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INTRODUCTION

Topicality of the research. Studying writers of the English speaking countries is of great importance for the graduates of English philology department. There are many Post World War Second writers in the English speaking countries whose works are not studied yet by our scholars. One of such writers is Alice Munro. Alice Munro is one of the pre-eminent short story writers in Canada and the winner of two Governor General's Awards. Her novel Lives of Girls and Women is a Canadian Classic. She has enjoyed a high degree of popular and literary success.' She is clearly a central figure in the short-story tradition in Canada, a tradition that goes well back into the nineteenth century and one that has earned Canada more international recognition than the novel.'

Munro occupies a solid position in that group of writers whose careers coincided with the artistic, cultural and political coming of age of Canada after World War II, a period during which the intrinsic value of Canadian experience came to be taken for granted. Unlike those writers who attained their maturity between the two world wars, or who were conditioned by Old World attitudes, sentiments and values, this younger group felt no obligations or compulsions to see their world in any other terms than those defined by their own vision and experience. Margaret Laurence, Robert Kroetsch, Hugh Wood, Mordecai Richler, Marian Engel, Leonard Cohen, Rudy Wiehe, Margaret Atwood, Clark Blaise — these are some of the major writers, born between the mid 1920s and early 1940s, who have felt no need to either ignore or to explain the place of Canada in their fiction, and it is to this rich and varied group that Munro belongs.

The aim of the research is to study the creativity of Alice Munro and analyze the main themes and themes depicted in her short stories.

Tasks of the research include:

- to review literature on the place of short story genre in Canada;
- to study Alice Munro's life and creativity in connection with short story writing in Canada;
- to review critical reception of Alice Munro;
- to analyze her short stories in terms of character and theme depiction.

Scientific scrutiny of the research problem. The creativity of Alice Munro has been widely studied in Canada and the United States. The Canadian short story writing genre and place of Alice Munro in this genre was studied by William Toye in his "The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature", Alice Munro's influence on the development of Canadian literature is outlined in David Stouck's work "Major Canadian Authors - A Critical Introduction to Canadian Literature in English", moreover, the works of Alice Munro were analyzed by such authors as Hallvard Dahlie in his "Alice Munro" Canadian Writers and their Works", Catherine Sheldrick Ross in her "Alice Munro: A Double Life", Alan Twigg in his "What Is: Alice Munro", Alice Munro was also included in Catherine Sheldrick Ross's "Dictionary of Literary Biography"

The novelty of the research. The theme of Alice Munro's creativity is new in itself. The work contains critical analysis of Alice Munro's activity as a short story writer and introduces the main trends in her writing activity, including the depiction of women characters, relation between men and women and other themes. Moreover, the research attains closer look at the genre of short story writing in Canada which is another new point that requires deeper consideration in our country.

The object of the research is Alice Munro's short stories.

The subject of the research is depiction of characters and themes in Alice Munro's short stories.

Methods used in the qualification work. During the completion of the qualification work research we used the method of literature review, literary analysis.

Theoretical and practical value of the qualification work. The work proposed new conceptual understanding of Canadian short story genre and has closer look at the creativity of one of the prominent women writers of English speaking world in the 20th century. The practical significance of the work can be observed in the necessity of materials in teaching History of Literature of English Speaking countries. Materials of the work can be used in teaching the course of English literature and World Literature as well as American Literature.

The structure of the qualification work. The work consists of introduction, two chapters, conclusion and the list of literature used.

The first chapter of the work is dedicated to the study of genre of short story writing in Canada, life and career of Alice Munro and her own views on her art.

The second chapter presents the works analyzed by us in revealing the characteristic features of character and theme depiction by Alice Munro in her short stories.

Chapter I. Literature Review. Alice Munro's Place in Short Story Writing in Canada

1.1 The Short Story in Canada

To understand a writer one has to place him/her in the literary tradition of his country. So here is an attempt to trace the development of the short story in brief till Alice Munro appeared on the literary scene.

People have always been enthralled, since the beginning of time by stories. A tale in any form, whether parable, myth, episode or a simple narrative has always ensured captive audiences. The great time for the short story as a form of literature was the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. During this time there was an increase in literacy in Britain and America and people looked for newer reading material. Hundreds of magazines gave the reading public novels in serial form and stories too. Soon, the short story became a favourite form of modern literature in England and America.

H. G. Wells, a master of the story-teller's art, once said, "A short story is or should be, a simple thing; it aims at producing one single vivid effect; it has to seize the attention at the outset, and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached... it must explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue sets in."[1]

These have been many important writers of the short story like Somerset Maugham, D. H. Lawrence, Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry James, Edgar Allan Poe, Katherine Mansfield, Frank O'Connor, H. E. Bates and others.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the short story became a popular form of literature, and people realized that it could be shaped

[1] R. J. Rees, English Literature — An Introduction for Foreign Readers (London: Macmillan, 1973) p.203.

independently and by its own principles. By the twentieth century, the world began to witness myriad changes and vicissitudes — some of immense magnitude and contradictions. Literature came to be affected by this. It reflects the momentous events and upheavals of the times from the two world wars, to disintegration and re-unification of major nations of the world, from ethnic strife to humanitarian global concerns.

The pace of life has quickened tremendously and people now have a tendency to gravitate towards fast paced reading. The story has therefore flourished and has become the chief food of millions of readers.[2]

Although the newly acquired colony of Canada was a British North American society like no 'other, because of its large French speaking population, it took several decades of exploration, immigration and settlement throughout what remained of British North America after the American Revolution to produce a recognizable indigenous English-Canadian fiction. Even then, many of the short stories and novels that emerged, often seemed little more than new cloth cut to old styles. Still, some were fashioned to cast new meanings on old shapes and to reform old myths for a new nation. One step towards the development of early English-Canadian fiction was the use of Canadian content in works published in the United Kingdom and the United States and written by British and American authors after they had temporarily lived in, or briefly visited, British North America.[3]

It has often been remarked that because Canada is a vast country composed of scattered pockets of population, its literature is inevitably regional in inspiration and character. Certainly, geographical areas vary in ways that, in other parts of the world, are reflected in different .counties rather than different provinces and in Canada, this characteristic is not so

[2] Ibid., p. 203.
[3] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 565.

obviously offset, as it is in the U.S., with a drive towards cultural uniformity. The diversity of regions attracted a comparable diversity of immigrants whose literature was naturally influenced by their different origins and traditions and although the individual writer does not necessarily portray or reflect his own region, a regional breakdown of the novelists of this period is as convenient a division as any.[4]

W. J. Keith in the Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature feels that English Canadian fiction in 1940 — 1960 draws few signs of forming a coherent literary pattern. There is no sense of a national movement, of predominant themes and approaches, of an accepted novelistic technique, or even of a concerted attempt to express Canadian or mid - twentieth century consciousness. Instead individual writers go their own ways searching for the fictional modes that suit them best and sometimes finding them. The two decades produced some major works - As for Me and My House (1941), Who has seen the Wind (1947), The Mountain and the Valley (1952), The Double Hook (1959) The Watch that Ends the Night (1959) and Malcolm Lowry 's Under the Volcano (1947).[5]

This period also saw the emergence of several important novelists: Hugh MacLennan; Ethel Wilson;, Robertson Davies and Mordecai Richler.[6]

Other writers were Malcolm Lowry, Sheila Watson and Ethel Wilson.

The short story has had a long and substantial tradition in English Canada. The sketches and stories of Thomas McCulloch and Thomas Chandler Halliburton first appeared in Halifax newspapers in the 1820s and 1830s respectively. From the mid nineteenth century on, stories by Canadian writers frequently appeared not only in Canadian newspapers but in literary magazines such as the Literary Garland and the Week and in

[4] Ibid., p. 574.
[5] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 565.
[6] Ibid., p. 573.

New York and Boston as well. Many writers of short fiction were women. Susanna Moodie, May Agnes Fleming, Rosanna Leprohon, Sara Jeannette Duncan, and Susie Frances Harrison were among the most prolific.[7] The short story has long been a favoured genre among Canadian writers. From Duncan Campbell Scott and Stephen Leacock, the succession has been continuous, including writers like Morley Callaghan in the 1920s and Sinclair Ross in the 1930s, and continuing to contemporary storytellers like Mavis Gallant and Audrey Thomas, W. D. Valgardson and John Metcalf ".

The devotion of Canadian writers to the story is all the more striking since it has never been a very profitable medium and for a long period during the 1940s and 1950s it was hardly publishable, for the popular magazines had ceased to print short fiction and the publishers to accept collections of them. But the writers kept on producing them, and for a long time, the only considerable outlet for them was the CBC, where Robert Weaver would accept them for broadcast on radio and then publish the best of them in anthologies issued by the Oxford University Press.[8]

It was in the final two decades of the earlier century that a few significant collections made their appearance. Gilbert Parker's romantic and melodramatic tales of the North-West were collected in Pierre and his People (London, 1882) a book that became very popular.[9] During this time, the most important collection, as a work of literature, was the poet Duncan Campbell Scott's, In the Village of Viger (Boston 1896), a series of stories that in a quiet, superbly controlled manner create the sense of a whole community. A decade and a half later (in 1912) another enduring collection of stories appeared. It was Stephen Leacock's Sunshine Sketches of a Little

[7] Ibid., p. 752.
[8] George Woodcock, Northern Spring (Vancouver, Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre ,1987) p. 132.
[9] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 752.

Town. Like Scott's book, and like so many other Canadian collections by a single author that would come later, it is a series of connected stories unified above all by setting, in this case the fictional town of Mariposa."

Raymond Knister suggests in the introduction to his 1928 anthology, Canadian Short Stories that it reflects "a new era" in Canadian short story writing; but in fact it can now be seen to signal the end of an era, since more than half the book was devoted to writers of an earlier period like Roberts, Scott, Thomson, Parker, Norman Duncan and Leacock. The "new era" was represented by Knister himself; Thomas Murtha, Morley Callaghan and several others who did not continue to write short fiction. The stories of Knister, who died tragically at 33, did not appear in book form until the 1970s." Murtha who only occasionally published in small American magazines produced enough stories that they could be collected in Short Stories (1980), but only after his death. Callaghan was the only 1920s writer in Knister's anthology to make a name for himself in this period; he went on to become the most influential figure in the development of the modern short story in Canada. His first collection, A Native Argosy was published in 1929, and Now that April's Here and Other Stories in 1936.[10] The Depression and the Second World War were dry periods in the growth of the short story in Canada." The development of a national literature is dependent on a great many factors, emotional and even material.

The modernist movement in poetry and the realist movement in fiction during the 1930s might have been ephemeral if World War II had not in many directions increased the Canadian sense of existing, as a separate nation, finally detached from the old, imperial links with Britain and anxious to defend itself from being absorbed into a continental culture in

[10] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 752.

North America. And any national literature depends for its survival on the development of the type of infrastructure which we often call a "literary world", meaning the kind of ambience in which writers are in touch with each other, in which responsible criticism develops, and in which there is a reasonable certainty of publication through a network of publishers, periodicals and media, willing to use literary material. That a fair number of writers should earn enough to work, without having to depend on academic appointments or journalistic chores is also one of the signs of a real literary world." Such a world hardly existed in Canada before the mid 1960s, but the shifts in national consciousness that began during World War II were making it possible.

