under the dominant patriarchal ideology she is unable to express her true feelings and sentiments. She is bored and disgusted by the social roles imposed on her which do not provide her with any self contentment, and looks for a release from suffocating circumstances” (Jeena 4). Munro’s protagonist Roberta of “Labour Day Dinner” is also dissatisfied because her husband seems to pay no attention to her. She observes him being extremely courteous to her daughters, admiring their finery and helping them into the car and at the same time ignoring her. She too is unable to express her true feelings and sentiments. While travelling to her friend’s house in the car, “shut up together, driving over the hot gravel roads at an almost funeral pace, they are pinned down by a murderous silence” (Munro 1982 136). She feels like “curling up like a jaundiced leaf” which she knows was a hysterical image (Munro 1982 136). She also feels an urge to scream and to open the door and throw herself on the gravel. But she cannot, because she is a wife and a mother with responsibilities. She is also bored and disgusted by the social roles imposed on her, which do not provide her with any self-contentment. Munro beautifully pictures the disastrous effect of the social role as a wife and a mother through the technique of multiple voice. George has seen Roberta change, “It seems to him that she has let the

children draw the sap right out of her body. She spends her time placating them, picking after them; she has to beg them to make their beds and clean up their rooms; he has heard her pleading with them to collect their dirty dishes, so that she can wash them” (Munro 1982 147). George continues:

I have seen her change from a person I deeply respected into a person on the verge of a nervous wreck. If this is love I want no part of it. He wants to enslave her and us all and she walks a tight rope trying to keep him from getting mad. She doesn't enjoy anything and if you gave her the choice she would like best to lie down in dark room with a cloth over her eyes and not see anybody or do anything. This is an intelligent woman who used to believe in freedom. (Munro 1982 147)

Valerie, Roberta's friend feels “[h]er life and her presence, more than any opinion she expresses, remind you that love is not kind or honest and does not contribute to happiness in any reliable way” (Munro 1982 140). Roberta herself is aware of her change. She pictures herself as a victim, “[s]he always is the one, disasters overtake her daily” (Munro 1982 137). She has changed into a woman whom Annis Pratt describes as “aliens in their own land, trapped by dependency upon male whims, who

try to disentangle themselves from wifely behaviour or method” (Jeena 4). She realises the impossibility of “having those pleasing surfaces once, and letting them speak for you; just for allowing an arrangement of hair and shoulders and breasts to have its effect” (Munro 1982 137).

Thus, Roberta comes to a reconciliation with the reality of aging, but is still anxious of the future of her two daughters. She thinks, “[T]he real danger is not to Angela, who would find a way to welcome insult, would be ready to reap some advantage. (Roberta has read parts of the journal). It is Eva, with her claims of understanding, her hopes of all-round conciliation, who could be smashed and stranded” (Munro 1982 152). This observation underscores Munro’s technique of exposing, through the mature middle-aged character, the truth about the continuity of female experience in a patriarchal society and the various strategies of survival, women may adopt to cope with such a condition.

When the reader passes through Munro’s “Hard Luck Stories,” one may find Julie a character who is not simple. She is one who knows “her stratagems, her efforts, her doubts” (Munro 1982 183). Her strategies of survival are different from that of the narrator who considers balancing of marriage and love and keeping it afloat, as a great exercise. Julie has “no illusions about being able to attract another man” (Munro 1982 183). She is so childishly and wilfully coquettish when she describes her love

for a boy whom she meets on the beach. Julie is quite different from Roberta of “Labour Day Dinner” because, when Roberta withered gradually under the pressure of her role as wife and mother, Julie continues her love affair outside marriage. She explains her experience with a psychology student who ultimately turns out to be a real lunatic, and with another man called Stanley who has written passionate letters to her to which she replies. Later, Julie comes to know that he has behaved in the same way to other girls. She continues, “[i]t turned out he’d been quite systematic, he’d picked one from each group, and he already had one in the group I was in so presumably it wasn’t me. Always a married woman, not a single one who could get bothersome. Nine of them. Really. Nine women” (Munro 1982 190). These two characters are eccentric males who try to manipulate women, especially married ones. To quote Muriel “I call neurotic any man/who uses his potential/ Manipulate others/ Instead of growing up himself” (Muriel 7). But Julie is a flashy, independent character who could see through pretences. She is different from women who feel jilted or doomed. She is proud that she attracted only the bizarre.

Another interesting woman who is described by the narrator of “Hard Luck Stories” is Caroline who had “the will to disturb” (Munro 1982 195). Here, the narrator comments, “[t]o be a *femme fatale* you don’t have to be slinky and sensuous and disastrously beautiful, you just have

to have the will to disturb” (Munro 1982 195). Here, Munro exposes the eccentric, psychosomatic behaviour of man and also declares that earlier concepts about women, especially about beautiful women, which branded them as *femme fatale*, are false. Munro presents three middle-aged people --the narrator, Julie and Douglas--who were still stirred up about love and sex bringing home to the readers the reality of “[l]ives pressed down, like layers of rotting fabric, disintegrating dark leaves. The old pain and privation” (Munro 1982 196). She explains how in middle-age, love takes a turn, a change of colour, a different meaning, “[a] pressure of the hand, with no promise about it, could admonish and comfort me. Something unresolved could become permanent. I could be always bent of knowing, and always in the dark, about what was important to him, and was not” (Munro 1982 197).

The narrator can be comforted without any restriction or obligation to know the man’s whims and fancies, without being enslaved by him, knowing very well what she is and what she wants, thereby escaping from “The inexorable enclosure,” of family life into “a new environment where “maleness” and “femaleness” no longer undermine the development of the human personality” (Jeena 4). This is a “new environment,” which is “beyond sexual politics; a new kind of space” (Jeena 4).

“Female protest can only be through the body itself, for like Freud’s hysterics, the central women characters of romantic fiction speak out through psychosomatic illness, fevers, ‘wasting’ disease or sexual transgression (for example, Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Catherine Earnshaw, Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, Tess of the De’Urburviles, Lucy Snow, Carline Helstone). Having no public voice, they can ‘speak’ only through their visual appearance” (Waugh 1989 188). Stella, the protagonist of Munro’s story “Lichen,” subverts this picture of women characters of romantic fictions, who have to seek escapade into psychic illness or sexual digression which are forced upon them by existing patriarchal conditions. Stella is a spirited woman who leads “a busy and sometimes a chaotic life” (Munro 1986 35). The plants she has potted, the jam, the wine-making apparatus, the typewriter, the books and papers that lay around their house, are proof of her spontaneity. She is also “a budding authoress,” as she herself claims because she has been writing memories and an article on the old lighthouse, a piece for the historical society and the local paper (Munro 1986 35). Besides she belongs to a play-reading group, a church choir, the wine-maker’s club and an informal group in which the members entertain one another in dinner parties that have a fixed (low) cost. Since she is so busy without a moment of life to be wasted, she is not one without a public voice or one helplessly forced

to speak only through her visual appearance like her Victorian sisters. So Stella is not bothered by her visual appearance. Instead, she will always dramatise. Munro says it is not only Stella but all women of middle age, “who has to come bursting out of the female envelop at this age, flaunting flat or an indecent scrawniness, spouting warts and facial hair, refusing to cover pasty veined legs, almost gleeful about it, as if this was what she’d wanted to do all along” (Munro 1986 33). Stella prefers to go along like an “unpackaged” female who is always making jam and jelly and packing them up (Waugh 1989 182).

This picture of the middle-aged Stella is juxtaposed with that of David who has once been her husband. He is one who can speak of woman with tender “disparagement--with amazement, even” when he is caught in the throes of love (Munro 1986 40). He is also interested in telling odd stories about girls whom he loved. He is so proud of his maleness that he comments to Stella, “you know, there is a smell women get. It’s when they know you don’t want them anymore. Stale” (Munro 1986 40). The word stale resembles the name Stella. Using it, David intends to make Stella feel that she is one such discardable being, a stale object. But Stella is confident of her own resources. She is beyond the reach of any sarcastic remark because she is already reconciled to her condition of aging. It is David, who gave her a photograph saying that it is the picture of his new

lover, who is immature and unable to reconcile with the truth that his concern about sex is something connected with physicality. Stella looks at the picture and sees “a flattened-out breast far away on the horizon. And the legs spreading to the foreground. The legs are spread wide--smooth, golden, monumental: fallen columns. Between them is the dark blot she called moss, or lichen” (Munro 1986 42). But Stella also realises that it is more “like the dark pelt of an animal, with the head and tail and feet chopped off. Dark silky pelt of some unlucky rodent” (Munro 1986 42). This image of a rodent with its head, tail and feet chopped off is a symbol of the sexist attitude of man. When he is concerned only about the brutal aspect of sex, woman is denied of real love and she is as pitiable as the rodent without its head, tail and feet. Here, it is actually David who is becoming stale because he has no other concern but sex. His pride, his vanity, his over-confidence in his strength, which results from his immature, ignorant state about his own aging, is exposed in a powerful language by Munro. The attitude of men like David who consider women only as objects for sexual pleasure is laid bare in this story. Stella is pictured as a strong, mature woman who refutes this role and proves that she is not a “packaged” article to satisfy the consumer’s desire (Waugh 1989 182). The author proves that Stella has the ability to strengthen her resources, “for much of life is a do-it-yourself project” (Muriel 274).

The protagonist of "Miles City Montana" is a character who is possessed by a contradictory vision of her husband. At times, she cannot tolerate him but on others, she is so infatuated by him. This split mentality of the narrator protagonist is expressed thus, "I wished that I could get my feelings about Andrew to come together to a serviceable and dependable feeling. I had even tried writing two lists, one of things I disliked--as if I hoped by this to prove something, to come to a conclusion one way or the other. But I gave it up when I saw that all it proved was what I already knew--that I had violent contradictions" (Munro 1986 91). This statement conforms to Munro's comment about Mary Wollstonecraft, "the attraction is not more intense, but the/desire to attach, not to lose, not to let go off" (Rasporich 19-20). The two feelings co-exist in the narrator. Munro presents an interesting psychological situation faced by ordinary women. Even the quarrels and its aftermath are portrayed as curious. After a terrific quarrel, the narrator and the husband Andrew become "racked and purged" (Munro 1986 92). They "clasped hands and laughed, laughed at those two benighted people, ourselves. Their grudges, their grievances, their self-justification. We leap-frogged over them. We declared them liars. We could have wine with dinner, or decide to give a party" (Munro 1986 92). Even quarrels are an occasion for celebration because in the process of the quarrel both husband and wife come to realise each other's faults, they are purged, their passions spent and they end up light-hearted.

In this story, as the narrow escape of “Labour Day Dinner,” Meg’s drowning and escape was a face to face encounter with the great enigma - -Death. This was in turn a doorway into the truth of life, which opens up clean and serene to the narrator’s confused mind. All contradictions, all quarrels are nullified by death which puts a full stop to everything. This realisation makes the narrator aware that life is short and therefore precious and something which you can deal with only once. So she is relieved to hear her husband’s words ‘on the way back’ which makes her feel the safety and comfort of their home. They continue their journey, the narrator says, “with the two in the back seat trusting us, because of no choice, and we ourselves trusting to be forgiven, in time, for everything that had first to be seen and condemned by those children: Whatever was flippant, arbitrary, careless, callous--all our naturally and particularly, mistakes” (Munro 1986 105). The simple depiction, of the complex realities of life--the contradiction, quarrel, children, home, death--everything there can be in life, through a journey taken by the narrator’s family signifies one of the tenets of the *reifungsromane* tradition in literature. The narrator, while journeying with her husband and children to Miles city, attempts a journey back and forth in time--back into her domestic life and forward into death. With the journey into herself, evaluating and calculating the value of life, she comes to the discovery that life is but a dream, which can

be rounded off by a sleep as Prospero has said. This gives comfort to her aching heart, a process of healing takes place and she is able to reconcile with the bare, harsh mundane realities. This is one among the many Munrovian stories which take as their subject “the way the skin of the moment can break open,” thereby disclosing another reality which shifts the protagonist’s perspective of everyday life (Munro 1986 305). The catalyst is often an experience of “the imminence of death” (Hoy 14).

