CHAPTER - II

ALICE MUNRO : LIFE

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CHAPTER- II

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Alice Munro is described as “Canada’s Chekhov”, “Canada’s Flaubert”. She is a wonderful storyteller who has been called a writer’s writer and many writers both in Canada and outside of Canada do love and admire her work. But Alice Munro is also a reader’s writer. She writes with intelligence, depth, and compassion, carrying her readers with her in her explorations of character, in search of some kind of understanding – no neat resolutions, just trying to figure things out in an elegant, moving way.

Alice Munro was born in Wingham in south-western Ontario, in 1931. She grew up near the small town of Wingham in Huron County, Ontario in a red-brick farmhouse with her parents, a brother and a sister. She was a precocious child. As a child, Munro was constantly telling herself stories. One of the first was “The Little Mermaid”, by Hans Christian Anderson, whose ending she could not bear. The mermaid has to make a choice between killing the prince and going back to join her mermaid sisters, a decision that Munro thought was horribly unfair. Therefore, she made up a new, happy ending. Being the daughter of the farmers, she grew up in the open atmosphere, and imbibed each and minute thing of nature. She attended the Lower Town School and then the Winghum and District High School, where
she was a top student. As a child, Munro dreamed of becoming an actress, and at one time planned a Gothic novel to be called *Charlotte Muir*. In her teenage years, she worked in the summer as a maid for a family in the affluent Toronto neighbourhood of Rosedale.

In 1949, Munro received a scholarship to attend the University of Western Ontario in nearby London, where she studied journalism before changing to English. She published her first story “The Dimensions of a Shadow” in the university’s student literary magazine *Folio* in 1950.

She had so much confidence in herself, at the age of seventeen, that she thought she would like to marry Laurence Olivier, and believed that she would have no trouble “snagging him” if the two were somehow to meet. She grew up in such a place where women were not expected to read books except on Sunday, because the rest of time they could knit. Her father was an avid reader, however, and also a writer himself, later in life. Munro said that she thought her father was undaunted by the prospect of writing a book because “if Alice can do it there should be no problem” (1).

She married Jim Munro, a fellow student from Oakville, Ontario, in 1951. In 1953, the first daughter was born, and Munro also had her first magazine sale, publishing the story “A Basket of Strawberries” in *Mayfair*. In the 1950s and 1960s, she would
continue to publish stories in Canadian magazines. During the late 1950s, Munro worked on a novel, alternately entitled “Death of a White Fox” and “The Norwegian”, which was never finished. The story, “The Peace of Utrecht”, was inspired by the death of her mother. It was published in Robert Weaver’s *Tamarack Review* in 1960.


In addition to her short stories, Munro has also written television scripts. How “I Met My Husband” was televised in 1974. Again, in 2005, the same was dramatized as Historica Radio Minute. Her television plays are – *A Trip to the Coast* (1973), *Thanks for the Ride, CBC*, (1973), *The Irish* (1978). Many of Munro’s stories have been adapted for radio and film. The 1983 film version of one of her most anthologized stories, “Boys
“Lives of Girls and Women”, won an Oscar for short film in 1986. A television movie of Lives of Girls and Women was produced in 1994. Her stories have appeared in The New Yorker, Atlantic Monthly, The Paris Review, and other publications, and her collections have been translated into thirteen languages. At last, after a long period of her short story career, the authorities of Nobel Committee conferred her with the highest prize, known as The Nobel Prize for literature in October, 2013.

1.2 Review of Critical Literature on Alice Munro

Review of literature helps in designing the study and in finalizing the methodology for collecting reliable data. It provides a good outline to carry the study and the gaps remained in the studies. On the topic under study extensive work had been done but in very few studies the impact of landscape on its people had been touched. Present study may help in bringing this gap. Some of the relevant studies done in abroad are reviewed here.

Munro was a voluminous and a prolific writer. She is the author of fifteen collections of stories; she has also written television scripts. She has received many awards and prizes. She has been honoured with Booker Prize for her over all contribution to fiction on the world stage. Munro has done more than any living writer to demonstrate that the short story is an art form and not the poor relation of the novel. The limitation of space does not permit detailed attention to each of her critical books and articles.
An attempt, therefore, is made to indicate the range and quality by reference to the representative ones only.

A number of bibliographies were published since 1974, covering all critical material available on her name. “Alice Munro: An Annotated Bibliography” by Robert Thacker, in The Annotated Bibliography of Canada’s Major Authors: Volume Five, edited by Robert Lecker, and Jack David, Downsview, Ontario, ECW Press, 1984; “Alice Munro (1931- ) ” by Allan Weiss, in his A Comprehensive Bibliography of English – Canadian Short Stories, 1950-1983, Toronto, ECW Press, 1988. These are but only two examples of the many. However, they are representative in their attitude.

The list of the articles, the reviews, and critical books is so long that it cannot be given. Munro’s criticism of short stories accounts for a dissertation itself.

Munro’s first collection, Dance of the Happy Shades was highly acclaimed and won that year’s Governor General’s Award, Canada’s highest literary prize. This success was followed by Lives of Girls and Women, a collection of interlinked stories that was published as a novel. The book’s pre-publication title, Real Life, suggests Munro’s preoccupation with what constitutes the “real”, and how it might be represented in fiction. Lives won the Canadian Booksellers’ Award.
Who Do You Think You Are? is her next collection which bagged the Governor General’s Literary Award for a second time. Who Do You Think You Are? appeared outside of Canada as The Beggar Maid and was nominated for the Booker Prize. Its opening story, “Royal Beatings” had been published by The New Yorker in March 1977 and was the first of many Munro stories to appear first in that magazine. The Moons of Jupiter contains twelve stories that present whole landscapes and cultures, whole families of characters. New York Times writes: “witty, subtle, passionate, The Moons of Jupiter is exceptionally knowledgeable about the content and movement – the entanglements and entailments – of individual human feeling. And the knowledge it offers can’t be looked up elsewhere” (New York Times, 1982). The Progress of Love, which was published in 1986, bagged the Marian Engel Award. These stories are set predominantly in rural south-western Ontario, and further evince a preoccupation with region, the untold or nontellable, and the lives of women. The Progress of Love is a distillation of much of her work, exploring the problems of time and the narrator’s relation to it, in a prose that is perfectly instinct with wonder and compassion. It also won the Governor General’s Award. The Collections Friend of My Youth, Open Secrets, and The Love of a Good Woman, show her continuing development as a writer and extended her fame beyond Canada’s borders. In 1995, she won the W.H. Smith
Award in Britain and in 1999, the National Book Critics’ Circle Fiction Award in the U.S.. *Runaway* won the 2004 Giller Prize and the 2005 Commonwealth Writers Prize.


Munro’s stories frequently appear in publications such as *The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, Grand Street, Mademoiselle, and The Paris Review*. In interviews to promote her 2006 collection *The View from Castle Rock*, Munro suggested that she would, perhaps, not publish any further collections. She has since recanted and published further work. Her latest collection, *Too Much Happiness*, was published in August 2009.