In the 1940s, the direction of Canadian fiction was changed by the appearance of two classic novels, Hugh MacLennan's Barometer Rising and Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House. Ross's book was a single triumph, a sensitive study not only of the frustration of life in small prairie towns but also of the plight of the artist in a country only just emerging from a condition of pioneer philistinism. But Barometer Rising was the beginning of a distinguished career, for MacLennan dominated the late 1940s and the 1950s in Canadian writing with his didactic novels. They were popular because, like the quasi epics of E. G. Pratt and the early poems of Earle Birney, they mirrored the preoccupations of a people , conscious that they were coming to terms with their own land and no longer depending on any of their various Old Countries.

It is, however symptomatic of the change in Canadian writing that since the late 1950s, no single figure has dominated any area in the way MacLennan then dominated fiction. This is due mainly to the rapid coming to maturity of Canadian literature during the past quarter of a century, and the notable variegation, in kinds of writing and in ways of writing, that has accompanied it. In 1976, Northrop Frye remarked on the colossal verbal

explosion that has taken place in Canada since 1960. The late and sometimes posthumous, publication of short story collections by writers who began their careers in the 1920s and 1930s suggests not only minimal enthusiasm for Canadian short stories but a lack of periodicals interested in publishing them. While the work of novelists in this period received feeble though steady support through book publication, serious short fiction on the whole, was apparently thought unworthy. However, this prejudice against story collections by a single writer was characteristic of American and British as well as Canadian publishing.[11]

It was not until after the Second World War, that the great leap forward, which Knister had thought he was witnessing, actually took place. In the 1940s, Montreal provided the country with two little magazines - "Preview" and "First Statement" - with a contemporary commitment; in 1945 they combined to form "Northern Review". Poets were at the center of this literary movement and some, notably Irving Layton, P. K. Page and Ralph Gustafson, were also writing short stories.

The most influential anthology of the post — war period was Desmond Pacey's, A Book of Canadian Stories (1947) in which the youngest writers represented in the 1947 edition were P. K. Page with "The Resignation" and William McConnell with "The Alien". The modern stories included works by Ross, Leo Kennedy, Callaghan and Knister.[12]

In the mid-fifties, two writers who went on to have productive careers published their first collections — Hugh Garner with The Yellow Sweater and Other Stories (1952) and Mavis Gallant with The Other Paris (1956).

Mavis Gallant is best known for her short stories, most of which first appeared in "The New Yorker". Living in Paris, she was not an influential presence in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s, yet one cannot ignore her

[11] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 753.
[12] Ibid., p. 753.

unique importance, both for her ironic world view and as a stylist, among Canadian writers of fiction. Happiness is beyond the reach of most part-discontented expatriates, unable to overcome the restraining habits, attitudes and beliefs imposed by relationships, families, class or history. Gallant's style — exemplary in its control of tone, telling detail, balance, and economy — depends, like her vision, on nuance, on slightly disconcerting qualifications and shifts of syntax and meaning that sometimes evoke an ambivalent response in the reader. Gallant is usually content to dramatize and describe a complex situation without bringing it to any resolution. The full meaning and significance of her stories, which often have endings without closure, resist easy summation.[13]

Margaret Laurence had a central influence during the literary renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s. She became a creative god-mother to an entire generation. Her four Canadian novels and one collection of stories, set in the fictional town of Manawaka, represent an ambitious and impressive attempt to write a comprehensive regional fiction that ultimately has universal concerns.

Manawaka embodies both an era and a way of life. Laurence is also a feminist writer of authority, who implicitly and explicitly anticipates the work of later writers as different as Marian Engel, Margaret Atwood, Jane Rule, Audrey Thomas, and Margaret Gibson.[14] If however, her recurring central theme is a woman's search for self-understanding and personal fulfillment, this always hinges on a simultaneous concern with the self's problematic relationship to her community. Self and community are ultimately inseparable; to define oneself is an aspect of defining one's community and one's past.

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[13] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 753.

[14] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 753.

Another writer of significance is Margaret Atwood. Although one instinctively assigns Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence to separate generations of writers, their careers for the most part overlap. Laurence's The Stone Angel (1964) and Atwood's first book of poems The Circle Game (1966) appeared within two years of each other. Since then Atwood has achieved a substantial critical reputation and wide popularity with her prolific output of both poetry and fiction; seventeen books in sixteen years. One of the recurring themes or concerns in her fiction is the survival of the self, usually female in a society whose personal and public relationships are characterized by alienation, domination and exploitation.

Atwood's fiction concentrates on the existential situation of the individual's essential isolation; all relationships are at best tenuous and tentative; the self is radically isolated both when it withdraws from, and when it returns to society. The emphasis is subjective and psychological; we tend to remember the voices and emotional landscape rather than the events of her novels, which nevertheless offer a wide ranging criticism of contemporary western society.[15]

At this time public broadcasting was bringing two other writers, Alice Munro and Mordecai Richler to the fore. In 1954, the CBC which for some years had been broadcasting poetry and short stories in various radio series, began a regular weekly programme, "Anthology" The growing interest in the short stories that were broadcast justified the publication of four books: Canadian Short Stories (1952), Ten for Wednesday Night (1961), Stories with John Drainie (1963) and Small Wonders (1982).[16] Hugh Hood, whose stories have often been broadcast, once wrote that "the CBC is far and away the most receptive and the fairest - though not the

[15] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 753.
[16] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 753.

highest- paying market for stories that I know of" But the mid-fifties, which saw the disappearance of Northern Review also saw the emergence of "The Tamarack Review" (1956-1982) as a medium for short stories, publishing in its early issues work by Munro, Richter, Hood, Jack Ludwig and Dave Godfrey. Among older magazines, "Queen's Quarterly", the "Canadian Forum" and "The Fiddlehead" also published short fiction.

Since the 1960s, a fair number of other literary magazines have provided outlets for the writer of short fiction, including the Malahat Review, Exile, Descent and Canadian Fiction Magazine.[17] Through the whole of the 1950s, only a handful of writers — Hugh Garner, Mavis Gallant, Morley Callaghan, Thomas Raddall were able to publish collections of their short stories. In Canada, as in England and the United States, it was still assumed that books of short stories wouldn't sell. The situation began to change dramatically in Canada in the 1960s and it could be argued that in the next two decades, the short story became the most interesting and varied literary genre in the country.

Two major commercial publishing houses — .McClelland and Stewart and Macmillan of Canada — have had numerous distinguished short story writers on their lists; McClelland and Stewart with Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Rudy Wiebe, Alistair MacLeod, among others, and Macmillan with Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, Jack Hodgins, Guy Vanderhaege and others. The real impetus has come from small literary publishers, and in this respect 1966 has to be seen as a momentous year in the development of the short story in Canada; the year in which Oberon Press was founded in Ottawa. Oberon has published Leon Rooke, John Metcalf, Hugh Hood, W .P. Kinsella, Merina Summers, W. D. Valgardson and a number of younger writers, as well as its short story annuals and a

[17] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 753.

variety of anthologies.[18] At this time came Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women (1971); about growing up in small town Ontario; George Elliott's The Kissing Man (1962), also about small — town Ontario.[19]

In recent years there has been a high degree of sophistication found in work in short fiction. Writers have acknowledged that these authors are getting increasing international recognition of their fiction. It may seem a paradox that at the same time, regionalism has become a powerful force in the Canadian story. The critic Northrop Frye does not see this as a paradox, however. In an interview with Robert Fulford in the short lived literary annual "Aurora" (1980), he said: "1 think that as a culture matures, it becomes, it becomes more regional "....and added later, "I think the country we know as Canada will, in the foreseeable future, be a federation of regions, culturally, rather than a single nation".[20] The best regional writers today are as sophisticated as any and are read in other countries partly for the insight they provide into the life of a particular locality. Jack Hodgins brings myth and magic realism in Vancouver Island and acknowledges the influence on his work of William Faulkner and the South American storytellers.

On the urban scene, the prolific novelist and short story writer Hugh Hood published a collection of linked stories in Around the Mountain: Scenes from Montreal Life (1967). Mordecai Richler's collection, The Street (1969) deals with Jewish ghetto life in that city. Among many other regional writers whose work is marked by literary sophistication are Howard 0' Hagan, writing chiefly about the mountain country of Western Canada in The Woman who got on Jasper Station. Rudy Wiebe, a writer of powerful, mythic stories in "Where is the Voice Coming From? and The

[18] Ibid., p. 754.
[19] Ibid., p. 755.
[20] William Toye, The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 753.

Angel of the Tar Sands and Other Stories and the poet Alden Nowlan, whose stories about small town life in New Brunswick were collected in Miracle at Indian River (1968). He left an unpublished collection at the time of his death.[21]

Many strands then, have gone into the pattern of the contemporary short story in Canada, making it a genre of significance.

1.2 A Closer Look at Alice Munro's Life and Activity

To gain an insight into Alice Munro's work it is necessary to understand her life and events which have shaped her career.

Alice Munro, daughter of Robert Eric Laidlaw and Ann Chamney Laidlaw, was born in Wingham, Ontario in 1931.[22] This was largely a rural community not far from Lake Huron. Her childhood was spent on an impoverished farm, where her father raised silver foxes. He was a marginal farmer, who switched to turkey farming during the 1940s and augmented the fluctuating family income by working as a night watchman in the local foundry. At a fairly advanced age, he began writing articles and sketches about his own life, and just before his death in 1976 completed a novel about a pioneer southwestern Ontario family, which was edited and published after his death as The McGregors: A Novel of an Ontario family, (1979). Alice's mother had been an elementary school teacher in Alberta and Ontario before her marriage, an occupation she was not allowed to pursue in the unemployment-ridden Ontario of the depression. Like many of the unfulfilled and despairing mothers of Munro's fiction, she expended her energies during the formative years of the three Laidlaw children in the nurturing of a family under conditions of deprivation and hardship. She

[21] Ibid., p. 755.
[22] David Stouck, Major Canadian Authors - A Critical Introduction to Canadian Literature in English (Lincoln and London :University of Nebraska Press , 1988) p. 257.

fought a long and painful battle with Parkinson's disease, to which she succumbed in 1959.[23] The small town in which Alice lived is Wingham itself but a mile or so west is known as lower Town. This small town of about 3000 people is approximately 125 miles from Toronto, 70 miles from London and 25 miles from the lake-port town of Goderich. Despite being at the junction of two highways and having its own CBC radio station, Wingham seems remote.