On examining the later collections of Munro like *The Progress of Love*, *Friend of My Youth* and *Open Secrets*, one comes across interesting characters like Violet, Dawn Rose, Isabel, Joan, Georgia and Millicent who are middle-aged women looking back into their life when they used to be young. Munro’s ability to be almost a historian may rightly be explained in Elam Daine’s words:

[She draws] history of paradoxical laws and non-dialectical discontinuities, a history of absolutely heterogeneous pockets, irreducible particularities, of unheard of and incalculable sexual differences; a history of women who have ‘gone further’ stepping back with their lone dance, or who are today inventing sexual idioms at a distance from the main forum of feminist activity with a kind of reserve that/does not

necessarily prevent them from subscribing to the movement and occasionally, from becoming a militant for it. (1994 40-41)

The life of Dawn Rose and Violet of the story "Fits" adheres to the idea of paradoxical laws, since Violet who is involved passionately in love had to sacrifice her love to save her family from the danger of an anonymous enemy who writes evil, threatening letters to her father. It is understood later that these letters are written by Violet's adolescent sister Dawn Rose who has just attained puberty. Some people describe this act as a form of insanity that girls of her age usually get into, "a kind of female insanity that strikes at that age" (Munro 1986 230). It is considered, "she hates men. She blames them. That's obvious. She has an insane hatred of men" (Munro 1986 230). But later, she marries. She has a son and leads a happy life until death. While Violet, smitten by the loss of her first lover, feels like drowning herself, her life is turned upside down. She decides to divert her painful mind to the care of her family, especially Dawn Rose. When Dawn Rose marries, Violet stays on with her Aunt and later gets a job in Bell Telephone. She wears colourful dress and proves to be a good storyteller for Dane, Dawn Rose's son.

In "A Real Life," one comes upon another character Dorrie who is set as a parallel to Murriel who is thirty and unmarried. She always jokes about marriage and returns from her travels, with cynical comments on

men. After her visit to Montreal and Philadelphia, she comments, "Terrible. They all get married young, they're Catholics, and the wives never die--they are too busy having babies" (Munro 1994 57). Dorrie is a rough woman, who wears odd dress and goes around shooting animals. A millionaire from Australia comes to Millicent's house where Murriel and Dorrie are present. He chooses the rough Dorrie instead of the flashy Murriel. Dorrie goes to Australia and leads a happy life on a big farm. The change in Murriel is great, "smoking and drinking and swearing were out, and so was wearing make-up, and the kind of music Murriel used to play, she played hymns now, of the sorts she had once made fun of. She wore any colour at all and had a permanent--her hair, going gray, stood up from her forehead in frizzy bunches" (Munro 1994 79). Thus Munro presents paradoxical laws that govern women's lives. The ones who conform to patriarchal code seem to lose life, while the rebellious independent ones seem to succeed creating illogical or non-dialectical discontinuities in their lives.

Munro's heterogeneous heroines who possess their own particularities of unheard of and incalculable sexual differences are not limited to Dawn Rose, Violet, Murriel and Dorrie. One may come across Isabel in "White Dump" who "saw her day as hurdles got through" (Munro 1986 303). She is in love with Lawrence. Her friend tells her that

Lawrence has a son. But Isabel decides to love him because “[t]his was what love was, or what life was, and she wanted to get started on it” (Munro 1986 304). She decides that years later, she will discuss this situation with her daughter Denise because the first extra love affair is the most passionate especially at the beginning or even before the beginning. She says, “perhaps just when it flashes on you what’s possible. That may be the best” (Munro 1986 308).

Joan is also married but attracted by a man who always deceives women telling them about Frazil ice. She decides to leave her husband and children. Though she realises it “an irreparable tear in her life” because she feels that “she had no choice but to be going” (Munro 1990 206). On weekends, middle-aged Joan, “goes to see her children, who are grown up and have forgiven her” (Munro 1990 207). When Joan looks back, she does not feel guilty but is amazed as though she has “once gone for sky diving” (Munro 1990 207). But she also becomes aware of “a new danger, a threat that she could not have imagined when she was younger” (Munro 1990 208). It is the approaching senescence, which she signifies by the word rubble. She says, “passing states, a useless variety of passing states. Rubble” (Munro 1990 208). But she wants to keep this idea at bay. So she pays attention to all ways in which people seemed to keep away the thought of aging. She chooses acting.

There is Georgia of “Differently” who is interested in watching for signs of being in love in other women. She thinks, where love is concerned, the trouble begins as soon as two people say that they loved each other. She thinks, “of being launched out on a gray, deep, baleful, magnificent sea. Love,” when she had the company of Miles who is a visitor in her book shop.(Munro 1990 233). But when she declares her love, Miles criticises her for being unfaithful to her husband Ben. Miles goes away to carry on an affair with Georgia’s friend Maya. But Georgia is never guilty. She realises that if she is to live her life once again, she will act in the same way as she has done so far, because she understands that “people make momentous shifts, but not the changes they imagine. Some of the characters like Violet and Murriel step back with their lone dance, some like Isabel, Joan and Georgia invent new sexual idioms though they do not conform to Derrida’s statement that they are feminists removed from the main forum “with a kind of reserve that does not necessarily prevent them from subscribing to the movement” (Elam 41).

While pondering upon the female, the problems she faces as a girl, a writer, a professional, a mother, a grandmother, an aunt, a spinster, a married woman--there is a possibility of mistaking Munro to be against men. But she is not. On the one hand, she is so preoccupied with women because it is the life experience of a woman that she possesses. On the other hand, she both admires and criticises the evil force that dominates

and oppresses the lives of girls and women and since patriarchy is one of the major oppressive apparatus, she is bound to criticise, for the sake of exposing the situation. Her criticism of man is not as fierce as Jonathan Swift's criticism of human kind. She is not a man-hater or hyena in petticoat. She is essentially a woman writer who tries to evaluate the man-woman situation in a patriarchal society from a female perspective. She mildly exposes the vanity and superiority that men claim to have over women through the character of Grandfather in "Connections," the male character like Art Chamberlain and Garnet French in *Lives of Girls and Women*, Ted Makkavala in "Accident," Stanley in "Dulse," Hugo in "Material," Clayton in "Executioners," Reul in "Wigtime" and a number of other male characters. She does not condemn them. She has made it clear in her stories that a woman is at the same time attracted and repelled by man. This contradiction which is inevitable, is life according to Munro.

She draws the character, the essence of man just to prove that women are no more "The angel makers, witches, hysterical women, the bad fucks, old cows, bitches in heat, wild cats, old mares, birds of ill omen, non-virgins, whores, lesbians, unnatural mothers, loose women, crazy ladies, chattering magpies, cock teasers, the depressed and sluts" as mentioned in Jovette Marchassault's *The Angel Makers* (Brandt 99). They are human beings with passions and sentiments and goodness and folly. Munro believes that it is not a sign of revolution "[w]hen the

oppressed adopt the manners of the oppressor and practise oppression on their own behalf” (Greer 315). So she does not portray women in men’s uniform. Instead, she presents women moving towards autonomy by expanding “their personal capacities for awareness, for spontaneity, and intimacy” (Muriel 297). They are, “seizing the occasion to speak... making a shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression” (Waxman 187).

It is true that Munro through formal experiment and thematic exploration deconstructs the stereotypes of gender, which are produced out of the deconstructive relations within the traditional family. Munro takes us “beyond the issue of male power versus female power by presenting images in which forces outside the control, level the power struggle to an insignificance in the larger scheme of things, by attributing great power to artistic creation, to a human being’s ability to liken” (Beran 75). Thus, she takes the readers to a realm “beyond androgyny” as Elaine Showalter said in a letter to Joyce Johnson of McGraw Hill Book Company in 1973 (Rasporich 12). This shift in perspective that Munro’s feminine voices provide, may seem to undermine the former philosophy concerning women but “in a historical sense they are an evocative and instinctive articulation of society in transition, and of women in search of themselves” (Irvine 95). And this transition is “required for a more equal society, viewing all human beings as part of the long inheritance, a human community in which we must play our proper part” (Waugh 138).

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I

**ALICE MUNRO:
DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE FROM
THE TRADITIONAL TO METAFICTIONAL**

P.K. PRABHA

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Chapter V

Language in Munro

Language is generally defined as communication among human beings, characterised by the use of arbitrary spoken or written symbols, with agreed-upon meanings. It is also considered by linguists to be a form of knowledge or thought or cognition. Language is also the particular way words are selected and combined by an individual, a group or a literary genre. The selection and combination of words is what is termed the style of writing, which pertains to the realm of people, or the total linguistic repertoire. Style is also “the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose and so on” (Leech 10). A study of style is an investigation of linguistic traits such as range of vocabulary, sentence length or frequency of certain conjunctions, based on the idea that a writer’s genuine ‘thumbprint’ is more likely to be found in unobtrusive habits beyond conscious artistic control. This chapter is dedicated to an exploration of the skill with which Munro uses language to bring about certain special effects in her readers.

Style is imbricated in both the written and spoken forms of communication. The written form of language is said to be “static, unchanging, reflecting the form of the language at the time the alphabet,

syllabary, or character system was adopted. The spoken form is dynamic, always changing, eventually, the written and spoken forms may no longer coincide” (Encarta 6). There is the standard language and variations of regional dialects that co-exist in a particular society. A standard language is the dialect that has become dominant. Such dominance is often due to governmental policy, whereby one dialect is conferred prestige over the others, and sometimes various regulations or customs ensure that it is used. The standard language is frequently the dialect used in writing. In speech, regional variations may be manifested in standard forms also.

Geoffrey Thornton states how a child, in the process of acquiring language “reflects the particular circumstances of his own individual history and experience” (Halliday 22). He goes on to emphasise that language acquisition is a unique inheritance. He explains, “It is an inheritance because he is endowed, as a human being, with the capacity to learn language merely by growing up in an environment in which language is being used around him. It is unique, because no two people occupy identical places in an environment where language learning is taking place, and, thus, must mean that the language learnt is unique to the individual” (Halliday 22). The environment is always shaped by culture and it is obvious that a child learns the language he hears around him. The child learns its mother-tongue in the context of behavioural settings where it comes into contact

with the norms of culture in the form of parental control, instruction, personal interaction and the like. Thus it is socialised into the value systems and behavioural patterns of culture through the use of language and, at the same time, learns how to use it.

