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1.1 Introduction

In the first phase – *Dance of the Happy Shades, Lives of Girls and Women, Something I’ve Been Meaning To Tell You, Who Do You Think You Are?* and *The Moons of Jupiter* – it is seen how Munro is particular about the female psyche. In her quest for an inner space, Munro is self–alienated from the national dream; she tries to create individual private world for herself. Her early stories are set against rural Ontario. Most of the stories deal with female characters and their quest for recognition and autonomy. *Lives of Girls and Women* and *The Beggar Maid* reveal the tension in the mother– daughter relationship. Another common feature is their regional colour– the weather, the villages and towns, not in their picturesque aspects but in all phases. While writing each story, Munro is aware of landscape.

Munro’s next collection *The Progress of Love* (1986) is a distillation of much of her work, exploring with increased profundity 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* (1990), *Open Secrets* (1994), and *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998) 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.

*The Progress of Love* (1986) continues to feature stories set predominantly in rural southwestern Ontario or Vancouver, and further evinces a preoccupation with region, the untold or untellable, and the lives of women. It added to a body of work, which was rewarded in the same year with the Marian Engel Award, given in recognition of an outstanding oeuvre by a female Canadian Writer.

*Friend of My Youth* (1990) contains ten stories. The collection is marked by a growing interest in examining history, whether it is the title story, in which the narrator considers her mother’s past, or Munro’s account of a fictional nineteenth-century “Poetess” in “Meneseteung”. The book’s interest in adultery and relationship prompted *Entertainment Today* teasingly to re–title the book “Sex Lives of Canadians”. It won the Ontario Trillium Book Award and the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize (Canada and Caribbean Region).

*Open Secrets* (1994), the third collection, contains eight stories. Most of her stories found in *Open Secrets* are set or focused on Munro’s native Canada, Huron County, and particularly in the small fictional Ontario town of Carstairs, although the setting in “The Albanian Virgin” is in British Columbia. The story “The Albanian Virgin”, found in *Open
Secrets, exemplifies Munro’s characteristic approach to short story writing as it explores central characters’ lives that are revealed from a combination of first person narrative and third person narrative. By using both narratives, Munro adds realism, some autobiographical information about her own life in the short stories. Since many of the stories are based on the region in which she was born, the characters and narrators are often thought of as being about her life and how she grew up; and making her stories appear from a feminist approach. This could also indicate why the central characters in the short stories in Open Secrets, are all women: a young woman kidnapped by Albanian tribesmen in the 1920’s in “The Albanian Virgin”, and a young born – again Christian whose unresolved feelings of love and anger cause her to vandalize a house in “Vandals.”

Her theme has often been the dilemmas of the adolescent girl coming to terms with family and a small town. Her more recent work has addressed the problems of middle age, of women alone, and of the elderly.

Open Secrets won the W. H. Smith Literary Award. Its stories are set predominantly in the fictional town of Carstairs, Ontario, and feature recurring characters and situations. The pieces are notably lower than Munro’s earlier stories, a trend that continues in 1998’s The Love of a Good Woman.
The stories of the collection, *The Love of a Good Woman* are set predominantly in the fictional town of Carstairs, Ontario, and feature recurring characters and situations. The pieces are notably longer than Munro’s earlier stories, a trend that continues in 1998’s *The Love of a Good Woman*, where the title story runs over seventy pages. Recently Munro has recorded her discomfort with the term “short story”, and has claimed simply to be writing “stories.” Indeed her ability to convey whole lives and communities in a few pages has led some critics to identity a novelistic quality in her short fiction, although she claims to have failed several times in attempting a novel–length work. As with earlier collections, the stories in *The Love of a Good Woman* are marked by an ostensible digressiveness that makes them purposefully untidy–resisting conventional patterns of beginning, middle, and end – in keeping with Munro’s belief in the chaos of life. 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 more back and forth and settle here and there, and stay in it for a while. It’s more like a house” (Robert James McGill 3). *The Love of a Good Woman* was the winner of the Giller Prize.

*The Love of a Good Woman* consists of eight stories. In this collection, Munro investigates the lives of modern women.
Throughout Munro seems to use first-hand experience – so perceptive, accurate and convincing. In her interview with Geoff Hancock, Munro recognized her life-long “Obsession” with the relationship of mothers and daughters. This obsession has repeatedly been discussed by Munro critics, most recently by Robert Thacker in his introduction to *The Rest of the Story: Critical Essay on Alice Munro* (1998). With a few exceptions, such as “Miles City, Montana” and a section of “The Progress of Love”, all of these mother–daughter stories have been written from the point of view of a daughter. Even in “My Mother’s Dream”, although the mother is the central character, the first person narrator, simultaneously a baby and an adult, is her daughter. When the story “Save the Reaper” was published in a longer and differently structured form in *The Love of a Good Woman*, Munro added an author’s note: “Stories included in the collection that were previously published in *The New Yorker* appeared there in a very different form. In addition to “Save the Reaper”, these stories are “The Love of a Good Woman”, “The Children Story”, “Before the Change”, and “Cortes Island”. In this collection, Munro introduces a new point of view, both in her choice of a protagonist and through that choice in her ironic reversal of the mother–daughter roles. For the first time, the central character is not only a mother but also a grandmother. “When I Wrote ‘Save the Reaper’ ”, Munro has commented, “in
my mind ---were the changes in the lives of people like me, who are now in their sixties”, with their “choices mostly made and lived with by now---” (Contributor’s Notes 388). Eve, (“Save the Reaper”) an unmarried grandmother and an out–of-work actress, remembers herself at many stages of her past: as her mother’s child sixty years ago; as a young woman free of her mother, and also free of conventional sexual morality; and as the mother of Sophie in various periods of her daughter’s life. Eve also imagines how Daisy, her three–year–old granddaughter, will remember her when Eve is dead.

Munro has several times in interviews expressed great personal interest in photography. When he interviewed her for Canadian Fiction Magazine on the eve of the publication of The Moons of Jupiter, Geoff Hancock suggested to her that “the formal technical processes of using a camera are remarkably similar to the way you use your prose”, and he asked whether she tries to “render a scene as a photograph might.” Munro replied, “Well, I see the scene. I see it awfully clearly. And I want the reader to see it the way I see it” (Hancock 107). She has described her most common initial impetus to write a story as a pictorial one: a preliminary picture will “generate some other images and attract than like a magnet. Things stick to it. Anecdotes and details” (Hancock 104). Photography figures prominently in her short stories. While describing the setting of her stories, Munro
communicates it in such a way that it is as if the reader is looking at a photograph. This type of description needs a specific type of photographic style. The photographic approach explains what is actually present in the landscape and synthesizes it with what is hidden.

Munro is regarded as the architect of environment. She explains the feelings aroused from the environment and metaphorically transports the reader into the story. Munro conveys the landscape and the significance of it. Canadian landscape have been a prime subject of both Canadian painting and poetry. Munro’s landscape juxtaposes reality and fantasy.

With these ideas in mind, let us look at Munro’s short stories.

1.2 Landscape in The Progress of Love

The stories in Munro’s collection The Progress of Love (1986) retain much of the diversity and the enigma of those in The Moons of Jupiter. Several stories such as “Monsieur Less Deux Chapeaux” and “The Progress of Love” narrate the events of past and present. “The Progress of Love” has been dramatized on television. First published in The New Yorker, the title story, like so much of Munro’s fiction since the early seventies, takes a familiar narrative detour back into the past lives of characters in quest of understanding of present situations.
The setting of the story exposes the psychological condition of her protagonist and other characters. Munro describes in the opening of the story the season of summer: “It was a hot enough day in September” (PL 3). When the narrator was twelve years, she helped her mother by giving a paper in her bedroom, during “the summer of 1947” (7). When Fame went to church on Sunday, she was accompanied by her Aunt Beryl and Mr. Florence:

I was used to going straight from Sunday school into church, and sitting for another hour and a half. In summer, the open windows let in the cedary smell of the graveyard and the occasional, almost sacrilegious sound of a car swooshing by on the road. Today we spent this time driving through country I had never seen before I had never seen it, though it was less than twenty miles from house. (PL18)

The setting reveals details about the character’s feelings and the evolving consciousness. The narrator, Fame, explores the life of her mother, Marietta, and the ravages wrought upon it by her grandmother’s near suicide. After seeing her mother standing with the noose around her neck, Marietta can never again love or forgive her father for his treatment of her mother. This hatred colours her life and she warns Fame against it: “Hatred is always a sin, my mother told me. Remember that. One drop of hatred in
your soul will spread and discolour everything like a drop of black in white milk” \((PL \ 6)\).

However, fame is puzzled to discover that there is another version of the story of her grandmother’s hanging: her Aunt Beryl remembers the event as much less serious and she has not kept a legacy of hatred. Furthermore, Beryl did keep the money left her by the father, whereas Marietta burned hers in the kitchen stove. The story contains a central mystery in the discrepancy between two versions of an event so important as to change family lives for generations. A further mystery is hinted at in the title – an odd title for a story that is apparently about hatred. However, Munro’s title is ambiguous in its reference as so many of her later titles are. “Progress” is not merely a movement forward from a time when “love and grudges could be growing underground” \((PL \ 31)\), but also a formal procession, orderly and ceremonious, including many diverse characters in its composition, and touching many states and persons in its passage.

The narrator, Fame, realises the importance of a married life where the husband and wife realise the importance of each other’s actions: “People doing something that seems to them natural and necessary, and the other believe that the important thing is for that person to be free, to go ahead” \((PL \ 30)\). This revelation makes her aware of the “moments of kindness and reconciliation” \((30)\) that one must have:
I wonder if those moments are not more valued, and deliberately gone after, in the set-ups some people like myself have now, than they were in those old marriages, where love and grudges could be growing underground, so confused and stubborn, it must have seemed they had forever. (*PL* 31)

Notable in this “progress” is the steadfast love Fame’s father shows for Marietta, and Fame’s love for them both. In this sense, the progress of love – indirect but relentless, various but orderly– is the subject of all Munro’s fiction.

