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THEME AND IMAGE IN ALICE MUNRO'S FICTION

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BY
DANELLE BOYNTON, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Danelle Boynton, B.A. (Western)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. H.J. Ferns

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ABSTRACT

Alice Munro's fiction has a distinctive style that grows, in part, out of the close relationship between her themes and images. The main concern of this thesis will be to explore the way in which Alice Munro uses certain key images to dramatize the central themes of her fiction. Munro's fiction examines the trials and occasional triumphs which the individual experiences in developing from childhood and youth to maturity and offers the reader insight into the complex processes of life through her subtle rendering of human experience.

It is Alice Munro's perceptive dramatizations of life that make each of her short stories and novels memorable to the reader. She possesses the ability to present 'real life'* vividly and convincingly as well as the talent to develop each story through her use of significant, and often recurring, images. These images are sometimes introduced obliquely at first, yet the reader is made aware of their significance because of Munro's skillful attention to dramatic and sensuous detail. When each story reaches a climax or epiphanal moment it is because its images have been cumulatively built up and dramatically emphasized as essential to our grasp of the climactic moment and most important aspects of each novel or story's theme.

The themes in each of her four works of fiction are

*The title she originally gave to Lives of Girls and Women (1971).

similar and are often repeated in greater depth from earlier to later works. As a writer of fiction, Munro has created collections of short stories and novels which are basically concerned with the maturation process and the recognition of moral and social pressures which can influence the individual. Munro's images are often sensuous and uncomplicated to begin with, mirroring the attitudes of her predominantly youthful narrators. As the individuals in her stories grow to understand some of the pitfalls of society, Munro's images sometimes become unnatural and almost threatening. In becoming so they reflect the corruption and pressures of society which produce the madmen, suicides and cripples of her world who are the deprived manifestations of society's spiritual deformation.

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INTRODUCTION

In an interview with Graeme Gibson, Alice Munro said, "I'm not a writer who is very concerned with ideas. I'm not an intellectual writer. I'm very, very excited by what you might call the surface of life, and it must be that this seems to me meaningful in a way I can't analyse and describe."¹ This "surface of life" concerns the ordinary--the reality in which disguises and deceptions are used so often that they become commonplace. Alice Munro's talent lies in her ability to explore this reality, and present the various tones and textures of personal experience.

Several critics and admirers of Munro's work have likened her attention to detail to the techniques used in photography. Such techniques necessitate an intense feeling for the exact texture of surfaces, the ability to capture a precise mood, thought or emotion. A photograph can capture some of these things using film as a medium, whereas Alice Munro relies on language to convey her responses to the reader. She often adopts a straight, documentary style that rejects the tendency of many photographers to manipulate images, and in an essay entitled "The Colonel's Hash Resettled", she defends

¹Graeme Gibson, Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1973), p. 241.

her use of images saying, "...I did not consciously plan, make, or arrange them; I found them."²

This method of "finding" images is one that demands far greater technique than the photographer's lens can adequately achieve. For this reason, it might be useful to note Alice Munro's mention of various visual artists in her interviews with Graeme Gibson and John Metcalf. To John Metcalf, she has admitted that Edward Hopper's paintings are doing "...exactly the same thing that writing I respond to does and what I would like to do."³ Hopper's paintings present ordinary scenes and buildings which might be found in any small town: the barber shop, the gas station, the look of a street on a Sunday morning, an old, ornate house. Yet, "they are like the edge of a stage beyond which drama unfolds"⁴, much like Munro's stories that move subtly, yet purposefully, towards a delicate, epiphanal moment or moral insight.

Of his own work, Edward Hopper has said, "My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription

²Alice Munro, "The Colonel's Hash Resettled", in John Metcalf, ed., The Narrative Voice (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), p. 132.

³John Metcalf, "A Conversation With Alice Munro", Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (Fall 1972), 58.

⁴Alfred H. Barr Jr., "Hopper's Art" in Edward Hopper: Retrospective Exhibition (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1933), p. 14.

possible of my most intimate impressions of nature. If this end is unattainable, so, it can be said, is perfection in any other ideal of painting or in any other of man's activities."⁵ The "activity" Munro chooses is the activity of writing, but her ideals are much the same as Hopper's. It is important for Munro to recall even the most minute detail which might aid in her dramatisation of the human condition. She peels back layers of experience in much the same way that an artist conveys an acute perception of his environment through a particular brush stroke, texture or colour.

As well as Edward Hopper, Munro has expressed an admiration for the work of Canadian painters Alex Colville, Jack Chambers and Tom Forrestal. These Canadian artists basically belong to the same school in contemporary painting, that of "magic realism" or its offshoots, or, as Munro has described it, "a kind of super realism."⁶ The concern of these artists lies in creating the suggestion of something significant contained in the seemingly ordinary scenes and objects they depict; a message which is not blatantly expressed but sensitively felt or sensed by the viewer. Each artist exercises a certain amount of selectivity of detail, each detail contributing to a greater understanding of the whole painting.

⁵ Edward Hopper, "Notes on Painting", in Edward Hopper: Retrospective Exhibition (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1933), p. 14.

⁶ Gibson, p. 253.

Like the artists she admires, Alice Munro employs her own technique of writing which precisely expresses the memories of her own childhood and her experiences in South-Western Ontario. Munro was raised in Wingham and made the following comment to Graeme Gibson about the area she grew up in : "I mean the part of the country I come from is absolutely Gothic. You can't get it all down."⁷ The use of the word "Gothic" gives particular significance to the fact that Munro admits that she is not a writer who deals in ideas, but is more concerned perhaps, with a particular vision. This vision rejects an extensive manipulation of image and symbol, relying more on the significance of what is there. In an essay written for The Narrative Voice, Munro explains that, "I do think symbols exist, or rather, that things are symbolic, but I think that their symbolism is infinitely complex and never completely discovered."⁸ Nothing is simple or obvious in Munro's imaginative world, the power of her writing is created by the revelations which come from everyday life.

Alice Munro offers the reader delicate vignettes and fully realized stories in both her novels and collections of short fiction, each story or novel reveals her most subtle and dramatic use of extended images. The imagery often evokes an intuitive awareness of the impact of each

⁷Gibson, p. 243.

⁸Alice Munro, "The Colonel's Hash Resettled", in John Metcalf, ed., The Narrative Voice (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), p. 132.

story. Within each story or novel there is a central theme or several similar themes which are central to her work and each theme is strengthened and emphasized by the imagery which contributes to our understanding of each story in her collections or each segment in her novels.

Munro describes her writing to Graeme Gibson in the following way: " I write sort of on--like a single tension, a tension string. That's the segment or the story. I don't write as perhaps, as some people say a true novelist does, manipulating a lot of strings."⁹ The course of this single "tension string" is invariably changed or disrupted by the personal revelation of one or more of the characters involved in an Alice Munro story. This revelation most often includes a discovery of the disguises and deceptions employed by others or oneself, or, a recognition of the boundaries erected by society which deny the individual. Munro's central images help to dramatize the following themes which are central to her work: casualities of adolescence, small town alienation and the illness of the apparent survivors (as indicated by the prominence of invalids, madmen and suicides in her work).

The message or vision which Alice Munro creates for her readers is revealed in the ever subtle humour, irony and compassionate understanding with which she treats her themes. Beyond her special angle of vision, Munro's

⁹Gibson, p. 258.

stories all focus upon a particular aspect of a character's experience which the character, and the reader, recognize as a moment in which their perspective is changed or subtly altered, offering both a significant or fresh conception of the world.

This experience might best be described as an epiphany, a moment which Stephen Dedalus defined as "...a sudden spiritual manifestation whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself...the most delicate and evanescent of moments."¹⁰ This same delicacy is a characteristic of Munro, who acknowledges her own inability to make images, rather she finds them inherent in her narratives. John Metcalf questioned Munro about her opinion of the traditional or classical short story which employs epiphanies:

Metcalf: I think that for years now we have been bedevilled by the Hemingway, Katherine Mansfield, Chekhov, James Joyce, you know, the epiphany short story... and lots of critics have said it's a dead form now and there is no point in messing with it any more.

Munro: Yes I've heard that they say that. I think it is perfectly true that you can't write the pattern story anymore. Every once in a while a story like this occurs to me and I sit down to write it and I'm bored...because I could do it well and easily and there is no point in doing it. Everything you do has to have some possibility of discovery for you or there isn't any point in writing short stories ...This is the way I write. I know that there is an entirely different point of view in which you are making something and you can make it according to pattern.¹¹

¹⁰James Joyce, Stephen Hero (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 211.

¹¹Metcalf, p. 61.

It should be noted that Munro does not respond to Metcalf's use of the word "epiphany" but rather, employs her own term "the pattern story". As Munro has said of the images she uses, she cannot "consciously plan, make, or arrange them"¹², suggesting perhaps that this is what a "pattern story" necessitates, a conscious manipulation of theme and image to determine a presupposed conclusion.

In her own stories, Munro does not consciously manipulate images but "finds" them, and, as she told John Metcalf in the interview quoted above, this is where some possibility of discovery lies. The discoveries which Alice Munro makes in her work exist in her ability to explore the surface of life. In her explorations she "finds" images and symbols which are complex and intriguing, offering her the stimulation she requires as an artist, the stimulation she does not experience in writing a "pattern story". This stimulant is found in each of her stories which involve some kind of recognition or revelation for the characters and the reader-participant.

In her first novel, Lives of Girls and Women, Munro describes Del's desire to become a writer:

And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together--radiant, everlasting.¹³

¹²As quoted on p. 2.

¹³Alice Munro, Lives of Girls and Women (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971), p. 249.

This same statement can be applied to Alice Munro herself, who has, in her own efforts as a writer, achieved moments which are "radiant and everlasting". Munro's attempts "to get it all down"¹⁴ are contained in her four published works, all of which exhibit the same attention to detail and a full artistic use of images which arise from her meticulous dramatizations of contemporary reality. The purpose of this thesis then, is to examine the themes which we find in Dance of the Happy Shades(1968), Lives of Girls and Women(1971), Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You(1974), and Who Do You Think You Are?(1978), and to explore the way in which the impact of Munro's work depends not so much on the direct expression of ideas as on her use of extended images, which most often lead to some special insight for her characters and for the reader. The way in which her main themes are dramatised in significant images is my central concern and in my examination of Munro's works I will illustrate how her use of images is an essential component of the themes themselves, enriching and enlarging the scope of each theme and the reader's inherent understanding of Alice Munro's sensitive and intricate investigation of "the surface of life".

¹⁴Gibson, p. 243.

CHAPTER I
DANCE OF THE HAPPY SHADES

In an interview with Graeme Gibson, Alice Munro makes a particularly interesting comment about her style of writing and the way in which she creates her characters and develops those themes which are prevalent in all her work:

But you see that I don't write about, I can't write about states of mind. I have to write about--I can't have anybody in a room without describing all the furniture you know...I can't yet get into people or life without--it's really what I was saying earlier-- without having all those other things around them....¹

These "other" things that surround Munro's characters and contribute to her vivid portrayals often develop into extended images that enrich those themes which are dramatically presented in Munro's first collection of short stories, Dance of the Happy Shades.

In this volume Munro's particular emphasis is on the lack of communication between family members, the pressure from society to conform and the individual's failure of will to create his own life. These themes might suggest a need for a close examination of the individual's thoughts and motivations, but Munro offers another, more complex method of studying the human condition. Munro makes subtle use of imagery which is complicated because of the

¹Graeme Gibson, Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1973), pp. 255-257.

many images which are interwoven and which overlap in her stories; the final result in each story is a sense that one has gone below the usual "surface of life" and discovered the discord, the isolation and the depression which is common to all participants in life.

It is of some importance that the majority of the short stories in this collection are narrated from the point of view of a child or an adolescent. A child's world is often entirely different from the world of an adult, just as a child's perspective on life often differs radically from that of an adult. Children do not have the same facility as adults to assimilate all the mores and ethics of adult society; more often than not they intuit right and wrong, depending entirely upon what they have understood and absorbed emotionally as much as rationally from their peers and elders.

Such is the case in the first two short stories to be discussed from this collection, each story narrated from the perspective of a child. For this reason, the themes are less complex, mirroring perhaps, the simplicity of a child's world. Consequently, the imagery Alice Munro uses to amplify these themes is also simplistic.

In "Walker Brothers Cowboy", the young daughter of Ben Jordan recollects a day spent with her father, a day in which she learns something more about her father, while the reader apprehends the man Ben Jordan, not just

as a young girl's father, but a man with a past independent of his family. Munro does not examine Ben Jordan's "state of mind", but rather, she details those things around him that he reacts to and against: those images that depict the special mood and tension that exists in the Jordan family and between Ben Jordan and Nora Cronin. The images are intensified by the guileless presentation of the child, which is not marred by the speculation or judgement frequent in the more mature mind.

The first series of images is introduced early in the story when the young daughter describes the dress her mother is making for her:

She has ripped up for this purpose an old suit and an old plaid wool dress of hers, and she has to cut and match very cleverly and also make me stand and turn for endless fittings, sweaty, itching from the hot wool, ungrateful.²

The child's reaction to her mother is sensual; she physically rejects the texture, colours and discomfort the dress causes, transmitting much of this dislike to her mother. Her mother wears a "good dress" to town when she goes shopping, one that is "navy blue with little flowers, sheer, worn over a navy blue slip"(p.5). The mother, it seems, is given to social pretension and does not spare her daughter in her desire to appear the smartly dressed, socially accepted woman and mother. She is not a housewife in "loose beltless dresses torn under the arms"(p.5),

² Alice Munro, Dance of the Happy Shades (New York: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1953), p. 1.

Page references for subsequent quotations will be supplied in brackets.

but a lady, whose daughter is her, "creation, wretched curls and flaunting hair bow, scrubbed knees and socks--all I do not want to be"(p.5).

From the child's observations of her mother's dress and behaviour, the reader is allowed some insight into Mrs. Jordan's character. Like many children, this young girl is at a stage where she idolizes her father; Munro does not offer psychological explanations of their relationship however, she offers images which contribute to an understanding of the deeper implications of Jordan family life.

On the one hand, the images which surround Ben Jordan are light and happy: the "white shirt , brilliant in the sunlight"(p.6), the jokes and songs he makes up for his children. On the other hand, Mrs. Jordan is surrounded by images of superficiality: her dress, her "delicate condition" and her joyless responses to life. This contrast is intuitively felt by the young girl who observes her father, Ben Jordan, the salesman who knows "the quick way out of town"(p.6), quite different from her mother who lies in the darkened back porch, nursing some real or imagined malady. Her father drives headlong into the country, knocking gamely on the doors of the farmers who, like him, are suffering from the depressed conditions of the thirties.

Munro takes special pains to describe the Depression, but the full impact of it is best realized in the children who try to play I Spy but, "...it is hard to find many colours. Grey for the barns and sheds and toilets and houses, brown for the yard and fields, black or brown for the dogs"(p.9). There is a sense of physical depression which surrounds all the characters, but does not completely oppress Ben Jordan, who invents his songs to lighten the atmosphere and to make light of his profession. This gaiety is not shared by his wife, who is physically alienated from him since she does not share his trips to his territory, his metaphoric escape to another and different world. This world is a shattered one, and ugly reality is revealed when the chamber pot is dumped out the window--an angry and disgusting exhibition of the truly "depressed" times and the lack of human kindness and warmth which has resulted from them.

After this Ben Jordan heads immediately to the Cronin house, a place which is strange to Ben's daughter because of those things she notices which are different in it and to her not quite right. Nora changes into a dress which is "flowered more lavishly than anything my mother owns, green and yellow on brown, some sort of floating sheer crepe, leaving her arms bare"(p.12). The riot of colours which Nora chooses contrasts the subdued, elegant costuming of Mrs. Jordan. Nora is full of life: she plays music and dances, she laughs heartily

at Ben Jordan's antics and shares a drink with him, even though, "one of the things my mother has told me in our talks together was my father never drinks whisky. But I see he does. He drinks whisky and talks of people whose names I have never heard before"(p.15). Just as the young girl discovers things about her father she had never known, so the reader discovers a new side to this "Walker Brothers Cowboy", who has been involved with, or perhaps desires a new involvement with Nora Cronin, a flashy, warm and vibrant answer to the Depression and his own depressed state.

The affection between Nora and Ben it seems, has never been consummated, and once again, the child's perceptions of the concrete reality which surrounds her offers a possible explanation. Ben's daughter notices a "picture on the wall of Mary, Jesus' mother--I know that much--in shades of bright blue and pink with a spiked band of light around her head, I know that such pictures are found only in the homes of Roman Catholics and so Nora must be one"(p.14). The child has connected a standard symbol of Catholic faith with Nora, and further remembers the implications which arise: her grandmother and aunt would say of Nora, "she digs with the wrong foot"(p.14). Besides the strangeness of this phrase, the child intuitively senses that there is something different about Nora that would not be accepted by her relatives.

From the imagery alone the reader receives a picture of Ben Jordan as a man not simply married with two children, but, a man who, beneath a surface of gaiety is straining against a marriage to a sickly and lifeless woman. This marriage had, perhaps, occurred after he was thwarted in his relationship with Nora, the forbidden Catholic who "digs with the wrong foot". Between all this is the young daughter, who understands that her father is not just a salesman for Walker Brothers, but a man capable of entering another territory:

...like a landscape that has an enchantment on it, making it kindly, ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you can not imagine(p.18).

The "changing landscape" of the child's father is one depicted through the physical reality of the dresses and cheap painting of the Mother Mary. Each of these objects symbolizes something more than itself and suggests that they too are not "ordinary and familiar", but belong in a changing landscape of human emotion. These images are the barometers which reveal the tensions within the Jordan family, as well as the social and religious differences which the young girl is just beginning to recognize.

The simplicity and clarity with which a young child "sees" is continued in the short story "Images", which Munro has said is the story she likes best in her

first collection³, the one that is "closest"⁴ to her. Again, a young child is taken on an expedition with her father, in this case to examine muskrat traps along the river. Her mother is pregnant and sickly, of no use to the child who is more interested in her father and the prospect of adventure. The child learns a similar lesson in this story to the one learnt in "Walker Brothers Cowboy". Again, she discovers that there are secrets in the adult world and "like the children in fairy stories who have seen their parents make pacts with terrifying strangers ...have discovered that our fears are based on nothing but the truth..."(p.43). The particular tension in this story is maintained by a series of contrasts: outdoor sights and smells as opposed to the strange taste and smell of Mary McQuade and the "sick bed" aura of the mother, Ben Jordan's boots that seemed to have a life of their own, "an index"(p.36) to his own vitality that contrasts the "fact of death", the "stiff, soaked body"(p.36) of the muskrats he matter-of-factly traps along the river. All of these contrasts grow from the opposing forces of images and actuality; the physical reality that the child observes and the subtle implication of the images themselves.

³Gibson, p. 254.

⁴John Metcalf, "A Conversation with Alice Munro", Journal of Canadian Fiction, 1 (Fall 1972), 53.

Mary McQuade is the very image of death, "waiting and breathing"(p.30) for the grandfather to die and the mother to have her child. Mary McQuade disturbs all the child's senses, her presence is like a pall, a disturbing threat:

...my father and Mary McQuade threw gigantic shadows, whose heads wagged clumsily with their talk and laughing. I watched the shadows instead of the people. They said, "What are you dreaming about?" but I was trying to understand the danger, to read the signs of invasion(p.35).

The "invasion" by Mary McQuade is both physical and emotional; her very shadow becomes as menacing as she is.

Ben Jordan "rescues" his daughter from the death-laden atmosphere of their home and takes her outside to his trap lines. Even when the narrator is safe and freed from the influence of Mary McQuade and her mother's sickness, she is confronted with death in the lifeless bodies of the muskrats and the eccentric Joe Phippen who suddenly appears to the child:

All my life I had known there was a man like this and he was behind doors, around the corner at the dark end of a hall. So now I saw him and just waited, like a child in an old negative, electrified against the dark noon sky, with blazing hair and burned out Orphan Annie eyes (p.33).

The power of this passage is the result of its presentation of the recognition of evil, the intangible fear of the unknown. Munro describes the child as being "transfixed, as if struck by lightning"(p.33), rather than paralysed with fear. The passage affects the reader in

much the same way: this sudden recognition of evil is much like a revelation or "lightning" flash that strikes forcefully because the imagery has consistently pointed towards a feeling of menace and death. The movement of the story has oscillated between life and death images (her sick mother, Mary McQuade, the frozen muskrats, and her father's energy and health) until it has become inevitable that there will be a cumulative, climactic moment.