Her story “The Bear Came over the Mountain” has been adapted for the screen and directed by Sarah Polley as the film *Away from Her*, starring Julie Christie and Gordon Pinsent. It successfully debuted at the 2006 Toronto International Film Festival. Polley’s adaptation was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, but lost to *No Country for Old Men*.

*Vintage Munro*, published in 2004, brings together stories spanning more than two decades of Munro’s career as a writer, called from five previous publications. Her daughter Sheila
Munro wrote a memoir entitled *Lives of Mothers and Daughters: Growing up with Alice Munro* (2002).

Munro’s stories often focus around coming of age tales and deal with rooted customs, traditions and family. However, her stories are not just for those who can identify, but also for anyone who understands human nature. Her characters are faulty yet real; her stories are filled with eloquent prose yet ordinary situations; they bring you into the lives of the characters without forcing the story onto the reader. It is this talent that makes Alice Munro not only a natural storyteller, but an incredible writer as well.

As it is already stated that within the scope of a dissertation one cannot make a comprehensive examination of every article, every periodical, every review and every critical book. The critics have done us the great favour of pointing new directions for others to pursue and have obligingly left us the opportunity to experiment with fuller applications of their analysis.

### 1.3 Formative Influences

Munro had a formidable influence of her parents, environment, books and various creative writers.

Mother is usually the first mapmaker in life. She encouraged Munro to explore and express. She was a school teacher. In her interview with Geoff Hancock, Munro speaks about her mother, as “Probably because I had a very intense relationship with my own mother. She became ill when I was
quite young” (215). Munro’s mother died of Parkinson’s disease. Munro was full of tension as her mother’s illness caused her restless and death imprinted on her psyche. The result was that Munro wrote her first real story on her mother. “Peace of Utrecht” was the first story which deals with the death of a mother. “Ottawa Valley” is a story about her. Munro tells Hancock: “It’s one story which is autobiographical. Most of my stories aren’t nearly as much as people think. But that is one. This is something I just keep going back to over and over again” (215). In her interview with Lisa Dickler Awano, Munro admits that she was inspired by the family for writing short stories. She, especially, referred to her father who was both a farmer and a writer. She observes: “My father wrote a book before he died, a novel about pioneer life. He had been a really hardworking man all his life, who had gone to high school for two or three years and had been very bright. But he got out into an agricultural life quite early and then in the last year of his life, he decided he wanted to write a book, so he did. His novel was rather conventional, but his feeling for language, which some people have to learn, was right there” (Internet: Lisa Dickler Awano: An Interview with Alice Munro, 2006, 9). Other members of the family who influenced Munro were “the wonderful aunts” (The Art of Fiction No. 37). Jeanne McCulloch and Mona Simpson asked Munro the influence of the aunts on her career. Munro responds:
My great aunt and my grandmother were very important in our lives. ---My mother was not in the role of the lead female in my life by that time, though she was an enormously important person; she wasn’t there as the person who set the standards anymore. So these older women moved into that role, and though they didn’t set any standards that I was at all interested in, there was a constant tension there that was important to me. (*The Art of Fiction* No. 137)

Munro came back to small-town south-western Ontario after a gap of twenty years. Twenty years passed, she was not able to forget her environment. She tells Eleanor Wachtel:

That’s one thing that did influence my writing – because I had written about growing up here, and I thought I was finished with anything about this area. When I moved back, I started seeing things entirely differently. I didn’t see them right away in present-day time, but I saw a lot of things that had to do with social class and the way people behave towards one another - things a child doesn’t see. So I wanted to go into that all over again. And that’s what I did. For me, personally, it was surprising. It was unexpected. (6)

A passage from “Walker Brothers Cowboy” reveals the impact of environment on Munro:
So my father drives and my brother watches the road for rabbits and I feel my father’s life flowing back from our car in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange, like a landscape that has an enchantment on it, making it kindly, ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine. (18)

Most of the stories are set in a fictionalized version of Huron County. The next influence is that of books, and various writers. In her interview with Jeanne McCulloch, Munro tells us about her reading, her preference of books and writers. To quote:

Reading was my life really, until I was thirty. I was living in books. The writers of the American South were the first writers who really moved me because they showed me that you could write about small towns, rural people, and that kind of life I knew very well. But the thing about the Southern writers that interested me, without my being really aware of it, was that all the Southern writers whom I really loved were women. --- I loved Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, Katherine Ann Porter, Carson McCullers. There was a Feeling that women could write about the freakish, the marginal. (1)
Munro read Carson McCullers, Flannery O’Connor, Eudora Welty. She had highest admiration for Eudora Welty. She was also influenced by Updike, Cheever, Joyce Carol Oates, Peter Taylor, William Maxwell, William Trevor, Edna O’Brien, Richard Ford, Mary Lavin, Willa Cather, Thomas Hardy, Wordsworth, Virginia Woolf and Chekhov and a number of others. She did not appreciate William Faulkner. She says, “I didn’t really like Faulkner that much” (Alice Munro, The Art of Fiction No.137). She was fond of reading the books such as The Brothers of Karamazov, One Hundred Years Solitude, and So Long, See You Tomorrow. She read all the time and was often struck by reading these books. Munro had a different inclination towards reading the short stories of Eudora Welty, Maxwell and Chekhov.

1.4 Rationale and Significance of the Study

The review of the recent Canadian short stories indicates that there is a wide scope for its study. Alice Munro, selected for research, belongs to the contemporary period. Munro began writing in her teens and published her first story in 1950 while studying in Western Ontario University. Munro has so far published one novel, Lives of Girls and Women (1971), and a few collections of short stories like Dance of the Happy Shades (1968), Something I’ve Been Meaning To Tell You (1974), Who Do You Think You Are? (1978), The Moons of Jupiter (1982),

Besides these collections of short stories, she has also written television scripts, including 1847: The Irish, broadcast on CBC in 1977, and the television play “How I Met My Husband”. In 1984 a cinematic adaptation of Munro’s early story “Boys and Girls” won an Academy Award in the live-action-short category.

The reputation of Munro as a brilliant short story writer goes beyond the borders of Canada. With one novel and more than eleven collections of short stories, she has established herself as a pioneering voice among Canadian fiction writers. The strength of her fiction arises partially from its vivid sense of regional focus – most of her stories being set in Huron County, Ontario. It is sometimes remarked that Munro’s fiction is nearer to autobiography than fiction and her themes have often been the dilemmas of adolescent girls coming to terms with families and small towns. Munro reached the peak of her achievement in the 1970s. “Among The women writers of Canada (Anglophone) she ranks with – pardon my levity – “The three Maggies” of Canada –
Margaret Atwood, Margaret Lawrence and Margaret Avison!” (S. Ramaswamy, 82).

Munro’s work is often compared with the great short story writers. For example, the American writer Cynthia Ozick called Munro “our Chekhov”. In Munro Stories, as in Chekhov’s, plot is secondary and “little happens”. As with Chekhov, Garan Holcombe notes: “All is based on the epiphanic moment, the sudden enlightenment, the concise, subtle, revelatory detail” (4). Munro’s work deals with “love and work, and the failings of both. She shares Chekhov’s obsession with time and our much – lamented inability to delay or prevent its relentless movement forward” (Garan Hulcombe, 7).