The river flowed past the foot of the Laidlaw property on its way from Wingham to Lake Huron at Goderich. This river was called Meneseteung before being renamed Maitland. This river took on a legendary quality for Alice as she grew up.[24]

Alice recalls that though her childhood was at times lonely and isolated, it was on the whole a rich and satisfying one:

I thought my life was interesting. There was always a great sense of adventure... we lived outside the whole social structure because we didn't live in the town and we didn't live in the country. We lived in this kind of little ghetto where all the bootleggers and prostitutes and hangers-on lived. Those were the people I knew. It was a community of outcasts. I had that feeling about myself...I didn't belong to any nice middle class so I got to know more types of kids. It didn't seem bleak to me at the time. It seemed full of interest.[25]

That kind of environment, together with her voracious and indiscriminate reading, enabled her early in life to develop a curiosity and excitement about herself and her world that helped to direct her towards a writing career. She began her schooling at Lower Town School. Life in that school was shaming, vulgar, unintelligible and frightening. Yet it

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[23] Hallvard Dahlie, "Alice Munro" Canadian Writers and their Works, ed Robert Lecker, Jack David, Ellen Quigley (Toronto, Ontario : ECW Press , 1985) p. 215.
[24] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Alice Munro: A Double Life (Toronto : ECW Press, 1992) p. 23.
[25] Alan Twigg, "What Is: Alice Munro", For Openers: Conversations with Twenty Four Canadian Writers (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour, 1981) p. 18.

taught her to build up her defenses. She learned not to confide in people and how to survive random violence and squalor. This is what she describes later in the story "Privilege" of Who Do You Think You Are? For two years Alice learned survival skills at Lower Town School. But this schooling experience was not what Alice's mother had in mind. She wanted her daughter to get into Wingham Public School in town, attended by children of a more genteel class. There Alice felt socially dislocated, neither belonging to town or country. Yet some of her own ambitions coincided with her mother's goals for her. She consistently brought home top marks and prizes for scholastic achievement. She got parts in the operetta performed each spring. Alice's mother should have become a successful businesswoman with the ideas she had. But sadly when Alice was about twelve, her mother developed Parkinson's disease. So by this time Alice took over the mother's role in the house. She learned to knit and mend from her grandmother and her sister.[26]

During this time Alice read a lot and thought about stories. Growing up in a community where feelings were hidden and reading was subject to ridicule, Munro was a secret addict. She read all the time even while washing dishes. Five milestones stood out, in her childhood , reading: Hans Christian Anderson's "The Little Mermaid"; Charles Dickens's A Child's History of England, L. M. Montgomery's Emily of New Moon, the poems of Tennyson and Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights. She turned to writing as a way of achieving complete possession.

Alice realized that if she wanted to go to University she would have to find the money herself. So she worked as a maid for a family in Rosedale, a wealthy section of Toronto in 1948 when she was between grades 12 and 13. Her only hope of getting into University was by winning scholarship money. She did win the money but it was barely enough. So to survive, she

[26] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Alice Munro: A Double Life (Toronto : ECW Press , 1992) p. 34.

sold her blood for 15 dollars a pint, she picked suckers from tobacco one summer and during the school year she worked part-time in Western's Lawson Library and in the London Public Library.[27]

She attended the University of Western Ontario for two years, then married and moved with her husband James Munro , to British Columbia, where he worked first for the T. Eaton company in Vancouver, then later opened a successful bookstore in Victoria.[28]

Alice Ann Laidlaw started writing stories when she was about fifteen years old. Catherine Sheldrick Ross in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 53, says that this was the time when Alice started exploiting her art. Because she lived on the outskirts of town, not quite town but not yet country, she could not go home for lunch. She spent her noon hours locked in the schoolroom writing stories that she never showed to anyone, writing being regarded as a freakish activity in Wingham, even for girls.[29] These stories, as she has since described them in interviews, were immensely romantic, tales of rapes and abortions, the occult, and love that is stronger than death. In 1949, she left Wingham for London, Ontario and spent two years at the University of Western Ontario. It was not until after her marriage to James Munro in 1951, and the couple's move to Vancouver that she started to write from her own experience about her native region. Although she had begun writing and publishing short stories at the University, her work progressed very slowly as she raised a family of three daughters.

Munro's first published story, "The Dimensions of a Shadow", appeared in the University of Western Ontario, student publication, "Folio" in April 1950. She recalls that her landlady remarked of this story, which

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[27] lbid , p. 46.
[28] David Stouck, Major Canadian Authors - A Critical Introduction to Canadian Literature in English (Lincoln and London : University of Nebraska Press , 1988) p. 257.
[29] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Dictionary of Literary Biography. Vol. 53 Canadian Writers since 1960. First Series (Gale C; 1986) p. 296.

was romantic and rather gothic, "Alice, that's not a bit like you," and remembers thinking, "That's very odd, that's not like the me you know; and why do you assume that's me?" The landlady's surprise was perhaps not to be wondered at, considering how the author had worked to make herself seem like everybody else. This was a defense perfected in Wingham, where ridicule was directed against anything odd. Later, in the 1950s in West Vancouver, a wife and a young mother with a house in the suburbs, she lived, she says, "two completely different lives — the real and the absolutely solitary life and the life of appearances," pretending to be what everyone wanted her to be.[30]

The Munros lived for twelve years in Vancouver and moved in 1963 to Victoria, British Columbia, where they started a shop — Munro's Books. Their youngest daughter Andrea was born in 1966 and joined Sheila, born in 1953 and Jenny, born in 1957. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Munro was privately writing the stories that were collected into her first book, from the earliest ones, "The Time of Death" and "The Day of the Butterfly" written when she was about twenty - three, to the last ones, "Boys and Girls", "Walker Brothers Cowboy" and "Images" written when she was thirty-five.[31] Her first published book was Dance of the Happy Shades (1968). It won the Governor General's award. However, although the stories that appeared in this collection had been sold to the few available Canadian markets for short stories — the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the women's magazine "Chatelaine" and little magazines such as "Tamarack Review", "Canadian Forum" and "Queen's Quarterly", these were years of constant rejections from publishers. Munro remained persevering and the award was due recognition of her work. Yet, she remained an obscure figure in the Canadian literary scene.

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[30] Ibid., p. 296.

[31] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Dictionary of Literary Biography. Vol. 53Canadian Writers since 1960. First Series (Gale C; 1986) p. 296.

Her second book Lives of Girls and Women was published in 1971. This book was written with a view to producing the conventional novel that publishers wanted. Never able to work in an office, Munro typed out draft after draft of Lives of Girls and Women on a table in the laundry room, where heat from the washer and dryer would make up for the inadequate antique furnace. She worked at the book almost every day for a year but the material had been in her head for ten years. Parts were already written for other stories that hadn't worked, such as the material about Miss Musgrave that was recycled in the portrayal of the Sheriff family in Epilogue: The Photographer. The book achieved more commercial success than Dance of the Happy Shades and was the first recipient of the Canadian Bookseller's Award for 1971-72. Four printings of its American edition were sold out in a month and it was an alternate Book-of-the-Month Club selection in both Canada and the U.S.[32]

By this time the literary climate had changed, and although she had been publishing fiction for nearly twenty years, Alice Munro was hailed an important new talent.[33] The next collection of stories, Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You appeared in 1974. The stories were written by her in a year, but sonic of the material had been developed earlier. Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You was dedicated to her three children. Sheila, Jenny and Andrea. Most of the stories are not autobiographical but two stories, "Winter Wind" and "The Ottawa Valley" return to familiar material — the grandmother and aunt who represent conventional femininity and the mother with Parkinson's disease, the daughter who feels humiliation. During this time her marriage to Jim ended and Alice lived separately with the children. The final breakaway was the offer of a job in '1973 as a seasonal English instructor teaching a summer school creative writing

[32] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Alice Munro: A Double Life (Toronto : ECW Press, 1992) pp. 67-68.
[33] David Stouck, Major Canadian Authors - A Critical Introduction to Canadian Literature in English (Lincoln and London : University of Nebraska Press , 1988) p. 259.

course at Notre Dame University in Nelson, British Columbia. She later accepted the post of writer in residence at Western University for 1974-75. While she was here, Prof Brandon Conron of the Dept. of English nominated her for the degree of doctor of letters, which was awarded to her with the citation, "Here, Mr. Chancellor, is an Alice, who, from everyday experience has created her own Wonderland." In 1976 the divorce between Jim and Alice Munro was finalized and she married Gerald Fremlin an old high school friend. That same year, Virginia Barber of New York became Alice's literary agent and sold her stories to the New Yorker. This marked the beginning of a long-standing connection.[34]

In 1978, a series of connected stories titled, Who Do You Think You Are? was published. Alice Munro won another Governor General's award. It was published as the Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose in the United States and U.K. It was short-listed for the Booker Prize.

The Moons of Jupiter a collection of short stories was published by Macmillan in 1983 followed by The Progress of Love in 1986. Friend of My Youth was published by Knopf in 1990 and Open Secrets in 1994 by Knopf.

Awards and honours have been bestowed upon Alice Munro, due recognition for her contribution to the literary scene in Canada and the world over. She was awarded the Governor General's Literary Award in 1969, for Dance of the Happy Shades, in 1979 for the Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose and in 1987 for The Progress of Love. She was awarded the Canadian Bookseller's Award in 1972 for Lives of Girls and Women. In 1976, the D.Litt. by the University of Western Ontario was conferred on her.

[34] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Alice Munro: A Double Life (Toronto : ECW Press, 1992) p. 76.

The Canada — Australia Literary Prize was awarded to her in 1977. The Marian Engel award was awarded to her in 1986 and in 1995 she was recipient of the Lannan Literary Award.

In 1984 the Atlantis Film adaptation of Munro's story, "Boys and Girls" won an Oscar in the live -action-short category. In 1991, Friend of My Youth was short listed for the Governor General's Award and won the Trillium Book Award of $10,000 for the best book published in 1990 by an Ontario author. It also won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize (Canada and Caribbean region). In April Alice Munro was awarded the 1990 Canada Council Molson Prize of $50,000 for her "outstanding lifetime contribution to the cultural and intellectual life of Canada.'"

On the one hand Munro was, and still is, the traditional woman, used to nurturing, devoted to her children, her second husband and domestic routine. She lived a fairly conventional married life until the age of forty when she wrote the final draft of Lives of Girls and Women and discovered that combining marriage, motherhood, and authorship was close to impossible.

While she cared for and cooked for her three children and a friend's, she worked regularly from nine to two a.m. sleeping on the average four hours a night. With her first marriage over, she found herself overworked and admits that it took her two years to recover physically from the cumulative strain.

In 1981, she insists:

I'm much more aware of people and human relationships than when I was younger, and I want my children to be happy and I want my marriage to be good. I probably want these things in a far more conscious way, in a deeper way, than I did when I was a young woman. The dutiful young

mother was a mask for a very strong drive — a kind of monomania about being a writer.[35]

Although Munro is mother, wife and homemaker who is seemingly unimpressed with her own success, she is neither the naïve intellectual nor casual artist she at times pretends to be. She is an extremely sophisticated, literate and literary woman with an exciting mind when it comes to a discussion of her work and the literary process, and however careful she is of other's feelings, quietly does not suffer either impressive thinkers or pretentious people gladly.[36]

Her lack of pretension and sympathy for the socially déclassé probably derive from a childhood that was characterized by extreme poverty and a feeling of dead-endedness. All of her early years she spent in Wingham, Ontario, where her father was a fox farmer during the Depression and after he went bankrupt in the post-war years, a foundry worker and then a turkey farmer. Her early memories are those of living in a kind of limbo in a physical setting outside of town; at the end of a dead-end road that didn't lead out to the country because the river curved around and cut them oft; and it was sort of the last reaches of the town and the road was like the Flats Road. She says:

I've used this same community in Who Do You Think You Are? A rural slum wouldn't quite describe it. It wasn't part of the town and there were a lot of bootleggers. And also this was the tail end of the Depression. So there were a lot of people who were just out of work but a lot of petty marginal type people tended to live in this area — so that it was a very different community from the town or the surrounding farming community.[37]

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[35] Beverly J. Rasporich, Dance of the Sexes - Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro (Alberta : The University of Alberta Press, 1990) p. 3.
[36] i Ib d., p. 3.
[37] Beverly J. Rasporich, Dance of the Sexes - Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro (Alberta : The University of Alberta Press, 1990) p. 3.

Yet it is this kind of setting that prompted her creativity and even nurtured it , despite the family home showing terrific effects of poverty both in and out. Her artistic sensibility seemed to be encouraged by the location of the house among other things.