The next story, “Lichen”, opens with the description of the house built up by Stella’s father. The house was built up “on the clay bluffs overlooking Lake Huron. Her family always called it “the summer cottage.” Munro further describes the home:

It was and is a high, bare wooden house, painted gray– a copy of the old farmhouse nearby, though perhaps less substantial. In front of it are the steep bluffs – they are not so substantial, either, but have held so far – and a long flight of steps down to the beach. Behind it is a small fenced garden where Stella grows vegetables with considerable skill and coaxing, a short– sandy lane and a jungle of wild black berry bushes. (*PL* 32)

As David was “a city boy” and as he came from “a different background”, David “was surprised when he first saw it
house], because it had how of the knotty–pine charm, the battered—down coziness, that those worlds suggested” (32). Stella, the divorced wife of David feels that “he had no experience of summer places” (32). Munro possesses the ability to present ‘real life’ vividly and convincingly as well as the talent to develop each story through her use of significant, and often recurring images. These images are sometimes introduced obliquely at first, yet the reader is made aware of their significance because of Munro’s skilful attention to dramatic and sensuous detail. Munro introduces another image of lichen in order to highlight the character of David. *The New International Webster’s Dictionary Thesaurus & Atlas* defines lichen as “Any of numerous low–growing plants composed of an alga and a fungus growing symbiotically, usually on surfaces inhospitable to higher plants, as bare rock” (Landau 414). Throughout the story, the landscape plays an important role, focusing on men’s selfishness.

The main character, Stella, is aware of the defect of her ex–husband David. David has relationships with various women but the fact is he cannot get younger. He visits Stella with his new girl friend, Catherine. He thinks that since Stella has no man, she has turned into a shapeless woman. He remarks to Catherine, “Look what’s happened to Stella---She’s turned into a troll (*PL* 32). He is angered when Catherine defends Stella and he thinks of her as:
The sort of woman who has to come bursting out of the female envelop at this age, flaunting fat or an indecent scrawniness, sprouting warts and facial hair, refusing to cover pasty veined legs, almost gleeful about it, as if this was what she’d wanted to do all along. Man-haters from the start. (*PL* 33)

David is bothered about age and appearance and this is evidenced by his description of Catherine too: “When David first met Catherine, about eighteen months ago, he thought she was a little over thirty. He saw many remnants of girlishness; he loved her fairness and tall fragility. She has aged since then. And she was older than he thought to start with – she is nearing forty” (*PL* 34). David has already begun to have another affair with a younger woman, Dina. He not only mentions his new relationship to Stella but thoughtlessly remarks, “you know, there’s a smell women get---when they know you don’t want them anymore. Stale” (*PL* 40).

David is ready to humiliate himself by begging for Dina’s love. When he rings her up, he begins to assume shameful ways of begging and in this way humiliates himself. His affair is based totally on sex and this is illustrated by his revelation to Stella of Dina’s photograph. When Stella sees the picture of Dina naked, she is only able to think of lichen, the stale weed that clings: “It looks like lichen, ---Except it’s rather dark. It looks to me like
moss on a rock” (PL 41). David, while leaving, forgets to take the photograph with him and it lies on his table, where it gets spoilt due to the sun’s rays. When Stella sees the spoilt photograph, she feels:

---the black pelt in the picture has changed to grey. It’s a bluish or greenish grey now. She remembers what she said when she first saw it. She said it was lichen. No, she said it looked like lichen. But she knew what it was at once. It seems to her now that she knew what it was even when David put his hand to his pocket. She felt the old cavity opening up in her. But she held on. She said, “Lichen”. And now, look, her words have come true. The outline of the breast has disappeared. You would never know that the legs were legs. The black has turned to grey, to the soft, dry color of plant mysteriously nourished on the rocks. (PL 55)

It is her awareness of the effect of the age and the realization of her husband’s material attitude that had made her divorce and had helped her to keep the “flow of the days and nights” (PL 55).

If “Lichen” is the story of a selfish man, David, “Miles City, Montara” is the story of distance between generations. The story of the journey is framed by the narrator’s childhood memory of the death of a young boy, Steve Gauley. In this story, the
young mother, travelling through Miles City on her way from British Columbia to Ontario, is driven by the near–drowning of her little daughter, Meg, to recall a drowning incident from her own childhood.

The journey from British Columbia to Ontario is tedious to the travellers when the travellers cross the landscape; much of nature seems to have been stripped. All that remains is mile after mile of a wide plateau containing little more than grassland and grainland. The narrator enjoys what she sees. “because it isn’t scenery” (92). As they drive through the fairly undramatic and featherless world of Douglas County, the empty views materializes as stripped horizons with a special appeal. The terrain holds back the possibility of the picturesque in order to set up its allure as a pure possibility—space, a space already present in the car trip itself. The leisure of just passing by car where nothing really claims her, not even the landscape, lifts the protagonist into a state where she can enjoy how distant thoughts come together.

What the narrator as a young girl experiences in the atmosphere surrounding this death is meshed with the guilt of the narrator as a mother who nearly world have to gaze at her dead child, drowned in a pool. The narrator cannot help but marvel at the unanchored life that Steve Gauley seemed to live with his father, but her curiosity is tinged with fear and distress. When the
news of death came, there is “no mother, no woman at all– no grandmother or aunt, or even a sister– to receive Steve Ganley and give him his due of grief” (85). All about Steve’s life seems “accidental”, the house they live in, the way his father takes care of him, and the way “their life” is “held together” (85).

Analogous to the drowning of Steve Gauley, the younger daughter in the family is about to drown in the pool where they have made a stop to refresh themselves. After Meg’s near drowning in the Miles City municipal pool, the young mother finds herself on the other side of the picture, savouring a ‘trashy’ pleasure in her brush with catastrophe, and remembering how close the line was for a child between adult helplessness and adult complicity.

The story ends with one of Munro’s wonderful catalogues of adjectives, often used in her fiction to pinpoint the elusive, various natures of human beings and their judgements:

So we went on, with the two in the back seat trusting us, because of no choice, and we ourselves trusting to be forgiven in time what first had to be seen and condemned by those children; whatever was flippant, arbitrary, careless, callous –all our natural, and particular mistakes. (*PL 105*)

The next story “Fits” is the story of murder and suicide. The story is set in Gilmore where Robert and his wife Peg reside.
In this story, a man has killed his wife and then shot himself. The whole citizens of the place indulged in gossip and speculation. Peg, the couple’s neighbour, who has discovered the obscene crime, becomes the focus of people’s attention. The citizens had strong objections for her silence. They cannot understand why she does not reveal any feelings. Peg is cool. She lets surface appearances speak even in private and intimate conversation.

While the citizens succumb to speculation and uninhibited forms of fanciful deduction, Peg stubbornly refrains from explanatory conjectures. She points out that she “hardly knew” the couple; no one knew “if they had a fight” (PL 125). Peg discards explanatory factors that might be transcendent to the scene. Robert is torn between fascination for his wife’s detachment and the unbearability of ignorance. Unable to gain satisfaction in the explanations given, Robert goes out for a walk in the winter landscape. In the small town of Gilmore, a sprinkling of snow has transformed the world into a place where everything suddenly seems unusually distinct and slightly magical. It is in the landscape of this shift that Robert regains a sense of life’s certainty. The feeling that you “could walk over the snowy fields as if you were walking on cement” and that the snow is “hard and easy to walk on” is likewise the sensation of having access to an elevated plane of unfailing lightness (127). This might be a thin surface that will carry one past “obstruction”
The snow’s smoothness exhibits a serenity that is akin to his wife’s common body movements.

In the end of the story, Robert realises his mistake and promises to carry his marriage over into a renewed stage:

He was getting quite close to a large woodlot. He was crossing a long slanting shelf of snow, with the trees ahead and to one side of him. Over there, to the side, something caught his eye. There was a new kind of glitter under the trees. A congestion of shapes, with black holes in them, and unmatched arms or petals reaching up to the lower branches of the trees. He headed toward these shapes, but whatever they were did not become clear. They did not look like anything he knew. They did not look like anything---. (“Fits” 130)

“Fits” is the story of Peg and Robert, “The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink is about Callie how she faces Edgar and Sam. Munro uses the symbol of moon, associated with feminity. In the story, we see that Edgar and Sam have relationship with Callie. Both feel that they are superior to Callie: “Because she was a little slavery, forever out of things, queer looking undersized, and compared to her they were in the mainstream they were fortunate” (PL 142). Callie, however, has a superior sense of herself and proves it by daring everything:
It was her scrapbook, and pasted in it were newspaper items about herself. The newspaper had invited people to enter into competitions. Who could do the most bound buttonholes in eight hours? Who could can the most raspberries in a single day? Who had crocheted the most amazing number of bedspreads, tablecloths, runners and doilies? Callie, Callie, Callie, Callie Kernaghan, again and again. In her own estimation she was no slavery but a prodigy pitying the slothful lives of others. (*PL* 142)

She finally goes to enjoy sex with both. Edgar and Sam behave cowardly while they enjoy their sexual intercourse. Both ran away from Cellie. Cellie is too smart to be outwitted, and figuring the young men’s intentions she pursues them. It is at this point that Sam understood, “Callie’s power, when she would not be left behind– generously distributed to all of them. The moment was flooded–with power, it seemed, and with possibility” (*PL* 157).

Years later Sam goes to Gallagher and meets Edgar and Callie. In their house, he sees a photograph of Callie and Edgar and “Callie looks a good deal older than on her real wedding day, her face broader, heavier, and more authoritative. In fact, she slightly resembles Miss Kemaghan” (*PL* 158).
The story ends stating that Edgar is happy. He seems to be happy because he is a man who is mentally dependent on someone and being with the hard-working efficient Callie has given him happiness.

“Jesse and Meribeth” opens with the description of “warm, shallow, rather murky waters of the Maitland River in summer” (PL 162). The main subject of the story is hinted at the beginning of the story. The nature of friendship is very well brought out by the narrator, Jesse. She thinks that two girls bound in the web of friendship would never tell each other’s secrets and also would not hide anything from each other. Their bond would be constant and they would not enter into friendship with others. Even after marriage their loyalty to each other would remain. Their daughters would be named after their friends and would ready to help each other out whenever they could. Believing in these romantic notions of friendship, Jesse prevails upon Marybeth to swear and promise and confide to strengthen their bond. Jesse takes up graduate school and Marybeth takes typing and book keeping course and begins working at an insurance agent’s shop. During their friendship, Jesse makes up stories about the people for whom she works— the Cydermans. She romanticises Mr. Cyderman’s interest in her and tells Mary Beth about the growing sexual intimacy between them. When they meet years later, Jesse is reminded of her lies and her relationship with Mr. Cyderman.
She then realises as she leaves Marybeth that there are changes as one grows up from fifteen to seventeen and seventeen to nineteen. She thinks of Marybeth and her growing sweeter and fatter, while she visualises the Cydermans fixed in their life while she herself would be “shedding dreams and lies and vows and errors” (PL 188). But she at that stage of life does not realise that: “I didn’t see that I was the same one, embracing, repudiating. I thought I could turn myself inside out, over and over again, and tumble through the world scot-free.” (PL 188) Munro’s story “Eskimo” throws a flood of light on the problem of a professional woman—whether she is a teacher or a nurse. The story also discusses the relationship of married men to women. Mary Joe in “Eskimo” discusses very ironically her relationship with Dr. Streeter for whom she works as a nurse. Mary Jo, while on a trip to Tahiti, slowly understands the relationship that exists between her and the doctor. She realises that she is after all just a mistress. She had faithfully served the doctor for ten years but she knows that though she had worshipped and adored him, her place in his life would always be secondary. Commenting on the relationship between Mary Joe and Dr. Streeter, Carrington observes:

Mary Joe can do her work because a nurse’s work traditionally defines her role as secondary to a man’s.