The collection of short stories has a common setting and characters. For this reason they have sometimes been called novels. They develop, however, as constellations of significant incidents rather than as continuous narratives.

The short stories of Munro invited a number of awards, prizes and publicity. She is a winner of the 2009 Man Booker International Prize for her lifetime body of work. Munro has won virtually every prize available to a Canadian short story writer, from three Governor - General’s Awards, starting with her very first book, Dance of the Happy Shades, in 1968, to the American National Book Critics Circle Award, the Trillium and two Giller Prizes. She was the first Canadian to win the PEN/ Malamad
Award for Excellence in short fiction, and the Rea Award for the
Short Story. She also received The Canadian – Australia Literary
Prize (1977), and the first winner of the Marian Engel Award
(1986). Her collections can be read in thirteen languages.

Scanty attention has been paid to the delineation of
landscape in her short stories. Munro remarks that landscape just
has an awful lot to do with all literature. Commenting on the
significance of landscape, Munro observes: “I think *Wuthering
Heights* couldn’t have been written coming from any other
landscape” (Laurie Kruk, 7). On her portrayal of landscape, she
says, “I couldn’t possess any other landscape or country or lake or
town in this way. And I realize that now, so I’ll never leave”
(Jeanne McCulloch, 2). There is great opportunity and wide scope
for research on the portrayal of landscape in the short stories of
Munro. Hence, the researcher would like to analyse and assess the
portrayal of landscape in the light of the theoretical context.

1.5 Munro’s Creed of Writing

At the age of twelve, Munro launched her career on
composing poems. She sent her poems to a publisher under an
assumed name. As the poems “Were not very good, they were all
sent back” (188). It was never her intention to be exclusively a
short story writer; she thought she would write novels like
everyone else. But now she acknowledges that she “doesn’t see
things in the proper way to write a novel” (1). She likes to see to
the end of each piece, to know that she will be done by say, Christmas, and she does not know how writers work on such long and open-ended projects as novels. “You might die while writing a five-hundred page novel” (1). She did not have that much literary energy to write the novel. She decided to write the short story because short story, like a lyric or a song, unlocks “our secret selves” (188).

Munro formulates her own theory of writing short story. She has her own knack of writing. Hancock wanted to know from her whether she would follow the tradition of writing story. She answered Hancock in the following words:

I’m not interested in any literary tradition. ---Right now, all that matters to me is making a new story. It’s as if I had never made any in the past. When that story’s finished, it’s only the new one that will matter. That’s why I can’t talk about myself developing as a writer. I don’t see a career. Because I look at things this way. I also don’t see a tradition. It’s probably all there but I have to concentrate so hard just on this little bit that I’ve got hold of. I have to work very hard to be a writer. (188)

She had her own method of storytelling. She observes: “I want to tell a story, in the old – fashioned way – what happens to somebody - but I want that ‘what happens’ to be delivered with
quite a bit of interruption, turn rounds, and strangeness. I want the reader to feel something is astonishing” (1).

Recently Munro has recorded her discomfort with the term “short story”, and has claimed simply to be writing “stories”. Munro has argued for stories not as linear narratives but as created worlds:

I don’t take up a story and follow it as if it were a road, taking me somewhere, with views and neat diversions along the way. I go into it, and move back and forth and settle here and there, and stay in it for a while. It is more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows---. (Knopf, 5)

She further adds:

---. At first, I did not know what to write about at all, because I had not really thought about what a story was. But then I thought about the way that I read, which --- is going into the story anywhere. I can tell in a couple of sentences how I feel about a story. Then, I go on reading, and I read frontwards, backwards, all over. It is just like being enclosed in the story and seeing things outside the story in a different way – through the windows of that
house. And it is not at all like following a path to see what happens. Quite often, I know what happens as soon as I start reading it. Maybe not the twists the plot will take, but the real story. In my story “Hateship, Friendship, ---” the plot is rather important, but often in a story the plot really is not the most important element.

(Knopf, 5)

Regarding form and structure of short stories, Munro says:

I did write Lives of Girls and Women, which is kind of a novel, but it’s in sections like stories. So why do I like to write short stories? Well, I certainly did not intent to. I was going to write a novel. And still! I still come up with ideas for novels. And I even start novels. But something happens to them. They break up. I look at what I really want to do with the material, and it never turns out to be a novel. --- so I wrote in bits and pieces with a limited time expectation. Perhaps I got used to thinking of my material in terms of things that worked that way. --- But I still did not write a novel, in spite of good intentions.

(Knopf, 7)

Regarding the length of the stories, opinions vary. The critics of short story opine that the short story should be short, brief and precise. But the story of James Joyce “The Dead”, published in Dubliners, runs pages together. Munro, too, has her opinion about
the length of the story. She says, “There are some things that you can accomplish in thirty pages, and some things you can not accomplish in thirty pages. Actually, my short stories are generally fairly long short stories. If I have something to say, I just keep on until I have said it, and then that is the end. Length suits the “statement”. Then I try to get a string to put the beads on, so that I will have a necklace at the end, rather than beads rattling round in a box” (Laurie Kruk, 2). A “good” short story may have as much “value” as a “long” novel. Length is not as important as quality, precision, accessibility, etcetera. Better to be “good” than merely “long”.

Munro works hard to make the story seems true. She tries to create an illusion of reality. When the Ancient Mariner tells his tale, it sounds pretty true. Alice Munro’s phrase is “Not true but real, not real but true” (Laurie Kruk, 8). She further adds, “What I think of, in terms of realistic writing, is: telling the truth as I happen to see it. I think Raymond Carver calls it “bringing the news”. I do not see myself doing “romantic” writing. I am satisfied enough with realistic writing” (8).

1.6 Hypothesis

The short stories of Alice Munro are marked by the use of rural and urban landscapes which play a predominant role in shaping the lives of the people.

1.7 Aims and Objectives of the Study
The main object of the study is to explore the portrayal of landscape in the short stories of Alice Munro.

1.8 Methodology

As it is an interdisciplinary research which deals with landscape and literature simultaneously, it naturally adopts interdisciplinary approach in its treatment of characters and themes depicted in the thirteen collections of Munro’s short stories. The methodology used for the present study is that of literary review followed by analytical, explanatory, interpretative and comparative methods. To begin with, the first chapter discusses the theoretical aspect. The researcher has opted the thirteen collections of short stories to analyse and assess the stories in the light of the theoretical aspect, that is, Munro’s landscape. The second chapter discusses the life and career of Munro chapter III, IV and V analyse the short stories. While analysing them, a care is taken to apply the parameters that are listed and explained in the first chapter. These chapters also adopt the method of interpretation and explanation. Comparison between stories is done where it is necessary to make the analysis more relevant and contextual. The last chapter records the findings of the researcher based on the short stories analysed. Comparative method is adopted in this chapter to arrive at a satisfactory and reliable conclusion. Regarding the style sheet, the study follows the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition) published by EWP, New Delhi, 2009.
1.9 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study of portrayal of landscape in the short stories of Munro is so vast and exhaustive that till date there are many writers such as Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Marvis Gallant, Margaret Avison, Marcia Kline and a host of others who have portrayed landscape in their writings. The theoretical context given in the second chapter proves to be a guide line for analysis of portrayal of landscape in the short stories of Alice Munro. In her several interviews, Munro makes clear the creed of her writings. As the scope is vast, the researcher, for want of space, gives a cursory glance of the portrayal of landscape in her short stories. It’s just a trailer of the highly enriched and qualitatively produced portrayal of landscape in short stories. This automatically brings limitations to the undertaking research study. Due to time and space constraint, the researcher has to delimit her study to some of the most portrayal of landscape of Munro. Munro presents realistically and graphically the portrayal of landscape of Ontario, a small town in Canada.
CHAPTER – III

THE FIRST PHASE :
USE OF LANDSCAPE
CHAPTER III
THE FIRST PHASE: USE OF LANDSCAPE

6. Dance of the Happy Shades (1968)


8. Something I’ve Been Meaning To Tell You
(1974)

9. The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose
(1978)

OR

Who do You Think You Are?