The intensity of this moment is broken by the physical realities of Joe Phippen's eccentricities: his house below the ground, his imagined threats from the Silas brothers, and his whiskey drinking cat are not a part of the world of death but a fact of Joe Phippen's existence. Once the shadow world of the Joe Phippens and Mary McQuades is revealed as nothing more than a slightly twisted fact of life, the child realizes that she is no longer afraid of Mary McQuade just as she has learned that she does not fear Joe Phippen. The images of fear and death are replaced by knowledge of reality, "dazed and powerful with secrets"(p.43), that conquers childish fears and allows the young daughter entry into the world of adult experience.

The success of this story lies in Alice Munro's ability to create a tension between the reality the child experiences and the illusion of death which is suggested by the imagery Munro employs. The young Jordan girl

learns there is much to be perceived below the "surface of life" and often, this discovery leads to an experience which she and her father, as well as the reader, can share.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Alice Munro does not believe in writing "pattern stories" and the reader can see from "Walker Brothers Cowboy" and "Images" that she successfully avoids this. Some of her stories are perhaps less complex, more transparent than others, yet they still exhibit the same attention to theme and image. Alice Munro has spoken of "Thanks for the Ride" and "Day of the Butterfly" as "...sort of exercise stories. They are sort of imitated, not specifically imitated but they fit into certain patterns."⁵ These stories each exhibit the same central concern with the individual who desperately wants to belong to a supposedly acceptable and admired society. What serves to focus the protagonists' failure and the inherent malady of society are the images which penetrate below the surfaces of life and explore the textures, sounds and smells that reveal the essential reality of falsehood and deception.

In "Thanks for the Ride", Munro presents her only use of a male point of view in the collection, but manipulates the story in such a way that the reader's attention converges on Lois, the narrator's date for the evening.

⁵ Metcalf, p. 53.

Lois is the bitter survivor of summer affairs with slick city boys who make use of small town girls and forget their names once the summer is over. Lois clings fiercely to some faint notion that she might some day be the equal of these boys with their money, cars and summer homes. Dick belongs to the world that Lois at once despises and desires, and becomes a witness to her bitterness and her struggle to better herself.

Lois's desires are for those material things which she sees as necessary to success, and Munro surrounds Lois with detailed descriptions of the tawdry, grasping world that breeds this discontent. This attitude is best exemplified by Lois's mother, who is thrilled by a cheap china elephant given to her daughter by a summer boyfriend and the fact that Dick's family owns a car and that his father might have a profession that offers him a position in society. She says to Dick:

"I've got no time for those that's just eaten up with malice 'n envy. I say it's lovely. I bet your mother, every time she wants anything, she just goes down to the store and buys it--new coat, bedspread, pots and pans"(p.50).

Lois's mother is stimulated by material wealth and is eager that her daughters should some day acquire "riches". Munro makes it clear that the jumble of goods which surround people are external trappings, though sometimes pathetic indicators of the individual's worth. Society has created a hierarchy based upon materialism and left unfulfilled individuals in its wake.

Lois's own attempts at betterment are ridiculous and exaggerated: her yellow-green dress becomes covered in burrs and her rhinestone necklace remains unnoticed in the back seat of the car. When Lois defiantly lists all her finest material goods, the "imitation cashmere sweater...that cost twelve dollars" and a "fur coat" that she is "paying on for next winter"(p.55), the emptiness and futility of her life is sharply focused. Dick derisively mimics her mother's gushing approval of those material objects and repeats her words, "That's nice... I think it's lovely for people to have things"(p.55). When Lois explodes and slaps Dick she releases all the tension which had been felt between them, a tension stressed by Munro's particular attention in detailing the material differences between Dick and Lois's lifestyles.

Hearing her mother's words, Lois realizes that she too is doomed to the life of the outsider who does not have, and who admires and envies the lives of those who do. The release of tension between Dick and Lois is followed symbolically by "that headlong journey"(p.56) which is not any consummation of love but a surrender of self that precludes any lasting emotion but sadness, the knowledge the grandmother possesses when she warns "You can do what you like with my gran'daughter...but you be careful. And you know what I mean"(p.52). This feeling of sadness is one that Dick cannot articulate for fear that Lois

would think him "pretentious and superior"(p.56). They part, always unable to meet as human beings, because of the wall that separates the privileged and unprivileged.

The imagery in this story is less subtle than "Walkers Brother Cowboy" or "Images". The narrator and Lois are not small children unaware of social pretense; each has an identity determined by their place in society. Munro essentially "lists" their material possessions imaginistically, the sum total of their individual wealth equalling their own sense of self-worth. Lois is left hardened and miserable by her encounter with Dick, while he has discovered another side of reality less comfortable than his own.

"The Day of the Butterfly" also follows the theme of social pretension closely, and examines the social barriers which are arbitrary and unfair, the pretensions which most often undermine an individual and defeat his will to overcome obstacles. Myra Sayla and her brother Jimmy are alienated from the other children by the barrier of their European origin which causes them to look, act, dress and even smell differently. The barrier which is erected between them and the other children is physical: Jimmy and Myra stand in the back porch, playing neither on the boys' nor girls' side at recess--they are outcasts, suffering martyrs who, "were like children in a medieval painting, they were like small figures carved of wood, for worship or magic, with faces smooth and aged, and

meekly, cryptically uncommunicative"(p.101).

Neither Jimmy nor Myra are physically offensive, they are simply unlike the others, who rely on outward conformity to determine their social standards. The leader of the class, Gladys Healey, is secure because her father owns a store and she can wear "flashing plaid skirts and organdie blouses and velvet jackets with brass buttons"(p.102), while Myra "glimmered sadly...in madeover dresses"(p.106).

Survival in such a world is tenuous and frightening, and Helen, the narrator of this story, is very much aware of this, because she too is a near-outsider, walking to school each day from her farm home, always in "a little danger, on account of this"(p103). Because of her own potential position as an outsider, Helen is able to recognize Myra as a possible friend. The token offering of the butterfly to Myra creates an almost unwelcome bond for Helen who becomes "panicky" at her own vulnerability, "And I was glad she had not put it on. If someone asked her where she got it, and she told them, what would I say?"(p.106).

Helen has crossed the social barrier and committed herself in some small way to Myra Sayla. The tin butterfly from the Crackerjack box becomes an image of the potential freedom Helen might find if she could successfully ignore the barrier that had been erected between the Saylas and the other children. The butterfly represents the inner beauty that has been confined, cocoon-like, by the bounds of Helen's society. The warmth and compassion that are

inherent in a child's nature are aroused by the gentleness, the essential sameness that Helen temporarily recognizes in the ever-suffering Myra.

Myra's suffering is manifested in an illness that is sure to bring about her death, the "akemia"(p.107) of which the children have no real knowledge. Instead, Myra's illness becomes "fashionable"(p.107) to the girls in her class who plan a birthday party for Myra while she is in the hospital. Rae McCarthy Macdonald comments that, "The death of the body has been preceded by another death, Myra's social murder at the tongues of the same girls who happily played the role of chosen bedside visitors."⁶

In conforming to the accepted role that her peers determined, Helen had to repress any of her impulses of generosity or individuality. It was too dangerous to be Myra's friend and accept her presents:

All the presents on the bed, the folded paper and ribbons, those guilt tinged offerings, had passed into this shadow, they were no longer innocent objects to be touched, exchanged, accepted without danger(p.110).

Besides possessing the shadow of a social outcast, Myra is marked by the shadow of death. Her death is paralleled to the death of the narrator as an individual; her deceit, her lack of desire to communicate with the other world of the outcasts plunges her into a similar world of isolation, "the treachery of her own heart"(p.110).

⁶Rae McCarthy Macdonald, "A Madman Loose in the World", Modern Fiction Studies, XXVII (Autumn 1976), 363.

The imagery found in the four stories discussed thus far reflects different aspects of illusion and deception. In "Walker Brothers Cowboy" and "Images" the imagery Munro uses reveals aspects of human emotion and character that offer the reader a deeper understanding of the reality and full impact of each situation. In "Thanks for the Ride" and "Day of the Butterfly", the imagery used magnifies the essential deception of the self, and others, which can result in the individual's failure of will.

In both "Thanks for the Ride" and "The Day of the Butterfly", the characters involved suffer from what Hallvard Dahlie calls "the sadness of experience rather than its fulfillment."⁷ In "A Time of Death" Munro offers another story of personal suffering in Dance of the Happy Shades, and once again the suffering comes from a desire to appear normal, to belong. "A Time of Death" offers various responses to the scalding death of a retarded infant, each response contributing to the final climactic response of Patricia Farry, who is indirectly responsible for the death of her brother, Benny. The entire impact of this story is not evident until the last paragraphs and, much like "Images", this impact is intensified by a cumulative response to the imagery which

⁷Hallvard Dahlie, "Unconsummated Relationships: Isolation and Rejection in Alice Munro's Stories", World Literature Written in English, XI (April 1972), 47.

precedes it.

Much of the tension in this story is dependent upon Patricia Parry, a child much older than her nine years, who,

...did things the way a grown-up does; she did not pretend things. She did not play at being a singer, though she was going to be a singer when she grew up, maybe in the movies or on the radio(p.92).

This strange child lives in a world of illusions which are perpetuated by her mother, who pushes her into the spotlight, encourages fame and the dream of the fortunes which she believes will follow. There is a pervasive sense of unreality in this story, everything in it is imperceptibly twisted and unnatural. Benny is slightly retarded, his father is drunk during the mourning and the funeral for his son, and the women who come to comfort the family in their loss do not like the slatternly mother, Leona Parry. Besides this, Patricia Parry does not acknowledge or mourn her brother's death and takes special care to appear normal and cheerful. Patricia's actions are reminiscent of Lois's in "Thanks for the Ride". She becomes absorbed in material things to escape from the guilt and pain she cannot accept. Patricia washes her feet in the shoestore so that Mrs. McGee will think her a clean, respectable child who appreciates the finer aspects of personal appearance. When she gets her new shoes, "she walked back and forth looking at them until Mrs. McGee said, Patricia never mind about shoes now!"(p.97)

Patricia tries to model her younger brother and sister into the type of children she believes are admired by the society that lives in the better part of town, and attempts a sophisticated conversation about the weather on the day her brother dies.

Patricia clings to the world of movie magazines and store catalogues, protected by the veneer of a civilized society that will never imagine completely the death by scalding of a retarded child. Munro develops Patricia's world carefully, illustrating those outside forces that drive Patricia from her own harsh reality to the illusory world of the famous and the rich. Munro details the weather, "the snow coming...feel in the air"(p.90), and "the puddles in the road all turned to ice and splintered up"(p.91), as well as the living conditions of the Parry's, "the dirty dishes and puddles of milk and porridge on the kitchen table"(p.93). This exactness of observation contributes to a mood of desolation; desolation because of the physical harshness of the Parry's' life and desolation because of the death of an innocent. There is a sense of waiting for the snow to come, for the landscape to change, for Leona Parry to resume her life and forgive Patricia.

Leona does finally return to act as Patricia's manager, but the cold frost continues and the snow does not come. It is the scissors man who appears instead, with his "unintelligible chant...so strange that you would

think that there was a madman loose in the world"(p.98).. The appearance of this strange character, this "madman" strikes a responsive chord in the reader, who has been prepared for the scissors man by the "madness" of the Farry family. Another chord is struck in Patricia, who responds to Old Brandon(or Bram as he was known to Benny) by screaming "I hate him! I hate that old scissors-man, I hate him"(p.99). Patricia's outburst is a result of the final penetration of reality, her realization that her brother Benny is dead. Her shrill cries are her instinctive response to death, a response that causes her to "look like a ferret, a wretched little animal insane with rage or fear"(p.99). This image of an animal further emphasizes the basic emotion which Patricia denied in favour of the civilized response that she believed more appropriate, more acceptable.

The final paragraph reflects the bleakness of the situation, the reality which Patricia will never escape:

There was this house, and the other wooden houses that had never been painted, with their steep patched roofs and their narrow, slanting porches, the wood-smoke coming out of their chimneys and dim children's faces pressed against their windows.... The snow came, falling slowly, evenly, between the highway and the houses and the pine trees, falling big flakes at first and then in smaller and smaller flakes that did not melt on the hard furrows, the rock of the earth(p.99).

This paragraph is one of almost photographic representation and illustrates Munro's perceptiveness, her ability

to "arrest or suspend motion...as in a still painting description."⁸ The snow blankets the harsh reality of tragic death and the pathetic feelings of the people involved, momentarily disguising the truth that Patricia had so long avoided in her own illusory world.

The imagery in "A Time of Death" relies heavily on the physical reality of the Parrys' living conditions. From Alice Munro's description of the weather, homes and characters involved, the reader intuitively feels a certain mood of futility which is essential to the theme of false illusion and self-deception. In "Boys and Girls", Alice Munro again relies on her ability to create for the reader a picture clearly etched in the mind's eye: a picture which recalls the spiritual differences between male and female which cause an essential division between the sexes early in life.

In "Boys and Girls", Munro explores another attitude prevalent in society, one that is realized early within the family unit. The eleven year old girl-child in this story begins to experience those differences that her parents come to expect of her as a female. Again, Munro emphasizes psychological barriers by illustrating them in terms of physical barriers: the father works with the foxes in their pens, removed from the house where the mother cooks and cleans. The mother rarely approaches

³Brandon Conron, "Munro's Sonderland", Canadian Literature, LXXVIII (Autumn 1973), 111.

her husband's domain, and he does not participate in her household duties. The daughter's sexual immaturity allows her the chance to work with her father, even though her mother expects that as the only "girl" she would want to work with her. The child believes that, "work in the house was endless, dreary and peculiarly depressing; work done out of doors, and in my father's service was ritualistically important"(p.117). Up until the action of the story, the young girl had been able to hide behind her undeveloped sexual identity and do those things which were most natural to her. Her brother Laird, with whom she shares a bedroom is her friend and confidant; they are afraid of the dark together and sing songs to one another. They do not yet suffer the conflict between "boys and girls". Instead, the girl suffers an internal conflict:

The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened, like the word child; now it appeared that it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become(p.119).

The girl no longer trusts her mother who expects this metamorphosis from child to girl as a matter of course, or her grandmother who chastizes her for not acting like a "girl".

When Laird and his sister see the horse Mack slaughtered, the girl is bothered by his death and feels "a little ashamed, and there was a new wariness, a sense of holding-off, in my attitude to my father and his work"(p.124). This statement marks the slow change from child to girl-child, an allowance that her father's world might not

be her world. The attempted slaughter of Flora becomes the girl's moment of recognition; she does not want Flora to die, even though she knows her gesture to free her is a futile one, she makes the final distinction between "boys and girls" and alienates herself irrecoverably from the males in her family. Hallvard Dahlie suggests that:

Isolation here is accompanied by the impulse to freedom by her act of setting the mare free: the horse, however, suggests that freedom is only an illusion...⁹.

This illusion of freedom is one that is fully realized by the young girl, who must now face the consequences of her act. But she herself has recognized the inevitability of her choice, because she, too, has erected a barrier, "I planned to put up some kind of barricade between my bed and Laird's, to keep my section separate from his...we did not sing at night any more"(p.126).

Laird has gone with his father to slaughter Flora because he too has been made over into the image of his male parent, while his sister is to be groomed in her mother's likeness. When the father discovers his daughter had set Flora free, he says, "with resignation, even good humour, the words which absolved and dismissed me for good.

'She's only a girl'. I didn't protest that, even in my heart. Maybe it was true"(p.127). The daughter can no longer elude the onset of her womanhood, just as she can not hope to elude the fact of Flora's death.

⁹Dahlie, p. 45.

The themes in the stories discussed thus far involve the lives of children or adolescents. In the next story to be examined, "The Peace of Utrecht", Alice Munro uses an adult narrator who recalls her past experience as a child and adolescent. For this reason perhaps, the themes and images are more complex and mature, reflecting the perspective of Helen, who once felt, and still feels, the pain of those memories.

"The Peace of Utrecht" is one of the central stories in this collection which contains several of the themes common in Alice Munro's fiction. Munro has acknowledged "The Peace of Utrecht" as her "first really painful autobiographical story."¹⁰ The story examines relationships within the family as well as the alienation which can result from a lack of communication between family members. Again, the characters are presented with a strongly developed physical setting that enhances our sense of Jubilee and Helen's rejection of the place of her youth.

Jubilee is described as being hot and uncomfortable; a hellish atmosphere is built up that is oppressive and disturbing. There are images of sterility in the "desert" (p.194) that lies between Maddy and Helen and the "unconsummated relationship" between Fred Powell and Maddy. This pervasive sense of the stifling heat and the unpromising future Jubilee offers its inhabitants contributes to Helen's unease and parallels her unwillingness to recollect

¹⁰ Letcalr, p. 53.

her past.

The "Gothic Mother"(p.195) of Maddy's and Helen's childhood is the grim shadow that Helen is reminded of as soon as she enters her old home. The diseased mother whose deteriorating condition made her "one of the town's possessions and oddities"(p.194), is actually a painful humiliation to her daughters, who suffered through her illness yet only "dealt" with her, "took all emotion away from our dealings with her, as you might take away meat from a prisoner to weaken him, till he died"(p.199). The images suggested by this simile are of imprisonment and punishment, a sense which is later anticipated when Maddy places her mother in the hospital and withdraws her love and comfort. The mother dies after attempting her "escape", remembered by the aunts as a shameful episode whose blame they charge to Maddy.

Their mother's disease served to separate the girls from the rest of the town, who sympathized with their plight but never fully understood their pain and embarrassment. Their mother's disease further alienates the sisters; Maddy is the first to recognize this when she says, "nobody speaks the same language"(p.209). Helen only fully realizes this after she has learned about the final details of her mother's death. Maddy and Helen can no longer share the present because they share a common past that they both hoped to escape. They can no longer share the common language of the past--

the words are too painful.

The aunts make sure "the haunts we have contracted for are with us, not gone without"(p.209), and preserve the dead mother's clothing, just as they preserve the memory of her last days and her attempted flight from the hospital. The aunts are imbued with "a simple unprepossessing materialism...the rock of their lives"(p.206), that only serves to alienate Maddy further and causes Helen to feel more guilt. Everywhere, Helen encounters aspects of her past that are painful to recall and cannot be assimilated by her. Helen's discovery of her old essay entitled "The Peace of Utrecht, 1713, brought an end of the War of the Spanish Succession", suggests a parallel to her own break with the past, an end to the internal conflict that Helen has experienced since her return to Jubilee.

This emotional conflict is one that is more deeply felt by Maddy, who is haunted by her guilt and the constant reminder of it in the person of her aunts. Maddy's internal scars are magnified and made manifest when she drops the glass bowl at the close of the story. This bowl becomes an image of Maddy's life, shattered and scattered because of her guilt and her inability to free herself. The use of detail in "The Peace of Utrecht" builds up a concrete and somber story that is much like the glass bowl, "heavy and elaborate"(p.210), a bowl that Maddy cannot grip tightly, cannot save from destruction.

Just as Helen and Maddy's past is presented fragmentedly, the fragments of that past lie on the kitchen floor, waiting to be picked up and swept away.

It is the glass bowl that serves to focus the theme of this story, accentuating Maddy's self-destruction because of her inability to escape the past. Her last words echo her failure, "But why can't I, Helen? why can't I?" (p.210) Just as Maddy's final cry of futility lingers in the reader's mind, likewise does the song of the final, title story of the collection which concerns the reluctance of a group of young mothers to attend the annual recital held by an aging spinster and her ailing sister. "Dance of the Happy Shades" is a song title which suggests gaiety, yet at the same time the "shades" suggest disembodied spirits, a combination of words both happy and ominous. Such is the tension found in this story, which is at once optimistic and pessimistic about the human condition, offering an insight into different aspects of charity and kindness.