Thus Munro uses the traditional doctor–nurse
relationship as a paradigm of the secondary position of some of her earlier characters. (1990, 162)

The story “A Queer Streak” is set in Ottawa, a different town of Ontario. The season prevailing in this place is summer. The family of Violet reside in a place which is “full of coarse grass and older bushes. ---The water welled up through the tough grass. Farther in, there were ponds and sinkholes. ---watching the water creep up on her boots” (PL 208–09). Setting the story on the background of this place, Munro opens her story like a fairy tale with the words:

Violet’s mother– Aunt Ivie– had three little boys, three baby boys, and she lost them. Then she had three girls.-- she gave the girls the fanciest names she could think of: Opal Violet, Dawn Rose, and Bonnie Hope. She may not have thought of those names as anything but temporary decorations. (PL 208)

The story reveals the sacrifice of the protagonist Violet for her family. The protectiveness of Violet towards her sister breaks her marriage in “The Queer Streak” (PL). She is engaged to be married to Trevor, a minister. The story has very close links to the Cinderella myth. Though the mother is not cruel she is embodied into the framework of the story not as mother but as an aunt. Violet’s wanderings into the waste ground are reminiscent once again of the story tale where the unhappy girl takes refuge in the
wilderness, but in this the myth is reverted by the refuge being a waste-land. The picture of the king in their parlour promises to her the riches that the future holds for her. “That seemed a promise to Violet, it was connected with her future, her own life, in a way she couldn’t explain or think about” (PL 209). This reference to a King and a rich future is once again shaped in a different way in the narration as Violet does not get married to the prince of her dreams, Trevor. The myth is structured into several frameworks and one finds that the father is named King Billy Thomas and there is also a horse called King Billy. Violet is left to take care of the house and manage the sisters.

Violet later has changes in her life. As she proceeds for her education, Violet changes her relationship with the family. She finds that she has lost power over them and can no longer control them. Also the younger sisters share a secret between them which finally changes the course of her life. The other change that happens is in the love that develops between Trevor, a minister and Violet. Trevor’s style of life gives her a vision of a different world besides her own. The engagement does not take place as Trevor learns of the anonymous threatening notes written to King Billy by Violet’s sister, Dawn Rose. He thinks that as he was a minister it was not right for him to marry a girl from a family, where lunacy may prevail. The door to her future gets closed by this innocent yet evil action of her sister. She
remains unmarried and comes back home. Her sisters, however, leave home, marry and settle while she gets stuck in the same place. The myth of Cinderella thus reverses and instead of gaining riches Violet is back at her place near the hearth.

Munro by freeing Violet from the bond of marriage seems to endow a particular independence to Violet. In Dane’s narration one finds that Dane remembers her as a professional woman. Dane knows that:

Nothing in her [Violet] wanted to be overtaken by a helpless and destructed, dull and stubborn old woman, with a memory or imagination out of control, bulging at random through the present scene. Trying to keep that old woman in check was bound to make her short-tempered. In fact, he had seen her– now he remembered, he had seen her tilt her head to the side and give it a quick shap, as people do to get rid of a buzzing unwelcome presence. (PL 244)

Thus, one finds that Violet is not broken down by the events in her life but is able to revive herself and emerge not only as successful professional but as also a protector of her family. The fairy tale ending is changed to depict the freedom and determined spirit of the heroine.

The bond between a mother and daughter is primordial. Munro depicts number of mothers and their relation to either sons
or daughters. “Circle of Prayer” is one of the types of stories where another is dominant over the daughter.

“Circle of Prayer” is a story told from the mother, Trudy’s point of view. The story opens by a violent act, namely Trudy hurling a jug at her daughter, Robin. The violence begins when Trudy discovers that the bead necklace given to her by her mother-in-law and which she had forbidden Robin to wear, had been given by Robin to a friend. Her questions directed at Robin are answered by silence, and in a fit of rage she hurl the jug. But unfortunately the jug falls on the rag. Robin had given the necklace to her friend and though Robin displays a frightened look she is, according to Trudy, “stubborn, calculating, disdainful” (PL 255). The story is interspersed by the death of a young girl in an accident. When Trudy hears this she is concerned and is afraid to hear that a girl might have been “dragged off a country road, raped in the woods, strangled, beaten, left there” (PL 256). Her concern is mainly because she knows that her daughter goes running and her beauty may cause her harm. Trudy begins to find love and wishes to reconcile with her daughter. When she hears about the circle of prayer that her friend, Janet believes in, she agrees to join them. What finally alters her view of her daughter and bridges the gap between her and Robin is a vision she has which portrays to her the importance of detachment. This helps her to be reconciled to the loss of the
necklace. The vision she has also reveals to her the importance of furthering oneself and placing oneself in the role of a spectator:

She sees her young self looking in the window at the old woman playing the piano. The dim room, with its oversize beams and fireplace and the lonely leather chairs. The clattering, faltering, persistent piano music. Trudy remembers that so clearly and it seems she stood outside her own body, which ached then from the punishing pleasures of love. She stood outside her own happiness in a tide of sadness. And the opposite thing happened the morning Dan left. Then she stood outside her own unhappiness in a tide of what seemed unreasonably like love. But it was the same thing, really, when you got outside. What are those times that stand out, clear patches in your life—what do they have to do with it? They aren’t exactly promises. Breathing spaces. (PL 273)

“White Dump” is the eleventh and the last story of The Progress of Love. “White Dump”, about a biscuit factory sugar dump, follows yet another weak dump, follows yet another weak-willed Munrovian heroine and her romantic travails.

Characters—Denise, Sophie, Isabel, Lawrence, Peter, Magda— are temporarily to be held in zones of renewed emotion. Denise in “White Dump” is troubled by happiness. She is
disturbed when her parents divorced. Yet she is still struck by “unfair, unbidden thoughts of accusation” (*PL* 288). When she paid a visit to the summer house, she notices that her father’s new wife is unconcerned about their distressing repetitive arguments: “Magda floats on top of these conversations, smiling at her flowers” (*PL* 277). Magda is a woman overly concerned with style and design, and irritating as that may be to Denise, she cannot help but absorb some of Magda’s seemingly superficial attitude.

Sophie, the grandmother of Denise, comes from an upper class. She is intrigued by the wilderness of the poor Bryce children. She dreams up images of how to sophisticate them, but when she is once allowed to invite one of them to her house, she is even more fascinated by the Bryce girl’s complete ignorance of all supposedly splendid things in a rich family’s environment.

Isabel, the mother Denise, and divorced wife of Lawrence, lives faraway in British Columbia. Her second husband is a commercial fisherman who used to be a TV cameraman. They live on a small farm and rent the land to a man who raises goats. Lawrence knew where about his divorced wife and her paramour. Sophie’s childhood memory of the leftovers from the production in a biscuit factory radiates as a coming true of the impossible. “It was something about the White Dump—that there was so much
and that it was white and shiny. It was like a kid’s dream— the most wonderful promising thing you could ever see” (PL 306).

The break of the marriage in “White Dump” materializes in a transforming beam of light that has no source in any characters’ agency, but is a rapture with uncanny significance to their lives. Lawrence observes: “It was wonderful. ---yon could see the changes in the landscape so clearly. He began to tell her about a glint lake” (PL 305). To the observation of Lawrence, Sophie said “It was most enjoyable” (PL 305). Denise could not keep quite. She, too, expresses her reaction about the landscape: “You could see way down into the water. You could see the rocks going down. You could even see sand” (PL 305).

To sum up, The Progress of Love contains a number of places like Carstairs, British Columbia, Gilmore, Toronto, Ottawa, Goderich, Southern part of Ontario etc. In Munro’s fiction, landscape of a place plays an important role. There are two types of landscapes, rural and urban, could be seen in her stories. The protagonists seek “real life”. In her interview with Jeanne McCullach and Mona Simpson, Munro speaks of her “real life”:

When you live in a small town you hear more things, about all sorts of people. In a city you mainly hear stories about your own sort of people. If you’re a woman there’s always a lot from your friends. I got
“Differently” from my life in Victoria, and a lot of “White Dump”. I got the story “Fits” from a real and terrible incident that happened here– the murder– suicide of a couple in their sixties. In a city, I would only have read about it in the paper; I wouldn’t have picked up all the threads. (Alice Munro, *The Art of Fiction* No. 137)

Munro brings the reader back to the present by meticulously illustrating the environment of the summer. The story “The Progress of Love” opens with the season of summer and the closing story of the collection has a fair weather of the summer. In this collection, the chief concern of Munro seems to be the relationship between men and women, and mother–daughter relationship.

1.3 Landscape in *Friend of My Youth*

In her interview with Harold Horwood, Munro makes clear that she loves landscape. She also loves other aspects such as the weather, the villages and towns, not in their picturesque aspects but in all phases. The same she declares when she talks of the influence of *Wuthering Heights*. To quote Horwood:

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.

(Alice Munro in Horwood interview 124)

Munro’s fascination with place in *Wuthering Heights* is reflected in her own treatment of landscape in *Friend of My Youth*. Munro uses sublime descriptions of Southern Ontario to parallel a protagonist’s psychological condition; landscape described as horrifying mirrors a protagonist’s petrifying experiences. There may be no haunted castles, secret corridors, or ghosts wandering the halls in Munro’s small towns, but there are decaying farms, and mines, haunting memories, invisible social forces, and secret fears that collectively cultivate an equally uncanny mood.

It is to be noted that religion and history are the two important forces of the Southern Ontario region that shaped the region’s personality. Southern Ontario setting is a small Presbyterian town with a disturbing disposition to silence honesty, repress feeling, and shun outsiders. Protestantism has strong impact on the region. Graeme Gibson, Dare Godfrey, Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel and a host others express their opinion about Puritanism and its severe impact on the region, and day today life of the people. To quote Gibson: “Puritan or whatever it was ---lack of ability to express, the lack of ability to feel, the imposition of rigidity” (Graeme Gibson 167). Munro’s settings reflect Protestantism’s darker potential. Michael Hurley
comments that many in the small-town Protestant culture who attempt to express their feelings eventually “doubt themselves, feel guilty, and are either ignored, ridiculed, rebuffed, or punished by the silent majority” (180). Munro’s characters do not escape these effects.

Since small towns are controlled by “silent majority”, the conflict between private and public aspects of a protagonist’s life dominates the Southern Ontario stories in *Friend of My Youth*.