Munro's young protagonists are characters who learn the language in the manner it is used at home, at school and in the larger society. But at times, they find themselves at loggerheads with the accepted norms of society as described in the first chapter of *Who Do You Think You Are?* entitled the "Royal Beatings." The beating Rose got is not for the obscene language she learns from school but for having repeated it at home and also for having taught her poor innocent brother such nonsense. Later, she confronts the 'f' word used by the children, especially the boys, at school but she has grown wise enough to restrain from repeating it. The words Flo use to describe the neighbours of the small town are exaggerated in tone and pitch and the way she narrates stories impresses Rose very much. Rose learns language through contact with other people in society, conflict in adult and child language and conversation of others and with others in the process of growing up to the status of an intellectual who can select and use words judiciously and also understand the hidden overtones of words. She has inherited from Flo, her stepmother, the ability to discuss, analyse and comprehend ideas through language. She has learnt from her

father the ability to manipulate language. She has also learnt to exaggerate and dramatise particular words like her stepmother.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del learns the difference in the use of language by Uncle Benny, the neighbor and her father. She also comes into contact with the language of the bootleggers and the idiots on the Flats Road. She has contact with the Aunts and uncle Craig who dealt with words seriously. She is quite aware of the nuances of language use. Hearing about the death of uncle Craig, Del comments, “The active verb confused me. He *died*. It sounded like something he willed to do, chose to do. As if he said, ‘Now I’ll die.’ In that case it could not be so final. Yet I knew it was” (Munro 1971 39). The little narrator’s sister in “Chaddeleys and Flemmings” of *The Moons of Jupiter* asks the question “what is raped?” (Munro 1982 3). Aunt Iris replies, “It means you get your pocket book stolen” (Munro 1982 3). Here the narrator comments, “Pocket book: an American word. My sister and I didn’t know what that meant either but we were not equal to two questions in a row. And I knew that wasn’t what rape meant anyway; it meant something dirty” (Munro 1982 3). Thus, the child, through contact, learns the implications of words though not in the complete sense. The narrator, Fame, of “Progress of Love” learns from her mother that hatred is a sin, “one drop of hatred in your soul will spread and discolor everything like a drop of black ink in white milk”

addressed. This question comes under the critical socialising context 'that makes the addressed ponder over one's status or position in society and in the situation under which the question arises. This question being the title of the collection rings throughout the stories encircling Rose, the protagonist. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Naomi, Del's friend, asks this question when Del walks out of company where Clive and others have been present. This question is one of identity, status and above all a reproach against the independent nature of girls like Rose and Del.

The regulative code can be found in Flo's narration about the white slavers in the story titled "Wild Swans." Here, she uses 'story' as a tool to give counsel to the young girl. In "Lives of Girls and Women," a story in the collection of the same name, Del's mother discusses man-woman relationships and its dangers with the aim of instructing Del to be cautious when dealing with men. Del describes the conversation thus:

'My mother spoke to me in her grave, hopeful, lecturing voice.' 'There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. Yes. But it is up to us to make it come. All women have had till now has been this connection with men. All we have had. No more lives of our own, really, than domestic/animals. *He shall hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force, a little closer than his dog, a*

little dearer than his horse. Tennyson wrote that. It's true. *Was* true. You will want to have children though. (Munro 1971 146-47)

While mothers play such regulative roles in the shaping of the psyche of female protagonists, the Aunts and old women of Munro also perform an important function. Aunt Annie in "Peace of Utrecht," Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace in *Lives of Girls and Women*, Aunt Iris in "Connections," and the old woman in "The Shining Houses," provide instructions to young women guiding them through unknown areas of truth.

The imaginative or innovative element in the acquisition of language is also an essential component in the development of Munro's child narrators or protagonists--In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del plays with words like 'Die-ud-cow' and in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Rose revels in repeating the words she has heard her father mumble while at work. She repeats words like 'Macaroni-Pepperoni-Botticelli Beans' without really grasping what they meant. But Rose can 'feel' these words. She explains, "Now and then some words would break through and hang clear and nonsensical on the air" (Munro 1978 4). Another example is the phrase she hears her father say, "the cloud-clapped towers" (Munro 1978 5). Munro explains, "The cloud-clapped towers, the gorgeous palaces, that is like a hand clapped against Rose's chest" (Munro 1978 5). Here, it

is the rhythm, the music, the feeling of words that allow the children to imagine and create meanings that are viable for their little hearts.

Another means of learning and acquiring language, which is a kind of cognition, or knowledge is interpersonal contact. Both Del and Rose, through interpersonal contact, learn how to use language and ponder philosophically over particular words to bring out more clarity to their awareness of it. In "Princess Ida," Del describes the influence that her mother's thirst for knowledge had exercised on herself, "I had the impression that in historical times the weather was always theatrical, ominous, landscape/frowned, sea glimmered in various dull metallic shades of gray" (Munro 71 55-58). Here, the choice of words like theatrical, ominous, frowned, dull metallic shades, etc., foreshadow the lives of girls and women that Munro depicts through the story of Del. Del's mother is often theatrical, her failures in business has contributed the ominous nature, and the frown is an inevitable expression on mother's face while delivering her statements on man-woman relationships that are quite often bleak and dull.

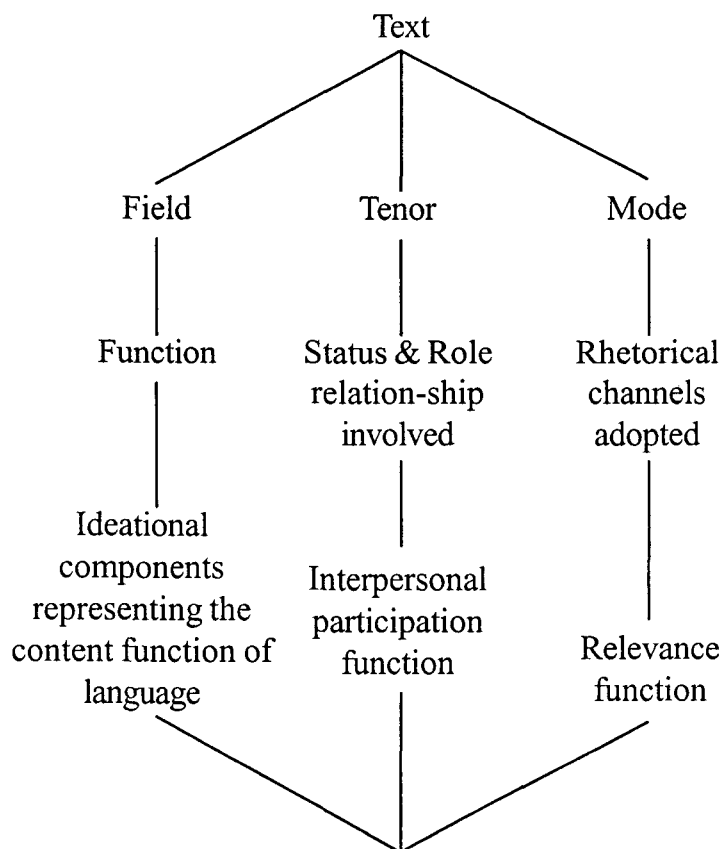
Rose, is also concerned about the use of words. When the word 'Royal Beating' lolls on Flo's tongue Rose ponders, "how is a beating royal? She came up with a tree-lined avenue, a crowd of formal spectators, some white horses and black slaves. Someone knelt, and the blood came

leaping out like banners. An occasion both savage and splendid” (Munro 1978 1). Flo’s description of the death of Rose’s mother is another example, “She said to Rose’s father during the afternoon, I have a feeling that is so hard to describe. It’s like a boiled egg in my chest, with the shell left on” (Munro 1978 2). This description or expression of the feeling the mother experienced because of a blood clot in her lungs is deconstructed thus, “Flo liked the details of death: the things people said, the way they protested or tried to get out of bed or swore or laughed (some did those things), but when she said that Rose’s mother mentioned a hard-boiled egg in her chest she made the comparison sound slightly foolish, as if her mother really was the kind of person who might think you could swallow an egg whole” (Munro 1978 2). Such descriptions prove the skill Munro exhibits in using words and then deconstructing it on parallel lines reducing it to the level of parody and irony to bring out effects that language could not attain otherwise. She does not artificially stretch the meaning of words or use words burdened with meaning, but uses seemingly simple words whose later explanations change them into magic casements of meanings.

Munro’s capacity for language use rightly conforms to the notion, “Language is the ability to ‘mean’ in the situation types, or social contexts, that are generated by culture” (Halliday 34). Listening to an interview with Hat Nettleton, the old Horse Whipper of the town, on the television

Rose feels that the life experiences narrated by Nettleton will be of interest to Flo who is in a Home. She knows that Hat Nettleton is a living link with their past. She can visualise Flo, “saying *Imagine!* In a way that meant she was having her worst suspicions confirmed” (Munro 1978 30). Rose remembers how Flo once blurted out “Ignoramuses” when father mentioned the talk of the town about an American spaceship that appeared in the sky after sunset (Munro 1978 27). The people considered it to be an evening star. Father argues with them saying that it is the planet Venus. Flo’s remark is in support of Rose’s father against the townsmen whom she calls “Old coots” (Munro 1978 26). She uses the slang ‘coots,’ meaning stupid fellow, without thinking that she herself was ignorant about the airship or the planet Venus. In *Friend of My Youth* again the word ‘ignoramus’ is used. To show the status of Flo, Munro places in her mouth these self-explanatory slang words.

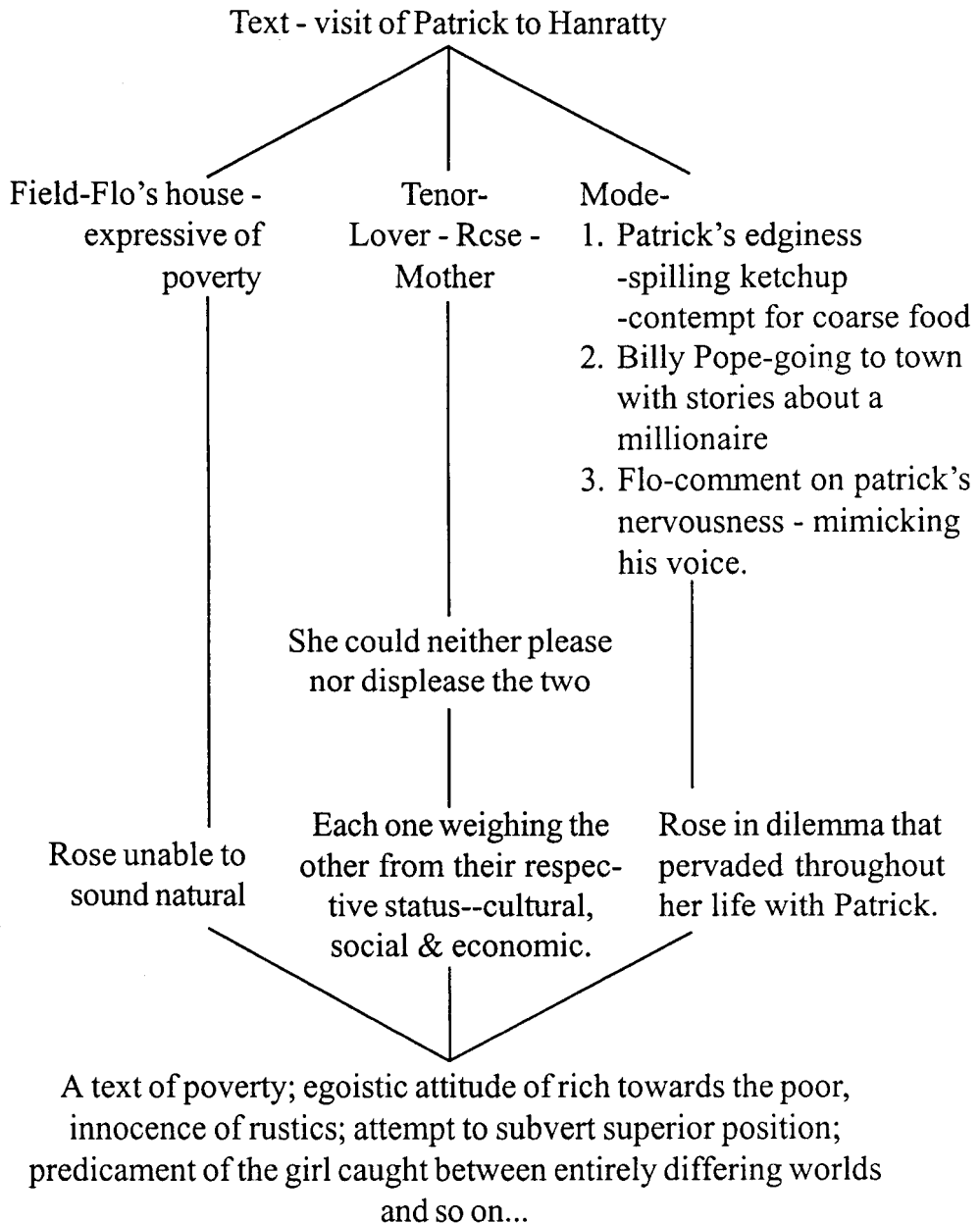
According to Halliday, a text is a linguistic form of social interaction in which progression of meaning is the result of selection made by the speaker from options in a context of situation. The context of situation is explained as the ‘situation type’ carrying elements that make them central to the process of cultural transmission. He divides it into three aspects: Field, Tenor and Mode. It is represented thus:



Open up a range of meaning potential where register is coded by particular sub-cultural angle on the social system.