Once more it is the physical setting that provides clues to the characters of the mothers and Miss Marsalles. Miss Marsalles has lived in a series of houses that have ranged from the dim elegance of a house in Rosedale to her smaller, less ornate home on Bala Street. Miss Marsalles' increasing poverty is suggested by her houses which have decreased in size and charm, and cause the conventional mothers to worry that at Miss Marsalles' recitals "anything

may happen"(p.212). Munro indicates that the mothers do not really care about gentle Miss Marsalles; they are too concerned about what others might think of their patronage of an embarrassing old woman. This story is essentially about girls like the young girls in "The Day of the Butterfly" who have grown up into young mothers and become socially calculating women, "women who have moved to the suburbs and are plagued sometimes by a feeling that they have fallen behind, that their instincts for doing the right thing have become confused"(pp.212-213).

Instead of a tin butterfly, Miss Marsalles is grudgingly given their presence at her recitals that have become disastrous offerings of stale sandwiches and flat punch. Like the giving of the tin butterfly, their presence is offered without sincerity, grace or any feeling for the pleasure they might bring to Miss Marsalles. When the retarded children are brought in to play their own selections on the piano, the narrator senses that "something has happened, something unforeseen, perhaps something disastrous..."(p.221). This "something" is suggested by Rae McCarthy Macdonald as being more than the appearance of the retarded children:

...the reader understands that the retardation of those children who are "not all there"(p.221) has been a symbolic externalization of the hidden, but ultimately graver, retardation of those smug social survivors, the nervous mothers and their normal children.¹¹

¹¹ Macdonald, p.357.

The climax of this story, the final blow to these "smug" mothers occurs when Dolores Boyle plays something "fragile, courtly and gay, that carries with it the freedom of great unemotional happiness"(p.222), a song called "Dance of the Happy Shades". The title reveals the ironies of this story; the retarded children are from a school named Greenhills which suggests the innocence and capacity for spiritual renewal that they have found with Miss Marsalles and communicated to the assembly through their music. The song Dolores plays is a happy dance of the "shades", expressing the simple world of the idiot children who can never fully understand that they are different. Rae McCarthy Macdonald further suggests that:

...Miss Marsalles and the "idiot" children, though strictly excluded from "the world", are, nonetheless, happy ghosts who know a measure of feeling and freedom, lost to the nervous mothers in their social garrison.¹²

The mothers try to pity Miss Marsalles, but cannot because of the inherent message in the song "Dance of the Happy Shades", "the one communique from the other country where she lives"(p.224).

It is in "Dance of the Happy Shades" that those who believe they represent normality and righteousness are exposed as being limited participants in life. Miss Marsalles has transcended any artificial boundary that determines acceptability, she simply accepts everyone, and in doing so becomes one of those "people who believe in miracles and do not make much fuss when they encounter one...To her no gift is unexpected, no celebration will

¹² Macdonald, p. 367.

come as a surprise"(p.223). From this story, the narrator (and the reader) learn a valuable lesson about the narrow confines of the world each individual has determined for himself when he negates the needs of others. "Dance of the Happy Shades" is, therefore, another story about self-deception: the belief that an individual can negate the gifts which experience and communication with others can offer.

In Alice Munro's first collection of short stories there are many survivors of experience who remain isolated, rejected and unfulfilled by any knowledge they might have gained. "Dance of the Happy Shades" is the one exception, and ironically, the true survivors are the children from Greenhills, who will never feel alienation or rejection as long as there is a Miss Marsalles. Hallvard Dahlie writes:

Mrs. Munro's world is neither consistent nor readily comprehensible; and as the reader struggles with its many paradoxes, contradictions, and ambiguities, he finds himself compelled to reassess characters and their motives, and ultimately to realize that "normal" characters in the conventional sense rarely exist in this world.¹³

Those best equipped to survive in Alice Munro's world are the children from Greenhills and Miss Marsalles, both of whom are unaffected by social pressures. It would seem then, that Munro's stories are concerned with the individual's need to remove those social boundaries

¹³ Dahlie, p. 43.

which might, and often do, inhibit their spiritual growth.

For many of her characters, the desire to conform to society defeats their will to be individuals. Even within the family there is a need to define oneself in terms other than daughter, brother, male or female. The stories in Dance of the Happy Shades are concerned with the individual's will to survive, a struggle with which all of Alice Munro's readers can identify. This common struggle is sympathetically presented by Munro who accentuates her themes with images that contribute to the reader's understanding of the tensions caused by social pressure and the difficulties in understanding oneself.

CHAPTER II

LIVES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

Lives of Girls and Women is spoken of as Alice Munro's first novel, but is not considered by its critics to exhibit any strict adherence to the novel form. Each of the chapters in the novel is almost, without exception, a short story in itself, and each deals with different aspects of the developing experience of Del Jordan. J.R. Struthers describes Lives of Girls and Women as an, "open form ...an organized book of prose fiction made up of autonomous units which take on extra resonance and significance when combined with other related units."¹ The particular "resonance and significance" that the reader discovers in the novel is that of the developing personality of an artist, combined with the maturation and growth of a young woman. Essentially, each chapter documents a particular stage in Del Jordan's life and the moments of crisis and realization that contribute to our final sense of Del as an artist and a woman.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Lives of Girls and Women and the various "units" within the novel and to explore their individual significance. As in Dance of the Happy Shades, there are certain prevalent themes which serve to link each chapter to the next, as well as to direct the reader to certain image patterns that develop within the novel itself.

¹J.R. Struthers, "Alice Munro and the American South", in John Moss, ed., The Canadian Novel Here and Now (Toronto: A.C. Press, 1973), p.122.

One of the central themes in Lives of Girls and Women concerns Del's growth from being a young girl to becoming a woman, from possessing an undeveloped personality to gaining the personality of an artist. Because this development is an ongoing process in the novel, certain images related to it develop and become more complex as they reflect similar changes in Del herself. As a child, Del's environment is the Flats Road which is characterized by the images of a closed horizon. As Del's horizons expand, so does the novel's imagery, which is no longer limited to the narrow world of the Flats Road but reflects the ever-changing surfaces and textures of Jubilee society, which urges the individual to conform, and so from first being an expanding horizon contracts into a prison once again.

As Del "grows" from child to woman she eagerly consumes the information found in books, as well as the knowledge she absorbs from day to day experience. When Del is self-indulgent or self-pitying, her world becomes smaller and less significant because her actions detract from her better qualities as a sensitive woman and creative artist. The imagery reflects this attitude and serves to enhance those negative qualities which diminish the individual. The incident with Mr. Chamberlain is an example of contracting imagery which minutely details the surrounding landscape and accentuates Del's alienation from

her romantic fantasies because of Mr. Chamberlain's selfish perversity. As a writer, Del's world was negated and diminished by her all-consuming love affair with Garnet French which denied her identity as an intelligent woman and artist.

When the affair is over she "sees" clearly enough to appreciate Bobby Sherriff's gracious ballerina-like motion which revitalizes Del and encourages her to embrace every aspect of life in future.

Much of Del's learning experience is gleaned from her association with characters who are rejected by Jubilee society. Uncle Benny, Ida Jordan, Miss Farris and Bobby Sherriff provide images of the outcast and the frustrated artist. The imagery which expresses these characters suggests the necessity of coming to terms with oneself; those who compromise (like Del's friend Naomi) become oblivious to social pressure while women like Ida Jordan and Miss Farris are not immune to pain and fear; they cannot survive happily in Jubilee. Uncle Benny and Bobby Sherriff find some measure of happiness in the simple natural life of the Flats Road or the finally pure and uncomplicated action of a pirouette before another person. The images expressing Ida Jordan and Miss Farris are not as uncomplicated, however. "Princess Ida" seeks an ideal much like her chosen title of "Princess"; like Tennyson's Princess from whom her name is taken she seeks freedom from men and education for women. Instead of fame, adoration or happiness, Ida suffers alienation and rejection. Miss Farris cannot hope to create in the narrow confines of Jubilee a community sensitive to art

and she finally chooses death to escape her isolation.

The difference in the images which characterize those who survive in society and those who are defeated by it illustrate the ironic division between the "social garrison"² and the inhabitants of the "other country", that world of art that is presented in "Dance of the Happy Shades". Rae McCarthy Macdonald uses these terms when she discusses Lives of Girls and Women, saying that, "...each chapter in Lives of Girls and Women depicts a different crisis in her [Del's] search for a liveable compromise between 'the world' and 'the other country'."³ What Del, and the reader, ultimately discover, is that the boundary between these worlds becomes harder to identify because of the tone and subtle implication of images which indicate that both worlds are flawed.

On the one hand, Uncle Benny and Bobby Sherriff are at peace with their lives and do not feel limited by their chosen horizons. On the other hand, Ida Jordan and Miss Farris are socially repressed and suffer within the confines of the outcast's world. It is Del who finally triumphs because she has the perception to accept and affirm the world in which she finds herself, and this affirmation, more than any other marks Del's maturation as a writer and a woman.

²Rae McCarthy Macdonald, "A Madman Loose in the World", Modern Fiction Studies, XXII (Autumn 1976), 122.

³Rae McCarthy Macdonald, "Structure and Detail in Lives of Girls and Women", Studies in Canadian Literature, III (Summer 1978), 199.

Munro develops the novel in such a way that the reader can fully appreciate the complexity of a young child developing into a sensitive and perceptive woman artist. The dual themes of discovering one's identity and self-expression through art find a successful vehicle in Lives of Girls and Women. The story of the novel traces the life of Del from childhood to young womanhood and details the physical and emotional changes that occur in her in this span of time. Running parallel to this documentary of "the lives of girls and women" is the artistic documentation of Del's spiritual maturation, a process which is marked by several significant incidents which develop into moments of recognition and revelation. These epiphanic moments are developed imagistically within the framework of each chapter and enhance the reader's appreciation of Alice Munro's portrait of a woman and artist.

The first chapter, "The Flats Road", provides a description of the world of Del's childhood. Here the physical geography has suggestive imagistic implications: all things civilized and desirable come to an end where the Flats Road begins. The Jordan family's isolation from the civilized world is emphasized by the fact that a mad-woman, an idiot and an evil bootlegger (married to a whore, no less) all live side by side on this road and are neighbours to the Jordans. Besides this collection of social outcasts, there is one other, Uncle Benny, a harmless

eccentric who is one of the first to contribute to Del's creative perceptions, and who offers her an insight into the tentative boundaries which exist in his world, and inherently in her own.

The flat, solid reality of the Flats Road dominates this chapter and acts as a means of comparison with the outside world of social reality. The first reference to one of the central images in the novel occurs in the opening paragraphs which describe the Wawanash River and its surrounding swamps, a child-like Eden which Uncle Benny claims as his own:

"You kids want to splash in the mud and scare off the fish you go and do it someplace else, get off of my river bank." It was not his. Right here, where he usually fished, it was ours. But we never thought of that. To his way of thinking the river and the bush...more or less belonged to him.⁴

The area around Flats Road is Uncle Benny's sanctuary, his own Eden that he leaves in dangerous pursuit of his mail-order bride. Madeline is tainted, she is an outcast who has a disturbing personality as well as a child out of wedlock. Yet, Madeline does not belong on the Flats Road which might, at first, appear to be a logical home for her twisted theatricality and violent temper. Madeline does, however, prompt Del's first responses as an artist

⁴ Alice Munro, Lives of Girls and Women (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971), pp.1-2.

Page references for subsequent quotations will be supplied in brackets.

and observer of "real life":

Her violence seemed calculated, theatrical; you wanted to stay to watch it, as if it were a show, and yet there was no doubt, either, when she raised the stove lifter over her head, that she would crack it down on my skull if she felt like it--that is, if she felt the scene demanded it(p.17).

Even as a young child, Del recognizes the truth beneath Madeline's bizarre facade: she is simply "acting" a part, a fact which Del, as an artistic child, recognizes.

Already, Del discerns Madeline's "theatricality" and need to create a "scene", suggesting to this creatively precocious child that there is something to be discovered below the "surface of life" as she knows it on the Flats Road.

In her own home, Del is free to read the city newspapers and keep up some connection with civilization in the form of the Jubilee Herald-Advance or the Saturday Evening Post. Uncle Benny's world lies beyond this, he reads only from a newspaper full of fantastic headlines:

FATHER FEEDS TWIN DAUGHTERS TO HOGS
WOMAN GIVES BIRTH TO HUMAN MONKEY
VIRGIN RAPED ON CROSS BY CRAZED MONKS
SENDS HUSBAND'S TORSO BY MAIL(p.5).

Del eagerly absorbs each wild tale, "bloated and giddy with revelations of evil, of its versatility and grand invention and horrific playfulness. But the nearer I got to our house the more this vision faded"(p.5). Del is capable of distancing herself, weighing truths and balancing them, piercing the distorted layers and recognizing reality. When Madeline leaves Uncle Benny, he borrows the Jordan's car to pursue her and is hopelessly lost

for two days. Uncle Benny's description of his trip to Toronto details a hopeless journey full of wrong turns, circlings and retracings, a journey which could be likened to a labyrinth, an endless descent into hell, where it was "just not possible to find anything, or go on looking"(p.25). Uncle Benny's acceptance of his unnatural wife signals the first indications that his Edenic life could be disrupted. When he physically leaves the Edenic environment that he has found at the Wawanash River and the Flats Road, he suffers fear and defeat at the hands of "civilization". Civilization seems to be the culprit: Madeline, a product of society succeeds in making Benny's life miserable and the roads to civilization only confound and confuse him.

Clearly, Flats Road might be a place of madmen and social rejects, but for outsiders like Uncle Benny it is a haven against the encroachments of the civilized world. Del perceives the two worlds that Uncle Benny unwittingly reveals:

So lying alongside our world was Uncle Benny's world like a troubling distorted reflection, the same but never at all the same. ...It was his triumph, that he couldn't know about, to make us see(p.26).

While Del can "see" the boundaries that Uncle Benny's distorted world suggests, she can also see that this knowledge implicitly involves her and her own family,

But they were connected, and this connection was plain as a fence, it was between us and Uncle Benny, us and the Flats Road, it would stay between us and anything(p.26).

The Flats Road then, acts as an introduction to the two different worlds which exist side by side, and the possibility of choice between them which is offered to individuals like Del. Benny chooses the Flats Road, while Del has not yet made any choice since she is not yet fully aware of the implications that her choice might have. Her own mother regards the Flats Road as "the last place" (p.7) she wanted to live, while her father "liked the Flats Road" and "everybody [there] liked him" (p.8). Physically the Flats Road is part of "the other country", but imaginatively, it offers redemption on its own terms because of its proximity to the natural landscape and the ever-flowing Wawanash River.

In keeping with the novel's themes of the maturation of the artist and the young woman, the chapters which follow document changes in Del's life: the choices and the alternatives which are only hers to decide and discover. Munro presents an abundance of characters and events that alter and determine Del's essential personality. Uncle Benny had been an example of "the other country", an important figure in her memories of the Flats Road. In "Heirs of the Living Body", the alternate world of social sanity is embodied in Uncle Craig and Del's aunts. If one regards Uncle Benny as a mentor of sorts, an eccentric teacher of the inconsistency and distortion found in life, then Uncle Craig is likewise a mentor, whose teachings are rooted in the solid reality

of history, politics, birth and death.

Uncle Craig's life is firmly entrenched in the factual evidences of human existence, the "whole solid, intricate structure of lives"(p.31), that he records so faithfully in his registers and his history of Wawanash County. Del's interest lies somewhere between these two interpretations of life. She is not entirely a part of either world: neither wholly able to discard the unreality of Uncle Benny's headlines nor the cold factuality of Uncle Craig's manuscripts.

Even as Del chooses the direction which her own artistic endeavours will take ("somebody who believed that the only duty of a writer is to produce a masterpiece" [p.61]) she is initiated into the real world of life and death and forced to attend the funeral of her Uncle Craig. Del rejects Uncle Craig's death since she is unable to accept its peculiar reality which she cannot understand. She attempts to comprehend death at an imaginative and artistic level as she tests out the meaning of the words "heart attack", trying to imagine Uncle Craig's death theatrically, like some scene removed from her own sphere of reality. As always, it is the final layer of truth that penetrates Del's sensibility; she tries frantically to avoid viewing Uncle Craig's corpse, and when thwarted by Mary Agnes, she is forced to act. As Rae McCarthy Macdonald says:

To Del, this act signifies the first of the choices - she must make between the garrison world and "the other country". She believes that by biting her cousin she has placed herself forever beyond the pale of family approval and will, therefore, be a free renegade from whom order and normalcy are no longer expected.⁵

Del's action, however, only places her in the shadow world of "...a borderline case. But they would not put me outside. No. I would be the highly strung, erratic, badly brought up member of the family, which is a different thing altogether"(p.57).

Del has unwittingly become a candidate for the country of her choice; she can be an outsider, or a grudging participant in the social garrison which Uncle Craig and the aunts so firmly inhabit. Del recognizes that even as her aunts reign in their own domestic sphere, perfecting their household and social adeptness, they too, practice their own brand of deception when confronted by Del's mother's naïve outrageousness.

My mother went along straight lines, Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace wove in and out around her, retreating and disappearing and coming back, slippery and soft-voiced and indestructible. She pushed them out of her way as if they were cobwebs; I knew better than that(p.37).

Once again, Del has seen two sides of reality; her aunts are at once gay, sweet creatures, and vindictive, sly women, eager to take offense. This revelation is "faintly chilling...a warning"(p.37) to Del who realizes that even below the surface of those she believes close to her, there

⁵Rae McCarthy Macdonald, "Structure and Detail in Lives of Girls and Women", Studies in Canadian Literature, III (Summer 1973), 202.

can lie other, dissimilar natures.

Like Del, Alice Munro herself speaks of this ability to capture the reality which most often eludes the writer.

In an interview with Alice Munro, John Metcalf asked:

It seems that in all your writing you glory in the surfaces and textures...do you feel surfaces not to be surfaces?

and Alice Munro replied:

Yes. Yes. I know exactly what you mean. I feel everything...Yes. I don't know how to answer your question without sounding pompous or pseudomystical ...It's very easy to sound this way when you feel about the way things look and the tones in people's voices..and.. it's probably...there's this kind of magic..you know...about everything.⁵

This intensity is like the intensity which Del experiences in her exploration of the dead cow with her cousin, Mary Agnes. Del assumes that Mary Agnes is predictable since Mary Agnes is retarded and slow in her actions and perceptions. Del pokes and prods the dead cow, hoping "to make sense of it"(p.45), yet at the same time unable to touch it, reach out and explore the reality of its death. Instead, Del makes the cow something other than it appears by imagining its markings as maps of the world. This game is much like the one she later plays when she imagines Uncle Craig's body as the dot at the end of a puzzle or maze when she is unwilling to approach his coffin. It is Mary Agnes who plunges Del into the world of reality when she astonishes her by placing her hand

⁵ John Metcalf, "A Conversation with Alice Munro", Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (fall 1972), 56.

over the cow's eye:

It often seemed then that nobody else knew what really went on, or what a person was, but me. For instance people said "poor Mary Agnes" or implied it, by a drop in pitch, a subdued protective tone of voice, as if she had no secrets, no place of her own, and that was not true(p.45).

Mary Agnes has impressed Del with the uniqueness of a nature which had been previously hidden from her. Del is, like Alice Munro, sensitive to the "secrets" which each person harbours below the "surface" of the self they present to others. It is Del who emerges triumphant in the chapter "Heirs of the Living Body". Through her familial experiences she discovers a new depth in Mary Agnes, who she had previously rejected as an inhabitant of the other country of social misfits. Inside the social garrison, she discovers the faults inherent in her aunts and learns that their world is shaped by a deceit that seems to govern everything and everyone. Del practices deceit, almost in retaliation, when she later allows Uncle Craig's manuscripts to be destroyed, and then feels "remorse, that brutal, unblemished satisfaction"(p.62). With the dead cow incident, Del becomes heir to a knowledge that is later valuable to the artist who desires to capture reality by exploring beyond the obvious exteriors of people and events. As a young girl approaching adulthood, Del is made aware of a world shaped by deceit that the aunts (and Del herself) are occasionally guilty of inhabiting. When Del bites Mary Agnes, she does not isolate herself

from either world, but remains a prisoner of each, an exceptional child. At the age of twelve Del is in limbo, an heir to the experience of death but not yet able to discern her own direction in life.