Throughout, *Friend of My Youth*, protagonists who appear irrational are punished with humiliation and psychological isolation. Towns in *Friend of My Youth* represent obsessions with propriety and prudence mask fears of instability.

Since Munro’s small towns struggle to maintain the old order as a key to survival, they persistently fear agents of change. The religion that dominates the towns is so powerful that the individuals have no freedom. The conventional morality and individual freedom, the two sets of values, become the cause of tension. Munro has noted that her own Southern Ontario heritage prevented her from speaking openly: “One does not try because one might fail---the personal revelation is also something that is not understood at all. It’s a shameful thing” (Gibson 247). Like Hester Prynne of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Munro’s protagonists have good reason to fear neighbours and townsfolk. Though her heroines do not face physical brands of punishment,
their emotional responses are similar; that they often resort to deception and concealment is not surprising.

Like religion, History also shapes Munro’s Gothic environment by providing metaphoric “ghosts”. The impact of History can be seen in the pening story where the protagonist is haunted less by her mother’s death than by the guilt she confronts during self–reflection. She fears the past because she feels shame whenever she thinks about her behaviour in the days leading to her mother’s death; fear of her past has power over her present. Yet she also longs for the time when her mother was alive; she misses the mother–daughter bond that at one time included the intimacy of storytelling. In Friend of My Youth, protagonists continually re–live experiences shared with their mothers (“Friend of My Youth”, and “Goodness and Mercy”), spouses (“Hold Me Fast, Don’t let Me Pass”, and “Wigtime”) and friends (“Differently”, “Wigtime”, “Pictures of the Ice”). Despite fears of taking imaginative journeys into the past, Munro’s heroines cannot avoid them; they long for information that will explain their present personalities. But during their journeys, they encounter the Gothic phenomenon called “nameless dread.” Many of Munro’s protagonists cringe when discovering things about themselves they wish they had left buried.

History haunts towns in much the same manner as it does protagonists; conflicts between old and new plague almost every
small town in this collection. In Munro’s twentieth-century Southern Ontario, what becomes spooky are the lengths to which some members of a community will go to prevent change. Because change draws Munro’s towns closer to a modernized world that many fear, it is often seen as evil. Munro’s typical heroine develops a heightened sense of fear when struggling to find independence from what Rasporich properly identifies as Munro’s “puritan-inspired world of gothic horror” (Rasporich 139). Female independence equals nightmarish change for many in Munro’s patriarchal towns, and they go to great lengths to prevent it. The three stories of the collection—“Oh, What Avails”, “Five Points”, and “Meneseteung”—illustrate that Munro’s fictional Southern Ontario communities are both Gothic and realistic. Emotional and sexual repression, secrets and deceptions, clashes with orthodoxy, broken taboos and unnatural silences are amongst the Gothic repertoire in these three stories.

Munro would like to bring to the notice of the readers as how religion and history shaped the lives of the Southern Ontario. The communities mentioned in “Oh, What Avails”, “Five Points”, and “Meneseteung” are both Gothic and realistic. Like the role of religion and history, the role of landscape as symbolic of a protagonist’s dark state of mind grows from the first story to the third, and by “Meneseteung” descriptions of landscape as terrorizing appear inseparable from Almeda Joynt Ruth’s
horrifying situation. Further, though the first two stories are set in the twentieth century and the latter in the nineteenth the same socio–religious pressures persist. Things that do change in small–town Southern Ontario, Munro suggests, do so only slightly and painfully. “Logan has grown”, Munro tells us in the story “Oh, What Avails”, “but it is still too small to have home delivery” (FY 195). The recurring uncanny differences between house and home in *Friend of My Youth* are enough to keep any mail carrier away.

“Oh, What Avails”, sets in Logan, one of the towns of Southern Ontario. Munro does not fail in portraying the flora and fauna of the place. Joan who stays with Morris brings to our notice the details of the place, especially how the local people are affected by the summer season: “This is a very hot day in Logan. The world beyond the shutters is swimming in white light; the distant trees and hills have turned transparent; dogs seek the vicinity of pumps and the puddles round the drinking fountains” (FY 195). Logan, the town where Joan grows up is typical of Southwestern Ontario towns bland and pragmatic when viewed in light, but suggestive of legend and flights of imagination when seen from a different perspective. In defining place, landscapes play an important role. Gothic landscapes both contribute to an symbolise Joan’s dilemma in “Oh, What Avails”. Joan denies truths about the environment that shaped her youth, and her selective blindness to similarities between her and her mother
constitute a Gothic dread of the terrible Other. To Joan, the past is very much alive. The memories of her mother haunt her. She feels that she has inherited many of her mother’s negative traits. She tries to repress her doubts.

Joan gossips and views others through the same cynical lenses as her mother did. The persons like Coony Butler, Morris, that Joan encounters are viewed with a sense of doubt. Joan’s gloomy life mirrors her mother’s, suggesting that Joan absorbed more from her than just contempt and blaming. Joan walks out on her husband and children and begins a new life. She explains her desertion by stating that at that time many parents underwent the phenomenon of separating. Marriages which had started innocently without any misgivings had split up (FY 207). Joan is amazed at the love affairs she has had. Joan realizes as she thinks of her past that that her brother and she had been taught some values: “They were taught a delicate, special regard for themselves, which made them go out and grab what they wanted, whether love or money” (FY 215). But the difference had been that while she had not been good in money matters and had grabbed love, her brother, Morris had grabbed money and hand not had a good love life.

Munro’s characterization of the Logan of Joan’s youth complicates Joan’s dilemma; Logan is ominous and its personality is like Joan’s mother’s: neither nurtures a sense of
being part of something. Logan is “haphazard” and has a castle-like post office, “cracked sidewalks--dusty streets”, and “costumed, obsessed” inhabitants (FY 196). That Joan is used to being identified as her husband’s wife suggests Logan’s patriarchal element, stifling a woman’s freedom. Logan is “pleased that a girl from this town” married the “famous, or semi–famous” journalist, implying its inferiority complex. Further, that they “do not care” for his job and see him as cynical and opinionated reflects both their fear of the urban culture and their hypocrisy (FY 194–5). Finally, the comment that Joan’s mother “did not believe that she and her children were poor in the way that people helped by the Lion’s Club were poor” (FY 181–82) indicates Joan’s mother’s pride and the focalizer’s discontent with it, but it also implies that some in Logan make it their business to know who is poor and who is not.

The house where Joan resides symbolizes the emotional isolation of its inhabitants. The house is full of tension. Whether the smelly, crypt–like rooms and cavernous halls contain more life than the rest of the unsealed house Munro leaves unanswered. The coloured glass through which Joan’s mother taught her to see the outside world is symbolic of Joan’s tainted outlook on life in adulthood. Joan’s mother doubtlessly taught her to look through the glass and to watch, judge, and nickname the outside world and its inhabitants, including Loony Buttler. By using insulting
words to Loony, Joan’s mother shows to children as how she is superior to anyone.

The Fordycehouse, as the source of Joan’s figuratively tainted vision and Morris’s literal blindness, is but one example of dark forces in the Logan landscape. In Logan, Joan is not taught to see Matilda as a beautiful princess but as shrouded in a “veil of stupidity” (186) and “a reproach” (188). In Logan, beauty like Matilda’s is seen as a “mild deformity” (188). Loony Buttler’s calling Morris “Deadeye Dick” further illustrates Munro’s dark characterization of Logan (193). Morris is also a man of bad luck that Logan produced him. He got an accident in the yard of the Fordyce house. The result is that he lost his eyesight. He became a grotesque figure. Morris was never obsessed with his disfiguration and there is nothing to suggest that he wants, as Joan desires him to have, “one of those new, realistic artificial eyes, whose magic sensitivity enables them to move in unison with the other, real eye” (FY 182).

Munro, in this story, shows how the religion and the past history have their impact on the characters. In addition to these, the landscape also plays its vital role in the lives of Joan, Morris and others.

If “Oh, What Avails” is the story of Joan, “Five Points” is the story of Brenda who tries extra marital relationship with Neil. Munro employs landscape with a view to illustrate the inner state
of Brenda who is haunted by the past in the present. There are three Gothic settings in “Five Points” and they develop a more intensified funeral atmosphere than that in “Oh, What Avails”. The three settings symbolise aspects of Brenda’s sexuality and intimacy with the men in her life.

The first two of these are Brenda’s “worn out” farm and the “salt mine at Walley, on the lake” (29); both are symbolic of Brenda’s sterile marriage to Cornelins. The third is the secret sexual rendezvous point; as the source of Brenda’s sexual rejuvenation and moral corruption, its description reflects anxieties and shame lurking in Brenda’s mind as a result of her affair. The degree of her confusion is further clarified when compared Maria’s sexual exploits and Victoria as a forth setting illustrates chilling connections between the two women.

The environment of the place is such where nearly every character has something to hide: Brenda lies to Cornelins, Neil lies to Brenda, Maria lies to her parents, and the boys lie about their use of Maria. Repressed emotion and fear of honesty so permeate this story that nobody feels comfortable thinking about the truth.

The first setting is the farmhouse of Cornelins and Brenda. Brenda associates the sterility of the farmhouse with Cornelins. To Brenda, Cornelins is as worn out as the secluded farm they manage with its “second hand furniture”, its “used appliances”,


and its weedy rock garden (29–31). Brenda feels the absence of “home”. At her house, she lives with her husband, daughters and a dog. The loss of the service of Cornelins caused tremendous on the mind of Brenda, and she feels desolation being married to him. Cornelius is trapped in his mind and lost in the past just as Joan’s mother may have been following her husband’s death in “Oh, What Avails”. He has nothing left to stimulate Brenda and instead leaves her to the “secret preparations” (32) she requires to meet Neil.

The salt mine where Cornelins used to work and where Neil now works, symbolically distinguishing Brenda’s dying relationship with her husband from her present affair with Neil. Though Munro never offers a full account of Cornelins, Brenda feels that he is oppressive and withdrawn. He once “slapped her for smoking marijuana” (46) and mocked her sympathy for a retarded child that he viewed as “just vegetable” (46). Before his accident, Cornelins worked in the mine for seven years and he “hardly ever spoke to Brenda about what it was like” (47). Despite her ill-treatment, she could not leave her husband because there is a little hope of emotional or economic support from a small town like Logan.

The salt mine symbolizes Cornelins’ hellish psychological condition. The mine, like his mind, is where “you can find out what real darkness is like” (47). Here, ransacked machines are
“piled into a dead– end passage that is sealed up – a tomb”, and the “ferocious noise” of the machines “cut out any human voice” (47). Cornelins has learned his silence in this funeral atmosphere. Brenda tries to keep aloof from him. When Cornelins does leave the house, he desires a return to the “Choppy and Cold– looking” lake (30) beside the mine that dammed him.