Examining the story “The Beggar Maid” that provides the sub-title of the collection *Who Do You Think You Are?* one finds the narrator commenting, “With Patrick there, she couldn’t slip back into an accent closer to Flo’s, Billy Pope’s and Hanratty’s. That accent jarred on her ears now, anyway. It seemed to involve not just a different pronunciation but a whole different approach to talking. Talking was shouting; the words were separated and emphasized so that people could bombard each other with them. And the things people said were like lines from the most hackneyed

rural comedy” (Munro 78 116). The context is that Patrick and Rose are in love despite the social, economic and cultural disparity in their status. Rose has taken Patrick to Hanratty and, unfortunately, Flo’s pocket is not in a shape good enough to serve good food or make arrangements for receiving a rich guest. Patrick detests the, “coarse-textured” food and the environment expressive of poverty (Munro 1978 17). At the same time, Billy Pope and Flo are sure to have their stock of comments about Patrick who exhibits edginess in his behaviour. Rose is placed between these two situations that haunt her all through her life with Patrick. This duality, even in the use of language--the existence of two registers--is one of Munro’s methods of bringing together of opposites that co-exist in this world. This could be represented as follows:



Even the language of the two differed. Rose has grown up in the Hanratty environment under the supervision of Flo, with her particular accent, which Rose outgrows as she becomes educated and refined. Patrick knows only the so-called high-class society and he is actually condescending when he accepts Rose and agrees to visit her home. Rose

knows very well how these two--Flo and Patrick--view each other. She is not able to go back to Flo's accent nor to go on with her acquired sophisticated language. This problem of Rose is well-expressed by Munro's use of words like 'jarred,' 'shouting,' 'bombarding' and "lines from the most hackneyed rural comedy" (Munro 1978 116). This presentation of a simple problem faced by girls of Rose's status clearly opens up a range of meaning potential where register is coded by the particular sub-cultural angle on the social system. Here, Rose is placed between the Hanratty language and the sophisticated language of the rich and educated, wherein two types of registers are encoded. Munro explicitly brings out how language becomes the vehicle of expression of patterns of social hierarchy, and the, "resulting tensions between an egalitarian ideology and a hierarchical reality" (Halliday 123). In the story, "Connections," also Munro presents patterns of hierarchy of this type by placing the female protagonist between her Aunt Iris and husband Richard.

Sara Mills, in her discussion of discursive structures, defines discourse as, "a set of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalised force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think. What constitutes the boundaries of a discourse is very unclear... discourses are those groupings of statements which have similar force--that is, they are grouped together

because of some institutional pressure, because of a similarity of provenance or context, or because they act in a similar way” (Mills 62). The instructive lessons given by the mothers of Del, (*Lives of Girls and Women*); Rose (“Wild Swans”) and Fame (“Friend of My Youth”) may be classified under the same institutional pressure, that is, the ethics of morality or abstention from sex. They have a similarity of context because, in each case, the mother, who has seen the ebb and flow of life guides the daughter, an adolescent who is not aware of the dangers that young, thoughtless girls fall into. But, the critical-minded daughters--Del, Rose and Fame--realise that the mother is placed in a different context from theirs. They also realise that what suits the mother will not suit them, that life of girls and women change with the changing times. So they are set in a new discourse for which they have to set about with new discursive strategies.

Foucault also discusses how discourse is regulated by institutions in order to ward off some of its dangers. He describes the processes of exclusion that operates on discourse to limit what can be said and what can be counted as knowledge. He calls the first of the procedures of exclusion, ‘prohibition’ or taboo. Munro discusses this element of exclusion through taboo or prohibition in her early stories where most of her protagonists are small girls. Small girls are excluded in two ways-- one

as a child and the other, as a girl. There are certain words, certain songs that little children ought not use and there are certain words and songs that girls, in particular, should not use. Such restrictions could be seen discussed in stories like “The Flat’s Road,” “Changes and Ceremonies,” “Royal Beatings,” “Boys and Girls,” “Wigtime,” etc..

Del is used to enjoy singing the song about the idiot Irene Pollox that runs like this:

Irene don’t come after me
Or I’ll hang you by your tits in a
Crab-apple tree. (Munro 1971 6)

But, when she goes past with her mother, she changes *tits* into *heels*. The girl is conscious that she is prohibited by some unknown laws of society from using words like ‘tits’ and so she will transform it into ‘heels’ before her mother and secretly enjoy singing it the other way. In “Royal Beatings” also the song of “Two Vancouvers...” that brings the royal beatings upon Rose is one she enjoys singing even when she is aware that it is taboo.

Munro’s characters often identify certain words that are not to be pronounced by children, being used openly by elders and they become conscious of the disparity in taboo. An example can be found in the last story titled “Ottawa Valley” from the collection *Something I’ve Been*

Meaning To Tell You. The following is Aunt Dodie's dialogue, "'Did you know,' she said, 'that I was jilted?'" (Munro 1974 184). This dialogue makes the child ponder, "My mother had said we were never to mention it, and there was Aunt Dodie in her own kitchen, washing the noon dishes, with me wiping and my sister putting away (my mother had to go and have her rest), saying 'jilted' proudly, as somebody would say, 'Did you know I had polio' or some such bad important disease" (Munro 1974 184). The discrepancy is evident in the way the girl says 'mother had said,' and the use of the past tense emphasises the strength of the prohibition. By the use of the word 'proudly' and the comparison to a 'bad important disease' the incongruity of the taboo is undoubtedly established.

Taboo and exclusion also appear in the form of religion. Many of Munro's characters are given instruction to the result that they come to possess weird ideas about Catholics, Presbyterians, United Church, Pentecosts, etc. In "Walker Brothers Cowboy," the child listens to her father's song about Baptists:

Where are the Baptists, where are the Baptists,

Where are all the Baptists today!

They're down in the water, in Lake Huron water,

With their sins all a-gittin' washed away. (Munro 1968 7)

For Del of *Lives of Girls and Women*, the Catholics seemed “Bizarre and secretive as Hindus, with their idols and confessions and black spots on Ash Wednesday” (Munro 1971 78). Her father’s Aunts live across from the Catholic Church and they make jokes about “nipping in for a bit of confession” (Munro 1971 78). Catholics are mentioned in ‘Walker Brother’s Cowboy’ as someone who, “digs with the wrong foot” (Munro 1968 14). In Del’s eyes, the Baptists are extremes in a completely “unsinister, slightly comic way” but she notices that no person of any social standing goes to the Baptist Church (Munro 1971 79).

Del comments on the Presbyterians, “they were leftovers, people who had refused to become United” (Munro 1971 79). The next she examines is the Anglican Church about which, “nobody knew or spoke much about” (Munro 1971 79). In the end, Del describes how her mother sits at the church, “She would sit looking all around, cautious but unabashed, like an anthropologist taking note of the behaviour of a primitive tribe” (Munro 1971 80). The child, Del, is instructed by society that only the United Church is the real or reasonable form of religious establishment and that all the others are extremes. But Del has read a lot and she urgently feels the need for God. So “On wet windy Sundays, snowy Sundays, sore-throat Sundays,” she goes to church, believing that God will display himself before her (Munro 1971 80). The adjective used

to describe the Sundays and the comparison of her mother to an anthropologist watching a primitive tribe are ways of deconstructing the whole range of purity and goodness and everything positive associated with religion. It is through the selection of particular words and a peculiar delineation of them that Munro reaches this effect of undermining dominant social codes. The society's discourse on religion is one of exclusion and the girl's discourse is an exclusion and sabotage of the former.

Foucault states, "there are certain subjects which it is difficult to discuss within Western societies, such as death and sex" (Mills 64). It is a discursive and institutional limitation that becomes habitual within a particular culture at a certain period of time. But in the case of Munro, she seems to keep aside the taboo and discusses both death and sex openly. Her main point of discussion is on life, death, sex, human behaviour, social norms, social institutions and human relationships. Another point she probes is the way narratives are woven around people. Through her female characters who are limited by taboo, Munro discusses these topics and makes the protagonists break away from those limitations to a freer status as women. She uses language as a vehicle to undermine and subvert the so-called 'normal' aspects of society and tries to bring forth the abnormality in the normal and the normality in the abnormal.

Basil Bernstein discussing “Aspects of Language and Learning in the genesis of the Social Process” describes that linguistic differences occur in the normal environment, for example, in the language use of children in their peer group, combat units in the armed services, criminal subcultures, and between status groups.

Linguistic differences between status groups are most marked where the gap between them is very great. This can be seen in Munro’s connected story collections like *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*, wherein Uncle Benny’s language differs a lot from Del’s people and again, the language of the boys differ greatly from that of girls, and the language of the mothers differ from that of young girls. This difference is not only due to status but also because they belong to subdivisions within subcultures. Uncle Benny and Del’s Father are farmers. Uncle Benny is a farmer who neither possesses much land nor much money to cultivate whatever is left with him. He has just the label of a farmer. Compared to Uncle Benny, Del’s father is wealthier and more educated. But both of them belong to the farmlands at the end of the Flats Road that connects their land to the city where the wealthy sophisticated, gentlefolk live. The language that boys use against girls is harsh, derogatory and hateful, but both boys and girls belong to the subculture in society, namely ‘children’s group.’ The language of the mothers and aunts differ from

that of the young girls like Del and Naomi. But all of them belong to the subculture ‘women.’ So, even among the different strata of society, the use of language is different according to status and role.

Here is a letter that Uncle Benny dictates to Del:

I am writing this letter in reply to what you put in the paper which I get through mail. I am a man thirty-seven years old living alone on my own place which is fifteen acres out at the end of the Flats Road. There is a good house on it with stone foundation... In the bush is more berries than you can eat and good fish in the river and could have a vegetable garden if you could keep off the rabbits. I have got a pet fox in a pen by the house, also a ferret and two minks and there is coons and squirrels and chipmunks all the time... (Munro 1971 10-11)

This letter does not conform to the grammatical precision of formal language. There are a number of ‘ands’ used to get ideas connected; no proper punctuation, for example in ‘I am a man thirty seven years old living...’ there is no comma to separate the information regarding his age and the description of the place he lives in. It is worth examining Otto Jespersen’s comment in *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin*. In the chapter designated ‘The Woman,’ he remarks, “Women speakers

and writers are, it appears, conservative, timorous, overly polite and delicate, trivial in their subject matter, and given to simple, repetitive or incomplete/illogical sentence structures (like a set of pearls joined together on a string of *ands*) softly spoken, and soft in the head” (Cameron 22). Through the example of Uncle Benny in *Lives of Girls and Women*, and Joe in “Images,” Munro seems to deconstruct the idea put forth in the above statement. She proves through her writing that not only women but also people like Uncle Benny or Joe who are marginalised, oppressed and excluded from society, will use the language that Otto Jespersen demarcates as women’s style. It is not because they are women but because of the inferior status or role they are prescribed to perform in society.