In the following chapter, "Princess Ida", Alice Munro presents a close study of Del's mother, Ada Morrison, who believes that she knows the direction Del's life should, and will, take. Once again, this chapter dramatizes a dual recognition, a conjunction between developing artist and developing woman. Those things that Del discovers about her mother frequently reveal truths about herself, because "Princess Ida", as Rae McCarthy Macdonald says, is the "adult version of Del's problem."⁷ Ada Morrison relates to her daughter the difficulties she had in her youth in her struggle to educate herself and escape from her depressing and restricting family life. Ada unwittingly continues this cycle with her own daughter. Where Ada's mother embarrassed her with her religious fanaticism, Ada herself embarrasses Del with her determined agnosticism. Ada was deprived of an education, so she forces learning on Del, encouraging her to "show off" her encyclopedic knowledge, while scorning the aunts' disapproval of "pretensions" and Jubilee's fear of knowledge. "And no else had a mother like that?" (p.79) asks Del despairingly, embarrassed by the very qualities she herself secretly harbours. her

⁷ Macdonald, p. 203.

mother's thirst for knowledge and the high-blown, grandiose descriptions of nature that she contributes to the town paper are like Del's own aspirations, as she herself admits. "I myself was not so different from my mother, but concealed it, knowing what dangers there were"(p.30).

The "dangers" lie in the rejection and isolation that Ada Jordan eventually suffers. Socially, she is rejected by Jubilee's inner circle of socialites, the Great Books discussion group, and the townspeople who wonder at her letters to the newspaper and the fact that she goes "out on the road". Ada's isolation is expressed in physical images: Ada no longer lives on the Flats Road, but "rents" a space in town, never really belonging in Jubilee, she is forced to wander the countryside in hopes of selling encyclopedias to farmers. She is physically separated from her husband and son, a situation later experienced with Del, who gradually loses respect for "Princess Ida" as her mother loses any sense of dignity, "her way of not knowing when people were laughing, of thinking she could get away with this"(p.79).

Nevertheless, Del wants "to repudiate her...at the same time I wanted to shield her"(p.63). Ada Jordan is Del's mother, and Del acknowledges this fact, aware of what Bronwen Wallace calls, "the power, the primacy of the mother that exists within each of us."³ Ada Jordan's power

³ Bronwen Wallace, "Women's Lives: Alice Munro", in David Helwig, ed., The Human Elements (Toronto: Oberon Press, 1973), p. 32.

lies in her ability to act, her unabashed attempts to better herself and hopefully, others. Her efforts are eccentric and embarrassing because she is such an active participant in life. These efforts are bait for Auntie Grace and Aunt Elspeth, and objects of scorn to the town, which passively observes her attempts to impart knowledge. This knowledge was regarded as an "oddity" by most, "it stuck out like warts"(p.65).

Del is not like the majority of townspeople in Jubilee, nor is she about to make the same mistakes as her mother. Del is an active observer, later an artist who differentiates between being and seeing. Her mother is not capable of such detachment, as revealed when her brother Bill comes to visit, full of glowing tales of childhood and their saintly mother. Del realizes that individual perceptions of the past(or present) can differ radically, that as a frustrated artist, her mother has fallen victim to a lack of detachment and is overcome by her past emotions. Del attempts to reconcile her mother's portrait of Uncle Bill as a child to the "indigestible fact"(p.37) of the man himself:

This Uncle Bill was my mother's brother, the terrible fat boy, so gifted in cruelty, so cunning, quick, fiendish, so much to be feared. I kept looking at him, trying to pull that boy out of the yellowish man. But I could not find him there(p.37).

Del recognizes the discrepancies between her mother's and uncle's interpretations of the past and this removes another barrier that the artist must overcome. Her artistic perception

is paralleled to Ada's sudden, bitter revelation that she too might have become a mother to be hated by her daughter.

When Del asks her what she will do with the money Bill will leave her, Ada replies ironically, "I could always send away for a box of bibles", recalling her own mother's use of a similar inheritance. Female pain has been carried through three generations, and now, Del is sensitive enough, mature enough as a woman to recognize, "something like the downflash of a wing or knife, a sense of hurt so strong, but quick and isolated, vanishing"(p.89). Del will also carry this sense of hurt, the isolation of being the child of a mother like Ada Jordan.

like Philip

The final paragraph of the "Princess Ida" section recalls the Wawanash River which benignly offers its fish and its sanctuary to Uncle Benny, but in Jubilee, "overflows its banks and carried away road signs"(p.90). This re-appearance of the river affirms Ada Jordan's self-induced isolation; when she lived on the Flats Road she rejected the landscape and the people vehemently. Like the Wawanash River, she is unwelcome in Jubilee, and when its waters recede, she too recedes to that nether world she now inhabits, selling encyclopedias to regions beyond the Flats Road, beyond Jubilee.

When Del grows into her "Age of Faith", it is for two reasons: to irritate her mother and to attempt creatively to understand religion. Del is bothered by

the fact that she "had never had a picture of God so clear and uncomplicated as my picture of the burglars"(p.92). Ironically, it was Ada Jordan who believed in burglars and furtively hid the key to the house on the Flats Road each time she left it, quite sure that the Jordan household and their valuables were "steadfastly reflected in burglar minds"(p.92). Ada, however, does not believe in God, does not believe that He too might know all, declaring that "God was made by Man"(p.105), forgetting that she herself created the burglars in her vivid imagination.

Del is dissatisfied by the fact that she has never seen evidence of a burglar, yet all around her in Jubilee lie the concrete symbols of God's existence: the Catholic, Baptist, United and Anglican churches. She hopes for some vision, "...praying--God.God. God. Then I would imagine for a few precarious seconds a dense bright cloud descending on Jubilee, wrapping itself around my skull"(p.105). Del desires a highly visual expression of God's existence, imagining some grand scene which will include her as the central participant.

Del attends church hoping to discover the secret meaning religion, hoping people will notice her as the devout child of the agnostic, Ada Jordan, "Sometimes I thought of the population of Jubilee as nothing but a large audience, for me; and so in a way it was; for every person who lived there, the rest of the town was an audience"(p.95).

Del's use of the word "audience" draws attention to her artistic aspirations which are essentially selfish and self-centered. It is her participation in the "performance" of religion that matters to Del. If she cannot be stimulated by religion she will ultimately reject it. Del's initial responses to religion are artistic; she desires concrete proof of God's existence equal to the religious symbols which she apprehends. Del is attracted to the Anglican church purely for aesthetic reasons: she admires the bell, "the theatrical in religion"(p.98), the dignity of rituals "which in other circumstances might have been wholly artificial"(p.93).

When Del takes these rituals and moves them to "other circumstances", specifically, the room where she takes Household Sciences, the ritual of praying does indeed become artificial and lifeless. Even though her prayer is answered, Del is dissatisfied, becoming, "more niggardly, ungrateful. ...it was almost as if He were showing off.

I wanted Him to move in a more mysterious way"(p.103).

Del's response to God and religion is sensual and artistic, determined by the images she has imagined after participating in the symbolic ritual. When no image appears, when there is no mysterious revelation, she rejects her religious searching during the Good Friday sermon in the Anglican Church:

The sermon was having a bad effect on me; it made me bewildered and argumentative. It even made me feel, though I could not admit it, a distaste for Christ himself, because of the way his perfections were being continually pointed out(p.103).

On the day Christ rises from the dead, in answer to all doubts and fears, Del significantly discovers that there really is no answer in religion, not for her.

Unfortunately, Del has chosen her brother Owen as a sounding board for her own religious experimentation, but failed to inform him of her own disappointments. Del must face her own brother's pain as he tries praying for Major, observing that, "seeing somebody have faith, close up, is no easier than seeing someone chop a finger off"(p.114). Del's statement graphically illustrates Munro's technique of providing visual imagery to support the intensity of Del's experience with religion. Rae McCarthy Macdonald notes that, "this comparison is typical of the use of physical deformity and injury to suggest psychological or spiritual maiming."⁹ The pain both Del and her brother Owen feel is likened to the pain and repulsion Munro imagines one would experience after seeing a finger chopped off; an experience which the reader can imagine and consequently recognize the importance of this moment in Del's life.

Del's pursuit of religion marks yet another stage in her emotional development and accentuates her desire to understand those aspects of life considered ordinary and normal by Jubilee society. In her explorations, Del has discovered the dark underside to those appearances which are acceptable to Jubilee, discovered that nothing

⁹ Macdonald, p. 205.

is as simple, or straightforward as she had been led to believe. Up until this point in the novel, Del has experienced an understanding of the arbitrariness of society, the alternate natures of family and friends and the effect of the past on the present. Del's consciousness has expanded outward, testing all premises, savouring the knowledge which she has fathomed. That religion does not offer any clue to the mysteries of her life, does not aid her in her search for personal freedom, signals a change in Del's attitudes and desires. These changes are examined in the following chapter, aptly titled "Changes and Ceremonies".

The ceremony referred to in the title is the central unifying image of this section, the operetta which is held annually at Del's school. Del is given a part in the operetta and becomes witness to Miss Farris's devotion to her art and the excitement which the operetta generates among its participants. The operetta frees the students from the routine of their daily lives, offers a new world where "the manufacture of what was not true"(p.130) dominates the practical world of learning. The operetta then, exists as a theatrical image in the chapter but also as a very real, and viable aspect of Del's development as an artist. Parallel to Del's discovery of this fabricated world the operetta offers is her interest in books, in the library where, "walls of printed pages, evidence of so many created worlds--was a comfort"(p.115). The created worlds of literature and theatre each offer an outlet to Del's own

creative impulses, which are essentially alien to the residents of Jubilee. In Jubilee:

...reading was something like chewing gum, a habit to be abandoned when the seriousness and satisfactions of adult life took over. It persisted mostly in unmarried ladies, would have been shameful in a man(p.117).

Del's tendencies mark her as an outsider and she, more than anyone is aware of this, having seen her own mother, suffers because of intellectual aspirations. When Del lures Naomi in to the library with promises of showing her a lurid passage in a book, Del feels "a slight sadness, handing this over. I was always betraying someone or somebody; it seemed the only way to get along"(p.117). Part of "getting along" in Jubilee necessitates concealment of the innermost self, making concessions to become accepted. One of these concessions is Del's acquisition of her friend Naomi, even though, "it interfered with freedom and made me deceitful in some ways"(p.119). That Del had a friend proved that she was not an outsider, was indeed a member of the social garrison, privy to its rites and rituals. These rituals are the "changes" noted in the chapter's title: the changes from child to adolescent, from the private individual to a potential member of society. Naomi and Del each desire to belong, to be admired and Del admits their friendship "extended and gave resonance" to life"(p.119). Together, Naomi and Del observe and comment upon the implicit hierarchy of high school life, their own sexuality and that of others. All these things revolve

around and are focused by, the operetta, the manufactured world of the theatre which heightens and excites Del's appreciation of the real world.

When the operetta is over the feeling of excitement and anticipation ends and things begin to fall into perspective. Naomi and Del are no longer consumed with their love for their "Fatal Attractions", Dale McLaughlin and Frank Sales, the daily routine of schoolwork is resumed, the object which had hung from a light in their classroom proves to be a sock rather than the French safe it was believed to be. The romantic, fairy-tale world of the Pied Piper operetta had permeated the everyday routine of the school children but now the romance was gone: the concrete reality of books, boys and socks overcomes any notion of love interests or sexual encounters. Del notes that, "it seemed to be a time for dispelling illusions"(p.137). She is comfortable during this transition from illusion to reality because she has her own alternative world of literature to turn to, while Miss Farris, the organizer of the operetta seems to be left with nothing.

Munro's portrait of Miss Farris suggests the world of the artist who has yet to establish a happy medium between the illusory world and reality. Miss Farris seems to want to perpetuate illusion; she lives in a house which Del describes as a "playhouse" and the Jubilee residents declare that it "doesn't look real"(p.125). Miss Farris

skates on the Jawanash River in a costume of her own design, wears outlandish clothes which she makes herself, dyes her hair and wears bright make-up, indulging herself in theatricality. Miss Farris is one of Jubilee's oddities, a woman whose eccentricities mark her as an outsider. The operetta is her passion, and when it is over she "did nothing special, only taught Grade Three, and played 'The Turkish March' on the piano every morning"(p.119). Miss Farris's suicide pushed her beyond the realm of acceptability; she had been a resident of Jubilee and was an outsider from its regular world, but now she had chosen a world beyond that. Miss Farris's life(and death) serve as an example, an ominous warning to Del. Just as "Princess Ida" taught Del the limits of social acceptability, Miss Farris's suicide taught Del the limits of the artistic individual who does not belong to the garrison, whose creativity offers the choice of isolation or self-destruction.

like Lady

Always the observer, always collecting images and impressions in her mind, Del sums up the Miss Farris whom Jubilee knew:

Miss Farris in her velvet skating costume, her jaunty fur hat bobbing among the skaters, always marking her out, Miss Farris con brio, Miss Farris painting faces in the Council Chamber, Miss Farris floating face down, unprotesting, in the Jawanash 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 the others? --they are going to have to stay together now(p.139).

To the residents of Jubilee the visual impression of Miss

Farris in "costume" and always involved in theatrical presentation, suggests a certain type of person. For Del, the final image of Miss Farris's death by drowning presents an image beyond the realm of theatre and illusion which is very real and would seem to negate all the other images of her. Del has sensed that there is something missing from this portrait, that particular clue to Miss Farris's nature that would prompt her act of suicide. As yet, Del has not been more than an observer of the possible hidden natures she had uncovered in Uncle Benny, Mary Agnes and her mother. With Miss Farris, Del desires more, she wants "the pictures to hang together", she wants to be able to create that missing information for herself. This desire marks the turning point in the novel: it is Del's departure from childhood and the recognition of her creative impulses.

The "changes and ceremonies" which herald adolescence more or less involve Del's initiation into the social world of Jubilee, and the tenuous beginnings of adulthood and maturity. The following chapters, "Lives of Girls and Women" and "Baptizing", trace Del's growing sexual awareness and, along with her growth as a woman, the reader recognizes her as an emerging artist. In Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel, John Moss speculates that in Lives of Girls and Women there are the "assumptions of sex as the primary metaphor for the maturing sensibility."¹⁰

¹⁰ John Moss, Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 24.

In "Lives of Girls and Women" and "Baptizing", Del experiences two kinds of sexuality: the perverse and degrading as well as the ecstatic and joyful.

When Del enters adolescence, she and Naomi become absorbed in a common curiosity about sex and "held almost daily discussions on the subject"(p.144). Del seeks in sex the same personal truths that she sought in religion, desiring through sex a validation of her own existence. Naomi and Del read all the sex manuals and study their pictures, but never experience, only imagine, the sexual act itself. Del's imagination is that much more vivid and persistent than Naomi's because she enjoys the sensual aspects of sex and her preoccupation with it is much more intense than her friend's. When Naomi's father reads the girls a lesson from the Bible concerning virginity, Del observes that Naomi is not reacting in the way, "with which she always recognized this subject... disgusted by the very thing that was my secret pleasure-- poetic flow of words, archaic expressions"(p.153). Del's awareness of her own consuming interest in sex reaches the same plateau of intensity as her religious experience. Del expected to see God, yet she expects her first sexual experience to be an act of depravity.

When Mr. Chamberlain begins bestowing his rough attentions on Del, she is thrilled because, "...this was what I expected sexual communication to be--a flash of insanity, a dreamlike, ruthless, contemptuous breakthrough in a world of decent appearances"(p.159). Del believes

that her acceptance of Mr. Chamberlain's gropings plunges her into another, more exciting world beyond "decent appearance". She is now a participant in that darker side of life that so fascinated her in others: "I had looked in the mirror of the girls' washroom and smiled secretly at my ruddy face, to think what lewdness I had been invited to, what deceits I was capable of"(p.161).

When Del believes she will experience her first real sexual awakening with Mr. Chamberlain it is oddly the surrounding landscape that dominates the incident. Mr. Chamberlain drives her out of town, outside the world of "decent appearances", stimulating Del into observing that, "...the countryside I knew was altered by his presence, his voice, overpowering foreknowledge of the errand we were going on together. ...I saw that the whole of nature became debased, maddeningly erotic"(p.165). Del observes the smallest details of the countryside, each description touching and meeting her own inner emotions. Mr. Chamberlain does not desire a shared experience with Del and she becomes an observer of his "performance"(p.167). Munro's use of the word "performance" emphasizes the theatrical images which are so much a part of her portrait of Del as an artist. This theatrical metaphor also recalls Del's observance of Madeline's "show"(p.17) which at once fascinated and repulsed her. Now, Del is more mature, almost distanced by Mr. Chamberlain's "performance", as if

he were on stage and she was his audience.

All Del's previous fantasies of exposing herself to Mr. Chamberlain had been deliciously decadent, yet this final confrontation is unenticing and perverse. Del's reactions, however, "...are not the expected ones. The experience is not traumatic. She is the detached observer, perhaps already the artist, storing the details away."¹¹ Del does not share this experience with anyone, because it belongs to a "different layer of reality"(p.165) than the reality of her mother or even of Naomi. Perhaps Del felt that if she told anyone of her experience it would no longer be hers alone, and would be rendered ordinary by the telling, just another "scene" from life.

Del is not ready to relate her own experiences, but she is ever eager to learn about others, through literature. Del is sometimes dissatisfied with novels which avoid detailing the sexual act because "books always compared it to something else, never told about it by itself"(p.172). Del essentially desires literature to mirror the truths she believes self-evident in real life. Del's dissatisfaction with literary interpretations of reality anticipates her later desire to write a novel and to attempt to capture aspects of life for herself. Del's mother encourages her daughter's artistic attempts and

¹¹ Miriam Packer, "Lives of Girls and Women: A Creative Search for Completion", in John Moss, ed., The Canadian Novel here and now (Toronto: MC Press, 1973), p.140.

warns against the pitfalls of being a woman:

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 up till now has been their connection with men. ...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(p.173).

Del's mother inhabits that other "layer of reality" that rejects physical abandonment in favour of developing one's intellect. Del has already chosen to indulge her own sexual impulses without sacrificing her creative impulses. She has determined that she will be a different kind of woman and does not agree that, "being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for..."(p.173). Del neither rejects her sexuality nor her own potential, she will "take on all kinds of experience"(p.174) as a woman and an artist.

She discovers that many of the rituals connected with womanhood are awkward and unnatural to her. Naomi makes her transition from high school to the working world, leaving behind all those things which Del finds comfortable and reassuring. She feels an outsider from the type of life which Naomi and the female population of Jubilee advocate. Del does not fuss over her appearance or use her feminine wiles, and is consequently at a loss at the Gayla dance while dancing with Clive:

...all I could think of to do was get some idea of this person he thought he was dancing with and pretend to be her--somebody small, snappy, bright, flirtatious. But everything I did...seemed to be too late(p.135).

Del cannot play a part; she is unwilling to enter the world which Madeline, Miss Farris, Mr. Chamberlain, and even Naomi, perpetuate.

Del's drunkenness and her feeling of illness the following day relate to her rejection of the social ritual to which she is not yet immune. Del rebels against Jubilee's social mentality, physically and spiritually repelled by the woman's place in society. Del asks:

What was a normal life? It was the life of the girls in the creamery office...that complicated feminine order; then turning it over, it was the life of the Gay-la Dance Hall, driving drunk at night...one side of that life could not exist without the other... There was no other way. And I was not going to be able to do it. No.(p.191).

This particular decision marks yet another turning point in Del's development. By choosing her own instinctive desires as opposed to those appearances society desires, Del has determined, for herself, a position outside the norm and beyond the social garrison.

Significantly, Del loses her only friend, Naomi, who was firmly entrenched in the feminine order. Del is left behind, alienated from Naomi's particular world. Because Del believes that she has failed to become a woman in the same mold as Naomi or the girls from the creamery, she immerses herself in her schoolwork, preparing for her final examinations. She has not yet successfully consummated any relationship; the incidents with Mr. Chamberlain, Clive and Jerry Storey make her feel alienated from sex and her "need for love had gone underground like a canny toothache"(p.205).

The physical pain of a "canny toothache" becomes an image for the spiritual pain and emptiness Del feels without anyone to love. Just as a toothache is taken care of by anesthetizing the area, so Del's emotions become numb and unresponsive.

Del's reawakening occurs at a Revivalist Meeting, and while the preacher is roaring about hell-fire and damnation, she too concentrates herself into a "white prayer"(p.208), hoping that Garnet French will come across the room and touch her. The strongest images in this section "Baptizing" are those of fire and water. Del's intense "white prayer" suggests a white heat, which is stimulated when Garnet touches her, "like fire, just as they say"(p.208). Parallel to Del's extreme emotions lies the Revivalist's sermon, which concerns:

This bridge, frail and swaying, hung over a bottomless canyon and the canyon was filled with fire. It was the River of Fire, the River of Fire down below, in which were drowning, but never drowned, all that yelping, shrieking, blaspheming, tortured horde he now enumerated...(p.203).