The most Gothic landscape in “Five Points” as the secret rendezvous point where Brenda meets Neil; it parallels Brenda’s violation of trust and foreshadows her failure to replace her old lover. Brenda’s perceptions of landscape show the darkness in her mind; things seem ominous because of her hidden shame. To highlight the character of Brenda, Munro compares and contrasts Brenda with Maria and Victoria. The world of Maria seems a circus. In Victoria, fluidity and change are not feared but welcomed. Victoria’s “big burst of paper flowers and marijuana fumes and music” (FY 32) symbolizes individual freedom. It is ethereal, bright, and active, a place with “flower beds”, “happy breaches”, and “magic peaks” that contrast sharply with Brenda’s three dark settings (FY 32). Victoria also resembles Neil’s trailer in that both are places where sex is plentiful and where it seems – on the surface – to bear no destructive consequences. But sex does have dark consequences for both Maria and Brenda. Despite the surface characterization of Victoria as a free– wheeling sexual
circus, the dark underside of Maria’s sexual exploits cannot be overlooked.

The short story focuses on guilt, despair, hysteria, repression, and broken sexual taboos. Brenda’s psychological condition is exposed. The settings of “Friend of My Youth”, and “Oh, Where Avails”, expose the psychological condition of her protagonist and other characters. Brenda’s inability to escape an unhappy marriage signifies that she feels alone in a world unwilling to listen to her voice.

Brenda by the end of the story becomes aware that Neil had “lost some of her sheen for her” (FY 49) and she comes to the conclusion that every relationship can finally turn out to be just a continuation of life.

The landscape in her next story “Meneseteung” is serious and haunting. “Toronto” becomes synonymous with “hell”, with Jarvis Poulter. The narrator refers to Toronto as an “encampment” (54), as a place where “tall elms overshadowed the town” (53) and where “There are quite a few people in the cemetery already --most of them died young” (54). In this place of early death, roads are “hot as ashes” (64) and hot weather brings chaos and madness:

More horses run wild then, upsetting buggies. Hands caught in the wringer while doing the washing, a man lopped in two at the sawmill, a leaping boy killed in a
fall lumber at the lumberyard. Nobody sleeps well. Babies wither with summer complaint, and fat people cannot catch their breath. Bodies must be buried in a hurry. One day a man goes through the streets ringing a cowbell and calling, “Repent! Repent!”. It’s not a stranger this time, it’s a young man who works at the butcher shop. Take him home, wrap him in cold wet clothes, give him some nerve medicine, keep him in bed, pray for his wits. If he doesn’t recover, he must go the asylum. \textit{(FY 55)}

References to sleeplessness, nerve medicine, and the asylum show that Toronto is ripe with fear and hysteria and suggests that Almeda is not its only victim. The whole town is like an asylum. The “mean–looking” and “weedy–looking” log homes and farms and the ragged little settlements” and “herds of horned cows” round out Munro’s characterization of the region (61). It is not surprising that Almeda imagines “a ball of fire rolling up Pearl Street” (63); manifestations of hell are both imaginable and real.

The residents of Toronto have fears of cultural instability. Toronto is afraid of “new” ideas that strangers might bring: “new business”, schemers selling “cures and gimmicks”, or preachers preaching “on the street corners” (55), for example \textit{The Vidette}, the patriarchal and judgemental voice of the collective
consciousness, warns residents to “be on your guard” because “these are times of opportunity and danger. Tramps, confidence men, hucksters, shysters, plain thieves are travelling the roads — —” (55). Toronto approaches paranoia in fearing change, and The Vidette with its “shy jokes, innuendo [and] plain accusation” (57), is reminiscent of Joan’s mother and Loony. Like them, and like the narrator constructing Almeda’s story, The Vidette bases its stories about others only on partial evidences: “There is no grounds for this, but it adds interest” (57). Strangers who “don’t look so prosperous are taunted and tormented” (55) because Toronto fears adding to the ranks of the impoverished.

Toronto is painted so darkly in “Meneseteung”. It does not include its “unrespectable and undeserving poor” (“Meneseteung” 55) but rather rejects them as its monsters. Queen Aggie and other Pearl Street Swamp residents symbolize the instinctive parts of the self that Toronto wants to deny. Its great fears are “instant fornication, on attack of passion. Brute instinct, triumph of the senses” (59 – 60). Toronto is such a place where the residents do not have a human identity. Queen Aggie is wheeled about town in a wheelbarrow and dumped into a ditch by a street gang “looking for adventures” (54). That the beaten woman whom Almeda confronts later in the story is not identified as Queen Aggie– and is not identified at all– is telling. Queen Aggie is clearly not alone in her torment.
Jarvis Poulter’s patriarchal values enhance the story’s funeral atmosphere. He represents Almeda’s only means of attaining “considerable respectability” (55), and her rejection of him seals her fate.

Jarvis is male, wealthy, and powerful and thus a key member of high society, Toronto’s views on marriage further exemplify the patriarchal values of the small-town culture he represents:

A man will keep his house decent, but he will never– if he is a proper man– do much to decorate it. Marriage forces him to live with more ornament as well as sentiment, and it protects him, also, from the extremities of his own nature– from a frigid parsimony or a luxuriant sloth, from squalor, and from excessive sleeping or reading, drinking, smoking, or freethinking.

(“Meneseteung” 57)

How a woman might benefit from marriage is not a concern for Toronto. Toronto sees Almeda as unnatural, unconventional, and a problem.

Almeda’s denial of Jarvis is a rejection of Toronto’s view of women; she desires to be neither dependent on nor a mother to Jarvis, whose true self is revealed the night of her confrontation with the mysterious drunk. In due course, Almeda changes her
mind about marrying him. Jarvis realizing the weakness of Almeda, tries to dominate over.

Almeda’s house symbolizes her dilemma. Almeda is torn between a desire to fit into her everyday world and desires for artistic and sexual freedom. Writing associates her with creativity, independence, and having a voice—three things patriarchal Toronto fears from its women. It sees her artistic creation as a “drawback” and a “barrier” (59) that has prevented her from becoming married; since Toronto uses the institution of marriage to sustain its patriarchal culture, it resents Almeda and deems her an “old maid” (58). Her madness is attributable to her necessarily concealed drives for independence, work, and power. Toronto fails to recognize that it provides the barriers inhibiting female independence, making them old maids before their time.

Almeda’s house reflects her struggle for freedom from conventional thought. Almeda’s house is not a place of comfort but of refuge; it is like an asylum that has figuratively been consumed by the larger asylum that is Toronto. Though Almeda lacks the doors and closes the blinds in an effort to maintain conventional thought and escape her attraction to wildness, it is too late. Almeda’s instincts verge on exploding her mind.

Almeda’s menstruation is the most powerful and graphic sign of her hysteria; it starts as the last of her sanity disappears. She overcomes conventional fears about the body, womanhood,
and sexuality, but at the expense of her sanity. Her death in the Swamp—whether suicide or accident—comes as little surprise.

Andy Belyea concludes in his analysis of the story “Meneseteung” by saying:

“Meneseteung” reads like Florence Nightingale’s autobiographical essay, Cassandra. Showalter notes:

that Cassandra is a scathing analysis of the stresses and conventions that drove Victoria middle-class women to silence, depression, illness, even lunatic asylums and death---Cassandra realizes that her passion, intellect, and moral energy have been destroyed by the petty obligations, genteel rituals, and religious cant of a mindless social code---society calls her mad---and she dies unregarded. (July 1998:64)

Munro has clearly spent a great deal of time researching hysteria and madness from historical, medical, and literary perspectives. In presenting a woman driven crazy by a society that restricts her freedom to the point of hysteria and death, Munro links Victorian realities to Gothic fiction. Both deal in repression madness, and monsters. Both are horrifying.

“Pictures of the Ice”, “Oranges of Apples” and “Wigtime” are the only Southern Ontario stories that seem to have “happy” endings: Karin is inspired to leave an oppressive Logan, Murray and Barbara remain married despite their conflict, and Anita and
Margot seem poised to recover a lost friendship. However, a closer look reveals that Munro’s every day characters continue to be plagued by terror, repression, silence, and paranoia; their happiness is superficial and short-lived.

Munro’s small towns thwart happiness in these stories, but unlike those unified by a Puritan consciousness in previous stories, towns are here divided by chaotic forces of change. Walley and Logan appear as though twenty or thirty years older, but their psychology of cruelty persists. Protagonists cannot feel at home in what should feel like familiar and comfortable surroundings because they are trapped in cruel conflicts between old and new. Munro’s protagonists are trapped between opposing functions and unable to fit in. Friendship or love relationships are successful only temporarily and partially. Values like compassion, loyalty, and trust are those for which the typical protagonist yearns, but she is prevented from attaining them by ideas, institutions, and characters that represent the “new”. “New” means evil in a way that is reversed from the stories discussed. The small town oppressed characters seek the “new”. Here, protagonists are terrorized for not adapting to or embracing it. Each story also has at least one ambiguous hero, and his double role compounds the story’s indeterminacy. For instance, Austin, in “Pictures of the Ice”, is both the story’s biggest liar and its biggest saint, and his death may or may not be suicide; Victor is a
“Splendid and disturbing” newcomer in “Oranges and Apples” who may or may not be a liar; Reuel drives senior citizens to Niagara Falls in “Wagtime”, but he may have a hankering for underage girls.

We are also offered a rare male protagonist in “Oranges and Apples”. The story sketches the suspicious behavior of Murray towards his wife and his way of taking it out on her. Murray befriends Victor, a Polish man who comes to live close to their place. Victor soon breaks up with his wife, Beatrice, and Murray not only gives him shelter but also finds a job for him. Soon, however, Murray starts having doubts about his wife and Victor. To know the truth one rainy night he insists that Barbara should take some bedspreads for Victor. He knows when she returns that Victor has had a relationship with Barbara. Victor, the day after this incident leaves the place. One can notice in the narration Barbara’s innocence. It is Victor who views her body, while she is sunbathing. Murray makes Barbara’s body the scene of battle, thus scarring her. In this story, Munro wants to prove that not only the male protagonists like Murray suffer but also women suffer Gothic paranoia and hysteria. Anita and Margot demonstrate in “Wigtime” that friends of youth can also be foes. The protagonists who can hope for provisional happiness in their place, but find that the real world in Friend of My Youth is a frightening place to live.