Uncle Benny’s conversation with Del’s Father is another example. Del’s father asks him about his ride to town, “Did the car give you any trouble?” and his reply is, “Nossir. She run fine” (Munro 1971 12). Here there is a play of gender in the words pronounced by Uncle Benny. His maleness is expressed through the statement ‘she run fine.’ The pronoun ‘she’ is very specific in explaining the phallogocentric attitude of the illiterate, marginalised Benny. These examples conform more to the characteristics of ‘public language’ identified by Basil Bernstein in which the uses are limited to, (1) “Short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences with a poor syntactical form, (2) Simple and repetitive use of conjunctions

(‘so,’ ‘then,’ ‘and,’ because), (3) Little use of subordinate clauses to break down the initial categories of the dominant subject, (4) Inability to hold a subject through a speech, so that a dislocated, informational content is facilitated, (5) Rigid and limited use of adjectives, (6) Infrequent use of impersonal pronouns as subjects of conditional clauses or sentences, (7) Frequent use of statements where the reason and conclusion are confounded to produce a categoric statement... etc.” (Hymes 253).

This prescription is true of children’s language also. Munro’s child narrator in “Walker Brother’s Cowboy” (*Dance of the Happy Shades*) begins a sentence thus:

Which is generally gray in the evening under a lightly overcast sky, no sunsets, the horizon dim. Also a long dark green building, like a roofed verandah, called the pavilion, full of farmers and their wives, in stiff good clothes, on Sundays.
(Munro 1968 8)

She continues, “That, and the docks where we would go and look all the grain boats, ancient, rusty, wallowing, making us wonder how they got past the breakwater let alone to Fort William... Not Dungannon where we used to live, Dungannon is near town and my mother is grateful for that” (Munro 1968 3). Here, the sentences begin with ‘Which,’ ‘Also,’ ‘That’ and ‘Not’ which is not according to the grammar of ‘formal language.’

By violating grammar Munro achieves an intimate tone through which the perception of a small child, who has keen observation and an eye for details, is presented.

In the chapter “Changes and Ceremonies” Del differentiates between the language of boys and girls thus:

Boys would bear down on you on their bicycles and cleave the air where you had been, magnificently, with no remorse, as if they wished there were knives on the wheels. And they would say anything.

They would say softly, ‘Hello hooers.’

They would say, ‘Hey where’s your fuckhole?’

in tones of cheerful disgust. (Munro 1971 98)

Del’s use of the words ‘bear down,’ ‘clean the air,’ ‘remorse,’ ‘cheerful disgust,’ etc., and the comparison to the knives on the wheels express the attitude of the boys towards girls and also the disgusting experience the girls suffer at the hands of boys of their own age. Del further explains, “The things they said stripped away freedom to be what you wanted, reduced you to what it was they saw, and that, plainly, was enough to make them gag” (Munro 1971 98). Here, through Del’s experience as a school going adolescent, Munro explicates the villainy and oppressive nature of language that boys use against girls even though they both belong

to the sub-culture, 'child.' If one explores further, one finds in the language of the mothers of Del and Naomi hints of caution and counsel. But Del's language is of resistance and Naomi's that of conformity. In this case, Uncle Benny's language and child narrator's language may be categorised as public language, which is different from the formal language. In the instance of using public language, the speaker is "within a mode of speech in which individual selection and permutation are grossly restricted, whilst in the case of a formal language the speaker is able to make a highly individual selection and permutation" (Hymes 253).

Bernstein further expounds, "Although the experiences of anxiety and guilt occur in all social groups, the speaker of a *public* language will tend to possess a relative inability to tolerate anxiety and guilt. It is suggested that behaviour is subordinate to *shame* rather than guilt. Shame indicates a felt diminution of *respect* accorded to conduct by *group*" (Hymes 257). This explains the motif of Munro's stories and in particular many of her characters that belong to the second and third phase of her writing, that is, of the stories from "Peace of Utrecht" to "Ottawa Valley" for being confessional and *Lives of girls and women*, *The Moons of Jupiter*, *Friend of My Youth* and *The Progress of Love*, for pursuing the theme of shame in being poor. Munro often describes poverty as a disease. In "Walker Brother's Cowboy," the child observes how her mother tries to hide their

condition of poverty, “We poured all we had into it, my mother says, and we come out with nothing. Many people could say the same thing, these days, but my mother has no time for the national calamity, only ours. Fate has flung us onto a street of poor people (it does not matter that we were poor before, that was a different sort of poverty), and the only way to take this, as she sees it, is with dignity, with bitterness with no reconciliation” (Munro 1968 4). Here, the child who sees through the pretensions of the poor mother undermines every sentence uttered by her. Once again, the child compares her walk with her father and mother:

This is entirely different from going out after supper with father. We have not walked past two houses before we feel we have become objects of universal ridicule. Even the dirty words chalked on the sidewalk are laughing at us. My mother does not seem to notice--she walks serenely like a lady shopping, like a *lady* shopping, past the housewives in loose beltless dresses torn under the arms. With me her creation, wretched curls and flaunting hairbow, scrubbed knees and white socks--all I do not want to be. I loathe even my name when she says it in public, in a voice so high, proud and ringing, deliberately different from the voice of any other mother on the street. (Munro 1968 5)

Here, the repetition of the word ‘lady’ with the second one in italics in contrast to the dress ‘torn under the arm’ brings out the irony of the situation. Here, it is not exactly poverty that is put to ridicule but the hypocritical pretensions to hide poverty. This is Munro’s art of using language to bring out the exact tone and texture of any experience. Munro, the writer as female, belongs to the sub-culture within the social hierarchy and hence shares the guilt and anxiety of the marginalised groups. This accounts for Munro’s transition from a writer of stories in the frame of fairy tales to a writer of confessional fiction. Her characters also belong to different age and status group and their language belongs to the realm of public language. So they are characterised as guilty and confessional. Another example of expression of guilt and shame could be found in “Connections,” a story from *The Moons of Jupiter*. The protagonist observes that her husband Richard, “always said the name of my native town as if it were a clot of something unpleasant, which he had to get out of his mouth in a hurry” (Munro 1982 11). She further elaborates:

Background was Richard’s word. Your *Background*. A drop in his voice, a warning. Or was that what I heard, not what he meant? When he said Dalgleish, even when he wordlessly handed me a letter from home. I felt ashamed, as if there was something growing over me: mold, something nasty and

dreary and inescapable. Poverty, to Richard's family, was like bad breath or running sores, an affliction for which the afflicted must bear one part of the blame. (Munro 1982 17)

Each word announces the shame and guilt the protagonist feels for being poor and for Richard's behaviour too. She also explicates the treachery in Richard's attitude towards Aunt Iris who is a 'connection' with her past and who is sincerely happy to see at least one of her relatives placed in a wealthy position. The following excerpt is an expression not of Aunt Iris's poverty but of Richard's narrow-mindedness:

'What a pathetic old tart,' said Richard coming into the living room as I was gathering up the coffee cups. He followed me into the kitchen, recalling things she had said, pretentious things, bits of bragging. He pointed out grammatical mistakes she had made, of the would-be genteel variety. He pretended incredulity. Maybe he felt it or maybe he thought it would be a good idea to start the attack immediately, before I took him to task for leaving the room, being rude, not offering a ride to the hotel. (Munro 1982 17)

Language varies as its function changes; it differs according to the situation. The name given to a particular variety of a language distinguished according to its use is termed 'register.' Some registers, according to

Halliday employ only a limited number of formal items and patterns, with the result that the language activity in these registers can accommodate little idiolectal or even dialectal variety. Such registers are termed *Restricted Languages*. Gunther Kress in his introduction to the book, *Halliday: System and Function in Language*, observes, “Malinowski identifies three major functions of language in Polynesian society: (1) The pragmatic function (as a form of action), (2) The magical function (language as a means of control over the environment), (3) the narrative function (language as a storehouse of useful and necessary information through its preserved accounts of history)” (Kress viii). In “Walker Brother’s Cowboy,” father uses the language of a salesman, which is restricted language or register:

Now then, missus, are you troubled with parasitic life? Your children’s scalps, I mean. All those crawly little things we’re too polite to mention that show up on the heads of best of families? Soap alone is useless, kerosene is not too nice a perfume, but I have here... or else, Believe me, sitting and driving all the way I do I *know* the value of these fine pills....

(Munro 1968 8)

For different products and different customers he would use different language style. He even uses different voices as the child notes, “one

gentling voice for the dogs and another, rousing, cheerful, for calling at doors” (Munro 1968 8). Here, language is manipulated to a pragmatic functional unit.

Uncle Benny in *Lives of Girls and Women* had another register--the language of an illiterate, perverted, broken farmer. The newspaper that he read was altogether different from that of what Del’s parents or anyone in the neighborhood read. Del always feels that Uncle Benny’s world is an entirely different one lying adjacent to her world. Del observes the town through which Uncle Benny has travelled while on his way to the house of the woman he later marries:

A map of the journey was burnt into his mind. And as he talked a different landscape--cars, billboards, industrial buildings, roads and locked gates and high wire fences, railway tracks, steep cindery embankments, tin sheds, ditches with a little brown water in them, also tin cans, mashed cardboard cartons, all kinds of clogged or barely floating waste--all this seemed to grow up around us created by/his monotonous, meticulously remembering voice, and we could see it. (Munro 1971 21-22)

This description of how new worlds are created through language using a ‘meticulously remembering voice’ is an example of how Munro

meticulously brings forth the power of language to create new worlds that once again form the other side of the so-called 'normal' view of life.

Through Del, Munro explicates the peculiarity of another register—the language of religion. Del describes the performance of the Anglican Church minister thus, “He had an English accent. *Dearly beloved brethrens, the scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness...*” (Munro 1971 83). She quotes the minister at length and comments on his method of sermonising:

And further along this line, and the minister took it up in his fine, harmonizing, though perhaps more restrained, English voice, and this dialogue continued, steadily paced, rising and falling, always with confidence, with lively emotion safely contained in the most elegant channels of language, and coming together, finally, in perfect quiet and reconciliation.

Lord, have mercy upon us,

Christ, have mercy upon us,

Lord, have mercy upon us. (Munro 1971 83)

This description is clinched by a very powerful deconstructive statement from Del, “So here was what I had not known, but must always have suspected, existed, what all those Methodists and Congregationalists and Presbyterians had fearfully abolished--the theatrical in religion” (Munro

1971 83). The word ‘theatrical’ provides the effect of a dramatic performance and reduces the whole activity of religion into an ‘acting out’ or a performance. This theatricality, Munro views not only in religion but also in domestic life, sexual life, work-a-day life and everywhere. Her characters like Rose make even a beating into a performance where the father is a poor performer and Flo, the mother, is brought down to sympathies and parodies of love.

Flo’s act of storytelling is a kind of performance. Her word for sexual relationship is ‘performance.’ “Relations performing. That was Flo’s word for it: *perform*. Back in the country, back on the hill farms she came from, Flo said that people had gone dotty, been known to eat boiled hay, and performed with their too close relations. Before Rose understood what was meant she used to imagine some makeshift stage, some rickety old barn stage, where members of a family got up and gave silly songs and recitations. *What a performance*” (Munro 1978 34). One could perceive the ‘silly songs and recitations’ having a close connection with the harmonising restrained voice of the Anglican minister. In domestic life, she portrays characters like Janet of “Office” or Pauline of “The Children Stay” or the other characters in collections like *Who Do You Think You Are? The Moons of Jupiter, Friend of My Youth, The Progress of Love*, etc., performing roles as wife, mother and lover. She even presents

death and disappearance, in the collection *Open Secrets*, in a theatrical manner. On the whole, Munro perceives life as a drama where old and young, man and woman ‘perform’ their roles irrespective of socio-cultural or economic conditions restricting them.