By the mid-seventies Alice Munro was definitely established as a major writer. From 1977 to 1981, while writing the stories for The Moons of Jupiter, she traveled to Australia, China, Reno, and Salt Lake City but said that traveling does not affect the writing. She had gone to Australia first in 1979 and her travel expenses were covered as part of the award for the Canada-Australia literary Prize. She cut short this visit to come back to Canada to accept the Governor General's Award for Who Do You Think You Are? She was back as writer in residence at the University of Queensland from September to October 1980. While in Queensland she found her experience very different from that of the University of British Columbia because here the students accepted literature as something of the past and not something they could do right then.

On 29th June 1981, Munro left for China along with six other Canadian writers, who were all guests of the Chinese writer's Association. The book Chinada, edited by Gary Goddes, documents this trip with photographs and participants' accounts. The Canadian writers spoke at a formal reception — Pat Lane spoke on the literature of despair, Suzanne Paradis on the Quebecois experience, Robert Kroetsch on the tall tale, Adele Wiseman on dolls and Alice Munro on writing the female experience."

Despite this international travel, Munro prefers a quiet life. She avoids public causes, controversies, and arguments to protect her energy for her work and for her personal life. In an unpublished interview with Catherine S. Ross, she says she knows the limits of her energy and that her solution is to placate people and to play both sides. This was her father's way. In

her writing as in her manner, she avoids taking sides, because she wants to see a thing all the way around. She resisted any kind of preaching. This resistance to lessons in literature began when she was a seven year old reading Ryerson Press Sunday-school papers. In her writing she avoids taking a political stand of any kind.

A journalism student in London, Ontario, once asked Alice, "As you get more mature, do you plan on writing more interesting subjects?" and the answer was," I don't intend to get more mature."[38] By, 1990 Munro had broken down the barriers that often separate literary and popular writing. With the book. The Progress of Love Munro felt that she was moving away from personal experience toward stories based on observation and presented on a wide canvas.

Alice Munro today is a well-known figure in Canada's literary scene. With about six requests a day to make public appearances, give readings, judge contests, offer opinions, and grant interviews, she sometimes. fantasizes about escaping her public role and living off by herself, with family and friends and writing books under some name nobody would know. She lives in a white frame house, with nasturtiums, blue delphiniums, raspberry canes, a bird bath and lots of trees in the backyard.[39] In an unpublished interview with her, Catherine Sheldrick Ross observed that her life is deliberately removed from the bizarre life of the artist. Munro responded, "*It's like that comment by Flaubert: "Live an orderly way like a bourgeois so that you can be violent and original in your work*".

In person she is warm, intense and amusing. She is concerned about her appearance unlike others who simply let themselves go. Pictures on book jackets show an attractive woman with a beautiful smile and dark,

[38] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Alice Munro: A Double Life (Toronto : ECW Press, 1992) p. 84.
[39] Ibid., p. 16.

curly hair, cut longer in the 1970s and stylishly short in the 1990s, unlike another of Canada's celebrated short story writers, Mavis Gallant who avoided marriage and children so that she would be able to write, Alice Munro has used her life as daughter, wife and mother as raw Material. It has been said that she is articulate, humourous and approachable and never misses a nuance of interaction going on about her. Beverley J. Rasporich says that she is an extremely sophisticated, literate and literary woman, an obsessively dedicated writer who has served a long apprenticeship, writing continuously since she was fourteen years old, a woman with an exacting mind when it comes to a discussion of her work and the literary process and however careful she is of other's feelings, quietly does not suffer either imprecise thinkers or pretentious people gladly.[40]

1.3 The Writer and Her Work

Alice Munro's first book was Dance of the Happy Shades published in 1968. She was invited by Earle Toppings of Ryerson Press to put together a collection of stories for a book. So she collected the stories written during the past fourteen years and wrote three new ones. The book has fifteen stories — "Walker Brothers Cowboy" "The Shining Houses", "Images", "Thanks for the Ride", "The Office", "An Ounce of Cure", "The Time of Death", "Day of the Butterfly", "Boys and Girls", "Postcard", "Red Dress — 1946", "Sunday Afternoon", "A Trip to the Coast", "The Peace of Utrecht", and "Dance of the Happy Shades". The three new ones she added were "Postcard", "Walker Brothers Cowboy" and "Images". These stories present the experiences of a young and perceptive narrator. They bring out the narrator's awareness of life in Huron County in the 1930s and 1940s.

[40] Beverly J. Rasporich, Dance of the Sexes - Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro (Alberta : The University of Alberta Press, 1990) p. 3 .

The stories do not really have plots. What they offer are a richly textured arrangement of material. Some of the stories originate from scenes in Munro's own life; "Red Dress — 1946" is based on her recollection of her mother stitching her a dress, "Walker Brothers Cowboy" from the experience of going with her father to visit a woman who teaches her to dance.

Her second book was Lives of Girls and Women. It was published in 1971. Munro intended this book to be a novel. However this did not materialize. So, Lives of Girls and Women became an apprenticeship novel in eight self-contained but linked sections. They are "The Flats Road", "Heirs of the Living Body", "Princess Ida", "Age of Faith", "Changes and Ceremonies", "Lives of Girls and Women", "Baptizing" and "Epilogue — The Photographer". It presents the experiences of Del Jordan, a perceptive girl from her childhood to maturity. It brings out her encounters with outcasts and eccentrics, her awareness of death, her relationship with her mother, with her friends, her experiences with religion, art and sexual awakening. The epilogue, which was added much later, brings out her vocation as a writer. Many elements of Munro's own life emerge in this book — especially the small-town setting, the attitudes of people, the confining and humiliating set up of the school, the river and some of the characters.

Her third book Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You, was published in 1974. It contains stories of small-town childhood and seven stories concerned with urban life, adult experience, the complications of marriage and communication problems between men and women. Two stories, "Winter Wind" and "The Ottawa Valley" are based on autobiographical material. Other stories are "Material", "Memorial", "Tell Me Yes or No", "The Spanish Lady".

Who Do You Think You Are? was Munro's fourth book and was published in 1978. It is an autobiographical work. It is a series of linked but self-contained stories about a central character Rose, who grows up with her father and stepmother Flo, in West Hanratty, a very poor place. The focus in not only on a girl growing up but on a woman's married life, her love affairs, her divorce and her career. Rose changes her rural accent, moves out from "home", marries Patrick, a young man from a wealthy class, takes up acting and in life too assumes roles and strikes poses. She finally returns home to discover who she really is. The book contains self-contained stories ike, "Royal Beatings", "Privilege", "Half a Grapefruit", "Wild Swans", "The Beggar Maid", "Mischief', "Providence", "Simon's Luck", "Spelling", and "Who Do You Think You Are?"

Munro's fifth book The Moons of Jupiter was published in 1982. It has stories like, "Chaddeleys and Flemings" which consists of two stories entitled "Connection" and "The Stone in the Field"; "Dulse", "The Turkey Season", "Accident", "Bardon Bus", "Prue", "Labor Day Dinner", "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd", "Hard-luck Stories", "Visitors" and "The Moons of Jupiter". The stories in this collection are about women characters who are older. They are in their forties and make discoveries about themselves. They are caught up in disastrous relationships and power struggles. They examine ways to cope with life. The first two stories and the last one are partly autobiographical. However, the stories in this work are unconnected.

The Progress of Love was published in 1986. It contains stories like "The Progress of Love", "Lichen", "Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux", "Miles City," "Montana", "Fits", "The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink", "Jesse and Meribeth", "Eskimo", "A Queer Streak", "Circle of Prayer" and "White Dump". Only a minority of the stories use autobiographical or family material. The stories bring out different facets of experience in the lives of women.

In 1990, Munro's next book, Friend of My Youth was published. It has stories like "Friend of My Youth", "Five Points", "Meneseteung", "Hold Me Fast, Don't Let Me Pass", "Oranges and Apples", "Pictures of the Ice", "Goodness and Mercy", "Oh, What Avails", 'Differently", "Wigtime". The characters in this book are older and seem to look back upon the past and human experience with compassion. They tell stories, they construct themselves and they Put things together.

Open Secrets was published in 1994. this book has stories like "Spaceships have Landed" and others. Alice Munro has written "The Colonel's Hash Resettled", an essay in The Narrative Voice: Short Stories and Reflections by Canadian Authors, edited by John Metcalf (1972).

She also wrote "What is Real?" published in the anthology Making It New: Contemporary Canadian Stories (1982). She uses an analogy between a story and a house and stresses that if works of literature are to have artistic integrity, writers must pursue their own visions of reality to the deepest — and possibly the darkest — places in their imagination.

1.4 Alice Munro on Her Art

Writers, like most people cannot live in isolation. They are shaped and moulded by others. It is not easy to trace the literary influences that shape a writer. We know, however that writers although largely creative and independent themselves, learn much and imbibe much from other writers as well-whether they are contemporary writers or their predecessors. So in this section I have traced the literary influences on Alice Munro.

In an essay entitled, "Alice Munro and the American South", J. R. Struthers discussed the influence on Munro of writers like Eudora Welty and James Agee, and in doing so he talked of the way in which both these writers were fascinated by the possibilities of photography as a medium

and its relationship to the kind of realistic writing they carried on. They saw the special literalness of photography not as a usurpation of the role of imaginative perception but as a means of enhancing it.[41] Many of the writers whom she acknowledges as having influenced her are internationally recognized practitioners of the short story: Katherine Mansfield, Mary Levin, Edna O'Brien, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Shirley Faessler, Mavis Gallant. Regardless of their diverse origins, these writers have in common an ability to transform a mundane, ordinary world into something that is unsettling and mysterious, and most of them are rooted strongly in a particular region.[42] She has also been strongly influenced by painters like Ken Danby, Christopher Pratt, Jack Chambers, Tom Forrestall and Alex Colville.

She is very much influenced by Edward Hopper. All these are painters who belong to the neo- realist movement. Photography has also had an impact on her. The photographs of Diane Arbus and Walker Evans have had the greatest impact on Alice Munro.

Munro was asked by Geoffrey Hancock in an interview what she thought of critics who tried to make connections between her and John Metcalf, Clark Blaise, Leon Rooke, Mavis Gallant and others. Her answer was:

I see we are all writing at the same time. And that we may write stories ,where it seems the things , we are trying to get at are similar. That's about all I can see. But later she says, "*I admire Mavis's stories tremendously without feeling that they're the kind of stories I could even write myself. With Clark and John and Leon, I feel that sometimes we are working the same kind of story*."[43]

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[41] George Woodcock, Northern Spring (Vancouver, Toronto : Douglas and McIntyre, 1987) p. 135.
[42] Hallvard Dahlie, "Alice Munro". Canadian Writers and their Works, ed Robert Lecker, Jack David, Ellen Quigley (Toronto, Ontario : ECW Press, 1985) p. 220.
[43] Geoffrey Hancock, "An Interview With Alice Munro" Canadian Fiction Magazine No. 43 (Toronto, 1982) p.77.

It is the qualitative texture of the regional South, rather than any formal influence, that Munro acknowledges, though, as she concedes, her Lives of Girls and Women has structural similarities to Welty's The Golden Apples.

It is difficult, however to trace her techniques to any particular development in the short story, for hers is a uniquely private fictional manifestation, born simply of precise observation and what seems to be a perpetual sense of astonishment about her world.[44]

Alice Munro's views on her art are revealed through articles written by her and her opinions in interviews conducted with her by various writers and critics among others.