It is Del who is now walking on this bridge, feeling the delicious heat from the River of Fire which is essentially her own lust, her desire for the flesh. Just as the Revivalist suggests that the bridge is tied to the banks of Paradise on the other side, Del is leaving the sexless world of scholastics and entering a new world of sexual fulfillment. On another level, this image of the bridge also suggests the two worlds which Del must decide between

in order to reach maturity: either the world of the social garrison and its expectations of a woman, or the world of the outsider, the artist.

Del experiences the fleshly delight of the River of Fire with Garnet during their "sessions by the river"(p.215). Their eventual consummation introduces Del to another paradisaal world, that of her first orgasm, an experience "almost too private, even lonely a thing, to find at the heart of love"(p.226). But there is something missing between Del and Garnet, something which is suggested in the alternate image of the bridge. Even though Del is consumed by her passion for Garnet, she is still a sensitive intellectual who is longing to hear the right words from Garnet, which would complete their union. But Del admits, "Nothing that could be said by us would bring us together; words were our enemies"(p.217). Words are Del's joy and without them she is reduced. The real world becomes secondary to the time she spends with Garnet: "...the world I saw with Garnet was something not far from what I thought animals must see, the world without names"(p.218). Del is suspended in a world of unreality, concerned only with physical gratification, never questioning her future.

Del is invited to be Naomi's bridesmaid at her wedding and during her visit with Naomi she is introduced to the bleaker side of marriage: the pregnancy that necessitates a wedding, the arrangements for the event itself, showers, dillies and embroidered pillowcases. Naomi is

gloomy about her impending marriage and never mentions that she might love her future husband. Del's visit with Naomi is followed by Garnet's own proposal of marriage and his attempts to baptize her. The river which has flowed through most of Del's significant experiences, on the Flats Road, with Mary Agnes and the dead cow and Miss Farris's suicide, suddenly becomes the focus for her own self-revelation. Del struggles against Garnet's attempts to push her under the water and she thinks: "I felt amazement, not that I was fighting with Garnet but that anybody could have made such a mistake, to think he had real power over me"(p.234). Del had felt safe in the world she had created for Garnet and herself, but when this world was shattered by the reality of Garnet's expectations of her, there was no longer any sense of balance, no perspective was left for her. "For Del, marriage with Garnet French would not involve baptism into a new life, but rather the death by drowning of her own real, imaginative life."¹² Del could not cross the bridge and become the wife and mother Naomi was destined to be; she could no longer negate the side of herself she had kept hidden from Garnet.

After Del leaves Garnet, she rediscovers that perspective on life which had been obliterated by her affair with him. When she was with Garnet the outside world did

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J.R. Struthers, "Reality and Ordering : The Growth of the Artist in Lives of Girls and Women", Essays on Canadian Writing, III (Fall 1975), 44.

not exist, but now Del sees:

Trees, houses, fences, streets, came back to me, in their own sober and familiar shapes. Unconnected to the life of love, uncolored by love, the world resumes its own, its natural and callous importance(p.236).

Once again Del is attuned to the landscape: while a scholar her world was deadened by the images of books, facts and report cards. As a young woman in love she was stimulated only by her lover--the outside world had no meaning. Now she could perceive the reality of her own existence, aware of the fact that life goes on: "Cities existed; telephone operators were wanted; the future could be furnished without love or scholarships. ...I supposed I would get started on my real life"(p.238). After this statement, Del repeats Garnet French's name three times followed by the words "Real Life". In these last words in this chapter, the imaginary lover's world and the world of reality are juxtaposed, just as they were in the events of the chapter itself. But Del has chosen "real life", made the decision to move on with her future, rejecting woman's conventional role in society in order to become an artist.

The epilogue to Lives of Girls and Women is entitled "The Photographer", suggesting that the whole of the novel has been "a photographer's own documentary"¹³ of the growth of Del as an artist and a woman. Del is

¹³J. R. Struthers, "Alice Munro and The American South", in John Moss, ed., The Canadian Novel Here and Now (Toronto: LC Press, 1973), p.124.

unlike other women in Jubilee, but is a woman no less, her drive and determination focused on her own creation:

"A time came when all the books in the library in the Town Hall were not enough for me. I had to have my own. I saw that the only thing to do with my life was to write a novel"(p.240). Del chooses the Sherriff family as a model for the characters in her story, and creates "The Photographer" to complete the cast of characters. The photographer is a strange, almost mystical figure whose pictures are disturbing portents of the future:

People saw that in his pictures they had aged twenty or thirty years. Middle-aged people saw in their own features the terrible, growing, inescapable likeness of their dead parents; young fresh girls and men showed what gaunt or dulled or stupid faces they would have when they were fifty. Brides looked pregnant, children adenoidal(p.243).

Just as the photographer's creations are unreal and grotesque, so is the novel that Del is trying to write. Like her imagined photographer, Del "changed Jubilee, too, or picked out some features of it and ignored others"(p.243). The novel Del imagines is replete with mental illness, suicide, madmen and twisted sexuality, an expression of her continuing affinity to "the other country" beyond the social garrison. Del is an artist in the same mold as the photographer, but as with her incomplete vision of the photographer, she is not able to satisfactorily complete her novel. Del realizes this fact when Bobby Sherriff invites her to have cake and lemonade. The structure of

her novel loses all credibility when she is face to face with Bobby Sherriff. She had believed she could determine the boundaries between people like Bobby Sherriff and those rooted firmly in reality, but the physical presence of Bobby Sherriff, the fact he is not abnormal or crazy suggests some fault in Del's novel.

After spending time with Bobby Sherriff, she realizes that it is daily life, presented truly and well, that determines the quality of the novels she will write. Del decides that she will make lists of all the everyday things in Jubilee but admits:

...no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together--radiant, everlasting(p.249).

Bobby Sherriff does offer something "radiant and everlasting" to Del, "he rose on his toes like a dancer, like a plump ballerina...and it seemed also to have a concise meaning, a stylized meaning--to be a letter, or a whole word, in an alphabet I did not know"(pp.249-250). This new language is one Del must learn to master as an artist who wants "every last thing". As John Moss says:

Having discovered that fiction fades in confrontation with reality when it is not true to the facts, that authenticity is the key at least to her own vision of truth, Del's story comes to an end.¹⁴

¹⁴Moss, p.50.

The final word spoken by Del in Lives of Girls and Women is "yes", an affirmation of Del's acceptance of her role as the artist who records real life, the novelist who sees clearly, and recognizes the dignity of daily life.

Daily life is the subject matter of Lives of Girls and Women, and perhaps explains Munro's early desire to use Real Life¹⁵ as the original title of the novel. Munro had admitted that Lives of Girls and Women is "solidly autobiographical"¹⁶ in emotion but not necessarily in incident, suggesting that this novel operates not only as Del's vision of herself as a maturing woman, but also as Munro's vision of the recording personality. Together they form the composite portrait of an artist.

¹⁵Mari Stainsby, "Alice Munro Talks With Mari Stainsby", British Columbia Library Quarterly, XXXV (July 1971), 30.

¹⁶Metcalf, p.53.

CHAPTER III

SOMETHING I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU

Alice Munro's second collection of short stories indicates a departure from some of the themes and images apparent in Dance of the Happy Shades(1968) and Lives of Girls and Women(1971). The settings are no longer always firmly rooted in Wawanash County, instead, they include North Africa, the west coast of Canada and the Ottawa Valley. Along with this change of setting, Munro creates characters who are often complex and more worldly-wise than the children and struggling adolescents who populate the greater portion of her earlier works. In Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You(1974), there is an exploration of sexual relationships in marriage and middle age, and the many deceptions that these relationships reveal. In some of the stories, Munro examines the deception of self as well as others, the personal guilt felt over acts of deceit, the essential individualism of each character and the lack of communication between generations. In one instance, the short story becomes a showcase for authorial technique and emphasizes the role of the artist as the creator of fiction.

The first five stories to be examined in this chapter share a common structure in that each centers upon the relationship between men and women. The title story, "Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You", is narrated

omnisciently but the story's centre of consciousness is Et, the spinster sister of the beautiful Char. The buried resentment felt by Et is suggested imagistically to the reader and consequently creates a tension between truth and illusion. Et embodies both aspects of truth and illusion: she is at once determinedly realistic and honest, yet at the same time perpetuates illusions in her lie to Char about Blaikie's marriage and her lack of honesty with Arthur when she withholds the information concerning Char's death. These contrasts in Et's character are supported by the imagery which surrounds her.

Et is the plain and brutally frank member of her family, "the one to tell you if you had been at the black-board with a hole in your stocking or a ripped hem."¹ She is a particularly precocious child who becomes a woman whose sharp perceptions of people and events distinguish her as a "town fixture" (p.130). It is a photograph that supplies the first image in this story, a picture of Et, Char and their brother Sandy, taken in such a way that they appear to be standing on a marble terrace rather than an ordinary floor. The deception which photographs are capable of creating bothers Et, "who didn't like mysteries or extremes" (p.7), and doesn't like the fact that Char appears to be beautiful in this picture. Ever eager to ascertain the truth, Et takes a look at Char as she grimly

¹ Alice Munro, Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You (New York: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974), p.7.

Page references for subsequent quotations will be supplied in brackets.

starches their father's shirts and discovers, "in some entirely not welcome way, that the qualities of legend were real, that they surfaced where and when you least expected"(p.6). Char becomes the unknown quantity in the story, the unpredictable "legend" who surfaces in real life, thwarting Et's dogmatism and practicality, just as the camera eye can reveal or deceive at will.

Char's beauty places her on a level unattainable by Et, and later, by her husband Arthur. Both Et and Arthur exist in the inconsequential world of small pleasures and daily routine, clinging to what they believe is reality. Arthur is a history teacher, concerned mostly with facts and dates, while Et works with her hands, a seamstress concerned with measurements, material and solid creation. There is a difference between Et and Arthur however:

He knew nothing. He did not know why things happened, why people could not behave sensibly. He was too good. ...Et differed from Arthur in knowing that something went on, even if she could not understand why; she differed from him in knowing there were those you could not trust(p.13).

Arthur is a romantic whose perceptions are dulled by his all-consuming love for his wife. Et neither loves, nor is loved--romance belongs to another reality which Et cannot fully understand.

Et does not trust Char because she cannot fathom her beauty, her inner emotions. Char is not a part of Et's or Arthur's world--they simply serve her. Char is comfortable in any world; she has the leading roles in plays

playing the "brittle exquisite young society woman"(p.15), or a statue that men fall in love with, while maintaining the position of the most beautiful woman in Mock Hill. Her lover, Blaikie Noble, also belongs to this special world, more handsome and exciting than the other males in town, "Blaikie Noble behaved like a man imitating a boy; he mocked himself but was graceful like an actor"(p.9). Munro's use of theatrical images here serves to enhance the central theme of deception. The theater relies on certain deceptions to present another reality to the audience using a stage, actors, costumes and makeup. Munro's imagistic references suggest that the theatrical image can be used on another level in the "real-life" drama of "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You". Blaikie and Char's stage is Mock Hill, their audience and critic, Et.

When Et witnesses their lovemaking in the grass, she realizes that she now has some secret knowledge of her sister, she "was left knowing more; she was left knowing what Char looked like when she lost her powers, abdicated"(p.11). The "powers" Char (and Blaikie) possess lie in their physical presence, both white-haired and finely made, "the same kind of animal--tall, light, powerful with a dangerous luxuriance"(p.14). Neither Et nor Arthur possess this beauty, they are commonplace people who do not participate in the magic of love, the despair of an attempted suicide or the daring of marrying several times.

While Blaikie, Char, Arthur and Et are playing word games one night, the Holy Grail is mentioned and later, Arthur chooses Sir Galahad to be his character in "Who Am I?". Et remarks that he should have used his namesake, then adds, "we all know the end of that story"(p.4). This reference to the Arthurian legends foreshadows the "down-fall" of Arthur's marriage as ironically predicted by Et. Arthur is, of course, the pitiful survivor of his wife's affair with "Sir Lancelot"-- Blaikie Noble--but is not aware of the circumstances surrounding Char's death. Just as the Arthurian legend is ironically twisted, the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is likewise applicable to the situation. Et's implicit deception, Blaikie Noble's late appearance and Char's death by poisoning recall the Shakespearean tragedy and clears the stage for Et to secure Arthur's dependence and his favour.

The poison which Char keeps in her cupboard indicates her dissatisfaction with her marriage and reaffirms Et's contradictory attitudes. Et is fascinated by the implications of the poison, "like something you read about, Agatha Christie"(p.13). Et is stimulated by the drama the poison suggests, yet does not confront Char with her discovery and later, does not reveal the poison's absence to Arthur. As a central image in the story, the poison operates on many levels. There is the slow poison which has infected Et ever since she discovered that Char was beautiful and that Arthur was "too good" for Char. Char

has poisoned her marriage to Arthur because of her infidelity and consequently Et poisons that affair with a lie.

Et does not seem to feel remorse for her part in Char's death, perhaps because she cannot recognize her own emotions and therefore cannot feel any guilt. The older Et is not much different from the child who turned cartwheels on the front lawn after her brother's death, burying any emotion, resolutely going on with life. The "something" Et is meaning to tell Arthur involves much more than she is willing to reveal about herself. Et is now the superior player, the unknown quantity in the drama she has precipitated. Now, Et belongs to the legendary ranks, possessing knowledge which no one else can gain or understand, finally the conqueror, content with Arthur and "if they had been married, people would have said they were very happy"(p.23).

Et's apparent happiness will never free her from the fact of her deception; she will always be burdened by the hidden knowledge she could not let Arthur "die without knowing"(p.23). The physical fact of Char's death destroys all of Et's illusions and deceptions; she must face Arthur with these facts or live with her own guilt. There is a tenuous balance between illusion(as suggested by the theatrical images) and the reality of Char's death. The final reality for Et, is that she has poisoned her own life because of the knowledge of her deception which she must live with forever. In "The Spanish Lady", Munro

also uses death as the instrument which undermines illusion and focuses the character (as well as the reader) on the essential reality of the situation.

The narrator of "The Spanish Lady" is struggling with the knowledge that her husband and her best friend are having an affair. The dichotomy of her attitude is revealed in the two opening letters which depict an understanding, supportive woman and a hurt, vengeful wife. During her train ride back to the coast to confront Hugh and Margaret, the narrator is absorbed in her own anguish, almost fascinated by the deception which her husband and her friend are capable of practising. The narrator is not a stranger to deception; she too has had her own affairs: "I have lied as well as I have been lied to" (p.183).

The train ride back home encourages the narrator to travel through her own past, remembering her marriage and her friendship. She finds some solace in the Rosicrucian's belief in reincarnation, the opportunity for a "fresh start" (p.189), which might offer her some reprieve from her own pain. The Rosicrucian also flatters her attractiveness, and tells her she was once a Spanish lady, momentarily entertaining her and diverting her attention from the problem which so consumes her.

The narrator's absorption in her problem is emphasized by the closed and contained atmosphere of her compartment, the self-contained world of the train which allows for a sense of false security, a removal from outside

reality. Just as the train reaches its eventual destination, the narrator reaches her own conclusion about marriage:

"There are layers on layers in this marriage, mistakes in timing, wrongs on wrongs, nobody could get to the bottom of it"(p.189). The narrator's recognition of this fact acknowledges that there can be no blame attached to one person or any single instance; nothing is that clearly or well-defined.

The narrator's final revelation occurs when she witnesses the death of an old man in the train station. The train has been a place of refuge, while the station offers a shifting, ever-changing vision of reality. The death of the old man focuses this reality, defines the final limits of man's existence. We can see here how Alice Munro dramatizes her central themes through the use of significant and suggestive images of the train and the station. The narrator's existence has centered on her flight and her return to the place where she had been deceived--all her life experiences mean nothing in the light of the deception by Hugh and Margaret. The old man's cry at his death reminds her of the complexity of life and moves her to an emotional awareness of her own insignificance:

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(pp. 190-191).

The Spanish Lady who was easily flattered, sure of herself and her own female powers realizes that she has nothing to offer in the face of death. The possibilities of reincarnation, revenge or self-renewal are trivial concerns when compared to the "message" she feels she must deliver after the old man's cry of death reaffirms her own existence. The final cry by the old man focuses everything for the Spanish Lady, and for the reader as well. The "message" the Spanish Lady has come to learn is a message the reader has been prepared for by the use of the train and station to dramatize the journey towards self-realization.

In "The Spanish Lady", the narrator's dichotomy of attitude regarding her husband's affair is later reflected and amplified in her changing attitude towards the inherent dichotomy between life and death. A similar dichotomy is examined in "Material", which does not explore the finite boundary of death but rather the infinite possibilities of creation. "Material" is a sharp and witty satire against 'the intellectual community', specifically the male professors and writers who attract the type of women who "absorb the contempt of the men on the platform as if they deserved it" (p.225). The narrator is above all this adoration, having been once married to a man named Hugo who inspires such reactions in his female audience.

Because this story deals with a writer's "material" and examines the process of creation, the reader is particularly aware of Munro's own technique, the artistic

knowledge she injects into the story. There are two marriages central to the story: that of the narrator and Hugo, as well as the narrator's second marriage to Gabriel. The narrator's marriage to Hugo gives us a close view of life with an artist and an insight into the way an artist uses reality to create fiction. It is the narrator who offers a different perspective on the same reality and illustrates the way in which she has used the same "material" in her own life.

The narrator's memories of Dotty are presented in conjunction with the events which contributed to the failure of her first marriage to Hugo. The narrator is not a "writer", but she is a sensitive, perceptive woman who does eventually narrate the story. She is a romantic who cannot understand why her present husband Gabriel has forgotten the language of his childhood, while she has retained all her memories of her past, the common "language" she and Hugo once shared. Her relationship with Hugo was described as "incompatible" by a marriage counsellor, but their incompatibility lay in the roles each determined for one another, the incomplete visions of each other that negated personal growth.

After their divorce, Hugo becomes successful and the narrator finds happiness with a new husband. While reading the dust jacket of Hugo's latest book, the narrator mentally strips her ex-husband of his literary pretenses and his image which "is not only fake but out of date" (p. 31).

Her condemnation of Hugo's deceptions recalls her own desire to fabricate an imaginary life with her "mysterious" husband Gabriel, whom she would like to believe "an ambassador from bad times as well as distant countries"(p.25). Gabriel is much like his namesake--a messenger of sorts who is really not an "ambassador from bad times" but a man who wishes the best for his wife and whose love and support helps her to understand herself.

The narrator compares her marriage to Gabriel with her marriage to Hugo, admitting that she was critical of Hugo early in their marriage:

I did not believe in him. I had not understood how it would be necessary to believe in him. He did not have the authority I thought a writer should have. He was too nervous, too touchy with everybody, too much of a showoff(p.35).

The narrator is frustrated when she saves up bits of information about Dotty that Hugo might use, telling him "he ought to pay more attention to Dotty if he wanted to be a writer"(p.32). The narrator had her own image of what a writer should be, an image of "calm, sad people, knowing too much"(p.35). Hugo does not fit this mold, nor does her husband Gabriel, who is "commonplace, perhaps," an engineer who will "never write a poem"(p.27).

The irony of this story is the fact that the narrator is also commonplace, and she herself does not suit her own vision of a writer, even though she is attempting to become one through the creation of the story. "Material" is a story which functions on several levels. It is

Munro's creation of a story, about a woman telling a story about how another writer creates a story. Beneath these layers of images and references to writing lies the art itself, this story "Material" as well as Hugo's story about Dotty, which offers the narrator her final revelation:

"There is Dotty lifted out of life and held in light, suspended in a marvelous clear jelly that Hugo had spent all his life learning how to make"(p.43). This ability is one which Munro is familiar with, a technique recognizable in all her fiction, captured by her own presentation of the characters in this story.

After the narrator has recognized Hugo's talent she is no longer sarcastic or self-assured. She recognizes that all acts of creation are to be applauded and admired. She finally decides that Gabriel:

...and Hugo are not really so unlike. Both of them have decided what to do about everything they run across in this world, what attitude to take, how to ignore or use things. In their limited and precarious ways they both have authority(p.44).