Just like uncle Benny’s newspaper cuttings and his vision of the city, one finds another register in the story “Royal Beatings,” that is, Diary writing. Rose’s father had scribbled, not exactly in a book or a diary but on scraps of paper, the following words:

Ate new potatoes 25th June. Record.

Dark Day, 1880’s, nothing supernatural.

Clouds of ash from forest fires

Aug 16, 1938. Giant thunderstorm in evng.

Lightning str. Pres. Church,

Turberry Twp. Will of God?

Scald strawberries to remove acid.

All things are alive. Spinoza. (Munro 1978 3)

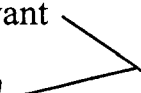
After recording these words, Rose comments, “Flo thought *Spinoza* must be some new vegetable” (Munro 1978 3). Anybody of Flo’s position would imagine so because the name of Spinoza appears mixed up with strawberries and new potatoes and words to signify the

calamities in nature like 'Dark Day,' 'supernatural,' 'clouds of ash,' 'forest fires,' 'giant thunderstorm,' 'lightning,' etc..

In addition to the work- related language, the public language, child language, and the diary, Munro often makes use of memory and the letter or the epistolary language with its tone of intimacy and pretense of revealing personally known truth to unravel the history of persons and changing rural spaces. This shift is more prominent in her third phase of transition as a writer in collections like *Friend Of My Youth*, *The Progress of Love* and *Open Secrets*. Memory also is used in stories from "Peace of Utrecht" onwards. Munro uses memory as well as free expressions that Otto Jespersen differentiates as having different functions. He explains that memory is, "repetition of what one has learned" and free expression is "another kind of mental activity, they have to be created in each case by the speaker" (Krishnaswamy 122). Munro's characters repeat past experience and then comment upon them whereby memory and free expression of language are fused in texts. She uses songs and poems in almost all her stories. It becomes an integral part of the corpus of Munrovian writing.

Munro uses newspaper language and also various typographical tricks like bold type, italics, capitals, concrete poem, etc.. Thus, she creates an altogether new experience by blending fictional and non-fictional

genres into a single text. In the story “Carried Away” that belongs to the collection *Open Secrets*, Munro uses the following typographical tricks:

- 1) Page 4 to 10 Letter – Section I – tone of intimacy established.
- 2) Page 18 Italics – Section II – A note from Jack Agnew.
- 3) Page 23 to 24 Newspaper report – italics – Section II – precisely describing details of the event.
- 4) Page 25 Bold letters – Notice at the Doud’s Piano factory.
- 5) Page 26 Italics – Title of Books.
- 6) Page 28 Italics – the inscription below the photo of A.V. Doud, founder of the factory.
- 7) Page 29 Italics – Title of Books.
- 8) Page 31 Italics – Public servant
Go on home!  About Doud.

In “A Real Life,” Munro uses italics, quotation, songs, letter, photograph, etc. In “Albanian Virgin,” in addition to italics and book names, she introduces words like ‘raki’--a kind of brandy; ‘kula’--tribe; ‘sofra’--low table; ‘striga’ --vampire; ‘oras’--devils etc. which is portrayed as part of the experience of Charlotte who strays into the unknown land of the people of Kula. “Open Secrets” is full of songs that add information to the story unravelled. She specifies days, months and year to locate

incidents in Time thereby making the reader feel that the happenings under discussion are real. In "A Wilderness Station" she specifies 1851, 1852, 1853, 1959, etc. and quotes from 131st psalm. In "Vandals," she uses wise sayings like, "Nature does nothing uselessly--Aristotle" (Munro 1997 271). Bird language is also used in the story "Vandals," "what does the red-winged black bird say? Company--ee! what does the Jonny Wren say? *Pleasa--pleasa--please, can I have a piece of cheese*" (Munro 1997 286).

As described above Munro mixes and fuses different varieties of language--the standard language for the mature narrators, the public language for ordinary people, children's language for child narrators and women's language for ordinary female characters. She sprays it with songs, poems, diary, memory and letters. She uses figures of speech like metaphor and simile in a deft and beautiful way. Some examples are:

- 1) "Her legs are long, white and muscular, marked all over with blue veins as somebody had been drawing rivers on them with indelible pencil" (Munro 1978 17).
- 2) "The street is shaded, in some places, by maple trees whose roots have cracked and heaved the side walk and spread out like crocodiles into the bare yards" (Munro 1968 1).
- 3) "Stricken farm yards" (Munro 1968 6).

- 4) “Her laugh was loud and noisy like an engine bearing down on you” (Munro 1978 7).
- 5) “Rose’s nature was growing like a prickly pineapple” (Munro 1978 6).
- 6) “Our Gothic Mother,” she said (Munro 1968 195).
- 7) “She looks like an Egyptian, with her long neck and small sharp face and greatly wrinkled, greatly darkened skin” (Munro 1968 203).
- 8) “Daily life continued, ringed by disaster as by a jubilant line of fire” (Munro 1990 127).
- 9) “On the edge of it, Roberta feels herself curling up like a jaundiced leaf” (Munro 1982 136).
- 10) “...in a voice like cream, scornful and loving” (Munro 1974 2).

“‘Language of women,’ says B. Sreedevi, “is a highly elusive topic ... An alternative term such as ‘genderlect’ might give a notion that it is a dialect associated with the sex of the speaker. This too is not fully acceptable” (Sreedevi 61). Since men and women are biologically, psychologically and physically different, the language they use to express their experience also differs. This difference is increased when women belong to the sub-culture group in the stratification of society. Linguists agree that in verbal skills, women are superior and that accounts for the female talent in story-telling. But linguists also state that in visual--spatial skill and mathematics, men excel. In the case of Munro, one may

emphatically claim that in addition to verbal skills, she exhibits an extraordinary tenor in visual-spatial manipulation and description of details with mathematical precision. Munro's early stories clearly explicate how gender is coded in the language boys/men use. But, she overcomes this feeling of inferior/superior status, accepts the position as female and utilises female potential to the maximum. This quality she achieves through her stories that gradually develop in multiple ways:

- 1) Protagonist - From childhood to young wives to middle-aged women.
- 2) Structure - Linear to non-linear.
- 3) Space - Linear to non-linear.
- 4) Time - Linear to non-linear.
- 5) Author - From adolescence to maturity.
- 6) Perspective - Personal to impersonal.
- 7) Language - Movement through different registers and use of typographical techniques.
- 8) Narrative - Traditional to Post-modern.

In her early stories, Munro seems to display an awareness of how language reflects and subtly reinforces social order. In them, she uses the accepted standard variety of language; but in the stories from "Peace of Utrecht" onwards, she tries to use distinctly female and male languages

judiciously. Being a female writer, she uses the language of women with a purpose. At the same time, she uses male and female languages to describe persons having feminine or masculine qualities. The portrayal of her characters brings forth the fact that she does not believe in the inferiority of women or the superiority of men. For her, it is a matter of power play and her characters, in one way or the other, succeed in overcoming such odds of daily life. Her early characters are ashamed of poverty and disease and they are overwhelmed by death. Gradually, the characters grow from adolescence of the early stories to middle-aged women in *Open Secrets* and “The Children Stay.” Thus, she succeeds as a writer in weaving historical and social events together with the personal and even the deeply private side of life.

A. Meillet in an essay titled “The Feminine Gender in the Indo-European Languages” remarks that the feminine gender appears as “a subdivision of the ‘animate’ gender, which is opposed to the ‘inanimate’ gender called ‘neuter.’ The feminine form is obtained by derivation from the masculine form by means of a suffix--â--or--yâ--. The feminine is, thus, a sub-division of the ‘animate gender’” (Hymes 124). This subordination of feminine is present not only in Indo-European languages. This has been proved by Mary R. Haas in her essay “Men’s and Women’s speech in Kaosati.” She says, “the speech of women is seen to be somewhat

more archaic than that of men and in certain cases men's forms differ from women's by the simple addition of an S" (Hymes 228-29). She further explains that women talk, "easy, slow and soft'. It sounds pretty, men's speech has too much ssss" (Hymes 229). But she adds that if a man tells a tale he uses women's forms while quoting a female character and similarly a woman quoting a male character uses men's forms. Munro, describing feminine qualities uses women's language and describing masculine qualities uses the phallo-centric language. In the mixing of these different varieties, she follows the oral tradition one finds in Kaosati. Edward Sapir found that differences in language spoken by men and women existed even among the aboriginal languages of Canada.

Linguists find a difference in the topics discussed by men and women. Munro, as a writer discusses domestic topics very closely woven into the rubric of female life. Probing into the topics discussed by Munro's characters, one finds that men talk about adventures, politics, history, war, physical world, etc., while women talk about the house, other women, children, sex, death, prayers, etc.. Linguists like James D.J. Drakich and Deborah Tannen observe:

Women are expected to use and do use talk to a greater extent than men to serve the function of establishing and maintaining personal relationships (this is not surprising, as

the responsibility for interpersonal relationships primarily rests with women); for example, as we have observed, women, to a greater extent than men, are expected to talk, and do talk, simply in order to keep the interaction flowing smoothly and to show goodwill towards others, and they are expected to talk, and do talk, about personal feelings and other socio-emotional matters relevant to interpersonal relationships to a greater extent, than men... what is particularly important in female friendships is the sharing of intimate feelings and confidences through talk, whereas in male friendships the sharing of activities is more important. (Wardhaugh 317)

Examples could be easily traced in Munro's stories where women establish and maintain personal relationship with emotional and intimate feelings they share. In "The Shining Houses," one finds Mary maintaining relationship with both Mrs Fullerton and the new inhabitants of the subdivision. In "Boys and Girls" the girl expresses emotional quality more than the boy in the event of killing their old mare. In "Peace of Utrecht" and "Connection," the Aunts provide a connection with the past, the unknown aspects of the life of the protagonists. In *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* Del's mother and Rose's stepmother Flo are the ones who maintain contact with others and share

ideas. In "Stone in the Field," the Aunts have no connection with the world. But mother is a person who moves into households to get the antiques by making a good relationship, forming a consensus and mediating between Poppy and the property owners. In "Carried Away," Louisa tells Jim Frarey about herself and after telling one story could not restrain from telling another. In "A Real Life," Millicent is the one who mediates between Dorrie and Muriel. In almost all her stories Munro portrays characters sharing intimate feelings and confidence through talk.

This way of sharing intimate feelings and confidence comes under the label of gossip. Deborah Cameron in her essay, "Introduction: why is language a feminist issue?" categorises gossip, story-telling, private letters, and diary as female genres. Mary MacQuade ("The Shining Houses"), Flo (*Who Do You Think You Are?*), Margot ("Wigtime"), Lily and Marjorie ("Turkey Season"), etc., are gossipy characters. Munro, as a writer, resorts to the tone of gossip because it is a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting. It is also a female cultural event that springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, at the same time providing a comfort of validation. There are four varieties of gossip distinguished, according to linguistic features, "house-talk, scandal, bitching and chatting" (Cameron 242). Deborah Jones specifies, "the women's gossip is an aspect of female

language use, distinguished from more general concepts of women's speech style and of gossip" (Cameron 242).

Analysing gendered language, Mark Robson and Peter Stockwell, in the book titled *Language in Theory*, points out that performance of femininity includes such patterns as:

- 1) Over-hesitancy, including pausing, stuttering, 'um-ing' and ah-ing', and uncompleted sentences which... slow... and... trail... off.
- 2) Non-assertiveness, including the avoidance or hedging of phrases that 'er, you know,' sound overly fluent or too, 'ahm,' confident, and the use of a rising intonation that invites agreement and support.
- 3) Self-reference in subject matter, and a tendency to personalize by using first person pronouns, inclusive and intimate 'we' and possessives.
- 4) Avoidance of swearing and other taboo forms.
- 5) Super-politeness, including a (hmn, yeah) high degree of (sure, yep, mmm) positive and supportive back channel.
- 6) Non-interruption (especially of men) in conversation (Robson 2).