Hazel after the death of her husband, Jack, comes to Scotland hoping to meet Jack’s girl friend, Antoinette and his cousin. During her stay there she notices the changes that have occurred in Antoinette and Dobie. This revelation reminds her of how she and Jack too had changed. She realizes then even before Jack’s death she had a nervous breakdown and after that incident she changed her life into one of “action, exercise, direction” (*FY* 83):

> She knew that when she had got out of bed (this is what she doesn’t say), she was leaving some part of herself behind. She suspected that this was a part that had to do with Jack. But she didn’t think then that any abandonment had to be permanent. Anyway, it couldn’t be helped. (*FY* 83)

She realizes that Jack too had changed from a quiet young charming man, into a braggart. One distinct memory she has of him is what she had noticed in him one day when she had been travelling to college. She feels that he had become a dull, grey
and insubstantial person. She thinks of the routine life he led spending a couple of nights at the legion and other days watching television. His life had become a mechanical routine filled with “chores, routines, seasons, pleasantries” (FY 104). She had only then realized that day that his loss of power had been replaced by “a ghostly sweetness” (FY 104).

“Hold me Fast”, is the story of Hazel, “Differently” is the story of Georgia who divorces her husband, Ben and lives with an instructor of creative writing with whom she had taken a course. She meets her ex– husband’s friend Raymond some years later at Victoria. This meeting reminds her of her ex– husband Ben and Raymond’s wife, Maya who had been her friend. Maya and Georgia had sex with other men and had kept it a secret from their husbands. Maya had an affair with another doctor, Harvey also had an abortion. Unlike Georgia she had not divorced Raymond and had continued a double life. Georgia had not been able to lead a life of lies and hypocrisy and had therefore blown up her own secure, happy life. But she had been ashamed to reveal to others her happiness with Ben and had always insisted that she had never been happy:

She had entered with Ben, when they were both so young, a world of ceremony, of safety, of gestures, concealment. Fond appearances. More than appearances. Fond contrivance. (She thought when she left that she
would have no use for contriving anymore.) She had been happy there, from time to time. She had been sullen, restless, bewildered, and happy. But she said most vehemently. Never, never. I was never happy, she said. (FY 241–42)

Now, when she meets Raymond she realizes that he still thinks that his dead wife as an ideal wife and tells him to take death differently.

These stories fall beyond the scope of this study. Each protagonist experiences anxiety, fear, and isolation, but she is never confronted with a small-town consciousness and its obsession with order and propriety. Conflicts between old and new fail to have the same devastating influence on a protagonist’s life, and though Munro continues to focus on fractured relationships and psychic fragmentation, characters here do not suffer the same dread and despair as their Southern Ontario counterparts. Fear exists but does not lead to paranoia or hysteria; men are not characterized as ambiguous villains but as obvious scoundrels or supplementary characters; and there are no hints at incest or masochism. There are no towns that seem like asylums and no houses that fail to be homes. Repressed emotions become mostly resolved, and each of the female protagonists has freedom from the undesirable chains of domesticity and patriarchal oppression that killed Almeda Joynt Ruth and drove Brenda into
infidelity. Even the endings do not conclude with the same disturbing uncertainties as those discussed in this study. In addition, there are no horned cows.

1.4.1 Introduction

It is noted in the first phase that Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) 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” (1989 148). The stories of these two collections are interconnected. In the next phase of the stories, Munro thinks of another series of stories. As she says:

---But I’ve often wanted to do another series of stories. In my new book, *Open Secrets*, there are characters who appear. Bea Doud in “Vandals” is mentioned as the little girl in “Carried Away”, which is the first story I wrote for the collection. Billy Doud is the son of the librarian. They’re all mentioned in “Spaceships Have Landed.” But I mustn’t let this sort of plan overtake the stories themselves. If I start shaping one story so it will fit with another. I am probably doing something wrong, using force on it, that I oughtn’t. So I don’t know that I’ll ever do that kind of series again, though I love the ideas of it. Katherine Mansfield said something in one of her letters like, oh, I hope I write a novel, I hope I don’t die just
leaving these bits and pieces. It’s very hard to wean
yourself away from this bits– and– pieces feeling if all
you’re leaving behind is scattered stories— —.
(Interviewed by Jeanne McCulloch & Mona Simpson)

1.4.2 Landscape in *Open Secrets*

*Open Secrets* is a collection of eight stories. The stories are
set predominantly in the fictional town Carstairs, Ontario, and
feature recurring characters and situations. The pieces are notably
longer than Munro’s earlier stories. In these stories, Munro
explores phenomena that border on the mystical power of
inhuman things. The ghost in “Carried Away” makes company
with creatures from outer space in “Spaceships Have Landed”.
What seems to be freakishly supernatural, however, has a bearing
on the unfathomable significations of ordinary life. Since many of
her stories are based on the region in which she was born, the
characters and narrators are often thought of as being about her
life and how she grew up; and making her stories appear from a
feminist approach. This could also indicate why the central
characters in the short stories in *Open Secrets*, are all women. The
theme has often been the dilemmas of the adolescent girl coming
to terms with family and a small town. The other subjects are—
freedom, love or romance, sex or sexuality, Dreams, Alcohol,
Revenge, Canada or Canadians, Small– town life, Tuberculosis.
In these eight stories, Munro revisits the physical and emotional landscapes that have become closely identified with her work. Nearly all of these stories take place in South eastern Ontario, near Lake Huron. Her characters are ordinary people with uncertain lives, connected by a common setting.

In an interview with Graeme Gibson, Alice Munro said, “I’m not a writer who is very concerned with ideas. I’m not an intellectual writer. I’m very, very excited by what you might call the surface of life, and it must be that this seems to me meaningful in way I can’t analyse and describe” (1973 241). This “surface of life” concerns the ordinary—the reality in which disguises and deceptions are used so often that they become commonplace. Munro’s talent lies in her ability to explore this reality, and present the various tones and textures of personal experience. In her essay “The Colonel’s Rash Resettled”, Munro defends in her use of images: “I did not consciously plan or make, or arrange them; I found them” (182). She makes of all kinds of images to describe character. “Vandals” is one of the stories of the collection, Open Secrets, in which Munro makes use of images drawn from nature as well as animal imagery.

“Vandals” is about a young born again Christian whose unresolved feelings of love and anger cause her to vandalize a house in “Vandals”. The story examines child abuse, the deception of appearances, and violence that feels upon itself.
The introduction of “Vandals” can also be read in mythical terms. In the non chronologically narrated story, the introduction is actually an epilogue, a dream that Bea has months after Liza has vandalized the house and tricked her into believing someone else to be responsible. During a winter storm, Liza, a born–again Christian, is symbolically reborn also as Persephone: she becomes the destroyer of Ladner’s house, “cold as the grave” (278). This sinister simile is linked to Bea’s dream which she describes in an unsent letter addressed to Liza.

“Vandals” opens with a letter that Bea Doud composes to Liza, the young woman whom she remembers as one of two “pretty sunburned children” (261) who grew up across the street from “Dismal”, the property that Bea shared with her recently deceased partner, Ladner. Bea means to thank Liza for checking on the property while Bea cared for Ladner in the hospital, but the letter never gets sent. Instead, Bea retreats into a period of slightly drunken musing that provides the material for much of the first part of the story. When Bea visited Ladner at Dismal, she notices the property and its geography. Bea sees live animals moving among “stuffed and life like” ones (271): for example, mating swans let out “bitter squawks” beside “a” glass fronted case containing a stuffed golden eagle with its wings spread a grey owl, and a snow owl” (271), and real birds flit in and out of a group of stuffed birds that are positioned beside signs inscribed
with “tight, accurate, complicated information” about their habitats, food preferences, and Latin names (271).

Ladner carefully constructed the garden. The presence of a fridge, detailed signs, and inert, reconstructed animals in a garden that also contains living ones seems to create a dialectical context for thinking about the relations between nature and culture, and between the natural and the stimulated. In addition to the species identification signs, Ladner has posted quotations in his garden:

“Nature does nothing uselessly.

—Aristotle

Nature never deceives us; it is always we who deceive ourselves” (271).

On one hand, the signs direct visitors to see nature in general and this garden in particular as a sanctuary from human pomp and pretense, a haven from deceit. When Bea stopped to read these it seemed to her that Ladner was impatient that he scrawled a little. She no longer made comments on anything she saw.

Munro uses the events that take place in Ladner’s garden to demonstrate the consequences of our failure to scrutinize the “natural”. When for example, Ladner takes Bea on her first tour of Dismal, Bea, who is wearing high heels and nursing a vague plan to seduce him, thinks. “this tour, so strenuous physically and mentally, might be a joke on her, a punishment for being, after all,
such a tiresome vamp and fraud” (272). Bea notes that the physical exertion of the hike has caused her lust to evaporate. Bea feels that the tour to the garden may be the source of health and purity, but nature does not work this way at Dismal.

In the second half of the story, Liza remembers what happened while she was swimming in the pond at Dismal. Ladner attempted to grab her between her legs, and she escaped his clutches by clambering through the diorama: “She splashed her way out and heavily climbed the bank. She passed the owls and the eagle starting from behind the glass. The Nature does nothing uselessly sign” (289). Liza is unable to articulate the trauma of Ladner’s assault, but her position among the animals is telling. The image of the violated girl child among the dead birds recalls the myth of Philomela, the rape victim turned tongue-tied bird.

Liza showed Bea some words carved into a tree: “P. D. P.” (292) As children are sexually abused in the garden, we can assume that Kenny has been led to believe that “P. D. P.” Sometimes does mean “pull down pants”. Ladner has made the animals in his garden. Animal bodies are also destabilized in “Vandals” through the use of animal imagery to describe the human characters.

Munro employs physical and emotional landscapes and various images drawn from life, nature and animal world with a view to describe the human characters.
The story, “Carried Away”, opens with Louisa, the female protagonist, receiving clandestine letters from an unknown man who has been called to the fronts of World War I. She becomes aware of a danger, but also of a certain freedom that the risk of the war entails. Like so many of Munro’s protagonists, Louisa is a daring and attentive woman. She has certain qualities of Callie (“The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink”), of Pauline (“The Children Stay”), of Lottar (“The Albanian Virgin”). The romantic promise of the letters makes Louisa believe that this man will turn out to be her destiny. When the war is over, he came to the small town of Carstairs and he never gets in contact with Louisa. Louisa learnt from the local newspaper that he is now married to another girl.

Munro further describes Louisa’s relationship with two other men. She loses her virginity with Jim Frarey and meets again Arthur, the heir of the town factory, Douds. When Arthur proposes to Louisa, he is paradoxically amazed and composed as if he had already known somehow.

After a gap of time, when we meet Louisa again as an old woman, her husband is no longer alive and she is still haunted by the memory of the hypothetical love affair with Jack Agnew. “Carried Away” is about the sexual history of a librarian that ends in a hallucinatory college of moments.
The ghost in “Carried Away” makes company with creatures from outer space in “Spaceships Have Landed”. A young woman in the small town of Carstairs mysteriously vanishes one night. Unie Morgan and Rhea, when they were girls, used to play an odd game together, a game that only they could understand.