When the narrator tries to write to Hugo, she realizes that she does not possess this authority and cannot compose a letter to him, cannot use Hugo's medium successfully. This knowledge makes her unhappy, "I envy and despise"(p.44), she says, not yet ready to recognize the significance of her discovery which will ultimately lead her to a fresh conception of her own, and others', individual worth.

The fourth story to be examined in this chapter moves away from the concerns of the adult world and explores

the emerging sexuality of a group of children. The story involves a simple emotional situation set once again near the Wawanash River. This story is reminiscent of "Boys and Girls" in Dance of the Happy Shades in that it explores the sexless boundaries of childhood and the confusing emotions that emerge with the awareness of sexual differences. The setting of the story recalls "The Flats Road" chapter in Lives of Girls and Women, the natural environment untroubled by civilization that comforted both Uncle Benny and Del when she was a child.

The sense of an unfallen Eden is enforced in "The Found Boat" by the vernal setting and the female protagonist's name, Eva. Together Eva, Carol, and the three young boys work in harmony, sharing a common desire to make their "found boat" float down the Wawanash River. The boat becomes an image of cooperation that is found by the children, a spirit that transcends the ordinary divisions between boys and girls. The found boat is at the center of the children's lives for part of a summer and is also the central image which prompts the themes of cooperation and maturation. The boat is actually a vessel for Munro's creative ability and serves to unite the characters and themes in her story. The accord between the children relies on certain sacrifices and on giving and taking freely. It is Eva and Carol who offer the first gift when they give up the boat to the boys and do not tell on them, feeling as though they were "relinquishing

something, but not discontented"(p.129).

This sharing of work and pleasure was presumably typical of life in Eden, encouraging a mutually satisfying atmosphere that eventually makes Eva feel a sense of privilege . "then and later"(p.131). When the boat is completed, the children take turns riding in it or running alongside it:

And the thing about being in a boat was that it was not solidly bobbing, like a log, but was cupped in the water, so that riding in it was not like being on something in the water, but like being in the water itself(p.132).

The boat protects the children from the water and gives them a sense of security, a feeling that they belong to this natural environment. The landscape suddenly begins to change, "the water had got shallower, and the land flatter"(p.133), signalling a change in events, a movement away from Eden and a change in the children themselves.

The children leave the boat behind and enter an abandoned station which contains evidence of depravity and destruction, the ruins of civilization. This train station is reminiscent of the one found in "The Spanish Lady" which also represented a change in the protagonist's life. In this case, the children's journey through life is imaginistically suggested by their trip down the river. The train station becomes an image of the harsher, grimmer side of life which inevitably penetrates the simple joys of childhood. The broken glass and the graffiti on the

wall remind the children of the reality they had escaped during the idyllic days spent working on the boat. They are stimulated by their surroundings, prompted to a game of "Truth or Dare" that ends with all of them taking their clothes off. They race out of the station, free of its tainted atmosphere:

They felt 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. They thought of each other now hardly as names or people, but as echoing shrieks...(p.135).

They are still children, unashamed of their bodies and proud of their boldness. Yet, when Clayton squirts water at Eva's breasts, he is no longer acknowledging their innocence as children, but is "loud and self-conscious"(p.136), aware of his own, and Eva's inherent sexuality. The boundaries between boys and girls, men and women, have been reconstructed and forbode their loss of innocence and expulsion from Eden. As if to emphasize this loss of innocence, Eva is ready to lie about the whole incident, declaring that she never cared anyway, "it was never our boat"(p.136).

This special world of the child and the multitude of emotions that precede maturity mark "The Round Boat" as a story unlike any other story in this collection. The simplicity of presentation equals the simplicity of the child's world, and consequently the story ends when this world changes. There is another theme in this volume

which is not as prevalent in Dance of the Happy Shades or Lives of Girls and Women, a concern to examine the distance between the world such as that in "The Found Boat" and the more complex world of maturity.

This distance is one that contributes to the differences in attitude and opinion that arise in the story "Marrakesh". A generation gap lies between Dorothy, a seventyish widow and grandmother of Jeanette, an idealistic thirty-year-old. Dorothy is confused by the stages she has witnessed in Jeanette and her present image: "Dorothy had seen pictures in magazines of this new type of adult who appeared to have discarded adulthood. Jeanette was the first one she had seen close up and in the flesh"(p.160). Jeanette wears childish clothes, does not bother with a hairstyle and maintains the body of a ten-year-old, suggesting to Dorothy that she is not unhappy but a perpetual "adolescent"(p.162).

Dorothy does not quite understand her granddaughter or her 'lifestyle' but she is less disapproving, more open-minded than her sister, Violet. The differences between Dorothy and Jeanette are focused by the trees which once lined Dorothy's street. They have been removed because of Dutch Elm disease and Dorothy feels compelled to explain this to Jeanette who declares, "The whole country is a junkyard...technology and progress are destroying the quality of life"(p.161). Dorothy's view is not as extreme, her opinions tempered by age and experience, and

the knowledge that the past cannot be recaptured. Dorothy cannot forget that she once protested the replacement of a wood fence by barbed wire: "How she hated change, then, and clung to old things, old mossy rotten picturesque things"(p.162). Dorothy realizes that she was not unlike Jeanette in the past, but was no longer a part of that world. "She believed then...that Jeanette was in some important way a continuation of herself. This was not apparent any longer; the connection had either been broken or gone invisible"(p.166).

This broken connection is caused by progress and change, which Jeanette rejects and Dorothy accepts as being inevitable. Dorothy admits that if a new supermarket were to replace the houses across the street, she would be, "looking out, looking not emptily but with strong curiosity...anything would do for her to look at; beautiful or ugly had ceased to matter, because there was in everything something to be discovered"(p.163). Dorothy's anticipation of fresh discovery precipitates a voyeuristic experience in which she witnesses her granddaughter making love to their married neighbour. The isolation which Dorothy has felt between herself and Jeanette can not be remedied by kinship or female understanding. Seeing Jeanette and Blair King console each other's loneliness somewhat mollifies Dorothy, whose turn it is to be shocked and outraged at this new sexual freedom.

Dorothy is affected by this knowledge of Jeanette's

and Blair's love-making but she has gained some wisdom from the experience. While Jeanette and Blair "would have forgotten it themselves by tomorrow" (p.173), Dorothy recognizes that they are more helpless than her, "helpless and endangered as people on a raft pulled out on the current" (p.173). This image of the raft suggests that they can be swept away by the tides and currents of life which Dorothy has weathered and that they have yet to master. Dorothy decides that "strength is necessary, as well as something like gratitude, if you are going to turn into a lady peeping Tom at the end of your life" (p.174). She needs strength to accept the vision of "the two welded figures, solid and bright" (p.174) of her granddaughter and Blair King, but will be gratified in her own way, because she knows that she will accept yet another intrusion into her life, "because there was in everything something to be discovered" (p.163).

The stories discussed thus far rely on central images to dramatize Munro's concern with the "surface of life". In each story, there is a turning point, an epiphanal moment which is focused by an image previously introduced in the story which suddenly takes on a deeper and richer significance. The protagonist's life is consequently made meaningful by this revelation, as is the reader's comprehension and appreciation of the story. The following four stories to be discussed in this chapter do not reflect Dorothy's persistent optimism, but rather,

display the pervasive motifs of regret and remorse. These four stories are unlike the first five in that they do not rely on male/female relationships to precipitate the plot. Instead, they deal almost exclusively with illusion and isolation, examining the trials and occasional triumphs in life. The first story to be discussed in this second grouping is "Walking on Water", a story which contrasts with "Marrakesh" and offers another perspective on the differences between generations.

Mr. Lougheed, a retired druggist, is much more reticent than Dorothy, a man who enjoys his isolation: "His aim was to give people what they thought they wanted, and continue himself, solitary and unmolested" (p.67). Mr. Lougheed's self-imposed isolation offers him the perspective of the observer, a perspective which is tempered by his age which seems to remove him from the concerns of contemporary society. Mr. Lougheed notes the differences between the attitudes of the participants in the contemporary generation and those of his past; in despair at youths such as Calla, Rex and Rover, who:

...struck Mr. Lougheed as having got there without parents, without any experience of highchairs or tricycles or wagons; they seemed to have sprung up, armed as they were, from the earth. No doubt that was how they thought of themselves (p.70).

Eugene is the one exception to the rule, an intelligent, kind and polite young man, "a gentle ambassador from the terrible land of youth" (p.77). Mr. Lougheed is concerned about Eugene's welfare and is alarmed when Eugene

decides to attempt to walk on water. Eugene's decision puzzles Mr. Lougheed because he cannot comprehend Eugene's idea of weightlessness or Eugene's motivation for attempting such a feat. Mr. Lougheed has felt some connection with Eugene and believes he understands the young philosopher, but discovers that there is something missing in their communications with one another, something that prompts feelings of fear and forboding.

This feeling is intensified when Mr. Lougheed finds the dead bird, an ominous image of death. Mr. Lougheed suspects (rightly) that Calla, Rex and Rover are behind the dead bird incident and he reviews his relationship with them. This strange trio prompts faint traces of memories in Mr. Lougheed, yet his connection with them is tenuous at best. He sees Rex and Calla copulating in the hall and objects to their "showing off" (p.71), which prompts his own memory of the "show" put on by the Brewer boy and his sister during his own youth. Again, Munro uses a theatrical image to dramatize her theme and in this instance the idea of a "show" suggests actors and an audience. Both Et and Mr. Lougheed are part of an audience--they are observers; neither was in love nor really loved by anyone. Both are guilty of living their lives through others, relying on family or friends to satisfy their existence. Unlike Dorothy, after witnessing the love-making Et and Mr. Lougheed flounder in the face of contemporary reality, while Dorothy finds some strength

in the knowledge that she can survive change.

Mr. Lougheed admits that past patterns are often repeated in the present, but members of this generation insist on "congratulating themselves on it"(p.71). He cannot accept "the difference between that time and now. ... How could one man know Mr. Lougheed's father and mother, and now know Rex and Calla?"(p.83). Mr. Lougheed's despair is soothed by Eugene, with whom he can communicate and share his apprehensions about the present world.

The central image in this story is the water which appears in the present world of reality and also in Mr. Lougheed's dream world. Eugene attempts to make real his illusion of being able to walk on water but fails, conquered by the physical reality of his own body weight. Mr. Lougheed's dream parallels Eugene's attempt to walk on water. Just as Mr. Lougheed struggles to understand Eugene's motivations, he struggles to remember the end of his dream and conquer that illusory world that so often intrudes on his waking moments.

Eugene's disappearance coincides with Mr. Lougheed's remembering the end of the dream in which "he saw a boy's body spread out, face down"(p.90) in the water, warning him that Eugene's disappearance might portend suicide, "that morning's show might have been only a rehearsal, an imitation"(p.91). The water imagery also creates the idea that Mr. Lougheed is very much like an island, remote

and isolated except for his occasional communiqués to Eugene, who represents the present generation for Mr. Lougheed. Eugene helps Mr. Lougheed begin to understand the confusing 'reality' of strange philosophies, mystical literature and the new sexual freedom. When Eugene disappears, Mr. Lougheed is cut loose from the mainstream of life and feels as if he is losing himself as well and approaching his own end. That Mr. Lougheed envisages the end of his dream suggests that his ties with his past and present are finished.

The final blow occurs when Mr. Lougheed appeals to Calla, hoping that she will be concerned about Eugene's welfare, but she is not since she says : "He wasn't one of us...he was fairly old"(p.92). This statement defeats Mr. Lougheed, who has tried intelligently to bridge 'the generation gap', but can no longer reach those inhabitants of this new world without Eugene. The world no longer has meaning for him:

Mr. Lougheed thought for the first time ever that he might not be able to get to the top of the stairs. He doubted his powers even for that. It was possible that he would have to go into an apartment building, like the rest of them, if he wanted to continue(p.92).

Unlike Dorothy in "Marrakesh", Mr. Lougheed cannot assimilate this new knowledge, the fact that Eugene is gone and that he must try to continue on with his own life. Without Eugene as his intermediary and confidant, Mr. Lougheed no longer has a buffer to protect him from the overwhelming flood of change and progress.

"Winter Wind" offers yet another view of the generation gap in this collection and returns once again to the setting of Wawanash County. The Grandmother and Aunt Madge characters are almost identical to those of Auntie Grace and Aunt Elspeth in Lives of Girls and Women and the Aunties in "Peace of Utrecht". Just as Del apprehended the hidden natures and the unfamiliar twists and turns of her aunts' personalities, the narrator of "Winter Wind" tries to understand her grandmother as she might have been in her youth.

There is less a sense of a gap between generations in this story than in "Marrakesh" and "Walking on Water", largely because the narrator in this story has accepted both worlds as her own. Whenever there was a storm in town she stayed in her grandmother's home, enjoying the calm and luxury, the snug comfort of their near perfect existence. The narrator has always seen her grandmother as being safe in this world, but discovers that she once had an unhappy marriage as a result of being in love with another man. This revelation stimulates the narrator into fashioning her own story, recreating the past, even though, "Nothing she ever said to me, or in my hearing, would bear this out. Yet I have not invented it, I really believe it, and so I must believe that we get messages another way, that we have connections that cannot be investigated, but have to be relied on" (p.201).

These "connections" recall those mentioned in "Marrakesh", the connections Dorothy believed broken between her and Jeanette. In "Winter Wind", the narrator still feels these connections because of her constant exposure to her grandmother's world and her affinity with the past which she intuitively recognizes as an integral part of herself. This past is remembered in the photograph of her great-grandparents which she takes with her wherever she goes. This photograph symbolizes the personal sacrifices her ancestors made when they ensured a good future for their children, "this photograph was the sign and record of his [her great-grandfather's] achievement" (p.194). The photograph is the unifying image in the story, indicating the narrator's desire to honour her past and respect the attitudes of an age gone by. Her grandmother has yet to make peace with the fact that she too, is a part of that past, yet must also learn to accept the changes of the present world.

It has always been difficult for the grandmother to accept the narrator's mother, who suffers from the same disease as the mother in "Peace of Utrecht", a disease which offends the grandmother's sense of propriety. When the narrator decides that she wants to return home, she is actually choosing the world of her own making which "had more scope" (p.202) than the unchanging world at her Grandmother's home. The chaos caused by the afflicted mother

stimulates the narrator to action, whereas she feels repressed in her Grandmother's care. The story her Grandmother tells her about Susie Heferman is not as much a tale about a freezing death in the "winter wind", as about the internal wasting of her grandmother, who had "become another old woman who people deceived and placated and were anxious to get away from"(p.206). The narrator in "Winter Wind" does not reject any aspect of her past or her present and therefore understands her grandmother, just as she has come to understand herself. It is the grandmother who is left isolated by the winter winds, the price that her pride has demanded.

"Executioners" is a story which also contains many of the elements present in Lives of Girls and Women. It is a story told in retrospect by an old woman anaesthetized with whiskey. Helena is an outcast as a young child, mocked for her strange appearance and her alcoholic father. She lives outside town, on a country road which houses the bootlegger Stump Troy and his son Howard. The vision of society in this story is once again twisted and deformed, like Stump, who has lost both legs and Robina, who has lost part of her arm. Each ventured out into society and was maimed by it, and now, lives outside the town.

The irony of this story is dramatized through the fire imagery which amplifies our sense of the social disease of alcoholic dependence. Helena's father, an ex-member

of Parliament was persecuted by the townspeople and, "My mother likened the event to the Crucifixion. He had come out on the balcony of the Queen's Hotel, to speak, to concede his defeat, and was prevented, jeered down, by Tories carrying brooms on fire"(p.139). These "brooms on fire" hasten Helena's father to an asylum, where he must try to cure his alcoholism. The same image of fire occurs when Stump Troy's house is ablaze, a house rumoured to be supported by a prominent member of society in compensation for Stump Troy's loss of his limbs.

In either instance, the destruction of human life by a society which should protect the individual has occurred because of that society's malaise. The town's lack of compassion forces men like Helena's father to enter an institution which society had created for its own protection. At the same time, however, the townspeople condone Stump Troy's bootlegging operation, because it supplies their own depraved natures.

Besides the hate and deception which Helena knows exists in the town, she experiences even greater hatred in Robina, who has her own long list of enemies. Robina is frustrated by her lack of power as an outcast who lives in the backwoods, and by the persecution from which she believes her brothers Jimmy and Duval suffer. Because Robina is an unsophisticated girl with primitive emotions, Helena does not suspect that she or her brothers Jimmy and Duval, "the clowns"(p.147), are capable of any serious

action. She has no way of knowing that their base natures are capable of carrying out one of the earliest actions known to man: the act of revenge. The death of Stump Troy and his son Howard by fire brings Helena to the realization that she has been an accessory in spirit to the actual executions. Her own consuming hatred of Howard Troy and her desire to drive "spikes into his eyes", have "his head torn from his body" or "surprise him with a knife"(p.149) are as merciless as the fire set to Stump Troy's house. The images quoted are particularly vivid and illustrate the intensity of emotion which accompanies Helen's desire to physically destroy and torture Howard Troy just as he taunted and tormented her emotionally. The full implication of the title "Executioners" and the theme of persecution and victimization is realized in the graphic images which Munro uses to intensify the basic emotion of hatred.

As an old woman, Helena is left with these vivid memories of the executions which took place within and without society. Her father was one type of victim, Stump Troy and his son Howard another. Helena has witnessed both executions, and still feels guilt at her implicit participation in Howard Troy's death. She muses that, "When everybody is dead who could have remembered it, then I suppose the fire will be finished with, it will just be as if nobody had ever run through that door"(p.155).

Helena is the only one left to remember the fire and its probable cause, left with a sense of personal guilt for her evil thoughts, a guilt which will only be extinguished with her death.

The final story in this collection is a companion piece to "Peace of Utrecht", the final story in Dance of the Happy Shades. "The Ottawa Valley" remembers a childhood journey in the life of a woman (who could easily be Helen from "Peace of Utrecht") who remembers the first signs of her mother's deteriorating health and all the events which follow. The child has noticed her mother's trembling arm and hand, and sought out the scientific documentation of her mother's disease in Fishbein's Medical Encyclopedia. Her Aunt Dodie had warned the narrator that she might one day have to "be the mother" (p.243) and look after her own mother just as Aunt Dodie nursed her mother who had dropsy.

The child is terrified by this vision of her possible future and confronts her mother:

'So, are you not going to get sick at all?' I said, pushing farther. I was very much relieved that she had decided against strokes, and that I would not have to be the mother, and wash and wipe and feed her lying in bed, as Aunt Dodie had had to do with her mother (p.244).

The mother can assure her daughter she will not have a stroke, but can offer no reassurance about the onset of Parkinson's Disease. The gloomy predictions the narrator reads in the Medical Encyclopedia are recalled when her Uncle James, Aunt Dodie and her mother recite poems to one another, poems

which contain images, or refer directly, to death.

The child's journey to the Ottawa Valley, to the place of her mother's childhood, succeeds in awakening new emotions in the child. Bronwen Wallace suggests that:

By juxtaposing these events and memories, the inter-relationship between mother and daughter, Munro explores concretely the juxtaposition of selves (daughter, potential mother, mother of a daughter) that exists always and powerfully in every woman.²

The journey to the Ottawa Valley is a trip remembered by the narrator which actually symbolizes the narrator's journey towards understanding herself. The greater part of this understanding lies in her confrontation with, and exorcism of, the memories of her mother.

Once again the image of the photograph reappears in the "series of snapshots... of Aunt Dodie, Uncle James and even Aunt Lena, even her children" (p.246), that the narrator arranges in her mind. Like the Photographer in Lives of Girls and Women, the narrator is incapable of reproducing the reality she desires:

The problem the only problem, is my mother. And she is the one of course that I am trying to get; it is to reach her that this whole journey has been undertaken. With 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 (p.246).

The narrator says that she does not want her mother "stuck to me as close as ever" (p.246), denying her mother because she cannot acknowledge herself as an independent, individual

² Bronwen Wallace, "Women's Lives: Alice Munro", in David Helwig, ed., The Human Elements (Toronto: Oberon Press, 1973), p. 65.

woman until memories of her mother are accepted. Like Maddy in "Peace of Utrecht", she cannot escape, knowing that "I could go on, and on, applying what skills I have, using what tricks I know, and it would always be the same"(p.246).