Examining the above points, one finds Munro's characters often using an over-hesitant, pausing and stuttering style of language. Such a character is Fame's mother who is polite and will say, "I'm afraid we're

not doing much to entertain your friend” (Munro 1986 15). But her sister Beryl’s speech is like this, “I’m not used to being anybody’s aunt, honey. I’m not even anybody’s momma. I’m just me. Call me Beryl” (Munro 1986 14). This difference is due to the difference in their nature or temperament. Marietta, the mother, is highly emotional in her view of the world and she has a victimised feeling all through her life. But Beryl was independent and matter of fact. The first dialogue includes the first person pronoun ‘I’ and the including and intimate ‘we’ but the second one includes only an emphatic bossy ‘I’. Munro’s characters are not all devoid of swearing or using taboo forms. For example the protagonist of “Turkey Season” is stunned by the words used by Lily and Marjorie. She knows that, “They sang at their work and talked abusively and intimately to the turkey carcasses.

Don’t you nick me, you old bugger!

Aren’t you the old crap factory! (Munro 1982 63)

At this point, she pauses to comment, “I had never heard women talk like that” meaning that it was the monopoly of men to use such language (Munro 1982 63). In “How I Met My Husband,” Alice Kelling addresses the narrator as “Loose little bitch...” (Munro 1974 67). Munro’s characters often do not interrupt conversation, but often reacts, like Helen of “Connections,” by throwing a pie at her husband for his wicked speech

or like Margot of “Wigtime” going disguised and curbing the illicit activities of her husband or like Stella in “Lichen” who, “slaps the meat over,” “Inclined to be fey” and “bangs around, getting out apples, potatoes, onions” (Munro 1986 40).

Annie Leclerc, in her essay “Woman’s Word” reports, “My body flows with the vast rhythmic pulsation of life. My body experiences a cycle of changes. Its perception of time is cyclical, but never closed or repetitive” (Cameron 77). Munro’s writings about early childhood are linear because the child protagonists of these stories do not know the cyclic nature of life. But as her characters move into adolescence the linearity is broken and a cyclic structure appears in her later works. It may also be because as a young girl or a beginner in writing, Munro has imbibed the notion of linearity from the socialisation through education but, later, acquiring knowledge of her own femaleness, her style of writing also undergoes changes. Depicting her child protagonists in her early stories, Munro talks about the Father’s world with interest and fascination, while the Mother’s world is extremely disgusting and repulsive, a sort of “disdainful harmony” as she mentions in “Something I’ve Been Meaning To Tell You” (Munro 1974 5).

One phrase that is repeated throughout Munro’s stories is ‘sort of.’ Every story inscribes this phrase. Pamela Fishman discussing

“conversational insecurity” describes how Lakoff identifies hedging as an aspect of women’s insecurity. By hedges she referred to the frequent use of such phrases as ‘sorta,’ ‘like’ and ‘you know’ etc. One finds Munro’s favourite phrase to be ‘sort of’ and frequent inclusion of the word ‘like’ in her catching similes that have already been mentioned in this chapter. Experiences unspoken or unmentionable are also subject to scrutiny in Munro’s fictions. She has a clever way of expressing and conveying the emotional dimensions of particular words. Here are some examples:

- 1) “Blind! This is the first blind person I have ever seen close up. Her eyes are closed, the eyelids sunk away down, showing no shape of the eyeball, just hollow. From one hollow comes a drop of silver liquid, a medicine, or a miraculous tear” (Munro 1968 12).
- 2) “The tiny share we have of time appalls me, though my father seems to regard it with tranquility. Even my father, who sometimes seems to have been at home in the world as long as it has lasted, has really lived on this earth only a little longer than I have, in terms of all the time there has been to live in. He has not known a time, any more than I when automobiles and electric lights did not at least exist. He was not alive when this century started. I will be barely alive--old, old--when it ends” (Munro 1968 3).

- 3) “Lovers. Not a soft word, as people thought, but cruel and tearing” (Munro 1974 11).
- 4) “Well.” This is a habit of country people, old people, to say “well,” meaning, “is that so?” with a little extra politeness and concern (Munro 1968 12).
- 5) The narrator of “Ottawa Valley” asks her mother for a pin to fix her pants and her mother tells her to take it off. The girl is scandalised. She comments, “I couldn’t imagine walking into church in a blue taffeta dress and no pants. Rising to sing the hymns, sitting down, in *no pants*. The smooth cool boards of the pew and *no pants* (Munro 1974 192) (Repetition of the words-
-to intensify feeling).
- 6) People describe Poppy as a queer person. “When they said he was queer, they just meant queer, odd, freakish, distrusting. His stammer and his rolling eyes and his fat bum and his house full of throw away were all rolled up into that one word” (Munro 1982 21).
- 7) Connection. That was what it was all about. The cousins were a show in themselves, but they also provided a connection. A connection with the real, and prodigal, and dangerous, world (Munro 1982 6).

- 8) Maiden ladies, they were called. Old maids was too thin a term, it would not cover them. Their bosoms were heavy and intimidating--a single, armored bundle--and their stomach and behinds full and corseted as those of any married woman. In those days it seemed to be the thing for women's bodies to swell and ripen to a good size twenty, if they were getting anything out of life at all: then, according to class and aspirations, they would either sag and loosen, go wobbly as custard under pale print dresses and damp aprons, or be girded into shapes whose firm curves and proud slopes had nothing to do with sex, everything to do with rights and power (Munro 1982 1).
- 9) People will sit and watch the lake as they'd never watch a field of waving grass or grain. Why is that, when the motion is the same? It must be the washing away, the wearing away, that compels them. The water all the time returning--eating, altering, the shore. A similar thing happens to a person dying that kind of death. He has seen his father, he has seen others. A washing away, vanishing--one fine layer after another down to the lighted bone. (Munro 1990 134).

Munro is often obsessed by the mother figure suffering from Parkinson's disease. This disease is the subject of discussion in many of

her stories. Another memory concerning her mother is that of a straight-backed chair or an upright piano or a loaf of bread. The writer discusses the foundry disease, pneumonia, polio etc. in detail. She sometimes resorts to excerpts from the Encyclopedia to describe a disease. The word 'Tart' or 'Tartar' also recurs in her stories. This is a word pelted against women by the male centered society. She uses qualifiers and often transferred epithets in a series to describe a particular person or events. Some examples are given below:

- 1) "On wet windy Sundays, snowy Sundays; sore-throat Sundays"
(Munro 1971 80).
- 2) "He would be cheerful, hearty, prudent, perhaps a bit self-congratulatory, attentive in a business - like way and he could manage in the middle of his attentions to slip in a warning, a joke, a friendly insult, a reminder of how things stood" (Munro 1982 51).
- 3) "Gail had a mental picture of one of those long-legged, short-haired, energetic, and boyishly attractive girls" (Munro 1995 170).
- 4) "Those vain quarrelsome men? Bloated, opinionated, untidy men, that is how I see them, corseted by the academic life, the literary life, by women" (Munro 1974 24).

- 5) “George, who is a stocky, dark, barrel-chested man, with a daunting professional look of self-assurance and impatience (he used to be a teacher), wears a clean T-shirt and non-descript pants” (Munro 1982 135).
- 6) “He never saw them getting off the train, with their paper bag, in a banging, jarring, crowded, utterly bewildering new place.
- 7) “... this breezy-talking silvery-blond woman with stern--bored expressions” (Munro 1986 107).

Linguists like Robin Lakoff state that one special feature of women’s language is a specificity in using color words. Lakoff elaborates on this subject in her essay “Language and Women’s Place.” Munro has an eye for exactness in colour depiction as seen in the following examples:

- 1) “We play I spy, but it is hard to find many colors. Grey for the barns and sheds and toilets and houses, brown for the yard and fields, black or brown for the dogs. The rusting cars show rainbow patches, in which I strain to pick out purple or green; likewise I peer at doors for shreds, of old peeling paint, maroon or yellow (Munro 1968 9).
- 2) Nora’s dress--“green and yellow on brown...” (Munro 1968 12).
- 3) “... the soft scrawls of blue and red and orange...” (Munro 1968 191).

- 4) "... they had copper rinses on their hair, and blue eye lids, and a robust capacity for drink" (Munro 1968 192).
- 5) "I recognized with alarm the peach-coloured be-jacket I had sent for Christmas" (Munro 1968 205).
- 6) "Pink cut-glass bowl" (Munro 1968 210).
- 7) "For years I've been wearing bleached-out colors which I suddenly can't bear. I buy a deep-red satin blouse, a purple shawl, a dark-blue skirt" (Munro 1982 174).
- 8) "Angela wears emerald-green damask with long sun-faded stripes, draped so as to leave one golden shoulder bare." "Eva is wearing several fragile, yellowed lace curtains draped and bunched up..." (Munro 1982 135).
- 9) Julie is wearing a pink-and white-striped shirtwaist dress, and a hat of lacy beige straw, with a pink rose under the brim (Munro 1982 181).

Munro is aware of the way in which gender is imbricated in language. Munro's characters are aware of the restrictions that gender imposes upon women. They analyse words that seem innocent, in a factual manner and deconstruct it to bring out the harshness of this cultural creation. Examples:

- 1) "I could make you very happy," said Jack to Hazel... "It seemed rash and sweeping to her, dazzling but presumptuous. She had to try to see herself, then, as somebody who could be made

happy. The whole worrying, striving complicated bundle of Hazel--was that something that could just be picked up and made happy!" (Munro 1990 103).

- 2) "She had meant that Barbara was not well-mannered, but couldn't she also have meant--loose? A loose woman. When he heard people say that, he'd always thought of an unbuttoned blouse, clothes slipping off the body, to indicate its appetite and availability. Now he thought it could mean just that--loose. A woman who could get loose, who wasn't fastened down, who was not reliable, who could roll away" (Munro 1990 132).
- 3) "She thinks about the first time Neil came to the Furnisher Barn, how he put his arm around Samson's neck and said, "Not much of a watchdog you got here, Ma'am." She thought the "Ma'am" was impudent, phony, out of some old Elvis Presley movie. And what he said next was worse. She looked at Samson, and she said, "He's better at night." And Neil said, "So am I." Impudent, swaggering conceited, she thought (Munro 1990 45).
- 4) Brain's explanation for leaving his job on the lake Boat was, "Yeah, fuckin,' boats, I got sick of that" (Munro 1982 19). The protagonist confides, "Language at the Turkey barn was coarse and Free, but this was one word never heard there. And Brain's use of it seemed not careless but flaunting, mixing insult and provocation" (Munro 1982 69).

- 5) “Hugo said he could not look at her without thinking of the word lumpen, but he supposed she might be nourishing like oatmeal porridge. She became his second wife” (Munro 1974 28).
- 6) Boys commenting on Eva and Carol who were wading through water, “Look at the fat-assed ducks in wading.” “Fat assed fucks” (Munro 1974 103).

Later, “Frank, who was the most literate, talkative and inept of the three, began referring to the boat as she, an affectation which Eva and Carol acknowledged with fish-mouths of contempt” (Munro 1974 104).