1.4 Introduction

1.5 “What is real?”

1.6 Tradition of writing linked stories

1.6.1 Regionalism as a defining feature of Canadian literature

1.6.2 Munro as a regionalist

1.6.3 The role of Landscape
CHAPTER- III

1.1 Introduction

Alice Munro is mainly a short story writer. She has a knowledgeable vision of time and places. There is an everyday quality in her writing. She uses the first person and omniscient narrative. Her narrators are at times first person retrospective. Some of her stories are memoirs, while others are autobiographical and still others make use of personal material. Most of the stories are based on her own experiences, some of her stories are epiphanic where there are revealed meanings. Her stories, especially those in LGW and WDY are linked and in the Bildungsroman category.

Most of her stories are local colour stories. They bear the flavour and colour of British Columbia, Toronto and other parts of Ontario. But she is closely identified with rural south-western Ontario. Whatever be the place where she locates her characters and episodes, she recreates the place and people by a complete detailing of all that the sense might register. She follows the technique of photographic realism which the American short story writer Eudora Welty has successfully practised. She describes circumstances in straightforward realistic language.

The photographer as an artist needs to record and reproduce reality as closely as possible. This aspect is witnessed in the writing of Munro. Stories that illustrate these are the town and people descriptions in Munro’s LGW and WDY.

Discussing this aspect of photography one is reminded of John Berger and Jean Bohr’s statement:
A photograph arrests the flow of time in which the event existed. All photographs are of the past, yet in them an instant of the past is arrested so that, a lived past, it can never lead to the present. Every photograph presents us with two messages: a message concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity. (86)

Del in LGW too makes this point when she writes about the photographer in her story:

People saw that in his pictures they had aged twenty or thirty years. Middle-aged people saw in their own features the terrible growing, inescapable likeness of their dead parents; young fresh girls and men showed what gaunt or dulled or stupid faces they would have when they were fifty. (269)

Thus, what one does notice in the work of Munro is the depiction of being able to look at the oddity of life and her ability to comment on the life of the people. Susan Suntag remarks that the camera has the power to catch so-called normal people in such a way as to make them look abnormal. “The photographer chooses oddity, chases it, frames it, develops it, titles it...” (131). The photographer is able to reveal the emotions and the feelings of the personality by a careful and artistic use of the camera. Munro, in her works, displays such artistic ability.

Munro also shares similar concerns about photography. In an interview with Hancock, she comments: “I like looking at people’s
lives over a number of years, without continuity. Like catching them in snapshots.” She further emphasizes “I don’t see that people develop and arrive somewhere. I just see people living in flashes. From time to time. And this is something you do become aware of as you go into middle. --- Mostly in my stories I like to look at what people don’t understand” (89-90).

1.2 “What is Real?”

In her short essay “What is Real?”, Munro compares the functions of a story to that of a house. It is worth noting that this essay was written by Munro in 1982, in the wake of the controversy aroused in Wingham, her native small town, after the publication of *Who Do You Think You Are?* (particularly “Royal Beatings”). Many people were offended by the way she had fictionalized their provincial reality and, last but not least, called them “a community of outcasts” in an interview. In December, 1981, in the *Wingham Advance – Times* an editorial expressed all the rage of Wingham people who felt so “Mistreated” by Munro.

In response to this harsh criticism, Munro wrote a short essay where she defended her position as a writer of fiction, who uses “bits of what is real, in the sense of being really there and really happening, in the world” (Munro 1982, 226), and transforms it “into something that is really there and really happening in [her] story” (226). To better explain how this “transformation” of reality into story works, she used the metaphor of a house:

--- I don’t take up a story and follow it as if it were a road, taking me somewhere, with views and neat diversions
along the way. I go into it, and move back and forth and settle here and there, and stay in it for a while. It’s more like a house. Everybody knows what a house does, how it encloses space and makes connections between one enclosed space and another and presents what is outside in a new way. This is the nearest I can come to explain what a story does for me, and what I want my stories to do for other people. (Munro 1982, 224)

Munro stresses the process of building up and the “Material” used:

I’ve got to build up, a house, a story, to fit around the indescribable “feeling” that is the soul of the story, ---Then I start accumulating the material and putting it together. Some of the material I may have lying around already, in memories and observations, and some I invent ---.(Munro 1982, 224)

It is easy to note that for Munro what really matters is the structure of the story, “the house”, where she, the author, can “move back and forth, and settle--- for a while”. The accent is on the craft of writing (which is equated to building a house) and the writer’s personality. This leads to writing about oneself, and inventing stories starting from actual deeds and characters. The house is an inner space from which she can look at “what is outside” in a different way, so that what she sees from her window is and is not Wingham: it is Wingham as Jubille or Carstairs or Hauratty or West Hanaratty.

1.3 Tradition of Writing Linked Stories
The Canadian English writers show a tendency to write linked stories. Though this tendency is as old as the oral tradition of the short tale the modern practitioners have tried it only sporadically. Turginev in a few series of lyrical stories about Russian countryside has experimented with the story cycles. Sherwood Anderson’s short story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) is an obvious paradigm of modern short story cycle. In Canada, linked stories have ensured more weight and narrative interest than the unconnected stories.

Among the short story writers of Canada who have substantial contribution to this genre, Munro occupies a prominent place. Her works embody certain elements that are crucial to the understanding of a typical Canadian short story. The amalgam of influences and conditions that prevail in the latter half of the present century is discernible in her stories.

Her first collection of short stories, *Dance of The Happy Shades*, was published in 1968, and it got the Governor General’s award. 1971 saw the release of the collection, *Lives of Girls and Women* and in 1974, her third collection, *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You* was published. This was followed by *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978), which was also chosen for the Governor General’s Award. (This Collection was published with a different title in the United States – *The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose*, and it was the runner-up for the Booker Prize). Her fifth collection, *The Moons of Jupiter* was released in 1982.
Of these five collections, *LGW* and *WDY* are sequence stories, that is, they are “a volume of stories, collected and organized by their author, in which the reader successively realizes underlying pattern and theme” (Robert M. Luscher, 148). Munro has described *LGW* as a novel. Munro herself has admitted to writing the parts at different times and not continuously in a sequence as a novel is generally done. Moreover critics have viewed it both as a collection of short stories and as a novel, thereby endowing an ambivalent identity of this book.