She has always been rightly reluctant to offer theoretical explanations of her methods, for she is quite obviously an anti-dogmatic; the kind of writer who works with feeling, ahead of theory. As she told Geoff Hancock, when asked about the dramatic action and meaning of a story:

What happens as event doesn't really much matter. When the event becomes the thing that matters, the story isn't working too well. There has to be a feeling in the story.[45]

In an interview published in the New York Times, November 10, 1986, Alice Munro says:

> *I never intended to be a short-story writer. I started writing them because I didn't have time to write anything else — I had three children. And then I got used to writing stories, so I saw my material that way, and now I don't think I'll ever write a novel.*

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[44] Robert Lecker, Jack David, Ellen Quigley, Canadian Writers and their Works. Fiction Series — Vol. 7 (Toronto, Ontario : ECW Press , 1985) p. 220.
[45] Geoffrey Hancock, "An Interview With Alice Munro" Canadian Fiction Magazine No. 43 (Toronto ,1982) p. 81.

This assertion would appear to be self explanatory and due justification for Munro's special interest in the short-story as a form of writing. But even on the theoretical level, she is shrewd in defining the perimeters of her approach, perhaps negatively rather than positively. She once, for example, in an essay written for John Metcalf's The Narrative Voice - entitled, "The Colonel's Hash Resettled", cautioned against attempts to read symbolism excessively into her stories. And she was right, for essentially her stories are what they say, offering their meaning with often stark directness and gaining their effect from their intense visuality, so that they are always vivid in the mind's eye which is another way of saying that she has learnt the power of the image and how to turn it to the purposes of prose.

Her visuality is not merely a matter of rendering the surface, the realm of mere perception, for she has understood that one of the great advantages of any effective imagist technique is that the image not merely presents itself. It reverberates with the power of its associations, and even with the intensity of its own isolated and illuminated presence. Munro herself conveyed something of this when John Metcalf, remarking on the fact that she seemed to glory in the surfaces and the textures, asked whether she did not in fact feel "surfaces not to be surfaces," and she answered that there was "a kind of magic... about everything... a feeling about the intensity of what is there."[46]

In an interview Alan Twigg asked her where she got her ambition to write and she simply said:

> *It was the only thing I ever wanted to do. I just kept on trying. I guess what happens when you are young has a great deal to do with it. Isolation feelings of power that don't get out in a normal way and maybe*

[46] George Woodcock, Northern Spring (Vancouver, Toronto : Douglas and McIntyre , 1987) pp. 133- 134.

coping with unusual situations... most writers seem to have backgrounds like that."

Several critics, including Catherine Sheldrick Ross, in "At Least Part Legend", have compared her to the magic realist school of painting, to artists like Edward Hopper Jack Chambers, Alex Colville and Ken Danby. The subjects of magic realist painters are ordinary objects which are painted in a mysterious photographic reality that is described by John Metcalf in his conversation with Alice Munro as "the magic of the ordinary". Geoff Hancock has briefly commented on its literary variety, pointing out that a writer like Robert Kroetsch, sending a group of runaway horses through Woodward's Department store, is actually using a common technique of the painters by juxtaposing real forms in unlikely places. "The combination of the two forms", suggests Hancock, "creates a third meaning, often difficult to explain". In Canadian fiction, he determines, documentary realism is magically reshaping itself as fiction writers instill humour and hyperbole into the landscape.[47]

Munro has always been one of those fortunate and self-sufficient writers who never really become involved in movements or in literary fashions. From the start, she has her own view of life, largely as she had lived it herself, and her aim was to express it in a fiction distinguished by craftsmanship and clear vision rather than by self-conscious artifice. It was a curiously paradoxical method of self-cultivation and self-effacement that she followed, for she has always written best when her stories or the episodes in her novels are close to her own experience in a world she knew, yet at the same time she cultivated a prose from which authorly mannerisms were so absent that it seemed as though the stories had their

[47] Beverly J. Rasporich, Dance of the Sexes - Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro (Alberta.: The University of Alberta Press, 1990) p . 132.

own voices. In the process Alice Munro became, next to Marian Engel, perhaps Canada's best prose stylist.[48] She says:

> *Mostly in my stories I like to look at what people don't understand. What we don't understand. What we think is happening and what we understand later on, and so on.*[49]

In an interview with D.R. Bruckner, in the New York Times, April 17, 1990, Alice Munro said. "There are more stories that I will ever be able to write". Most seem to suggest themselves, out of her experience, and to compete for her attention. Some originate with anecdotes told by other people, or chance remarks overheard. "It may be something slight, a combination of the way people are talking on a bus and a look they have", she said. She talks about her writing like an explorer and about success and failure in a way that reveals an old-fashioned conscience about work:

> *I just have to wait for a person to form, she said. "The voice usually comes with the character and a person gets formed early and distinctly if the story is going to work at all. And of course, it may be months or years before it works. In my whole career, there are only a couple of stories that I know simply do not work. And if they don't, you know, it is because you're writing too hard, or not hard enough". When they do work - after the first handwritten drafts, made in note books two or three pages a day in three or four-hour sessions and repeated rewritings on a type writer for months or longer — they become strangers of a sort to their author. "What 1 would really like to do with*

[48] George Woodcock, Northern Spring (Vancouver Toronto : Douglas and McIntyre , 1987) pp. 134-135.
[49] Geoffrey Hancock, "An Interview With Alice Munro" Canadian Fiction Magazine No. 43 (Toronto 1982) p. 90.

my stories is just leave them behind and forget them," she says. "I never read one of them except when I have to give a reading. I don't; because I always want to change things. But 1 wouldn't revise. One of the writers I admire a lot, Frank O'Connor, kept tinkering, with stories, I think. But I don't think its a good idea.

The stories absorb me completely at the time they are taking shape and when I am writing. But then afterward, the person who has done them isn't quite there anymore... I pin my faith on the next story; I always know its really going to work. I used to think I would get over that, that I would reach some kind of plateau and know that was it.

But after all these years, I still count on the next one to be perfect. 1 guess I'll just go on feeling like this till I die. The next story will be the perfect one."[50]

Alice Munro was born, lives in and largely writes about the same part of the world - rural south western Ontario. She says that it is not very different from the Midwest. The people are very rooted in the place, and it doesn't really matter what happens outside — fame is getting your name in the local papers, not in the Toronto Globe and Mail. "Everybody in the community is on stage for all the other people", she says. "There's a constant awareness of people watching and listening. And , and this may be particularly Canadian - the less you reveal, the more highly thought of you are".

[50] D. J. R. Bruckner, "An Author Travels to Nurture Ideas about Home". New York Times — April 17, 1990. p. C 13.

Most of Munro's stories deal with the written subjectivity of truth our inability to see things through other's eyes. "There is a terrific isolation", she says, "but there are always attempts made to bridge it, which are endlessly interesting. People say I write depressing or pessimistic stories, and I know that in my own life, I'm not a pessimistic person, so I think the dark side of myself gets expressed in the stories, which the bright side goes on being". Many of her characters appear to be isolated and consider themselves outsiders - as do many writers. When asked whether she considers herself an outsider, she says:

I've always worked both sides of the fence. I feel an outsider but 1 p,o in disguise most of the time. I think most writers do. Because I grew up in a community where hardly anyone read, let alone thought of writing - it wasn't something you could convey your interest in when you talked to other people.[51]

She states in an interview with Geoff Hancock, when talking about her affinity for the short story, "I think the most attractive kind of writing of all is just the single story. It satisfies me the way nothing else does."[52]

In a 1973 interview with her, Graente Gibson asked her whether she saw herself as trying to record things, like a representational painter. Munro responded by saying:

I see my technique as being very. traditional, very conventional. Yes; sometimes this worries me, because I see other people making breakthroughs —if not may be it is in a way or thing like, well, I'm not doing the current thing, but it isn't really that. It's that I'm slow to pick up these ways of doing things which are really so good, so effective. But I suppose, I don't even know the terms in which one talks about painting, but I suppose what I admire is a kind of super realism anyway, like I'm crazy

[51] Mervyn Rothstein, "Canada's Alice Munro finds Excitement in the Short Story Form". New York Times —Nov. 10, 1986, Late City Final Edition Section C; p. 17 .
[52] Geoffrey Hancock, "An Interview With Alice Munro" in Canadian Fiction Magazine No. 43 (Toronto, 1982) p. 86.

about Edward Hopper. Later she admitted being fond of Andrew Wyeth and Jack Chambers too.[53]

Commenting further on style in her writing she says:

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.[54]

In an interview with Beverley J. Rasporich, Munro comments on literary influences and the authorial process. She claims to be influenced by many writers and in them admires different qualities:

There's an American writer named Elizabeth Cullinan who writes almost flat stories. The effect is so quiet, and half-way through you'll think, "Is she really going to be able to pull this off as a story?" and then the afterglow of the story is terrific. And I admire that very much.

That kind of indirection that doesn't look fancy is what I'm getting more and more excited' about now.[55]

When asked how real her characters were to her, Alice Munro says, "Oh, very real, because they are aspects of myself." She also says that she has never created characters like Charles Dickens did for example, who imagined he was conversing with his characters as other people:

In the stories where I'm quite removed from the characters... they will have been drawn very much from real life. I've either done that or used aspects of myself. One of the creative characters, I think, is the mother in Lives because she is quite a long way from my own mother and she has quite a lot of several people in her, and actually she is about the only character I feel that I have completely created because she is quite different from anyone I've ever known."

She was also asked to comment about criticism that she is limited by being an autobiographical writer, in particular, by being a White, Anglo-

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[53] Graeme Gibson; Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto : Anansi ,1973) p. 256 .
[54] Ibid., p. 257.
[55] Beverly J. Rasporich, Dance of the Sexes - Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro (Alberta : The University of Alberta Press, 1990) p. 22.