The narrator in "The Ottawa Valley" must also live with her personal sense of guilt about her desire to be rid of her mother's memory. Like Helena in "Executioners", her uncharitable thoughts are as condemning as Howard Troy's obliteration by fire or the obliteration of her mother's memory.

The nine stories which have been discussed in this chapter each follow the same basic pattern which is common to Alice Munro's technique as an author. The reader sympathizes with Munro's characters, whether they are old men or women trying to understand the generation gap or children adjusting to their new-found sexuality. The reader is taken along with these characters through a series of seemingly abstruse, delicately textured incidents which are disrupted by a circumstance that offers some new revelation to the character (and the reader). Each of the stories in Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You offers a special insight into the strengths and frailties of the human condition, as well as Munro's special gift, which, to use her own words from "Larrakesh", is the ability to conceive "in everything something to be discovered"(p.163).

CHAPTER IV
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

Alice Munro's latest novel, Who Do You Think You Are?(1978), exhibits the same structure and basic concerns as her earlier novel, Lives of Girls and Women(1974). Like Del, the central character in Who Do You Think You Are? is an artist, an actress and television interviewer whose roots lie in Wawanash County, in the small town of Hanratty. Rose's life is examined from her youth in Hanratty to her middle age, and her experiences in various locales, each of which signals a change in her personal development. As in her earlier work, Munro's use of extended images focuses those themes that are central to her work and enhances her exploration of the events and characters in Rose's life.

Many of the images used by Munro in this novel are prompted by the novel's title--Who Do You Think You Are? This title suggests some kind of quest for identity, a need to examine the distinctive character belonging to an individual. Because the central protagonist in the novel is an actress, the images which express her are often theatrical and artistic. We experience Rose's search to understand herself and in doing so, are made aware of the importance of Munro's use of theater and art as a medium by which she expresses Rose's final answer to "who do you think you are?"

We have seen that in Lives of Girls and Women (and in other stories) that the theater suggests images which concern illusion and reality; the world of the theater encourages an illusory world, an escape from reality. Most often, this illusory world is deflated by the incapable reality of day to day existence. As an actress, Rose is involved and tempted by, the stage, and the glamour and excitement of being a celebrity of sorts, an individual whose life is less commonplace than others. In sharp contrast to the world of theater and the images it evokes lies the town of Hanratty and the hardship Rose encounters in her youth. Rose's identity lies somewhere between her youthful experiences in Hanratty, her disappointments in marriage, and her life as an actress. Ultimately then, the concerns of this novel are focused upon an answer to the question asked of Rose: "Who do you think you are?"; a question whose answer lies in the sum total of all Rose's experiences and the images which dramatize them.

The one character in this novel who most affects Rose, and in fact, vies for the reader's attention with her, is Flo, Rose's stepmother. Flo's importance is emphasized by the cyclical movement of the novel, which chronicles Rose's departure from Hanratty and her eventual return, which in both instances, includes a separation from, and a reunion with, Flo. Just as Hanratty is Rose's physical locus, Flo is her spiritual locus, her essence. Although each woman is a separate individual, they are similar in

more ways than they would care to recognize or admit.

Rose's eventual goal in life is to act, and consequently the images which express her are often theatrical and artistic. The imagery which presents Flo is also often theatrical, but essentially it reveals that Flo is a "character", a vigorous player in the dramas of life, dramas which are most often of her own making. In the first of the linked stories entitled "Royal Beatings", Rose and Flo are the participants in a familiar ritual that satisfies their mutual desire for drama and excitement and precipitates a crisis which they find challenging and unpredictable.

This ritual concerns the beatings which occur after the usual conflict between a mother and daughter, but in "Royal Beatings" this conflict is expressed in theatrical images. Flo threatens Rose with a "royal beating", a term which conjures up fantastic images for Rose:

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. In real life they didn't approach such dignity.¹

Rose's imagination creates a scene of pageantry, complete with the "formal spectators" who would gratify her need for an audience. Flo, of course, plays a crucial "role" in this "event" because she precipitates the action, plays her part well, "and it was only Flo who tried to supply the

¹ Alice Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), p. 1. Page references for subsequent quotations will be supplied in brackets.

event with some high air of necessity and regret"(p.1).

The scene of the "royal beating" is presented as if it were to be staged: "Suppose a Saturday, in Spring. Leaves not out yet but the doors open to sunlight. Crows. Ditches full of running water. Hopeful weather"(p.10). Besides these stage directions there is a feeling that the words Flo and Rose say to one another belong to a dialogue each is familiar with, that, "has been going on forever, like a dream..."(p.11). As the action continues, Flo asks Rose "Who do you think you are?", challenging the identity with which Rose is comfortable. This question approaches something like a climax in the scene between Rose and Flo, one that has become more intense as each of them becomes stubbornly and irrecoverably immersed in the roles they have determined for themselves.

Rose contradicts and objects with such poisonous reasonableness and mildness, displays theatrical unconcern. Flo goes beyond her ordinary scorn and self-possession and becomes amazingly theatrical herself(p.13).

Once their "performance" has gone beyond even their own limits, it becomes necessary to force a crisis, come to the resolution they had avoided in their verbal parrying.

When Flo summons Rose's father to punish her for her "back-talk and impudence"(p.14), he becomes an unwilling participant in their scenario. With his appearance, however, the scene changes from pretense to reality, and Rose is the victim of a "royal beating", no longer a vivid and provocative pageant but a painful experience.

Rose's father believes he must play a part equal to his role of the punisher and, "His face, like this voice, is quite out of character. He is like a bad actor, who turns a part grotesque"(p.16). Rose's father's physical distortion of the scene emphasizes Rose's and Flo's distortion of the drama they were rehearsing. Flo and Rose never expected their scene together to end in this way. Flo becomes upset at her husband's method of punishment and Rose suffers mental as well as physical humiliation from her father's kicks and blows. Ever the actress, "Rose must play her part in this with the same grossness, the same exaggeration that her father displays, playing his"(p.17). She cries, shrieks and whimpers, escaping later to her room to ponder some kind of dramatic retaliation such as a suicide attempt or running away from home.

Gradually, things return to normal as "they are... drawn back into themselves"(p.18), returning to their everyday roles of mother, father and daughter. Occasionally, to hide her ignorance, and divert the family's attention, Flo performs for them, doing various tricks. In one instance after a "royal beating", she performs a double-jointed trick on a chair as if to prove that even if she does not share her stepdaughter's and husband's worldly wisdom, she is no less than they are, a performer, an individual in her own right.

Running parallel to the drama and theatricality of Rose's home life, is the drama which occurs in Nanratty.

In the descriptions of Hanratty, the reader is reminded of Jubilee and the various themes and images which accompany Munro's memories of small town life in western Ontario. Hanratty is divided physically and socially by a river which runs through it; determining West Hanratty as the poorer, more impoverished area of town where Rose and her family live. This physical and social division affects Rose as a child and, later, as an adult. Rose is exposed to the violence and deprivation which accompanies poverty, heir to Flo's stories about the evil side of human nature and the wickedness in West Hanratty.

The details concerning Becky Tyde, the crippled dwarf, recall similar themes from previous Munro stories. Becky's twisted figure becomes an image of the morally twisted society that prompts her father's murder. The same logic that the society in "Executioners" used to support Stump Troy's bootlegging operation, is applied to the three assailants who were released early from jail to good jobs supplied by influential members of society. Flo's story of Butcher Tyde's murder is recalled at the end of "Royal Beatings", when Rose is more mature and capable of greater insight.

The radio interview at the end of this chapter works as a significant image in two ways. First, it is an image of the artistic medium Rose will later employ, and secondly, it is reminiscent of Flo's own story-telling abilities which Rose later learns to imitate. Flo's story vies with that

Nettleton's memories of his own past, which makes no mention of the horsewhipping episode. Hat is revered as a "living link with our past"(p.22), fussed over by nurses and reporters while Flo and Rose share the knowledge of Hat as a murderous horsewhipper. Just as Flo and Rose shared their own drama during a "royal beating", they share the truth about a drama which occurred in real life, another beating, which reveals the vicious, demoralized society that they live in.

The essential deprivation of West Hanratty is explored in the following chapter entitled "Privilege", which documents Rose's experience at school and the degradation and perversions she was exposed to early in life. Later on as a mature adult, Rose amusingly recalls her past, often shocking others who cannot believe such things possible in childhood. The descriptions in this chapter basically prove that Rose is a survivor, mostly because of her imagination and her ability to escape hardships by acting out her fantasies and dramatizing whatever small pleasure she experiences. Rose herself admits that, "learning to survive, no matter with what craveness and caution, what shocks and forebodings, is not the same as being miserable. It is too interesting"(p.27).

Rose's interest in survival and the complexities of her life make her an interested observer when Franny and Shortie McGill copulate in the entry way of the Boys' Toilet. Rose remembers that Flo uses the term "performing" to describe the brother's and sister's act, prompting

Rose to envision, "...some makeshift stage, some rickety old barn stage, where members of a family got up and gave silly songs and recitations. What a performance!"(p.25). Much like her vision of a royal beating, Rose is disillusioned when reality falls short of her imaginative expectations, and the McGills' performance is an act of "no general significance"(p.27).

When Rose begins to idolize Cora, she falls into the same trap of glorifying and enlarging people and events until they no longer belong to reality, but to the world Rose creates for herself, a world which eventually clashes with reality. Munro uses the theater as an image to express this disparity between illusion and reality. Rose intently observes Cora's every word and action, noting the smallest details of appearance, gesture and tone. She becomes an actress, imagining herself in the role of Cora:

When she was by herself she would act that out, the whole scene...Rose being Cora. She would turn just as Cora did...imagining the fleshy satin over her own hips...She wanted to be Cora now(p.31).

This desire to be like Cora is intruded upon by the reality of Rose's situation. She can only secretly worship Cora until such time as Cora, Flo or perhaps someone else, recognizes her obsession. Rose makes the mistake of inviting reality into the scenes she imagines with Cora, and steals candy from Flo's store, thereby drawing Flo and Cora into her secret.

It is Flo who spoils Rose's secret love for Cora,

mimicking Cora's tone of voice and insulting her appearance. Rose's attempt at mimicry had resulted in tender, imaginary scenes between herself and Cora. Flo's imitation of Cora is depreciatory, destroying all of Rose's illusions and making Cora a figure of public mockery rather than private worship. Flo too, is an actress of sorts, but she uses this ability to mock illusion rather than create the illusions which Rose prefers. Flo asks Rose if she is in love with Cora and,

Rose answered no, because she associated love with movie endings, kissing and getting married. Her feelings at the moment shocked and exposed, and already, though she didn't know it, starting to wither and curl up at the edges. Flo was a drying blast(p.35).

The warmth Rose felt from her increased feelings of love was nurtured by her ability to protect this love from others. While she was pretending to be Cora, trying to capture her image for herself, she was safe from the "drying blast" of cold reality that Flo delighted in providing. As yet, Rose does not understand love, associating it with another aspect of the theatrical, with "movie endings" that also present an illusory picture of life.

This illusory world that Rose creates for herself is at variance with the world she encounters each day. The image which Munro uses to indicate the base, coarser aspects of Rose's life is that of the Boys' and Girls' Toilets. Rose is in despair each day because she cannot use the filthy toilet where evidence of a lack of sanitation and personal cleanliness abound. Rose sees the

outhouses as "scenes of marvelous shames and outrage"(p.23), places which balance the other world of imagination, and put it into perspective. Rose is sensitive and perceptive, she can accept the world of the Boys' and Girls' Toilets as well as the joyful, imaginary world which she carries in her head. For this reason Rose "was not miserable"(p.27), sensing perhaps, her own innate ability to survive as long as she maintains her abilities to imagine and create.

As if in accordance with this attitude, the situation at Rose's school eventually improves. The outhouses are replaced by flush toilets and all evidence of past flagrancy is obliterated. The prosperity of the war years and Rose's own success as an artist are ironically presented through the image of the toilets. Rose's memories of these years are stimulated by her memories of the Boys' Toilet and the Girls' Toilet, memories influenced by her own artistic nature:

When Rose thought of West Hamratty during the war years, and during the years before, the two times were so separate it was as if an entirely different lighting had been used, or as if it was all on film and the film had been printed in a different way, so that on the one hand things looked clean-edged and decent and limited and ordinary, and on the other, dark, grainy, jumbled, and disturbing(p.37).

The image of Rose's life on film recalls the "Photographer" section in Lives of Girls and Women, and anticipates Rose's own involvement with film when she becomes an actress and interviewer. It should be noted, however, that Rose's memory of West Hamratty contains two separate

images or photographs which exist simultaneously in her mind. She is no longer the child who can be hurt and upset by another's interpretation of her life and her imaginary world; she remembers outhouses and flush toilets with equal fondness. Rose is an artist who acknowledges all aspects of experience and the fact that, "life was altogether a series of surprising developments"(p.36).

The "surprising developments" in Rose's life are described variously in the chapters following. These developments in Rose's life are changes which are signalled by images of change and experience; images which are as many-faceted as the characters Rose encounters or the many aspects of her own character that she eventually discovers. In "Half a Grapefruit", Munro creates a special tension between the dreams of youth and the reality of life, romance versus fact. This tension is introduced by the incident that inspires the chapter title: Rose's bold assertion in her Health and Guidance class at high school that she ate half a grapefruit for breakfast that day. Rose sees grapefruit as an image of luxury and prosperity, an image she desires for herself because the truth about her coarse breakfasts and country background embarrasses her. Her lie is transparent, however, and she is teased and disgraced by fellow classmates who mockingly repeat "half-a-grapefruit" within her hearing.

From this incident Rose learns that there are

certain exceptions to her youthful illusions, but still continues to cultivate her own special world as a defense against the encroachment of a crueller, outside reality. Rose's ability to embellish and undermine reality in her stories helps her to cope with the "hazardous"(p.39) life of high school:

The change in Rose, once she left the scene, crossed the bridge, changed herself into chronicler, was remarkable. No nerves any more. A loud skeptical voice, some hip-swinging in a red and yellow plaid skirt, more than a hint of swaggering(p.41).

Rose is still the actress who changes herself from one scene to the next, an artist who details the facts of life. Whereas Flo had told Rose tales about Hanratty, Rose is now the story-teller, embroidering her stories in much the same way that Flo undoubtedly had. "Flo and Rose had switched roles. Now Rose was the one bringing stories home. Flo was the one who knew the names of characters and was waiting to hear"(p.40). The theatrical image suggested by "characters" and "roles" is particularly apt. Munro suggests to us that Rose cannot easily accept the reality of High School, and finds subterfuge in her ability to act out the role she would prefer in life, a role Flo delights in hearing because she is stimulated by exaggeration and the outrageous.

Rose tells Flo the stories about her fellow classmates' escapades, their affairs and their deceptions. The story Rose tells Flo about Ruby Jarruthers and her loose

morals is humorous and probably exaggerated. Her method of recalling Ruby, Runt, Del and Horse turns the participants into caricatures of a sluttish girl and oversexed boys. Rose's ability to change and create characters is counterpointed by the ever present reality she is reminded of when she learns that Ruby suffered, and eventually died from breast cancer and that the boys have become respected members of the community. Rose is constantly warned of the fact that one cannot entirely escape or ignore reality.

This awareness is repeated within Rose's own family when her father suffers from lung cancer. Rose is immersed in Macbeth, reciting lines to herself, imagining the effect certain speeches might have on Flo or Billy Pope. Just as Rose enjoys the tragedy of Macbeth, she enjoys the tragedy that her father's illness suggests:

There is no denying the situation gave Rose pleasure, at times. A severe pleasure, when she was not too mixed up in it, washing the sheets or listening to a coughing fit. She dramatized her own part in it, saw herself clear-eyed and unsurprised, refusing all deceptions, young in years but old in bitter experience of life(p.49).

Rose's pleasure in the stoic role she chooses for herself is deflated by Flo, the harbinger of reality who makes her confront the dirty sheets and stained underwear that confirm her father's illness. Rose can never hope to escape the cruel fact that her father is dying.

There is also a certain tension between Rose and her father because of Rose's artistic and intellectual

tendencies. "She mooned and daydreamed, she was vain and eager to show off; her whole life was in her head"(p.45), unlike Flo, who despised "show-offs" and concerned herself mostly with the concrete reality around her. Rose's father compares his daughter to his wife, deciding that Rose is wanting in comparison to Flo, who was: "naive intellectually; childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions and superstitions and traditional beliefs"(p.45). Rose is entirely the opposite to her stepmother, preferring books to "charming jumbled notions". Her father cannot help but share his daughter's aspirations, but feels that "safety lay with Flo"(p.45), realizing, perhaps, the hardships his daughter would encounter.

Rose's father only reads the titles of books she brings home, rejecting the wealth of knowledge within them. Rather than read Macbeth and appreciate it as a study of the evil at work in the individual, he prefers to listen to Flo's naïve account of the evil woman with "second sight" who tried to poison her. Rose's preferences for Shakespeare's dramatic classic and the three Weird Sisters contrasts to Flo's superstitious belief in the witch she personally encountered in her youth. While one woman enjoys Shakespeare and the other enjoys tales of superstition, neither can dim the delight each feels in their choice of drama and intrigue.

Rose's interest in the theater and acquiring knowledge isolates her in some ways from her family. While she can share and exchange stories with Flo, she can never expect Flo to understand that the act of story telling is contained in the books Flo finds threatening. Her father's alliance with Flo alienates Rose, who is left to pursue her life on her own. Just as her father is ready to approach death, Rose is ready to pursue acting. Rose's father prepares for his death ritualistically: "His shed was locked, his books would not be opened again, by him, and tomorrow was the last day he would wear shoes"(p.53). In much the same way Rose prepares for her new life, except that she opens books and doors to a new world, putting on whatever costume or disguise is necessary in order to become an actress.

Before Rose decides to leave home and pursue a career she is initiated into the world of sex. The incident with the "minister" on the train in "Wild Swans" is bizarre, yet at the same time stimulates Rose's desire to experience and appreciate all aspects of life. Flo tells Rose yet another fantastic story, this time concerning the perils of single girls and the threat of white slavery: "Watch out, Flo said as well, for people dressed up as ministers. They were the worst. That disguise was commonly adopted by white slavers, as well as those after your money"(p.55). Flo's warning about "disguises" becomes

an example of her perceptiveness. The undertaker is a regular customer at Flo's, and still drives his hearse, a dramatic practice which prompts Flo to believe that he seduces unsuspecting women in his hearse. The song he sings makes her even more suspicious: "Her brow is like the snow drift/Her throat is like the swan"(p.57). This story about the undertaker sets the tone for the rest of the chapter and contains the images of disguise and swans, which are repeated later in the chapter. Significantly, Rose does not believe Flo's story, thinking it was "all nonsense...who could believe it of a man that age?"(p.57).

In this instance, the story which Flo tells Rose is very close to Rose's own experience. She is the victim of a man's attention, a man who claims that he is a minister but is not "disguised" as one. He opens his conversation with Rose by mentioning the wild swans he had seen the other day, recalling the romantic song that the undertaker sang to himself. The "minister" strikes Rose as a romantic man, perhaps like the undertaker, a man who says "snows, a poetic sounding word. Anyone at home would have said snow"(p.59). Like Del Jordan, Rose delights in the sounds of words and the images they convey. Unfortunately for Rose, this "minister" is not a romantic but a lecher, ready to take advantage of young girls. Rose, as yet, is uneducated in matters of sex, expecting her lover to be "lapping and coiling his way through slow pleasures"(p.61).

The pleasure Rose does experience is unwelcome and agonizing, taking place in the unlikely surroundings of a passenger train.

The "minister's" stealthy explorations and Rose's unspoken dialogue take the form of a mime play. For every word not spoken or action not taken, the "minister's" hand moves inch by inch towards his anticipated destination. Although this man is not disguised as a minister, he disguises the movement of his hand beneath the newspapers he has carefully placed. Rose finds it difficult to relate the man to his actions, "a man used to deference, an appreciator of nature, delighter in wild swans"(p.62). As if to gain perspective during this bizarre sexual initiation, Rose romanticizes the landscape, making it a part of this encounter. The landscape she describes abounds in sexual images, her own sexual excitement is likened to that of a stream: "his stubborn patient hand was able, after all, to get the ferns to rustle and the streams to flow, to waken a sly luxuriance"(p.63).