With these ideas in mind, let us see how landscape has been portrayed in these collections.

1.3.1 Regionalism as a Defining Feature of Canadian Literature

Canada’s vast distances, natural barriers, diverse patterns of settlement, and locally specific histories have led many commentators to see regionalism as a defining feature of Canadian culture. George Woodcock articulated a widely held view when he asserted that Canadian literary traditions have always been fundamentally regional, developing differently in different parts of the country. In the preface to *The Bush Garden* (1971), Northrop Frye stressed the importance of regions to the creative imagination, arguing that an imagination conditioned by prairie stretching to the horizon would develop differently from one shaped by the huge mountains and trees of British Columbia or by the churning sea around Newfoundland. According to these influential literary critics
the experience of living in a vast country of strikingly different landscapes has inevitably led Canadian writers to assert a primary imaginative allegiance to specific regions rather than to the whole country.

Regionalism has long been regarded as a key to understanding Canadian literature, just as it has been recognized as a characteristic of the best American writing which is rooted distinctively in New England, the Midwest, or the South. The diverse and overpowering landscapes and sharply marked seasons of Canada predictably dominate works written in pioneer times, such as Susanna Moodie’s celebrated and querulous *Roughing It in the Bush* (1971). In the contemporary period, too, the fiction of Canada’s leading writers – including Margaret Lawrence, Rudy Wiebe, Jack Hodgins, and Alice Munro – is marked by a compelling and authentic sense of place, which, in each case, describes and defines a circumscribed, particular, geographic and psychic space. Like Southern American writers (William Faulkner or Eudora Welty, for example) whose range of place is as limited as their field of focus is deep, many Canadian authors find value as Munro does, in “Writing about places where your roots are” (John Metcalf 56).

In all her five collections, namely, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Something I’ve Been Meaning To Tell You*, *The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose*, and *Who Do You Think You Are? The Moons of Jupiter*, Munro defines rural South western Ontario, and specifically Wawanash County, drained by the seasonally flooding Wawanash River in much the same
manner as Faulkner uses his mythic Yoknapatawpha County, Welty interprets limited settings in Mississippi, or Flannery O’ Connor and Carson McCullers recreate the daily life of small-town Georgia. That Munro’s inspiration springs from the Ontario landscape is emphasised by comments she has made in interviews about her work. In her interviews, she frankly confesses that she is a regional writer. To John Metcalf she freely confesses: “I am certainly a regional writer in that whatever I do I seem only to make things work --- if I use this ---plot of land that is mine” (56). In an interview with Graeme Gibson, she has remarked: “--- I grew up in a rural community, a very traditional community --- The concern of everyone else I knew was dealing with life on a very practical level---” (1). In this way she shares much with Welty, whom she identifies as “probably my favourite writer” (Mari Stainsby 29). Like Faulkner, Welty recognizes a sustaining connection with Mississippi as “the named, identified concrete, exact and exacting and, therefore, credible, gathering spot of all that has been felt” (Welty 62).

Munro shares with other regional writers the need to write about characters from her own place and time. In fact, much of Munro’s fiction is nearly autobiographical. She admitted to Metcalf that *Lives of Girls and Women* is autobiographical. “In emotion completely--- in incident up to a point --- Some is invented but the emotional reality, the girl’s feeling for her mother, for men, for life is all --- it’s all solidly autobiographical” (58). Self awareness, identity, history, myth, and sense of place are all tied together in her
writing. Typically, Munro writes about characters whose protestant-Irish-Scottish heredity persuades them to cling together, tribe-like, and not range far from their home ground.

1.3.2 Munro as a Regionalist

Munro has categorically admitted to several of her early interviewers that she is a regionalist. But as time passed, she gave twisting to her thoughts. She was not willing to accept the remarks of the critics. She remarks:

---I don’t like to be described as a regional writer. I’m annoyed sometimes when people think I write about a sort of idyllic life or a sort of pastorale, because I’m seen as someone who writes about small towns in the country. It almost seems to be by accident that I write about those people, because I know their houses, and I know certain things about their lives. But I don’t think of them as particularly different from people you might find elsewhere in the world. It’s just something I do without thinking about it. Nearly everybody I write about lives in a place where I have once lived. So maybe I’m not very good about imagination. (Online, 5)

Munro speaks to Alfred A. Knopf in a different tone:

To me, the region is important just because I feel it so vividly, but I don’t think I’m writing experiences that are limited to that region. I think if I had grown up somewhere else on the continent, I would be using that as my setting and perhaps certain things about the characters would be
different.--- When I read---Edna O’Brien’s stories of her youth in Ireland, I feel a tremendous connection. I don’t really think the main thing about a story, ever, is to bring a region to life. I think it’s just to bring what you know of life to life. And people have regions everywhere – some regions may not be seen as regions---. (Online 4-5)

In another interview, Munro speaks about the physical setting and different sorts of people. She also speaks about her inclination towards landscape. To quote her:

I don’t think of myself as being in any way on interpreter of rural Ontario, where I live. I think there’s perhaps an advantage living here of knowing more different sorts of life than you would know in a large community.--- The physical setting is perhaps “real” to me, in a way no other is. I love the landscape, not as “scenery” but as something intimately known. Also the weather, the villages and towns, not in their picturesque aspects but in all phases.--- (online 2)

1.3.3 The Role of Landscape

Munro, later in her interviews, speaks more frankly about the role of landscape. In her interviews with Laurie Kruk and Harold Harwood, Munro speaks about the fascination of place and treatment of landscape in her stories. To quote Harwood:

Oh well *Wuthering Heights* was the BIG influence --- things in *Wuthering Heights* delighted me, not the romanticism but the things that she did about the farm, the
house, the fields --- It was the way I could visualize everything – the way I was really living in that house.

(Harwood interview 124)

Munro’s fascination with place in *Wuthering Heights* is reflected in her own treatment of landscape in most of her collections of short stories. In her interview with Laurie Kruk, she is more reflective about the landscape. While speaking on the worries and concerns of people, she says that “they [worries or concerns of people] are specific to a certain landscape.” She further adds “I think landscape just has an awful lot to do with all literature. I think *Wuthering Heights* could not have been written coming from any other landscape” (Laurie Kruk 7). It appears from her various interviews that different landscapes suggest different stories or characters.

A large part of Munro’s life is her connection to Canada, thus much of her work goes into great detail to share the experience of it with her characters and her readers. She both explains the feelings aroused from the environment and metaphorically transports the readers into the story.

Critics consequently argue various theories concerning the means by which Munro conveys the landscape and the significance of it. Three critics that analyse Munro’s landscape each reveal separate understanding of how the setting comes across to the reader. Lorraine Mary York, Beverly Rasporich and Andrew Stubbs challenge different perspectives, but ultimately all three ways of interpreting Munro’s landscape offer valuable insight toward fully
comprehending the short stories. In Munro’s short stories her attention to detail depicted in the setting jointly refract the characters’ innermost feelings, as well as immerse the reader inside the story in a photographic and paradoxical way.