It is through Rhea that most of the story is focalized. She is brought to a bootlegger’s houses by her boyfriend Billy Doud. The atmosphere is clandestine and somewhat hostile. Intoxicated, Rhea lets herself be seduced by Billy’s best friend. Rhea learnt from the wife of Mr. Monk about the endurance of woman. Although, both are friends, yet they are different in their outlook of life. As a young woman Rhea separates herself from Eunie. Her peculiar looks and eccentric behavior have become a matter of embarrassment for Rhea. Eunie’s way of socializing by telling outrageous stories infuriates Rhea, especially since she does distinguish between fiction and reality. Rhea is “frazzled” by questions of the origin of these stories: “Was it real or was it play?” (239). The story ends where Billy wishes to marry Eunie. The story “Carried Away” was included in Best American Short Stories 1991.

Most of her stories found in Open Secrets are set on Munro’s native Canada, Huron County, and particularly in the small fictional Ontario town of Carstairs. But the setting of “The
Albanian Virgin” is British Columbia. The real tour de force of this collection is “The Albanian Virgin”, which spans some forty years and only briefly involves Ontario. The chief figure is Canadian– born Charlotte, who is kidnapped in the 1920s by a primitive Albanian tribe, the Ghegs, but returns to tell her story. A parallel figure is Claire, owner of a book store in 1960s Victoria, British Columbia. The storyline exists on three levels– Charlotte’s life as a captive of the Ghegs, Charlotte’s story told years later to Claire in Victoria, and Claire’s own confused tale of marital unhappiness and escape. Most of the stories carry within them a glimmer of evil submerged in the ordinary. Although Munro is not a writer of horror fiction in the usual sense, though her stories ring absolutely true, the darkness within then is enough to chill the bones.

1.5.1 Introduction

Munro continues a trend of longer stories from Open Secrets to The Love of a Good Woman where the title story runs over seventy pages. Her ability to convey whole lives and communities in a few pages has led some critics to identify a novelistic quality in her short fiction, although she claims to have failed several times in attempting a novel– length work. As with earlier collections, the stories in The Love of a Good Woman are marked by an ostensible digressiveness that makes them purposefully untidy– resisting conventional patterns of
beginning, middle, end– in keeping with Munro’s belief in the chaos of life. Munro has argued for stories not as linear narratives but 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's more like a house” (Robert James McGill 3). *The Love of a Good Woman* was the winner of the Giller Prize. Two of the stories of this collection are closer to the heart of Munro: “In my new book, I’m very attached to “Save the Reaper” and “My Mother’s Dream” (Interview “Save the Reaper” was published in *The Best American Short Stories* 1999.

Munro, like in other collections of short stories, describes the region, house furnishings and other physical settings in great detail. All the eight stories of *The Love of a Good Woman* are set in the provincial town of Munro, namely, Vancouver. Of Vancouver, Munro says:

I lived in the suburbs, first in North Vancouver, then in West Vancouver. In North Vancouver, the men all went away in the morning and came back at night, all day it was housewives and children. There was a lot of informal togetherness, and it was hard to be alone. There was a lot of competitive talk about vacuuming and washing the woolies, and I got quite frantic. When I had
only one child, I’d put her in the stroller and walk for miles to avoid the coffee parties. This was much more narrow and crushing than the culture I grew up in. So many things were forbidden—like taking anything seriously. Life was very tightly managed as a series of permitted recreations, permitted opinions, and permitted ways of being a woman. The only outlet, I thought, was flirting with other people’s husbands at parties; that was really the only time anything came up that you could feel was real, because the only contact you could have with men, that had any reality to it, seemed to me to be sexual. Otherwise, men, usually did not talk to you or if they did they talked very much from high to low. I’d meet a university professor or someone, and if I knew something about what he knew, that would not be considered acceptable conversation. The men didn’t like you to talk, and the women didn’t like it either. So the world you had was female talk about the best kind of diet, or the best care of woolies. I was with the wives of the climbing men. I hated it so much I’ve never been able to write about it. Then in West Vancouver, it was more of a mixed suburb, not all young couples, and I made great friends there. We talked about books and scandal and laughed at everything like high–school
girls. That’s something I’d like to write about and haven’t, that subversive society of young women, all keeping each other alive. But going to Victoria and opening a bookstore was the most wonderful thing that ever happened. It was great because all the crazy people in town came into the bookstore and talked to us. (Interviewed by Jeanne McCullach and Mona Simpson 2)

The stories from *The Love of a Good Woman* are set in Vancouver. The physical and emotional landscapes are closely identified with her work. The physical setting is perhaps “real”. The background in these stories is beyond all doubt and authentic. The interiors of the houses, the views from their windows, the walks the people take on the roads and streets of the places where they live– all these, and the weather, are made so real that a reader who had never heard of Canada would understand, and perhaps even half recognize, the world Alice Munro is describing. Nearly all of these stories take place in different suburbs of Vancouver. Her characters are ordinary people with uncertain lives, connected by a common setting.

Like the landscape, the house plays an important role in the lives of the characters. In her interview with Lisa Dickler Awano, Munro says of house: “---I cannot tell a story without wanting to say what kind of house people lived in, if it was brick, what color
of brick, what there was in the kitchen, and all sorts of things that can become too much of a weight, and sometimes I do consciously try to cut them down a bit” (Awano 14). Liza vandalizes Ladner’s house; two houses appear in “Save the Reaper.” Ladner’s house is described as “cold as the grave” (“Vandals” 278); a rented and vacation house and a sinister house to which Eve is led by following the Ford pickup track of one of the partying men. No story can be seen without a house.

1.5.2 Enid: A Portrait of Modern Woman

Eight stories of Munro investigate the lives of modern women. The first story, “The Love of a Good Woman”–is in three sections which deals with Enid, a nurse, who tends to dying people in their homes. She will show a similar escape from conventional entrapment. The title of the story– “The Love of a Good Woman” refers to Enid, but her philanthropic wish to “be good, and do good will fall short of goodness and virtue. Enid’s attempt to please her dying father by promising to give up her plans to become a professional nurse is not altogether virtuous. “The deathbed promise, the self– denial, the wholesale sacrifice. And the more absurd the better. This was what she had given into. And not for love of her father, either (her mother implied), but for the thrill of it. Sheer noble perversity” (LG 40). Commenting on the character of Enid, Catherine Sheldrick Ross observes that the polarities of the good woman/bad woman are not fixed. Ross,
further, wants to place Enid among the variants of invading practical nurses, Mary Mc Quade in “Images” and Audrey Atkinson in “Friend of My Youth”. The mother of Enid makes the daughter to think about a job– offer. Enid prefers nursing to pray service.

The story is deeply concerned with it the justification of choice and matters of good and evil. Enid goes out to the river and stands there just watching a boat moving. Tied to a branch, a plain old rowboat was being lifted very slightly, lifted and let fall. Now that she had found it, she kept watching it, as if it could say something to her. And it did. It said something gentle and final. You know. You know” (LG 62–63). Suddenly Enid’s life undergoes a deviation. Realizing that she is not in control, in need of “establishing order where there was non before” (LG 52), and that it is not up to her to judge or find out about anyone’s guilt, she enters a state of release. The uncertainty of Rupert’s guilt in the death of Mr. Willens can remain concealed. She is no longer burdened by the need or wish to confront Rupert with a question.

Enid is no longer concerned with her life as destiny. Nor does she want to be a saint or martyr. She simply puts on a pair of rubber boots and meets whatever will follow: love, life, sex or death. Enid somehow escapes being trapped in a pathetic role of self–sacrifice. Charles E. May claims that “The Love of a Good Woman” is ambiguously open– minded and that the reader does
not know “whether Enid confronts Rupert and, if she does, whether he pushes her in the river or rows them both back to the shore” (“Why Short Stories” 17). Nevertheless, the story does not primarily rely on the workings of ambiguity but on the phenomenon of possibility:

She hadn’t asked him yet, she hadn’t spoken. Nothing yet committed her to asking. It was still before. Mr. Willens had still driven himself into Jutland pond, on purpose or by accident. Everybody still believed that, and as far as Rupert was concerned Enid believed it, too. And as long as that was so, this room and this house and her life held a different possibility, an entirely different possibility from the one she had been living with (or glorying in—however you wanted to put it) for the last few days. The different possibility was coming closer to her and all she needed to do was to keep quiet and let it come. (*LG 75–76*)

### 1.5.3 Landscape in “The Love of a Good Woman”

Lorraine Mary York, Beverly Rasporich, Andrew Stubb and a host of others argue various theories concerning the means by which Munro conveys the landscape and the significance of it. Each critic reveals separate understanding of how the setting comes across to the reader.
The setting of the story is a familiar place of Munro’s home in Canada. After recounting Enid’s past, Munro brings the reader back to the present by meticulously illustrating the environment of the summer where a murder ensued in a small town. This summer there was a great downpour of rain every few days, and then the sun came out very hot, glittering off the drenched leaves and grass. Early mornings were full of mist— they (Rupert’s family) were so close, here to the river— and even when the mist cleared off you could not see very far in any direction, because of the overflow and density of summer. The heavy trees, the bushes all bound up with wild grapevines and Virginia creeper, the crops of corn and barley and wheat and hay. Everything was ahead of itself, as people said. The hay was ready to cut in June, and Rupert had to rush to get it to the barn before the rain spoiled it:

This summer there was a great downpour of rain every few days, and then the sun came out very hot, glittering off the drenched leaves and grass. Early mornings were full of mist— they were so close, here, to the river— and even when the mist cleared off you could not see very far in any direction, because of the overflow and density of summer. The heavy trees, the bushes all bound up with wild grapevines and Virginia Creeper, the crops of corn and barley and wheat and hay. Everything was ahead of itself, as people said. The hay was ready to cut in June,
and Rupert had to rush to get it into the barn before a rain spoiled it. (*LG* 44–45)

In naming and classifying the plants, adding the production of crops, and concluding with the mention of a barn as the setting gives the ideal picture of the countryside, almost as if a photograph. The photographer is able to reveal the emotions and the feelings of the personality by a careful and artistic use of the camera. Complementing Munro’s work as photographic, Rasporich regards “the landscape imagery is a metaphor for the actual situation” (Rasporich 133). The juxtaposition of strange behaviour in weather strengthens the reading of Munro’s ‘photography’ of the Quinn’s residence as suspiciously “too perfect”. Munro’s weather reveals the “evolving consciousness” (Rasporich 130) that a death, in fact, occurred as a murder. The symbolism of the weather plays with the minds of the reader and the characters, like the body found in a river. Due to the impromptu changes in weather, the predictability whether it will be raining or extremely hot out vanishes, along with the security of living in the countryside. The universal association of the pleasant weather of summer and the safety of small-town life unexpectedly sever any assumptions with the irregular weather and secret murder. The early morning mist mentioned adds a sense of mystery combined with the course found in the river; however, the addition of the mist as part of the environment
insinuates an eerie and precarious mood. Not only does the mist suggest secrecy and seclusion, but its placement also denotes danger and suspicion.