As the "minister" becomes more persistent in his gropings, Rose reluctantly becomes more stimulated and the landscape correspondingly becomes more erotic. Rose opens her legs to the "minister's" hand and,

As they looked down at the preglacial valley, the silver-wooded rubble of little hills, as they came sliding down to the shores of Lake Ontario, she would make this slow, and silent, and definite, declaration...(p.63).

This image of the "preglacial valley" corresponds to Rose's

offering her self to the "minister's" explorations, "pre-glacial" suggesting the onset of Rose's sexual excitement which is further emphasized by the "shores of Lake Ontario", which recall the earlier image of the stream. The image of the valley's formation suggests the shape of the female genitalia, all images which now duplicate the explicit nature of the "minister's" act.

As Rose nears orgasm, everything she sees outside the train window takes on an aura of eroticism:

...the big pulsating pipes of oil refineries...bed-sheets and towels used to wipe up intimate stains flapped leeringly on the clothesline, where even the children seemed to be frolicking lewdly in the schoolyards, and the very truckdrivers stopped at the railway crossing must be thrusting their thumbs gleefully into curled hands(p.63).

Rose's sexual release occurs just as she approaches the Exhibition Grounds, whose gates and pillars are reminiscent of a vision of heaven where "you could have had such a flock of birds, wild swans, even, wakened under one big dome together, exploding from it, taking to the sky"(p.63). This final image of the wild swans signals Rose's orgasmic release and the end of the encounter with the "minister". Like Del, Rose's experience does not leave her scarred or disgusted by sex--it is just another "surprising development" in life.

When Rose arrives in Toronto, Flo expects her to deliver a message to an old friend who often masqueraded as a famous actress she resembled, but Rose does not,

thinking: "...it would be an especially fine thing, to manage a transformation like that. To dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named, skin" (p.64). In her own way, Rose admires the "minister's" daring to touch her, and Mavis's nerve when she attempts to appear as someone else. Rose admires their ability to acquire "newly named skins", an ability she masters when she acquires the "skin" of an actress, which also allows her to practice a variety of disguises herself.

When Rose leaves Hanratty to enter college she has vaguely formed hopes of entering the acting profession. "She wanted to perform in public. She thought she wanted to be an actress but she never tried to act, was afraid to go near the college drama productions" (p.69). Rose never does perform in public, not until several years later, because of her marriage to Patrick Blatchford. Rose meets Patrick at college and their courtship and marriage are the central concerns of the following two chapters to be discussed, "The Beggar Maid" and "Mischief". Because of Rose's marriage to Patrick, her acting abilities are repressed in favour of her new role as wife and mother. Rose's marriage to Patrick fails for several reasons, the most important among them being their lack of communication, Rose's consuming desire to create an exciting life of her own and Patrick's inflexible, unchanging attitude that

stifles Rose's individuality. Essentially, "The Beggar Maid" and "Mischief" illustrate Rose's failure in marriage and her inability to act the traditional role of wife and mother. These chapters are yet another stage in her development as an artist and an individual, a stage in which she discovers her capabilities and her limitations as well as an understanding of the possible direction her life may take.

"The Beggar Maid" chapter describes Patrick's romantic nature which arouses Rose's sympathy and her desire to be cherished:

He had many chivalric notions, which he pretended to mock, by saying certain words and phrases as if in quotation marks. The Fair sex, he would say, damsel in distress. The pretended irony would not fool anybody; it was clear that he did wish to operate in a world of knights and ladies; outrages; devotions (p.74).

The world Patrick desires for himself and Rose is an idealistic world which is impractical in modern day society. Even though Rose enjoys the escape from reality that acting offers her, she is not an idealist, learning her lesson from Flo and the difficulties she survived in childhood. Patrick suffered no such difficulty, he is the son of a wealthy department store owner who has known few hardships in life. When Rose marries Patrick she takes on his name and his aspirations, smothering her own in favour of a subservient role.

Before Rose and Patrick marry, they visit their prospective in-laws, and Rose becomes intensely aware of the

material differences between the Blatchford's mansion and Flo's home. On the one hand, the Blatchfords talk about tennis, golf, badminton, boats, horses and the quality of their food and accomodations. On the other hand, Flo uses plastic table cloths, fluorescent lights, lime green swans and country sausages. Instead of theatrical imagery, the images which populate "The Beggar Maid" and "Mischief" are those of the socially aware consumer trying to project an image of prosperity. This is the image Patrick prefers, rejecting Flo's way of life and forgetting the fact that his future wife might be attached to this unassuming way of living. Rose and Patrick truly belong to two different worlds, and each refuses to sacrifice one for the other:

Nevertheless her loyalty was starting. Now that she was sure of getting away, a layer of loyalty and protectiveness was hardening around every memory she had, around the store and the town, the flat, somewhat scrubby, unremarkable countryside. She would oppose secretly to Patrick's views of mountains and ocean, his stone and timbered mansion. Her allegiances were far more proud and stubborn than his(p.88).

When Rose leaves Hanratty she leaves behind Flo and all her childhood aspirations. She becomes the mother of Anna but still feels as if something is missing from her life. Rose attempts an affair with Clifford, a concert violinist, the person closest to art and the theatrical in Rose's limited life. The affair begins with hope: when Clifford calls Rose, her surroundings become a part of her own excitement at sexual promise: "The kitchen was dazzling. The whole scene in front of her, of Patrick and Anna at the

table, the coffee pot with dribbles down the side, the jar of marmalade, was exploding with joy and possibility and danger"(p.110). This joyful beginning is quickly eclipsed by their inability to consummate the affair. Instead of a bright joyful sun shining over the relationship, they meet in the dark and grope unsuccessfully in the gloomy backroom of a shoestore. As if to confirm the image of darkness which dooms their affair, Clifford appears tanned and healthy at the onset of their game playing, then appears pale and tired just when they are about to consummate the affair in Powell River.

Clifford's wife is actually a good friend of Rose. Jocelyn and Rose share the same scorn for the materialistic, narrow-minded society which breeds men like Patrick, the ultimate consumer bent on success. Patrick's home, furnishings, Wedgwood vases and Neptune water fountain symbolize the emptiness in Rose and Patrick's life, an emptiness temporarily concealed by material possessions. No object can replace Rose's personal ambition to succeed, and when Clifford and Patrick do not satisfy her physical desires, Rose decides to find a life for herself and divorce her husband.

When Rose attends a party at Clifford's and Jocelyn's several years after her divorce, she is confronted by Clifford's success and their affluent 'lifestyle' and Jocelyn's admission that they were now "consumers! And it's

okay!"(p.131). Just as Patrick's absorption with material possessions and success contributed to Rose's decision to have an affair, Jocelyn's capitulation to the same standards signals a similar change in her morals. Rose, Clifford and Jocelyn 'make love' together, a final statement of the changing morals which Rose has come to accept.

Rose survived the trials of the Boys' Toilet and the Girls' Toilet--the new sexual freedom and changing ethics are only another challenge to be met by her. Without Patrick or the security of his money, Rose must provide a life for herself and her daughter, Anna. Rose describes the circumstances of her divorce, "as if she was walking a swinging bridge and could only keep her eyes on the slats ahead, never look down or around"(p.134). This image of the swinging bridge occurs several times in this chapter entitled "Providence".

After their divorce is final, Rose can look ahead to her future and pursue her career. Rose gains a successful job at a radio station but finds it difficult to manage this job and raise her daughter as well. The image of the swinging bridge is suggested when Rose considers Anna: it seems as if Rose is on one end of the bridge and Patrick on the other and Anna is the last connection between them. Anna's parents must decide which direction she will take, whether she will be most happy with Rose's hectic life or the organized bliss which Patrick's new wife offers.

For Rose, Anna is a stabilizing figure, a part of reality that is sure and unchanging:

She could feel the weight of Anna in the apartment then just as naturally as she had felt her weight in her body, and without going to look at her she could see with stunning, fearful pleasure the fair hair and fair skin and glistening eyebrows(p.141).

The same swinging bridge supports our image of Rose's hectic life, which oscillates between joy and disappointment, "streaks of loss and luck"(p.150). Her love affairs follow the same pattern and become brief communications back and forth which never develop successfully into romance; attempted rendez-vous that fail because either Rose or her lover cannot complete the trip to see one another, cannot cross the lover's bridge. Anna is a support, a "weight" in Rose's life that momentarily stops the bridge from swinging, urging the security of domesticity.

When Anna leaves to move back with Patrick it is as if Rose's one link with a settled life has been severed. She leaves Calgary and moves to Toronto, sometimes driving as far as Kingston to attend a party. In the chapter "Simon's Luck", Rose's luck seems to have run out. She is in a transitory stage: single and unattached, but desperate for security and steady male companionship. When the chapter opens, Rose is seen wandering the streets, lonely, looking in people's windows and longing to belong to their gatherings, yet because "Rose is an actress; she can fit in anywhere"(p.152). Rose's acting ability no

longer holds the same promise that it once did; she is no longer young and falls into the category of women who dress to look younger. Rose says of her own dress that she wears to a party, "there was something wrongly youthful or theatrical about it"(p.153), voicing her own dissatisfaction about her choice of costume. This statement suggests that Rose is going through an identity crisis, unhappy with herself both physically and spiritually.

The party Rose attends strengthens this feeling when the young hostess makes Rose feel uncomfortable and a former student embarrasses her by his drunken accusations. Rose is aware of a generation gap, one which she had once been able to bridge with her talents as an actress. Now, this talent fails her and she is unable to save herself from the scorn she feels emanating from the hostess, her ex-student and the younger members of the faculty who she believes are "giving her quick, despising looks. Or so she thought; she couldn't look directly at them. Establishment. That was Rose. Was it?"(p.158). Rose is suddenly caught between two camps, unsure of her allegiance and unhappy with the labelling that others find necessary to use. Simon appears like some lucky charm, soothing Rose's fears and offering her companionship, a possible love affair and support for her wounded ego.

Simon is also a romantic, mysterious figure to Rose, as a Frenchman who escaped the Occupation and now teaches in a Classics Department. What Rose does not realize

is that Simon is an actor in his own right, a theatrical, gesturing character full of stories, anecdotes and advice. Within a few days of knowing him she "knew a few of his characters. That was the humble workman. Some others were the Old Philosopher...The Mad Satyr"(p.161). Just as Rose had retreated to different disguises as a protection against reality, Simon employs various characters to protect his own secrets. Rose practises the same materialism she once rejected in Patrick, unaware that her trips to the supermarket and new sheets for her bed are domestic attachments which stifle Simon as they once did Rose.

When Simon does not return, Rose flees her rented house because it is full of those things she bought to share with Simon, objects which had become "images of loss"(p.169). She leaves the city in her car, prompting another image similar to that of the swinging bridge:

And so it was, back and forth, as if the rear end of the car was held by a magnetic force, which ebbed and strengthened, ebbed and strengthened again, but the strength was never quite enough to make her turn...(p.169).

Rose finally reaches a point of stasis where "the world had stopped being a stage where she might meet him, and had gone back to being itself"(p.170). This recurring theatrical image of the stage reinforces the fact that Rose has undergone a healing process. We no longer have Rose and all of Simon's characters alone together, performing exclusively for one another. Rose now sees the world as a stage full of promise and new possibility, an attitude which brings

her to Vancouver and a steady joy working in television,

Rose has come full circle as a mature woman and an actress, weathering divorce, unhappy affairs and moments of insecurity. When she learns of Simon's death she thinks, "...it was unfair, that such a chunk of information should have been left out, and that Rose even at this late date could have thought herself the only person who could seriously lack power"(p.173). Rose had been convinced of Simon's luck, his power as a man to come and go as he pleased. But Simon dies, and only then does Rose realize that she too has his power, she has left the place of pain and found a new life for herself.

Rose's regeneration is complete when she returns to Hanratty. Her odyssey has taken her to various locations and different stages in her development as an artist; it is now time to return home. Just as Rose begins to realize her own power and strength, it becomes necessary to use it to support Flo, who is slowly becoming senile. Even as an old woman, Flo never loses her power to affect her stepdaughter and influence her life. For the greater part of the novel, Flo's stories anticipate like occurrences in Rose's life, and the chapter entitled "Spelling" consequently begins with Flo narrating a story concerning senile ladies and the County Home, the institution where the failing Flo will eventually end her days. "Spelling" and "Who Do You Think You Are?" reunite Flo and Rose, except that now their roles are completely reversed, Rose playing the

housekeeper/mother role while Flo becomes more like a child in her senile state.

Flo's regression is indicated by the jumble of everyday objects that are out of place, the disrepair and dirt that Flo despised when she had all her faculties. Rose cooks, cleans and cares for Flo, feeling an obligation to protect the old woman just as Flo had once cared for Rose. Rose has a vision of the life she will lead with Flo:

She pictured herself going to Hanratty and looking after Flo, living with her, taking care of her for as long as was necessary...But the crankier Flo got, the milder and more patient Rose would become, and who, then, could accuse her of frivolity and egotism?(p.181).

Again, Rose creates a scene where she will become a martyr and her brother Brian will not fault her for her goodwill. Rose is conscious of the fact that her brother (and occasionally Flo) disapprove of her way of life and Rose herself feels occasional feelings of guilt for her excesses. Rose is not bothered by Brian's opinion of her as much as she is by Flo's, and in retaliation for her hurt feelings, she mocks her stepmother to her friends, trying to feel superior to Flo who still can influence Rose even though she is now a grown woman. Rose wants to "finally remove herself from Flo's shade"(p.186), and free herself from Flo's opinions and influence.

Only when Flo becomes older does her power lessen, but she still manages to shadow Rose's life and remain ever

an independent character. It is no victory for Rose to see Flo's retreat from reality--Flo's retreat from reality forces Rose to face her own. Rose sees the old women in the nursing home and senses through them her own eventual fate and the fact that the Flo she once knew no longer exists for her. The question, "who do you think you are?" that Flo once asked Rose when she was a child reverberates through the final chapter and is repeated by Miss Hattie, Rose's English teacher in High School. These last chapters contain those memories and experiences that contribute to Rose's understanding of herself, an understanding dependent upon her acceptance of her stepmother, her childhood and her life as an actress.

The final chapter in the novel links Rose to several characters in Hanratty, establishing and emphasizing her connection to her small town. Milton Homer, a man "not all there"(p.195), is a "mimic of ferocious gifts and terrible energy"(p.192). He is something of a village idiot, yet he holds an important place in Hanratty society. He unwittingly mocks the religious institutions of the town, making fun of the parades put on by various organizations, drawing whiskers on his face outside the church and defeating his aunt's petition against Sunday night radio. Milton is a twisted figure or an actor not fully realizing that he is mocking the town's institutions, or intruding upon the townspeople's lives. Milton is accepted by Hanratty as a harmless town fixture and not considered a serious threat to its pride.

Milton does not threaten the town because he was born 'different'. People like Rose and Ralph Gillespie choose to be different when they draw attention to their talent and are consequently regarded as outsiders by the citizens of Hanratty.

Ralph Gillespie does imitations of Milton Homer, duplicating his facial expressions and method of talking. Ralph Gillespie is not an accepted member of Hanratty, however; he is an outcast because of his injuries that allow him a pension, making him "set for life"(p.201), and no longer a part of the town's daily struggle to survive. Munro's portrayal of Milton Homer and Ralph Gillespie indicate the fine line between acceptance and rejection. Milton is allowed his mimicry because he doesn't know better, Ralph is condemned for imitations because he should know better. Ralph is a threat to the people of Hanratty because of the fact that he shows off when he imitates Milton, and he does not have to conform to the town's work ethic.

When Rose returns to Hanratty she is reminded of her profession which must seem "highhanded"(p.203) to the townspeople. She is aware of her own family's occasional disapproval, and when she meets Ralph Gillespie again, she focuses on a possible answer to "who do you think you are:". Ralph's imitations are no longer amusing when Milton Homer is sent to the Home and is no longer familiar to Hanratty.

Ralph had been too pleased with his ability to entertain and was unwilling to change with the times. His ignominious death reminds Rose of her own fallibility as an actress and the necessity to always do the best she can and recognize the "power" of individuals such as Flo, who were vital links to reality. Rose realizes, "...she did not want to do Milton Homer. She wanted to fill in that magical, releasing way, transform herself; she wanted the courage and the power"(p.200).

This power comes to Rose when she realizes she becomes the sum total of all the characters she has ever met, and must be true to them, respecting that which is unique in each individual. Rose suspects that, "she might have been paying attention to the wrong things, reporting antics, that she couldn't get and wouldn't get. And it wasn't just about acting she suspected this"(p.205). Rose realizes that she had not been true to herself, or to the life she lived. As an actress, Rose has been tempted by the two worlds of reality and illusion which confront the artist; worlds which Munro dramatizes by using images of the theater. The answer, then, to the question "who do you think you are?" lies in Rose, and her ability to embrace reality and transform herself into a better individual, a better actress, full of the courage and power needed to play the roles acting demands. But Rose must always be, above all else, herself, a vital woman very much a part of life.

CONCLUSION

Alice Munro has admitted that the style of particular visual artists is very close to what she would like to accomplish as a writer. It is of some interest then, to note a comment made by Jack Chambers concerning a specific quality of art. Chambers refers to the:

...peculiar impact of some paintings, where reality is so imminent that one feels he has stepped off the conveyor belt of time momentarily and actually glimpses the world in pause. Few paintings do this but when it happens the viewer on the outside looking in is able to experience the flow of time in which he is travelling and of which he is seldom, if ever, conscious.¹

This particular quotation might easily be applied to Alice Munro's work if one were to substitute "fiction" for "painting" because the skill Chambers refers to is one sought by artists in all media. As readers, we experience "the flow of time" through Munro's use of sensuous detail and the images which arise from an extended presentation of particular objects, emotions or experiences.

Chambers's quotation is a vivid reminder that Alice Munro possesses a talent as remarkable as the artists she admires. In each of her books we find examples of the "peculiar impact" that her stories evoke, an impact which is directly attributable to her subtle mounting of image upon image, and the consequent depth her imagery achieves.

In the story titled "Images" from Dance of the

¹Paul Duval, High Realism in Canada (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1974), p. 61.

Happy Shades, the intensity of the moment when the young-girl first sees Joe Phippen is caused by the accumulation of images of death and fear which starkly contrast the images of security and life which surround the young girl's father. When Bobby Sherriff pirouettes before Del in Lives of Girls and Women, the mind's eye creates a picture which is complete, a climactic image of art achieving a precarious balance (a dance movement significantly) or reconciliation of the opposing tensions of life. Ida Jordan cannot achieve this precarious balance and the lack of strong and enduring images to define her leave an unfinished picture with the reader.

In much the same way the reader comes to understand the full impact of the message the Spanish Lady feels she must deliver in Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You. Her life has been as trivial as the images which characterize her as a shallow and self-centered woman. Her metaphoric journey by train to a new understanding of herself is focused by the death cry of the old man and the knowledge that death is indeed an end to the journey of life.

"The Spanish Lady" is a story very much like the painting Chambers describes, one which "glimpses the world in pause", much like a Joycean epiphany, it ends with a moment which will change the Spanish Lady's life forever.

The same type of moment is experienced by Rose in Who Do You Think You Are? when she decides who and what she must be to fulfill herself as a woman and an actress.

The reader as well as Rose possesses an incomplete picture of her attained identity until the final chapter of the novel. Rose is ultimately a composite of many characters, the result of numerous experiences (imagistically presented) which suggest various identities: the scholar, the daughter, the mother, the actress, the consumer, the lover. Rose explores these identities as an actress and Munro consequently uses theatrical images to present the "roles" Rose plays. All these theatrical images serve to emphasize Rose's need to discover herself, shed any disguises and acknowledge herself as an individual.

As in all of Alice Munro's work, it is the individual character who remains in the reader's mind. Each character is created by a carefully worked pattern of images which offers clues and insights into the character's essential nature. Above all else, Munro's characters are human, largely because they experience moments which are vital, real and vividly portrayed. Her themes are familiar to us all and concern the desire to understand oneself and survive in a complicated world. The images Munro uses to dramatize this basic concern are often direct and simple, taken from the materials of life and woven into the intricate fabric of her short stories and novels. Alice Munro's triumph is much like Uncle Benny's in Lives of Girls and Women, and that is, "to make us see".²

²Alice Munro, Lives of Girls and Women (New York: Coward-McCoy, 1971), p. 25.

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