In Munro’s description of the setting York informs us how Munro communicates it in such a way that it is as if the reader is looking at a photograph. Although York is not the first to mention that Munro’s work does this, she explains it in a way that draws on the commentary of Munro herself, and of the evidence within Munro’s short stories. She looks at the stories of Munro as each having a specific type of photographic style whether it is realist, super-realist or visionary and examines compared to actual pictures and their photographer. While this approach perceives Munro to be an artist when writing, Rasporich understands her landscape and setting to be less a piece of art and more an expression of the emotions unravelling at the moment. This theorist forgoes the photographic approach to explain that the “landscape imagery is a metaphor for the actual situation” (“Dance”, 133). Lastly, Stubbs states that in looking at Munro’s landscape she juxtaposes reality and fantasy. His argument in a way combines the ideas of the first two theorists. The details as a photographic image that York attests represent the more realist side of the Canadian country and the details as metaphorically implying a greater meaning that Rasporich believes represent the more functional side of Stubb’s claim. Yet, he also adds that in Munro’s writing she becomes the architect of the
Many of Munro’s stories are set in Huron County, Ontario. Her strong regional focus is one of the features of her fiction. Many compare Munro’s small-town settings to writers of the U. S. rural South. As in the works of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O’ Connor, her characters often confront deep-rooted customs and traditions. Her first collection, Lives of Girls and Women, written in the peculiar genre of the open-structured novel, is a “self portrait of a young woman as a young artist in rural South-western Ontario” (J. R. Struthers 197). It focuses on Del Jordon from age eight to eighteen as she experiences joy and agony in religious faith, education, sex, and passionate love. Throughout, the reader watches the development of the artist as she rejects her Uncle Graig’s dull family history, only belatedly realizing that she, too, “would want to write things down” (LGW 201). In the beginning of the novel, Del attempts to break from the family by rebelling against a past she wishes to escape; but by its conclusion she craves the details of her roots and of the town, Jubilee, just as passionately as she denied them earlier.

With photographic realism Munro creates a mini-universe in Jubilee, including a protagonist who quests for knowledge and a mythic Wawanash County replete with lists of historical and genealogical data. Jubilee, the town where Dell grows up, is typical of South-western Ontario towns bland and pragmatic when viewed
in one light, but suggestive of legend and fights of imagination when seen from a different perspective:

Jubilee was visible from a rise about three miles away on the No. 4 Highway. Between us and it lay the river flats, flooded every spring, and the hidden curve of the Wawanash River, and the bridge over it, painted silver, hanging on the dusk like a cage. The No. 4 Highway was also the main street of Jubilee. We could see the towers of the post office and the Town Hall Facing each other, the Town Hall with its exotic cupola hiding the legendary bell-- and the post office with its clock tower, square, useful, matter-of fact. The Town lay spread almost equidistantly on either side of the main street. Its shape, which at the time of our return would usually be defined in lights, was seen to be more or less that of a bat, one wing lifted slightly, bearing the water tower, unlighted, indistinct, on its tip. (LGW 77)

In defining “place”, landscapes play an important role. In Munro’s fiction there are two main types of landscapes, urban and rural; but also important is the zone in between, where several of her adolescent protagonists live. For example, Del Jordan lives “at the end of the Flats Road” (LGW 10), while Nadine in the story “Royal Beatings” lives “across a bridge from the main part of the town” (12). Situated between town and country, Del’s house symbolises her existence in a limbo between two societies, urban and rural. Del comments on the ambiguity of Flats at the outset of Lives of Girls

Raw Text: Jubilee was visible from a rise about three miles away on the No. 4 Highway. Between us and it lay the river flats, flooded every spring, and the hidden curve of the Wawanash River, and the bridge over it, painted silver, hanging on the dusk like a cage. The No. 4 Highway was also the main street of Jubilee. We could see the towers of the post office and the Town Hall Facing each other, the Town Hall with its exotic cupola hiding the legendary bell-- and the post office with its clock tower, square, useful, matter-of fact. The Town lay spread almost equidistantly on either side of the main street. Its shape, which at the time of our return would usually be defined in lights, was seen to be more or less that of a bat, one wing lifted slightly, bearing the water tower, unlighted, indistinct, on its tip. (LGW 77)

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and Women: “The Flats Road was not part of town but it was no part of the country either. The curve of the river, and the Greenech Swamp, cut it off from the rest of the township to which it nominally beloved” (9).

The Jordon Farm, where Del’s father raises foxes, is identified as a “place” that is different, and her father’s occupation is depicted as unusual like the Patter boys’ bootlegging business also on Flats Road.

Del spent her childhood days at Uncle Benny’s untidy, rural house. Uncle Benny’s world is the real agrarian countryside. Del was seen happily catching frogs for her Uncle Benny in Greenech Swamp. The house where Del is living is “tall and silvery, old unpainted boards, bleached dry in the summer, and dark green blinds, cracked and torn, pulled down over all the windows” (LGW 62). Del is disturbed when she discovered that the house of her Uncle Benny contains misfits like Madeline, the deranged wife. In the short story, “Images”, Joe Phippen’s “hole in the ground” house similarly blends the good and the bad:

It was all one room, an earth floor with boards not nailed together, just laid down to make board paths for walking, a stove on a sort of platform, table, couch, chairs, even a kitchen cupboard, several thick, very dirty blankets of the type used in sleighs and to cover horses. Perhaps if it had not had such a terrible smell – of coal oil, urine, earth and stale heavy air – I would have recognized it as the sort of place I would like to live in myself, like the houses I made
under snow drifts, in winter, with sticks of firewood for
furniture. (DHS 40)

In the novel, the young protagonist seeks “real life”, first through
religious faith, then through education. Rejecting Flats Road which
is peopled with misfits, bootleggers, and idiots, Del strives to find
acceptance within Jubilee, a conventional world of organized
society and rules. It is not easy for Del to embrace town life and turn
her back on the rural scene. She, however, struggles hard to make
settlement at her new town life. She refers to “the order, the
wholeness, the intricate arrangement of town life that only an
outsider could see” (LGW 78-79). Del remains an outsider in
Jubilee, embarrassed and ill at ease in each new situation, and she
confesses: “I missed the nearness of the river and the swamp also
the real anarchy of winter, blizzards that shut us up tight in our
house as if it were the Ark” (LGW 31).

Worlds within worlds exist in Jubilee itself. There is Del’s
mother’s world of “serious sceptical questions”, Naomi’s “real and
busy world”, in the high school commercial department, and the
image of Jubilee presented by citified Uncle Bill: “Jubilee seemed
not unique and permanent as I had thought, but almost makeshift
and shabby; it would barely do” (LGW 71). Throughout the novel,
Del tries to find world into which she fits best.

Del’s pursuit of knowledge and a university scholarship is
interrupted by Garnet French, who introduces her to the sensuous
world of sex and, simultaneously, returns her to her first love, the
country. When Garnet drives her out of town in his truck, they
“cross over, going into a country, where there was perfect security” (LGW 238). Visiting Garnet’s rural house, Del overcomes herself consciousness and pushes aside her reactions, which are surprisingly like those of her mother, as she tries to ignore “that gray smell of stewing chicken” (245). But, caught in a fantasy of romantic love, Del admits: “There’s no denying I was happy in that house” (247). This is the emotion felt by the protagonist, almost without exception, when she immerses herself in the rural world.