Granted together the weather and the landscape entail suspicion towards the death of the optometrist the very changing weather parallels Enid’s her nursing. The summer once again contains plenty of rain; a characteristic more of spring, and produces crops early; a characteristic of fall, which flips the standard of summer weather. The unconventional summer relates to Enid’s situation. She takes care of Rupert’s house, the dying wife and the wife’s children. Her situation like that of the weather is not as it should be. Enid lives vicariously through another family’s life, rather than living a normal life of her own; likewise, the summer assumes characteristics of other seasons, rather than remaining true to its typical qualities.

“Jakarta” is in four sections. Munro focuses on the two young couples– Kath and Kent, Sonje and Cottar. Kath and Sonje are good friends. Both reside in cottages, “quite primitive and cheap to rent” (81). Everybody is planning to move on to a proper house. “Except for Sonje and her husband, whose plans seem more mysterious than anybody else’s” (81). Munro records in detail the habits of these young women. Munro continues the same setting of “The Love of a Good Woman”, but with little difference. The season, the weather and the role of the mist is not
as detrimental as in the first story. Sonje is grave and stubborn whereas Kath is brisk and scornful. Cottar, husband of Sonje, is clever and methodical, Kent is straightforward. The suspicion of where about of Cottar is maintained throughout the story. As Sonje is desperately in search of her husband, Cottar, Munro describes the state of her mind:

---where the wind that had been stirring the bushes, all this time, had risen to push hard at them. And these were not the sort of bushes that stream their long loose branches before such a wind. Their branches were tough and their leaves had enough, weight so that each bush had to be rocked from its roots. Sunlight flashed off the oily greens. For the sun still shine, no clouds had arrived with the wind, it did not mean rain. (LG 114–115)

The inner mind of Sonje is just like the changing weather of the season. At the end of the story, we notice that Sonje prepares of determines to go to Jakarta to find Cottar, if possible. Munro’s description of Jakarta is quite real and authentic:

In places like Jakarta people don’t shut themselves up.---A man like Cottar could not have just slipped by. ---There’s the old Portuguese Church. Built in the late 1600s. It’s a Muslim country of course. They have the biggest mosque there in Southeast Asia. (LG 111–113)
Munro shifts her setting from Vancouver to Jakarta as a sort of excursion. The story ends with the mystery of Cottar and his whereabouts.

The setting of “Cortes Island” continues the same, that is, Vancouver and the season, the summer, is not much changed. Mrs. Chess, “twenty years old, five feet seven inches tall, weighing between a hundred and thirty-five and a hundred and forty pounds” (*LG* 117), lived in a basement in Vancouver. She meets the members of the Gorrie family. The narrator describes various events that she came across on the Cortes Island; the narrator was desperately in search of a new apartment. As she puts, “All the time that I was a young wife, and then, without undue delay, a young mother—busy, faithfully, regularly satisfied—I kept having dreams now and then in which the attack, the response, the possibilities, went beyond anything life offered” (*LG* 144).

“Save the Reaper” was closer to the heart of Munro. The story was published in *The Best American Short Stories* 1999. When it was published in a longer and differently structured form in *The Love of a Good Woman*, Munro added an author’s note: “Stories included in the collection that were previously published in *The New Yorker* appeared there in a very different form” (Carrington 36). In addition to “Save the Reaper”, these stories
are “The Love of a Good Woman”, “The Children Stay”, “Before the Change”, and “Cortes Island”.

One of the important leading themes of her work is the relationship between mothers and daughters that Munro had a lifelong obsession. This obsession has been repeatedly discussed by the critics. Even in her interview with Geoff Hancock, Munro has cleared this point. Munro also made clear in regard to the subject of the story. As she says: “When I wrote “Save the Reaper”, in my mind---were the changes in the lives of people like me, who are now in their sixties---” (Carrington 34). Eve, an unmarried grandmother and an out-of-work actress, remembers herself at many stages of her past: as her mother’s child sixty years ago; as a young woman free of her mother, and also free of conventional sexual morality; and as the mother of Sophie in various periods of her daughter’s life. Eve also imagines how Daisy, her three year old granddaughter, will remember her when Eve is dead.

Carrington analysed the story in the light of the classical myth, the myth of Demeter–Persephone. In the classical myth, Demeter, who originated in the ancient Minoan Earth Goddess, “appears in her three traditional roles as Maiden (or Kore in Greek), mother, and wise Crone” (Carrington 37). Worshipped “at her cult site, Eleusis”, she is “the Grain Goddess of the fertility mysteries celebrated and practised at [the shrine]. Her daughter
[is] the menarcheal Grain or Corn maiden seed of life” (Carington 37). Demeter loses her virgin daughter, Kore, when Hades, the Lord of the Underworld, abducts her from a flowery meadow and rapes her. Bursting out of the, suddenly opened ground with “the thunder of hooves” and “the screech of chariot wheels shatter [ing] the air”, he carries her off to his dark domain. In search of her lost daughter, the grieving Demeter, turned into a “wisdom–bearing Crone”, wanders the earth. Initially, Kore refuses to eat anything in the underworld, but finally eats some pomegranate seeds. When Demeter eventually finds and rescues her, Kore’s return to her mother can be only temporary. Because Kore has eaten “the food of the dead”, she must annually return to Hades for the three months of winter. In the underworld she bears the new name Persephone, “she who brings destruction” (Carrington 37).

In “Save the Reaper” two houses reappear, a rented vacation house ‘in the middle of cornfield” (LG 149), with the “name Ford on the mailbox” (LG 177), and a sinister house to which Eve is led by following the Ford pickup truck of one of the partying men. Both houses suggest the symbolic equation with Hades. After a five year absence from house, Sophie has returned from California with her two children by different fathers.

Intensely disappointed by the double change of plan, not only by this summer’s truncated visit but also by the loss of
joyfully anticipated future visits, Eve takes the two children for a drive while Sophie picks Ian up at the airport. This drive, the opening scene of the story, begins Munro’s narration of the story’s main action. In the car, the seven–year–old Philip initiates a game: he pretends that there might be “aliens” travelling to Canada from space and “translated” into people whom they have “abduct[ed]” by sucking “them out of the car into another car” (LG 147). His excited fantasy of vehicular abduction echoes Kore’s abduction in the chariot of Hades. Within the scope of a dissertation, one cannot make a comprehensive study of every story in detail.

“The Children Stay” is about Pauline to whom anything could happen. Her family consists of “a young father and mother, their two small daughters, and an older couple, the husband’s parents” (LG 181). The family was spending a holiday together on the east Coast of Vancouver Island. The weather, the mist, and the tide do not seem to disturb the travellers who come on the back of the sea to enjoy.

Pauline, the young mother, does not either like the beach or like the road that runs behind the cottage for a mile. The family was quite happy until Jeffrey Toom sneaks into their family. It was Brian who introduced Jeffrey Toom to Pauline for the participation of dramatic activities. Munro says that “Pauline is not an actress” (LG 184). Yet, she is compelled deliberately to
play the roles. Many plays like *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Orpheus and Euridice* were enacted. Brian describes her character:

“She just needs a kick in the behind”, Brain said to Jeffrey. “She’s like a little mule, it’s hard to get her started. No, seriously, she’s too self-effacing, I tell her that all the time. She’s very smart. She’s actually a lot smarter than I am.” *(LG 185)*

During rehearsal, Pauline continued her friendship with Jeffrey. Brian began to doubt and wished to keep on rehearsal. Their mutual friendship resulted in elopement. As she is married and mother of two children, she did not dare to run away. She became desperate and master her courage up to run away, keeping the children stay.

Munro’s focus is Pauline, the young and modern woman who is in search of her freedom in both love and sex. The story foreshadows Munro’s coming collection *Runaway*.

The three concluding stories of the collection, *The Love of a Good Woman* – are “Rich As Stink”, “Before the Change”, and “The Mother’s Dream”, the latter is closer to the heart of Munro. “Rich As Stink” depicts the portraits of Karin, Rosemary and Derek. Karin is a modern woman who “applied a red lipstick to her mouth by using the window as a mirror ---and a long black cigarette holder which she held ready to clump between her teeth at the right moment” *(LG 215)*. Rosemary, the mother of Karin,
“was wearing a long dark–blue dress with gold and orange moons on it and had her hair freshly dyed, very black, piled up in a toppling bird’s nest on top of her head. She looked older than she did in Karin’s memory, and a little forlorn” (LG 216). “Derek was easy to find in a crowd because of his height and his shining forehead and his pale, wavy, shoulder–length hair. Also because of his bright steady eyes and satirical month and his ability to stay still” (LG 216).

“Before the Change” deals with the relationship between father and daughter. She stopped her research work and wants to take a break. She talked on various subjects like abortion and did not make any adjustment with the servants of the house. Many a time, she criss–crossed with her father. Munro’s focus is on their conversation rather than on the landscape of the place.

In the concluding story, “My Mother’s Dream” Munro is aware of the season. The opening story of the collection opens with the summer season and in the last, we notice the settlement of the season. As Munro puts: “Snow had settled overnight on the luxury of summer. A change of reason unexplainable, unexpected” (LG 293). All left house, “and my mother was alone in the high spacious house amongst its rather formed trees and gardens” (LG 294). The subject is, again, the relationship between mother and daughter. Munro records in detail the relationship in
between mother-daughter, mother and father, and her relations with her relatives.

To sum up, in these four collections, Munro focuses on the human relationships—the relationship between mother—daughter and father—daughter. The bond between a mother and daughter is primordial. Munro has already given this hint in her previous collection *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You*. In her concluding story “The Ottawa Valley”, Munro writes:

> The problem, the only problem, is my mother. And she is the one of course that I am trying to get; it is to reach her that this whole journey has been undertaken. With what purpose? To mark her off, to describe, to illumine, to celebrate, to get rid, of her; and it did not work, for she looms too close, just as she always did. (246)

The second subject is the depiction of the problem of modern women—love, sex or to run away. The researcher has minutely made a careful study of landscape and noticed how landscape reveals the inner minds of the characters. Stories such as “Friend of My Youth”, “Pictures of the Ice”, “Oh, What Avails”, Five Points”, Oranges and Apples”, and “Differently”—are good examples of landscape where Munro tries to reach the innermost hearts of the characters.