Saxon, and Protestant (WASP) one. But while Munro admitted that the statement about WASP philosophy was true she also said that the exploration of it was what she was doing. "I can't do anything else. I can hardly set myself up as a Jewish writer or an Indian writer..."[56]

Alice Munro makes use of the Gothic in her work. Beverley J. Rasporich wonders why it is that Canadian female authors were preoccupied with the Gothic. She observes in this interview:

You acknowledge that you began to write by trying to imitate Southern Gothic stories; in the style of Carson McCullers. Marian Engel and Margaret Atwood have a penchant for the gothic; and one of your characters effectively remembers Wuthering Heights. Munro admits that that was the biggest book of her life but also says that anything that is explored with honesty and feeling and excitement on the part of the writer remains interesting. She says she admires Jane Austen a lot but, "I don't think I'm in the stream of Jane Austen writers"...I mean if you put Charlotte Bronte here and Jane Austen here, I'm, on Charlotte Bronte's side of the fence.[57]

Much of Munro's world described by her is stark and seemingly colourless. Alan Twigg asks her, "When the kids play I Spy in your stories, they have a hard time finding colours. Was your upbringing really that bleak?" She says, "Fairly. I was a small child in the Depression. What happens at the school in the book you're referring to is true. Nothing is invented".[58]

Many of her stories dwell upon life in the Huron County and present a sordid side altogether. Hancock once asked her whether her stories contained a veiled social commentary. He observed that in her stories there

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[56] Ibid., p. 24.
[57] Beverly J. Rasporich, Dance of the Sexes - Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro (Alberta : The University of Alberta Press, 1990) p. 22.
[58] Alan Twigg, "What Is: Alice Munro", For Openers: Conversations with Twenty Four Canadian Writers (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour, 1981) p. 18.

seemed to be a kind of class system present. Munro told him that when she had come back to live in Huron County, she thought she had written it out:

I didn't intend to write any more about it. Because I had written "Lives". When I came back, one of the things I noticed immediately was the class system. As it operates now and as it operated then which is very different. Another thing that made me do it was a friend of mine was teaching a class on Lives of Girls and Women and one of the women in her class actually came from where I grew up. This woman put up her hand and said, "I think the class should know that Alice Munro came from the wrong side of the tracks." "So to her, my vision is suspect. 1 thought, yes, I did, and I never realized how much this influenced me and how much it is still in this reader's mind." Munro was also asked about whether a writer had a social function. To this question she said that if a person who has a social function gives people guidelines, then the writer does not have a function. "Good writing, honest writing is a necessity for some people, so a writer is providing a necessity." But she also says, "1 think the writer should be unaware of this function. I am saying that the art which doesn't set out primarily to rouse any sort of social attitude or reaction probably succeeds more than that which does." She cites Uncle Tom's Cabin as an enormous example of what propagandist art can do. So, according to her, art works as propaganda.[59]

Alice Munro repudiates the idea that literature is there to teach lessons. She does not subscribe to all forms of correctness whether urged by Chinese Marxists (which she saw on her visit to China when they adhered to the party line) or Methodists or feminists who want strong female role models, or literary censors. So much so that in an interview with Hancock when asked about whether she embedded lessons in her stories, she vehemently stated:

[59] Geoffrey Hancock, "An Interview with Alice Munro" Canadian Fiction Magazine (Toronto 1982) p. 95.

Ahhh! No lessons. No lessons ever. I didn't even think, when I began writing, that I was writing about women at all. I just wrote these stories. When I wrote "Lives" it didn't cross my mind that I was writing a feminist book.[60]

To Alice Munro, literature is an opener of life as she says in her essay "What is Real?". She was hurt and expressed as much in an interview with Alan Twigg when in Huron County a group of people wanted to keep Lives of Girls and Women, Margaret Laurence's The Diviners Steinbecks's Of Mice and Men and Salinger's Catcher in the Rye out of high schools. She observes:

It doesn't particularly bother me about my book because my book is going to be around in bookstores. But the impulse behind what they are doing bothers me a great deal. There is such a total lack of appreciation of what literature is about! They feel literature is there to teach some great moral 'lesson. They always see literature as an influence, not as an opener of life. The lessons they want taught are those of fundamentalist Christianity and if literature doesn't do this, it's a harmful influence.

They talk about protecting their children from these books. The whole concept of protecting eighteen year old children from sexuality is pretty scary and pretty sad. Nobody's been forced to read these books anyway. The news stories never mention that these books are only options. So they're not just protecting their own children. What they're doing is removing the books from other people's children.[61]

When asked to comment upon Atwood's theory on Del Jordan in Lives of Girls and Women that she writes as an art of redemption and whether her own writing was a compensation for loss of the past, Munro simply said:

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[60] Ibid., p. 112.
[61] Alan Twigg, "What Is: Alice Munro", in For Openers: Conversations with Twenty Four Canadian Writers (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour, 1981) p. 15.

Redemption is a pretty strong word. My writing has become a way of dealing with life, hanging onto it by recreation. That's important. But it's also a way of getting on top of experience. We all have life rushing in on us. A writer pretends, by writing about it, to have control. Of course a writer actually has no more control than anybody else.[62]

In her essay "What is Real?", Munro talks about how people ask her why she writes about things that are so depressing. She observes "People can accept almost any amount of ugliness if it is contained in a familiar formula, as it is on television, but when they come closer to their own place, their own lives, they are much offended by lack of editing". But her defence is that she puts a certain incident into a story because she needs it there and it belongs there:

It is the black room at the center of the house with all other rooms leading to and away from it. That is all. A strange defence. Who told me to write this story? Who feels any need of it before it is written? I do. I do, so that I might grab off this piece of horrid reality and install it where I see fit, even if Hat Nettleton and his friends were still around to make me sorry.[63]

And this is her spirited defence of her kind of reality.'

[62] Ibid., pp. 15-16.
[63] Alice Munro, "What is Real?" Making It New: Contemporary Canadian Stories. Ed. John Metcalf (Toronto : Methuen, 1982) p. 223.

Chapter II. Practical Part. Critical Analysis of Alice Munro's Characters and Themes

2.1 Critical Work on Munro

Though Alice Munro has been writing for some three decades and more, critical attention of any extended sort did not appear until the beginning of the 1970s when serious response to her 1968 collection of stories began to formulate. She had received, it is true, some attention during the 1950s and 1960s particularly from "Tamarack Review" editor Robert Weaver, who was consistent and perceptive in his praise of her work, but she earned only a line or two of objective mention in the 1965 edition of the Literary History of Canada; Canadian Literature in English. It was however, the awarding of the Governor General's Award for Dance of the Happy Shades that signaled to the country as a whole the arrival of a new force in Canadian literature even though the initial response to that event focused more on who Munro was than on the substance of her fiction.

To date, serious critical attention has been limited to interviews, articles and reviews published in scholarly and academic journals. The first graduate thesis on Munro's work came out of Queen's University in 1972, and in the ensuing decade her fiction has received increasing attention from graduate students across the country as well as abroad. Several interviews have been conducted since Mari Sainsby published the first one in 1971, and though some of these are livelier than others, all elicit much the same information about her life and career, about the various influences on her work, and about her opinions on being simultaneously a writer and a woman in Canada. She has been interviewed by Alan Twigg, Geoff Hancock, John Metcalf and others. Scholarly articles on Munro

show a steady but not spectacular growth, with the majority of them thematic in nature, though a few also address structural and stylistic natters. The titles of the articles arc revealing, suggesting not only the richness of Munro's fiction but also the versatility of her critics. Where one speaks of isolation and rejection, another counters with confinement and escape, a third with resolution and independence and yet another with transience; one discusses her vision, and not to be outdone, another her double vision; we have private landscapes and wonderlands, both with and without the looking glass; child-women and primitives view with the masculine image and the growth of a young artist in her fiction; two critics link her with James Joyce, one with the American south and a third, with myth and fairy tale. In short, scholarly criticism of Munro to date seems to be following the standard exegetical route that all writers routinely undergo, perhaps particularly those whose fiction is relatively uncomplicated and accessible to a wide range of readers.[64]

Some articles on Munro are "Artist and Woman: Young Lives in Laurence and Munro" by Rosalie Murphy Baum; "Our Feeling Exactly", "The Writing of Alice Munro", "Papers from Waterloo Conference by Joseph Gold". There are articles that are based on comparative study like Heather Cam's "Definitions of Fool: Alice Munro's 'Walking on Water' and Margaret Atwood's Two stories about Emma: 'The Whirlpool Rapids' and 'Walking on Water”. There are also articles that take up feminist issues like Barbara Godard's "Heirs of the Living Body: Alice Munro and the question of a Female Aesthetic", Marlene Goldman's "Penning in the Bodies: The Construction of Gendered Subjects in Alice Munro's Boys and Girls", Helen Hoy's "Alice Munro: Unforgettable, Indigestible Messages". Specific articles on narrative technique are Katherine J. Mayberry's "Every

[64] Hallvard Dahlie, "Alice Munro" Canadian Writers and their Works, ed Robert Lecker, Jack David, Ellen Quigley (Toronto, Ontario : ECW Press, 1985) pp. 221-222

last thing...Everlasting: Alice Munro and the Limits of Narrative; Gerald Noonan's, "Alice Munro's Short Stories and the Art that Distrusts Art."

Extended criticism of Lives of Girls and Women began appearing about the mid - 1970s and to date it is this book that has attracted the greatest amount of attention. In a 1975 article, Tim Struthers analyses this novel within the perspective of its being a Kunstieroman, drawing a number of parallels between it and Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, as well as making an interesting observation on the closing words of Lives of Girls and Women and Ulysses. Del's final word "Yes", Struthers suggests, moves this novel, as did Molly Bloom's in Ulysses, 11'0111 irony to affirmation, a position, that the "Epilogue" itself supports. Marcia Allentuck argues in her article that Lives of Girls and Women along with the stories, "The Office" and "Material" provide evidence that the emotional dependence women experience with men is difficult, if not impossible to overcome, and John Moss shapes his analysis of Lives of Girls and Women to the overall theme of his "Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel".[65]

In the recent past, criticism of Munro has begun moving away from its thematic slant towards a concern with structure and style, though there is as yet no study exclusively devoted to these formal aspects. If there is the beginning of a consistent ideological stance in Munro criticism, it lies, not surprisingly in the feminist approach. Both Rasporich and Allentuck edge into this area, but the strongest position taken to date is that by Bronwen Wallace in an article published in 1978. Wallace pursues, with reference mainly, to the collections of stories, Munro's own implication, made in an interview that women, as members of a subject race, have visions and , perceptions that are qualitatively different from those of men; indeed, she

[65] Bronwen Wallace, "Women's Lives : Alice Munro". The Human Elements: Critical Essays. Ed. David Helwig (Ottawa : Oberon, 1978) pp. 52-67.

concludes her perceptive study by arguing that the presence of so many selves in a woman constitutes her unique strength rather than a weakness.[66] In an article published the following year, Nancy Bailey combines a feminist approach with a Jungian analysis of the androgynous nature of the female —artist figure.[67] In recent years, in the 1990s James Carscallen in The Other Country:

Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro (Toronto: ECW Press, 1993) Ajay Heble in The Tumble of Reason: Alice Munro's Discourse of Absence (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) Catherine Sheldrick Ross in Alice Munro — A Double Life (Toronto: ECW Press, 1992) and others have published critical works on Munro. 81 The themes cover patterns and paradoxes that occur in Munro's work, running the gamut of thematic concerns, feminism and identity.

Munro writes about various particular things — rural south-western Ontario, Canada. She writes about the lives of girls and women. But because she sees reality with truth we can simply say that she is a great writer and one who writes about nothing less than human beings."[68]

I have based this study on selected fiction by Alice Munro with special reference to Dance of the Happy Shades, Lives of Girls and Women, Who Do You Think You Are?, The Moons of Jupiter, The Progress of Love and Friend of My Youth. It depicts the universal appeal of Alice Munro as a writer because her stories, even while they bring out realism and regionalism along with feminism and a characteristic narrative technique, stretch well beyond the interests of women only.

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[66] Bronwen Wallace, "Women's Lives : Alice Munro". The Human Elements: Critical Essays. Ed. David Helwig (Ottawa : Oberon, 1978) pp. 52-67.
[67] Nancy Bailey. "The Masculine Image in Lives of Girls and Women," Canadian Literature, No. 80 (Spring 1979) pp. 113-120.
[68] James Carscallen, "Alice Munro" Profiles in Canadian Literature (Toronto: Dundern Press, 1980) 0.79.

2.2 Themes and Character Images in "Boys and Girls"

Alice Munro's short story, "Boys and Girls," has a very interesting detail written into it. The narrator's brother is named Laird, which was carefully chosen by the author. Laird is a synonym for lord, which plays a important role in a story where a young girl has society's unwritten rules forced upon her. At the time of the story, society did not consider men and women equal. The name symbolized how the male child was superior in the parent's eyes and in general. Along with that, the name also symbolizes the difference between the sexes when this story took place. The time when this story took place was a time when men and women were not equal. Mothers had traditional roles, which usually left them in the house, while men also had their roles, outside of the house.