Even when Art Chamberlain drives her into the country to perform his grotesque act of masturbation, Del compares him merely to a puppet performing to satisfy her curiosity. The symbolic landscape is frankly erotic:

It was just now the richest, greenest time of year; ditches sprouted coarse daisies, toad flax, buttercups, hollows were full of nameless faintly golden bushes and the gleam of high creeks. I saw all this as a vast arrangement of hiding places, ploughed fields beyond rearing up like shameless mattresses. Little paths, opening in the bushes, crushed places in the grass, where no doubt a cow had lain, seemed to me specifically, urgently inviting as certain worlds of pressures. (LGW 185)

After his bizarre demonstration, Munro writes of a landscape containing feelings of disappointment and embarrassment. The landscape was postcoital, distant and meaningless (LGW 187). Through the experiences of Rose, Munro has brought Southern Ontario alive to the reader. By establishing a female identity
through regionality, she has also succeeded in transcending the predicament of marginality. In the title story of her 1973 collection *SMT*, Munro brings before our eyes – the rural and the urban landscape. The story evokes a modern society already caught up in a tourist industry, where a rural community can benefit economically from playing up to urban expectations about rural difference, as Blaikie Noble does by invoking a gothic narrative in his tours. Accordingly, because of this economic relationship, tourists always enjoy a degree of protection and distance even when aspire to achieve the “native” experience. Their experience is constrained by the fact that they are consumers whose business is needed by those telling the story. Accordingly, they participate in the production of the very space they are to consume since the experience is tailored for them. As Et says, a tour guide like Baikie “knows how to fascinate” (*SMT* 1) his clients with the right stories. To use another recurring word, Et is concerned about fit – explicitly in the case of her tailoring, but implicitly with regard to the tour. She senses that the story Blaikie tells his clients does not fit with her own sense of place, but it does fit with what they want to hear, especially urbanities from places like Toronto, “where from what Et had seen on the streets, nobody knew a good fit from a bad” (*SMT* 18).

The first story of the collection shows us about rural urban relations and the performance of place.

Excursion is another recurring word in *SMT*. Blaikie Noble enacts the sense of the word. The “local” judgement is that Blaikie should not have been “taken to California, let mix with all sorts of
people” (SMT 11). However, excursions have the ability to change us: “Ever since I went on that excursion, I hear things”, says Et (20). An excursion is by definition a journey that finishes in the same place that it began, and Munro’s story indeed refuses to pretend that it will forever transport us to some other destination. This is emphasized by the short story format: reading a Munro text is a series of excursions. J. Hillis Miller has defined “topology” as “topographical study of a particular place” (1995 16). Munro stories, then, are always engaged topologically. But the ways in which Munro carries out such a study bear consideration, since they indicate to what extent any community is knowable. Raymond Williams writes: “Most novels are in some sense knowable communities. It is part of a traditional method – an underlying stance and approach – that the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways” (1973 165). Munro does not have a straightforward relationship to this tradition, and challenges it continually in her fiction. Critics like Linda Hutcheon and Coral Ann Howells observe that Munro creates locations and characters so exactly. Yet at the same time, these stories could be anywhere – any small town. Munro maps the region with apparent casualness, the illusion at all times being that she assumes we know the town in which this story is happening. In SMT this revelation is achieved through a repetition of phrases. For example, Blaikie Noble’s name has appeared many times already in the story when he is referred to by the narrator as “Blaikie Noble, the hotel owner’s son” (SMT 7).
SMT volume differs from the earlier books. Of thirteen stories in the collection, six are set in Jubilee, and deal with the contemporary world. Seven stories are set in a big city, often Vancouver, and are concerned with urban life, adult experience, the complications of marriage and of the breakdown of the relationship, the barriers to communication between the sexes and between the generations, and other new material. Some of the stories, notably “Memorial” show the adult lives of people who have left Jubilee for the city, carrying with them Jubilee materialism and giving it wider scope and a more modern guise. June in “memorial” has devoted her life to the informed purchase and orderly maintenance of material objects, but when her son dies in a car accident – suicide is suggested -- these objects can not fill up the emptiness. In three of the autobiographical stories, “Memorial”, “Winter Wind”, and “The Ottawa Valley”, grown up daughters wrestle unsuccessfully with the ghost of the mother and her still unmet demands. In “Winter Wind” the narrator recalls her mother as a sort of artist manqué. She makes the same contrast between her mother’s world and her grandmother’s world that Del Makes in LGW, comparing her “mother’s world of serious sceptical questions --- and unsettling ideas” (186) with her aunts’ world of “work and gaiety, comfort and order, intricate formality” (187). In the last paragraph of the intense final story, “The Ottawa Valley”, the narrator says that her mother is the one of course that I am trying to get (SMT, 246): it is to reach her that this whole journey has been undertaken. With what purpose? To mark her off, to describe, to illuminate, to celebrate, to
get rid of her; and it did not work, for she looms too close, just as she always did” (SMT, 246). In these stories guilt is not gotten rid of, but it is recognized and accepted, which in itself can be a form of release.

The Moons of Jupiter contains eleven stories. As the title indicates, there is a greater geographical expansiveness than before: the collection includes stories set in Australia and New Brunswick. The title story deals fictionally with the death of Munro’s father, who died in 1976 after a heart operation. In “The Turkey Season” a girl learns to gut turkeys and wonders of a gay dalliance between her boss and an employee. The attempt to reclaim the past through a return journey figures in “The Stone in the Field” and “Accident”. The frailties of old age, so devastatingly revealed in “Spelling” of Who Do You Think You Are?, are once again examined in “Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd”, and touched upon in a lighter fashion in “Visitors”. The boundaries and limits of Puritanism in Huron County are defined in “The Stone in The Field” and “The Turkey Season”.

This collection is not, however, dominated by Huron County character types, or even by the return to Huron County of those who survived their childhood in that area. The representative protagonist of the book is a middle-aged woman.

“Dulse” focuses on the theme of love. Lydia has been dumped by a selfish academic lover and flees, as Rose might, to a New Brunswick island. There she finds three more male candidates for sexual favours – a young but experienced French Canadian, a
wistful middle-aged potato farmer, and their boss, an assertive and vulgar self-made man. Lydia is tempted to indicate her availability either to Eugene, the imploring boy, or Lawrence, the self-confident man of the Maritimes world: “In the past she might have done it --- Now it seemed not possible” (*MOJ* 50). Lydia rejects the professor and appreciates the rural gentleness of the farmer more than the more overt advances of his companions.