In the chapter entitled “Writing Gender,” of *Language in Theory: A Resource Book for Students*, Mark Robson and Peter Stockwell explain, “Cumulative and Process Oriented sexuality of Women” is metaphorically extended to the desire for openness, endlessness and the blurring of closure and other generic boundaries (Robson 33). The previous chapters of this thesis and the above mentioned peculiarities in Munro’s writing unravel a desire for openness, endlessness, and blurring of closure and other generic boundaries. So all Munro’s stories may be termed as an ‘écriture feminine’ since there is a style characterised by fluidity of form in syntactic organisation and also since it, “allows ambiguity and polysemy of word choice” (Robson 33). It may also be noted that it is open to readerly participation in a shared and potentially endless process of meaning-construction.

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I

**ALICE MUNRO:
DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE FROM
THE TRADITIONAL TO METAFICTIONAL**

P.K. PRABHA

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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Conclusion

Alice Munro attracts the attention of readers in two important ways - by her use of the erstwhile marginalised genre of the short story and by her choice of the lives of girls, women and other ordinary people who were pushed to the margins of society. This bold step has given prominence to both the genre and the humans who were ignored. Through this endeavour she conveys to the reading public that there is no human existence that is negligible or fit to be thrown into the periphery. She emphasises that every human life is precious, every individual possesses a strategy of survival and that everyone celebrates life in his or her own way. Through her stories she destroys the division between the centre and the periphery to show that every individual occupies a central position in the design of life.

She also defies the idea of good and bad affirming through the life of her characters that these sharp divisions are simply arbitrary. She manipulates the dichotomies defined by patriarchal society to bring out moments of recognition that are rooted in the present moment. They are seen in relation to the people, places and perceptions of the past with a special use of language which articulates the experience in a lucid and vivid manner. To capture such moments of recognition, she positions

dichotomist concepts like Life--Death; Normal--Abnormal; Happiness--Sorrow; Dignity--Shame; Light--Darkness; This World--Other world; Past--Present etc. against each other and brings out the different shades of day-to-day life experiences that pass from childhood to old age in myriad colours and deviant paths of physical and psychic realms of human existence.

Reading Munro is like undertaking a journey from the Gothic situation of the pre-Sixties to the post-modern situation of the post-Sixties. This is achieved by a special rendering of the narrative structure, manipulation of narrative techniques, depiction of female characters and a particular use of language. The early stories and the later stories mark a definite change in milieu, life style, attitude, values, social structure and economic condition.

The stories of the early phase are structured like fairy tales where the insignificant individual suddenly appears to be the most important personality. Stories like "Dance of the Happy Shades," "The Day of the Butterfly," etc., belong to this phase. The seven stories of this period are set in a Gothic milieu where the heroine is presented as a helpless being. Towards the end of the stories the helpless being gets transformed into a Cinderella figure on whom all attention is showered. Even in these stories Munro's uniqueness becomes evident in the way she brings out the

absurdity in defining people as good/bad or normal/abnormal. This off-beat outlook though not prominent in the early stories gains emphasis in her later stories where she completely discards such conventional divisions bringing out her talent as a female writer with a different perspective.

Munro moves from the traditional stance of narrating one incident in a short story to the portrayal of an incident viewed from multiple positions and narrated through multiple narrative voices. Further, the story line abandons the linear mode and moves backward for a re-vision of the absent past and moves forward again. This stance changes into a spiral movement and later to a zigzag oscillation between space, time and events. Her later stories are more open ended and provide the reader enough space to interpret. While the early stories anticipate readers they are not imbricated in the rubric of narrative. But in later stories beginning from "Peace of Utrecht" that defy a definite ending, the role of the reader becomes inevitable. As one approaches *Open Secrets*, Munro presents multiple endings out of which the reader may select the plausible or reject them and conjure up a new conclusion. The concept of plot, though used in the early stories like "The Day of the Butterfly" and "Postcard," is abandoned in the later ones like "Fits" and "Jack Randa Hotel." Here, the reader is compelled to rack his/her brains to unravel the mystery behind

the events. This escape from a definite plot is brought about through the complex narrative structure of the later stories.

Munro's perfect technical skill combines power with simplicity and sympathy with intelligence. She focuses on the unwritten world of women which accounts for the relevance of Munro's works in the post-modern context. The attraction of Munro's stories is in providing a reading experience of an event in which one plays a part but without any absolute control over it. It is openness to further experience leading to a shocking awareness of the position of reality. Through her narrative structure which is an art of disarrangement, and her unsettling fictional endings, Munro disturbs the reader's equilibrium. The shifts in narrative theme and structure in the Munroviaan fictional world throw the storyline open to questions and the disarrangement, demands new judgments. Munro's brilliance as a chronicler becomes evident as one reads from *Dance of the Happy Shades* to the *Open Secrets* and "The Children Stay."

The presence of the author in Munro's texts occupy an ambivalent position between her narrated self and her real self. 'Delay,' 'postponement' and 'différance' is identified in her works. Munro achieves this quality by putting off any sort of reconciliation or coming to terms with situations in her texts. Munro's technique of postponement and différance reaches its climax in her collection *Open Secrets*. Munro's narrative technique in

the early phase is the achievement of a natural and memorable ending which satisfies the reader by completing the long chain of events that precede it. The reader moving forward to the *Open Secrets* finds that Munro has already surpassed the stage of a natural ending that completes a chain of events. Her later stories comprise of scattered episodes that are to be picked up by each reader to be rearranged according to the temperament of the one who takes it.

Munro's fictions are self-referring fictions--stories about story telling--metafictions. Stories from "Peace of Utrecht" are self-reflexive fictions or fictions about fictions. Through her stories she conveys awareness that there is no turning back in life. The only way back is through remembrance. So Munro uses memory to create the chain of tradition which passes on experience from one generation to the other. Munro's apprehension of the act of narration is expressed through Rose in *Who Do You Think You Are?* who feels that each telling falsifies an experience. The reader feels that each reading of Munro provides a new experience. As the reader proceeds to *The Progress of Love* and *Open Secrets* one finds Munro questioning the reliability of memory and adopting new techniques like the diary and the letter to challenge and provoke the reader.

Munro's fictional world defies the traditional notion that the short story, unlike the novel, is incapable of accommodating a fully developed fictional world and so the focus should be limited to one or two incidents

in trying to make it effective. She often focuses on one incident but reaches out to encompass other incidents associated with the main one. She also extends her realm to include two or three generations of women and the changes that occur in the small towns during the passage of time. She also spreads out her magic carpet over Space including different locales within one story frame. Another significant feature of her story is that it outgrows the traditional concept of empathy or identification of the reader with the text. Munro skips through Time preparing the reader for the jerks and bumps in the experience of reading. She hammers into the head of the reader that every sentence she places becomes both real and unreal. Her stories evolve self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions in her rendering of the characters and events and also in her management of Time and Space.

A special feature of Munro's story world is that it gives the feeling that stories are everywhere. For example, in the collection *Who Do You Think You Are?* one finds Rose narrating the story of Flo who narrates stories about Rose's dead mother and so on. Every story leads to a new character about whom there is a story to be told. The experience of reading Munro's stories lands one in the mise-en-abyme of stories from where there is no escape. Munro and her story-telling characters not only narrate stories but the stories tell us about them. Thus the readers enter into the heart of the characters in the midst of all the experience they narrate to us.

Munro's talent as a story-teller affirms that the art of story-telling will never come to an end. To her, people often become characters in a story of the past since she herself has mentioned that life is preserved in anecdotes as in mental cellophane. Story-telling will continue to share experience as long as there are human beings on earth. To prove this, Munro picks up ordinary women like Flo or Aunt Annie to declare to the world that women are the greatest story-tellers. It is they who perpetuate the past to the future generation through their narratives. Munroian characters assert that the female talent of story-telling will continue as long as such women exist in this world.

Munro does not offer advice like the traditional story-teller. But she conveys a new kind of wisdom fit for the post-modern age. Human beings in the present face new challenges for which a new kind of wisdom enabling them to overcome the moment of crisis is to be arrived at. Munro presents before the reader certain problems for which she places more than one solution leaving the thread for the reader to knot. Munro interprets the ordinary aspects of life in an extraordinary and marvellous way with unfailing accuracy and allows the reader to interpret things the way he/she understands them. Thus her narratives achieve amplitude that ordinary information lacks.

The traditional concept of Death as reference point in a story is made use of by Munro. The difference lies in the way she extends the

dimension to a consideration of the value of life, a desire to be in life and a struggle to comprehend Death which continues up to the stories “Winter Wind” and “Ottawa Valley.” She further turns to an altogether different aspect of Death as though she had realised that it was not easy or possible to gain control over Death as in the case of Reality. So, in her later collection *Open Secrets* she presents different perspectives on Death through different characters. Like all post-modern metafiction writers, Munro recognises, that Death and Reality could be understood only in fragments and not as a unified whole. She deals with Death as related to pain and guilt up to her collection *Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You*. In *The Progress of Love* and *Friend of My Youth*, she contrasts it with life situations that provide an awareness of the value of life. But *Open Secrets* deal with this theme in an analytical, distanced way and ascertain that Munro has succeeded in overcoming pain or at least minimising the significance of that painful enigma.

Munro's female characters deserve special attention. Stories of the early phase depict lives of girls, gradually give way to young women and later posit mothers, middle-aged women and old women. It is when the young woman blends into the role of the mother that a magic transition occurs in the narrative structure and style of the writer. The young woman, herself a mother looking back into the life of her mother, is a bold step in

the development of Munro as an artist. She portrays women who aspire for a better future and also those who are amputated from their past. But she projects the lives of women who struggle to cope with their present. In her early stories the protagonists move away from home and later come back to see that the reality of the place has not changed as in "Peace of Utrecht" and *Lives of Girls and Women*. In her later stories, the narrators move in Time and Space and return to see their hometown totally changed as in the stories of *Open Secrets*.

Munro's stories strike at the root of patriarchy, the system of male domination and superiority based on the thesis of male control relegating woman to a subordinate position. She presents characters that resist patriarchal control over women's sexuality and mobility. She does not deal with the theme of property or wealth. She recognises patriarchal control in relation to power and dominance. And the explication makes clear that Munro is more in tune with the radical feminists who believe that patriarchy precedes private property. She also drives home the fact that the basic contradiction is between the sexes and not between economic classes. She exposes clearly the hierarchical and exploitative relationship between the sexes. At the same time she does not present an attitude of antagonism or hatred towards men. She discusses the theme of masculinity in her stories "Material," "Dulse," "Turkey Season" etc. and includes homosexuals and handicapped persons to explicate the vicious trap of

patriarchy as a system. Through her stories like, “Boys and Girls,” “Changes and Ceremonies,” etc., she explains that maleness and femaleness are not biological constructs but rather the result of a long historical process. Munro views patriarchy as a system and attempts to deconstruct it through her later stories.

Munro achieves the transformation from traditional story-telling to the metafictional mode through her special use of language as well. The use of metaphors and similes become restricted in later stories. She brings violent changes in the accepted notions regarding sentence structure and semantics to suit her story structure. She also blurs the boundary between different genres of writing by mixing poetry, prose, newspaper reports, articles from magazines and dialogues into the single frame of the short story. Typographical transformation also marks her development from the traditional concept of short story to the post-modern. The most remarkable feature in her use of language is the deconstructive stance. She deconstructs all traditional notions of meaning, time, space, human body, psyche, physical world, the patriarchal institutions like family, school, church, etc., through her unique use of language.

Thus, the act of reading and analysing Munro’s fictional world which gradually transforms from the traditional world of the pre-sixties with its old values and concepts, to the postmodern metafictional stance

in structure, theme, characterisation, plot, language, etc., is not a half sleep but a gymnast's struggle. The reader has to alert oneself and construct the text from the hints, the clues, the launch or framework the writer provides. Each reading of Munro is a new experience true to the proverb that says none of us can step into the same river twice. Like the river of life, Munro's stories flow incessantly, without beginning or ending, meandering through infinite ways, always new and enchanting.

I

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