The male was the dominant figure in the house, while the woman had to be subservient. It was an off thing to see my mother down at the barn. She did not often come out of the house unless it was to do something – hang out the wash or dig potatoes in the garden. She looked out of place, with her bare lumpy legs, not touched by the sun, her apron still on and damp across the stomach from the supper dishes. The narrator had problems coming to terms with the role in life that she was expected to lead. She wanted to work outside with her father doing the work that she deemed important. The mother tried to get the narrator to work inside doing work deemed appropriate for a lady, however it was not something she enjoyed. "I hated the hot dark kitchen in the summer" (p. 530). The narrator was not considered of any consequential help to her father, simply because she was female. "Could of fooled me," said the salesman. "I thought it was only a girl" (p. 529). Even though the narrator could do more work than her younger brother, she was still under appreciated. "Wait till Laird gets a little bigger, then you'll have a real help" (p. 530).

Laird, on the other hand, was able to go out and do the things that he enjoyed. When Flora, the family's horse, runs away Laird is invited to join the father and his assistant to re-capture the horse, while the narrator must stay at home. When the narrator is reminiscing of the past, she recalls a time when she lured Laird up to the top of the barn. The whole purpose of this idea was to get Laird in trouble. However, when her parents come and remove Laird from danger, they are actually mad at her, instead of Laird. This shows how the parents were more concerned with their son and that he could do no wrong. This reflects society's notion at the time, how men were always right. My father came, my mother came, my father went up the ladder talking very quietly and brought Laird down under his arm, at which my mother leaned against the ladder and began to cry. They said to me, "Why weren't you watching him?" (p. 534) The grandmother is the best example of how women were thought of at the time. She is from a time when there were even stricter rules of conduct for girls. The narrator's parents are more lackadaisical than the grandmother and a lot less out-spoken. She voices what was taught to her when she was a child. At the time of the story, girls were expected to be dainty and quaint, while a man was expected to be the rough and tumble one. "Girls don't slam doors like that." "Girls keep their knees together when they sit down." And worse still, when I asked some questions, "That's none of girls' business." I continued to slam the doors and sit as awkwardly as possible, thinking that by such measures I kept myself free. (p. 532) The narrator, however, did not keep herself free. Eventually, she began to change and to become a stereotypical female. She began to conform to society's idea's about women.

Near the end of the story, Laird starts to realize his sex-determined superiority. He explains to his father and mother how Flora escaped from the yard and also starts listening to his father almost exclusively. "We

shot old Flora," he said, "and cut her up in fifty pieces." "Well I don't want to hear about it," my mother said. "And don't come to my table like that." My father made him go and wash the blood off. (p. 536) Laird washes the blood off only after his father tells him to do so. This shows the dominance of males in the society of the time. Laird may field his mother's complains, but only does something about it once his father tells him to do so. This shows how his father is the authority figure, that his mother secondary to his father. Even the daughter thinks lowly of the mother in comparison to the father. "It showed how little my mother knew about the way things really were" (p. 531). "Boys and Girls" takes place at a time where there is no such thing as equality between the sexes. Men in this society are the dominant, authoritarian heads of the house-hold whose work is done outside the home. Women are expected to look after the men and their work is done in the home. The narrator in "Boys and Girls" slowly becomes accustom with her role in society. The narrator and her brother symbolize the roles of males and females in that society. The narrator is forced into doing jobs that she doesn't enjoy doing, namely that associated with women's work at the time. Laird is allowed to do what he pleases. Laird is the lord, as a male he is deemed as the more important of the two, simply because of his sex, while the narrator cast into her womanly role, being of secondary importance[69].

2.3 Image of Woman in "Runaway"

"Runaway," the first story in Alice Munro's collection of the same title, concerns two runaways: Carla, whose abusive husband, Clark,

[69] Munro, Alice, "Boys and Girls," Introduction to literature, eds. Gillian Thomas et al, third ed. (Toronto: Hardcourt Brace, 1995), p. 528 All subsequent references will be from this edition and will be cited in the text.

inspires her to run away, and Sylvia, her neighbor who encourages Carla's runaway attempt. Sylvia's husband has passed away, and she comes to rely on Carla for help around her house and develops an obsessive concern for her abused friend. Sylvia's friends describe her affection for Carla as a crush. While Carla resents Clark's abuse, it seems apparent that without Sylvia's planning and urging she would not have taken a bus out of town, only to get off the bus and call Clark to come and get her. Significantly, Carla, who is wearing some of Sylvia's clothes, decides that the clothes do not “fit” her.

Sylvia, who later moves to an apartment in town, also may be considered a runaway. Besides the two women, there is another runaway: Flora, Carla's pet goat, who mysteriously vanishes and returns in supernatural fashion when Clark threatens Sylvia physically. The goat's sudden appearance saves Sylvia, and then Flora again vanishes. After Carla returns to Clark, she finds Flora's bones in the woods. She speculates about how Flora died and then absolves Clark of any guilt—something she has to do if she is to go on living with him. In effect, she runs away from the truth; Flora's fate could become hers.

As in The Moons of Jupiter (1982), Runaway contains three stories featuring the same protagonist, in this case, Juliet. Like many of Munro's characters, Juliet is an intellectual who does not “fit” into society. A classical scholar, she is out of place in a traditionally male field, and she has been encouraged to get out of academia and into the “real world.” When she receives a letter from Eric Porteous, a man she once met on a train, she leaves the school where she teaches and goes to Whale Bay, where Eric lives. Upon arrival, she finds that Eric's wife has died and that her funeral had occurred that day. Eric spends the night with Christa, with

whom he has been having an affair. He then returns home to find Juliet and “claim” her. They eventually marry.

If chance provides a happy ending (Christa even becomes Juliet's friend and confidante), time will alter Juliet's happiness. In “Soon,” she returns to her hometown with her daughter, Penelope, named after Homer's character in the Odyssey (c. 725 b.c.e.), to see her parents. The unsuccessful return to the past to resolve relationships is another of Munro's themes. Juliet discovers that her parents’ marriage has deteriorated as her father's independent streak and her mother's onset of senility have increased the gap between them and left them complaining about each other to Juliet. Juliet's obsession with a painting titled “I and the Village” also indicates that she is aware of her own lack of belonging in the community; to the villagers, she is “the girl who speaks Latin.”

She decides to write to Eric that “I don’t know what I’m doing here. I can’t wait to go home.” At the end of the story she reconsiders and thinks that her home is with her parents and that her duty is to “protect, as best you can …what happens at home.” Unfortunately, when her mother reaches out to her, she cannot or will not reply. Instead, she turns her attention to cleaning up the kitchen. The last line, “She had put everything away,” applies not only to dishes but also to her parents. She has, in effect, run away again, this time from relationships.

In “Silence” Juliet reaps the results of not having responded to her mother; Penelope runs away from her. Since the events in “Soon,” Eric has drowned and, in classical Norse fashion, his body has been set out to sea on a burning boat. Juliet has become a television personality who specializes in interviews. This is ironic, as Juliet does not communicate

well with her own daughter. As “Silence” begins, Juliet travels to the Spiritual Balance Centre, where she is informed that Penelope has experienced loneliness and unhappiness.

Juliet dismisses the comments about Penelope, but the “silence” continues, broken only by an occasional birthday card from her daughter, some not even signed.

2.4 Themes and Characters in “Family Furnishings”

The stories selected in Family Furnishings, a fine and timely follow-up to Alice Munro’s winning of the 2013 Nobel Prize, date (it says on the cover) from 1995 to 2014, thus making a sequel to the Selected Stories of 1996, which drew on the previous thirty years of Munro’s writing. But there is one exception to this dating in the new selection, the magnificent story “Home.” “Home” was first published in a collection of Canadian stories in 1974, so it was written when Munro was in her early forties. She then went on working on it for thirty years, revising, correcting, and changing its shape, and it was republished in much-altered form in 2006: so it appears here as a “late” story. That process of revisiting is fundamental to Munro’s methods. She constantly revises her work; she reuses her subject matter with the utmost concentration and attention; and her characters, like her (and often they are like her), compulsively return to their pasts.

“Home” tells of a visit, in the first person, to the farmhouse she grew up in between the 1930s and the 1950s. All Munro readers know this place, and know that it is a farm in Morris Township, Huron County, Western Ontario, near the town of Wingham, though it often isn’t named in the stories, or is called something else. She is visiting her father and her

stepmother, with whom she has an edgy relationship. She is remembering her mother; she is recalling her childhood; she is witnessing, though she doesn't yet know it, her father's final illness.

And she is deciding, as Munro's characters often have to decide, what "home" means, and what to do with it when you have left it:

Time and place can close in on me, it can so easily seem as if I have never got away, that I have stayed here my whole life. As if my life as an adult was some kind of dream that never took hold of me.

Her long journey home begins with three bus rides, the first fast and air-conditioned, traveling along the highway, the second a town bus, the third an old school bus making stops out into the country: as if, stage by stage, she is traveling into a slower close-up of her past life. In the last bus, it is difficult to see out of the windows:

I find this irritating, because the countryside here is what I most want to see—the reddening fall woods and the dry fields of stubble and the cows crowding the barn porches. Such unremarkable scenes, in this part of the country, are what I have always thought would be the last thing I would care to see in my life.

Something very similar happens in a story called "The Beggar Maid," in Who Do You Think You Are? (1978), anthologized in the earlier Selected Stories, where a scholarship girl at university from a poor rural family has to deal with her rich, clever boyfriend's snobbery. His condescension to her uneducated family and "unremarkable" surroundings, which she herself at this point can't wait to get away from, brings her confusion and misery:

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.

“Loyalty” might seem an odd word to pick out as the key to a writer who famously betrays her home, her family, and her tribe in order to make stories out of them, and who exposes with ruthless energy and a cold eye the shameful secrets of the long-ago past. In the stories, she often reproaches herself for these betrayals—she knows that she has “escaped things by such use”—and is reproached for it by those she has left behind and then made use of.

“Use” is a loaded, uneasy word in Munro: when she goes back to her hometown she sometimes feels that she has “written about it and used it up.” She knows the shifty, blurring lines between “using,” “using up,” and “making use of.” But she is committed to the principle of using everything up, just like her Scottish Presbyterian Laidlaw ancestors, whose immigrant history she reconstructs in one of her most lavishly staged, large-scale, and well-known stories, “The View from Castle Rock.” That “rock” of Puritan principle appeared at once, when she first started drawing on her family life. In “The Peace of Utrecht” (1960), a young woman returning to her family home after her mother’s death visits her aunts, who, to her horror, have saved her mother’s clothes for her, which she rejects:

They stared back at me with grave accusing Protestant faces, for I had run up against the simple unprepossessing materialism which was the rock of their lives. Things must be used; everything must be used up, saved and mended and made into something else and used again.

Wanting to shed the family stuff, yet needing to use it and make it “into something else”: the theme is echoed in the title phrase of this new selection. It’s spoken by a character called Alfrida, a cousin of the narrator’s father, once an object of fascination to the girl, now a burdensome reminder of the past. Alfrida’s house is stuffed full of furniture. “‘I know I’ve got far too much stuff in here,’ she said. ‘But it’s my parents’ stuff. It’s family furnishings, and I couldn’t let them go.’” The

Munro-ish girl in the story, busily trying to shed her “family furnishings” as fast as she can, will also find, by the time she becomes the writer of this story, that she “couldn’t let them go.”