“Labor Day Dinner” is also a story with much to say about love, but it not focused upon the perceptions and reactions of a single protagonist. The story is focused on the contrasting sensibilities of two middle-aged women – Roberta and Valerie. Roberta, the victim of middle-aged “subtle withering”, feels she has “no clear moments of authority” in living with George – she has given up her work as an illustrator of children’s books in order to help him with his endless home improvement schemes. Valerie, the hostess, has been physically unattractive all her days, but thrives in an existence independent of love. Since her husband’s death, she has master minded her own house renovations, and her air of lively self-command contrasts with Roberta’s edigness. By the end of the story, Roberta feels that temporarily “she has power” in her relationship with George, but the reader is left with the impression that she, like Lydia, is doomed to be “up and down”. In general, the story opposes the volatile emotions of Roberta’s household to the more controlled, but also more limited, feelings of Valerie and her daughter Ruth, the inheritor of her virtues. The story presents these two responses to
life, making their consequences clear but not choosing between them.

The landscape changes with subtlety in Munro’s works, but the Wawanash River always dominates the natural scene. Sometimes the composition has the nightmare quality of a Bosch Canvas; other times it is surrealist with erotic, Daliesque colours. Munro features two “white” seasons: frigid winter and brutal summer. Each season provides evidence of the contrast between urban and rural settings. In Jubilee in winter “snow banks along the main street got to be so high that an archway was cut in one of them between the street and the sidewalk” (LGW 119). The young protagonist of the story “Winter Wind” views a more exciting snowscape in the country:

From my grandmother’s bedroom window you could look across the CPR tracks to a wide stretch of the Wawanash river, meandering in reeds. All frozen now all ice and untracked snow. Even on stormy days the clouds might break before supper time, and then there was a fierce red sunset. Like Siberia, my grandmother said, offended, you would think we were living on the edge of the wilderness. It was all forms, of course, and tame bush, no wilderness at all, but winter buried the fence posts. (SMT 192)

The regimented snow in town contrasts with the untouched naturalness of the rural winter scene, and as always, the river is visible only in the country.
Summer produces similar contrasts; the characters experience the heat as discomfort in the town but as pleasant balm in the country. The story “A Trip to the Coast” depicts the white heat of Ontario towns in summer” with no shade on the road and no creek nearby” (DHS 172). In the morning the fields, however, remain “damp and shadowy”, “thick with birds”, and the sky is “pale, cool, smoothly ribbed with light and flushed at the edges, like the inside of a shell” (DHS 174). By noon even in the country “you could not hear a cricket or a bird, but there was a low wind; a hot, creeping wind ---” (DHS 174). Munro uses the hot summer day as background for death, in the same way Southern American writers do; like them, too, she creates a richness of natural detail.

Just as urban and rural landscapes differ, town and country houses contrast in Munro’s fiction – in colour, concept, and feeling. Town houses conform to all the rules of Jubilee society. A typical town house is the grandmother’s house described in the story “Winter Wind” with all its hallway “all wood, polished, fragrant, smooth, cozys as the inside of a nutshell. A yellow lamp was on in the dining room” (SMT 193). A typical country house is Nadine’s in the story “Royal Beatings”; it is a house located behind her stepmother’s store, the whole becoming part of the landscape: “red brick with the veranda pulled off and the orchard, what was left of it, full of the usual outflow – car seats and washing machines and bedsprings and junk” (WDY 8).

By the end of Lives of Girls and Women, Del is determined to write a novel about Jubilee. Munro describes the frustrations and
difficulties of the writer-heroine who aspires to capture all the details of place:

I would try to make lists. A list of all the stores and businesses going up and down the main street and who owned them, a list of family names, names on the tombstones in the cemetery and any inscriptions underneath. A list of the titles of movies that played at the Lyceum Theatre from 1938 to 1950, roughly speaking. Names on the cenotaph (more for the First World War than for the second). Names of the streets and the pattern they lay in. The hope of accuracy we bring to such tasks is crazy, heart breaking. And no list could hold what I wanted for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together – radiant, everlasting. (LGW 276)

In the process of planning her first novel, Del tries to make lists of the buildings, streets, and details of Jubilee noting odour, colour, temperature, and decor. For the first time, she longs for Uncle Graig’s destroyed history of Wawanash Country, for recreating the essence and texture of “place” is no easy task. Her technique ultimately blends memory and imagination:

For this novel I had changed Jubilee, too, or picked out some features of it and ignored others. It became an older, darker, more decaying town, fall of unpainted board fences covered with tottered posters advertising circuses, fall
fairs, elections that had long since come and gone. People in it were very thin, like Caroline, or fat as bubbles. Their speech was subtle and evasive and bizarrely stupid; their platitudes crackled with madness. The season was always the height of summer – white, brutal heat, dogs lying as if dead on the sidewalks, waves of air shuddering, jellylike, over the empty highway. (*LGW* 270)

Sensuous depictions of textures and surfaces add to the realism of “place”. Like Welty Munro relies most heavily on the sense of smell, though taste, touch, sight, and sound are also represented. In the story, “The Peace of Utrecht”, Jubilee itself and the Wawanash River are identified through the senses as “a smell of reeds and the black ooze of the river bed” (*DHS* 191). At the Baptist revival meeting, where Del makes the acquaintance of Garnet French for the first time, she notes “a sharp green smell of sweat, like onions, smell of horse, pig manure, feeling of being caught, bound, borne away; tired, mournful happiness rising like a cloud” (*LGW* 177). Smell and touch fuse to increase the sexual tensions between the two: “I smelled the thin, hot, cotton shirt sunburnt skin, soap, ad machine oil. My shoulder was grazed by his arm (it is like fire, just as they say) and, the slipped into place beside me” (*LGW* 175).

Stories such as “Images” and “Boys and Girls” from *DHS* or “Home”, similarly use a combination of odours to create atmosphere and advance characterization.
Munro’s “place” is south-western Ontario – specifically, Jubilee located in Wawanash County on the Wawanash River – which becomes a mythic landscape for her, in the same way that Yoknapatawpha does for Faulkner. Urban and rural landscapes the Wawanash River inextricably woven into the fabric, summer and winter settings, polished town houses and cozy country dwellings – all described in sensuous detail – work hand in hand to define a sense of place in Munro’s fiction and to create a bond between her work and that of the authors of the American South. Like her southern contemporaries, Munro uses towns possessing a sameness of appearance, and she creates characters who are part of the land – those descendants of emigrants who remained in one place and did not roam about the countryside. The Wawanash River, like Welty’s Mississippi, is important in their lives as the scene of sexual discovery, of suicide through drowning, and of baptism. Through the rhythms of seasonal change, the weather patterns, even the thinness or density of landscape, one feels Munro’s identity centred where her roots are, rural South-western Ontario.

Munro in South-western Ontario represents Canada in microcosm. She has successfully transformed a particular limited region into a symbol of Canada and Canadian life. Munro’s treatment is so convincing and vivid that we begin to feel that whatever is taking place in Ontario happens everywhere.

Five books published in fourteen years have firmly established Alice Munro among Canada’s best writers of prose fiction. Her form is the short story and her material is largely the
experience of a girl growing up poor in a small South-western Ontario town and subsequently making her way, with pain, self-awareness, and amazement, through the various passages of life: school, leaving home, university, marriage, children, divorce, making a career, and establishing new relationships. Munro’s talent lies in presenting these ordinary experiences so that they appear extraordinary, invested with a kind of magic.