In spite of herself, the writer has remained loyal. She is loyal to place and the past, faithfully and perpetually reconstructing it, so that no one, having read her, would ever again say, “What’s so interesting about small-town rural Canada?” She is loyal to truth, getting the detail precisely right in every phrase and word, so that people, habits, objects, scenes, and places that are lost and gone in the real world remain alive on her pages. (“It was more than concern she felt, it was horror, to think of the way things could be lost….”) She is loyal, also, to her chosen form, masterfully working and reworking it all her life, so that no one in the world now would say, “Why didn’t Alice Munro ever write a novel?” or “Why would a short-story writer win the Nobel Prize for Literature?”

Writers who get away from, or are in savage dispute with, “home,” yet spend most of their lives writing about it, are not uncommon, especially in North America: think of Shillington, Pennsylvania; Newark, New Jersey; Milledgeville, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; Red Cloud, Nebraska; or Great Village, Nova Scotia. What is special about Munro’s lifelong use and reuse of “family furnishings” and “unremarkable” local landscape?

Partly it is her exceptionally thorough and dedicated mining of the same ingredients, which endlessly come up rich and fresh, seem never to be used up, and however artfully shaped, feel “real.” Lives of Girls and Women (1971) was going to be called Real Life. Munro’s “real life” ingredients become enormously familiar to us: the childhood in the fox farm on the edge of town, the mother with incurable Parkinson’s, the studious girl reading her way out of the country into university, the expectations for young women in 1940s and 1950s provincial, conservative, colonial Canada; the early marriage and motherhood in

Vancouver, the condescending young husband, the adultery, the divorce, the deaths of her parents, the returns home.

In her stories about her mother's past, "My Mother's Dream" and "Dear Life," she nudges us to remember that this is "real life," even though she didn't witness it herself: "It is early morning when this happens in the real world. The world of July 1945." "He does not have any further part in what I'm writing now…because this is not a story, only life." But Munro has also issued warnings about reading any of her work as "not a story, only life," as in her introduction to The Moons of Jupiter (1982): "Some of these stories are closer to my own life than others are, but not one of them is as close as people seem to think."

Just when we are tempted to treat everything she writes as autobiography, she will make her central character into the abused wife of a child murderer ("Dimensions"), or a nineteenth-century Russian woman mathematician ("Too Much Happiness"), or a teacher in love with a doctor in a TB sanatorium ("Amundsen"). So we have to be wary of calling all these stories "only life." But that doesn't make them feel any less real. How is it done? It's often hard to work it out. Jane Smiley, in her affectionate, admiring introduction to this volume, is happy to throw up her hands, call it magic, and leave it at that.

Part of the magic comes from the stories' fabulous naturalism. While Munro's characters are going about their business, not much noticing the scenery (except for the Hardyesque woodsman in "Wood"), she is noticing it for them. The late stories have a special tenderness for landscapes, especially at their most indeterminate:

Mist was rising so that you could hardly see the river. You had to fix your eyes, concentrate, and then a spot of water would show through, quiet as water in a pot.

And such a long time it takes for today to be over. For the long reach of sunlight and stretched shadows to give out and the monumental heat to stir a little, opening sweet cool cracks. Then all of a sudden the stars are out in clusters and the trees are enlarging themselves like clouds, shaking down peace.

Meanwhile everyday jobs are being done (Munro is as good at this as Updike is): bread-making, shoe repairs, milking a cow, drying fox pelts, cleaning a foundry floor. We learn what we need about "working for a living" (the title of one of the stories), about odd corners of houses, about how families eat their meals. The lives of objects sing out from these historical stories, which shrewdly and knowingly, often satirically, take us through a century or more of closely observed regional life.

But naturalism and historical accuracy are only the half of it. Munro is famous for her destabilizing treatment of time, jumping us far ahead, or back to something we've missed. She is wonderfully crafty at making her stories seem to move both forward and backward, to be at once anticipatory and elegiac. A girl sits at the kitchen table, doing her Latin translation, chewing her pencil, and writing: "You must not ask, it is forbidden for us to know—what fate has in store for me, or for you." Munro's characters, like us, don't know what fate has in store either, but she often lets us look ahead and find out.

The slow-burning fuse that is a Munro story frequently hides, then exposes, something violent, shameful, or sensational. Down-and-out characters struggling on the edges, psychopathic killers, vindictive children or vengeful old people, abused women, passionately self-abnegating lovers, irresponsible adulterers, horrible acts of cruelty, startlingly show up inside these domestic, realistic narratives. "Southern Ontario Gothic," this gets called, though the luridness of "Gothic" doesn't quite fit the remarkable mixture of savage extremes and formal control.

The mixture is at full blast in the first story in the selection, “The Love of a Good Woman” (1996), which follows one of Munro’s favorite structures, or plots, the slow uncovering of a secret act of violence, emerging from an environment where there is too much surveillance, too much unspoken knowledge, too many collaborations in silence, too much shame. In this story, the corpse of a small-town optometrist is found in his car in an icy river by a gang of boys, and the secret story of his murder is revealed, as unpleasantly as possible, to the nurse of a malevolent dying woman. The vindictiveness of the characters in this story can take your breath away:

Once a woman had asked Enid to bring her a willow platter from the cupboard and Enid had thought that she wanted the comfort of looking at this one pretty possession for the last time. But it turned out that she wanted to use her last, surprising strength to smash it against the bedpost.

“Now I know my sister’s never going to get her hands on that,” she said.

And there’s the heart of the magic: the voice of the speakers, and the voice of the narrator who has them speak. From the start, Munro has been brilliant at this, but in the late stories she has developed an extraordinary elastic fluency, a way of moving without any apparent effort between vividly distinctive local voices, and the sense of someone talking to themselves, or repeating a tale, and something more resonant and contemplative. So we hear, very exactly, as if in our ear, the voice of flattening, down-putting comment, the voice of know-all neighbors, the voice of score-settlers:

You want to know what Alfrida said about you?… She said you were smart, but you weren’t ever quite as smart as you thought you were…. She said you were kind of a cold fish. That’s her talking, not me. I haven’t got anything against you.

In the simplest of words, and with the greatest of power, she makes us see and hear an “unremarkable” scene we will never forget:

Across from my father is the bed of another old man, who has been removed from it and placed in a wheelchair. He has cropped white hair, still thick, and the big head and frail body of a sickly child. He wears a short hospital gown and sits in the wheelchair with his legs apart, revealing a nest of dry brown nuts. There is a tray across the front of his chair, like the tray on a child’s high chair. He has been given a washcloth to play with. He rolls up the washcloth and pounds it three times with his fist. Then he unrolls it and rolls it up again, carefully, and pounds it again. He always pounds it three times, one at each end and once in the middle. The procedure continues and the timing does not vary.

“Dave Ellers,” my father says in a low voice.

“You know him?”

“Oh sure. Old railroad man.”

The old railroad man gives us a quick look, without breaking his routine. “Ha,” he says, warningly.

My father says, apparently without irony, “He’s gone away downhill.”

We are not going to be allowed to look away from “real life.” Nor is the narrator going to let herself off the hook, about what can be forgiven, what must be regretted, what needs to be told. In some of the most moving stories, we hear the narrative voice asking questions of herself, returning to her own life as to an unresolved problem. In “Soon,” the daughter, as usual, revisits the family home while the father is looking after the increasingly frail and demented mother. The daughter holds the mother at bay; if she doesn’t, she feels she will be sucked in, will never get out or get back to her own life. The mother, Sara, says to the daughter, Juliet, in a shaky voice that at the time seems to the daughter “strategically pathetic”:

“When it gets really bad for me—when it gets so bad I—you know what I think then? I think, all right. I think—Soon. Soon I’ll see Juliet.”

But the daughter does not reply, and will look back on this moment, later, with desolating self-reproach. Writing it as though she is talking to herself out loud, Munro folds the unbearable emotion, with great beauty, tact, and sorrow, into the everyday:

When Sara had said, soon I’ll see Juliet, Juliet had found no reply. Could it not have been managed? Why should it have been so difficult? Just to say Yes. To Sara it would have meant so much—to herself, surely, so little. But she had turned away, she had carried the tray to the kitchen, and there she washed and dried the cups and also the glass that had held grape soda. She had put everything away.

CONCLUSION

In the given qualification work I tried to explore the greatness of Alice Munro as one of the great women short story writers in the 20th century and beyond not only in Canada but also in the English speaking world as a whole.

In the course of writing the qualification work I tried firstly have a closer look at the Canadian short story writing and Alice Munro's place in this realm.

According to our research results we may suggest that a typical situation in a Munro story is that a woman's predicament, in some family or social situation—something that seems trivial, or everyday-ish—will explode into a major problem. For example, in "Runaway," Carla lies to her husband, Clark, telling him how her employer's husband lured her to his bed. This sexually excites them both, initially, but then leads to something more threatening. Carla tries to solve the issue by running away, and the choices she makes lead her and Clark to discovery.

It becomes clear that Munro is a good psychologist when you see how often her characters have to act out a solution before they can think it out. That's the human condition—we feel our way through a situation. We rely on interaction and imagination before we find the rational path. In other words, intermediate irrationality must often precede rational behavior. This is an unpopular idea in a world of computer logic, but we need writers with Munro's scope and talent, especially in our time. We go to literature, and to art generally, for explanation—we're hungry for it. Munro has the courage to show that modern life is almost senseless and inexplicable, and she proves that it's more complex than we can bear to know.

She is a master of representing how the mind works, how we come to truths through strange pathways; how all of our mental experience—lying,

concealing, denying, free-associating, and rationalizing—leads to discovery, to revelation, if we cooperate with our powers of imagination, intuition, and impulse—those "glories" that are described by the Romantic poets. Acting out our petty behaviors is part of struggling toward insight and revelation, if only we can cooperate with our powers; if we are not bludgeoned into ignoring them. We all lie and conceal things, and there will always be thoughts we don't say aloud; but reflecting upon these issues, even silently by ourselves, leads to discovery and an appreciation of how full of contradictions life is.

Munro reminds her readers that we must not let the walls of the prison-house grow around us, not let custom weigh on us, not see getting and spending as living. From Munro, we infer that we must make friends with our own intuition, our own imagination, our own naïveté.

I have tried to show that Alice Munro excels as a narrator of short fiction by using the characteristics of this type of prose creatively and freely. Some of Munro's best stories function on many levels: as good reads, as psychological profiles, as social comments, and as meta-narratives that demand active participation of the reader. This paper has dealt mainly with Munro's later work. A comparison to Munro's earlier stories and an analysis and discussion of the spatial expansion to quality-how the increasing length of her stories perhaps connect to more depth-would be only one good field for further investigation. Just as with reading her stories, one never finishes with analysing Munro's writing.

One of Harold Bloom's ten great short story writers, Hemingway, in an interview with George Plimpton 1958, described his approach to writing, his famous "top of the iceberg" analogy, as follows:

Prompted by this, I suggest a different image. Reading Alice Munro's stories is like trying to cross a river by jumping from float to float; separate stories may be connected or have been connected by way of motif,

topic, or character. The reader is never on safe ground, always aware of the movement or elasticity of time and space. Aware also, that more lies beneath the surface of every story told. Crossing over is a shaky experience that might not take you where you hoped to go. Nothing is quite as expected and you are likely to arrive at a different place than the one imagined when setting off. Yet it is a risk well worth taking.

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