Chapter Four
Illicit Territory and Terrain of Sex

I don't know why my subconscious mind selected this man's nude figure while there were various other men that I had acquaintance with, desired, loved and lusted after. (Ambai, Vittin 143)

A scrutiny of the scenes of sex and sexual imagery in the stories of Ambai and Alice Munro shows them to be graphic painters of the human anatomy. The way they map the male or female body grants their style the aura of body language. They both freely focus on how the terrain of sex is sculptured, textured and structured in contemporary life and society. Ambai believes that sex needs to be "treated as a natural emotion with no effort on the part of the author to extra-sweeten it." She feels that "Sex is good when true lovers get together in a natural longing or the husband and wife indulge in it as a part of married life" (Face 162).

Traditional Tamil writers have throughout treated sex as a "male-feeling" with the woman asking "for sex only for a child, never for enjoyment" (163). As she grew up, Ambai refused to conceive of sexless love and rejected the "separation between the mind and the body" that had emerged over the years due to the people's persistent failure to perceive love and sex in their proper perspective (164). Writers of the Gandhian era,
who place platonic relationships at a higher level and disdain physical intimacies, get flayed by Ambai in her critical treatise, *Face*. She points out how some of the writers "have viewed sexual abstinence as a very Indian quality" (167).

The famous ancient Indian book on erotics, *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, disproves the belief that Indians have throughout insisted on the renunciation of sex. The Indian God, Kama, resembles the Greek Eros and the Roman Cupid in His exploits. In his introduction to this Indian classic, Spellman writes of how this God shoots His flowery arrows even at Brahma and makes Him commit incest with His own daughter and of how neither the Gods nor the mortals could escape the shafts of Kama (29-30). He points out how other famous works composed in ancient India also treat sexual desire as an obviously innate urge of all creatures.

Alice Munro, known for her "candid confession," just before her remarriage to Gerald Fremlin concedes that

> doing without men is an impossibility . . . obviously sex is the big thing, and the whole thing of emotions that radiate out from good sex, which seems to me so central in adult life, and so irreplaceable. . . . I'm in a relationship that makes me happy and I feel
very secure that way. (qtd. in Ross, Double Life 79)

Munro's fiction finds explicit expression of female sexuality which reminds one of the feminine libidinal energy and jouissance that the French feminists talk about. Munrovian women generally are not ashamed of their own bodies and do not regard their sexuality as unfeminine, unlawful or shameful. The stories of Ambai, on the other hand, paint the passions of their protagonists on a subdued note; but one could discern in their silences and subtexts the urge of the women to stray into the "illicit territory" when they experience alienation from their partners. In most cases, the Ambaian women enjoy only in their fantasized realms the transcendence of sex that the Munrovian heroines actualize by transgressing the bounds of tradition. The two writers, however, are at great pains to show how the absence of sexual harmony brings to the surface the familiar, the ordinary and the banal inside marital life making the grass greener on the other side of the fence. Martin writes, "The narrator in 'Bardon Bus' has at least once attained this transcendence, but only in Australia" during her brief "but supremely happy liaison with X" (141-142).

Women's relative release from regimentation in the west in the second half of this century has begun to show how male dominance could no longer be maintained
through sexual suppression. In "Sexual Ethics and Women," Bertrand Russell remarks, "Men have from time immemorial been allowed in practice, if not in theory, to indulge in illicit sexual relations" (293).

The female intelligentsia would no longer put up with this prerogative. Their protest manifests itself in their promiscuity when their men dominate or ditch them. Olive Banks writes that the feminist movement in the west has witnessed

a loosening of manners and morals and an emancipation, for the young middle-class girl in particular, from those suffocating conventions that had restricted her within the narrow world of Victorian morality. (180)

The attitude towards sex has not, however, been revolutionized in many parts of India so radically as to permit girls to have sexual intimacy before marriage unlike the Munrovian girl, Naomi, who tells Del, "Everybody does it. It's getting to be just like saying hello" (Lives 194). Traditional writers contend that sex is only for procreation and not for recreation. To a conventionally conditioned woman writer in Tamil like Gomati Nagarajan, chastity is "a code of one-man-for-one-woman and she feels that this should be observed mentally and physically for sex, according to her, is a divine secret to be shared
by only the husband and the wife" (Ambai, *Face* 86). The Tamil writer, Gugapriyai's view on the treatment of sex needs to be revealed as the scatological metaphor she uses shows a traditional Tamil woman's outward contempt for explicit expressions of eros:

> There is no need to show the guests the latrine in one's house. One might show the prayer room. The latrine, if dirty, will proclaim itself by its stink. Likewise, in stories, one must not write about the bad things in life. (qtd. in Ambai, *Face* 71)

The striking contrast between the Tamil cultural context and the Canadian way of life is brought into focus as one juxtaposes the Ambaian girls with their Munrovian counterparts. One could find in the narrator and her friend, Lonnie, in "Red" of Munro's first collection the prototypes of Del and Naomi in *Lives*. The thirteen-year old heroine in the former story would talk with her friend intimately of sex and gather information of it from different sources in her early teens:

> Also we read articles on frigidity of the menopause, abortion and why husbands seek satisfaction away from home. When we were not doing school work, we were occupied most of the time with the garnering, passing on
and discussing of sexual information. We had made a pact to tell each other everything.

(Munro, Dance 149)

The naivety of Ambai's Chellam and Champakam in "Fifteen" shows what most Tamil girls brought up in a conservative middle-class families are like. At the age of thirteen, Chellam responds to the romantic overtures of Kalivaradanan, her tutor's son, but she does not know what love really is nor does she know how to answer his letter. Her cousin, Champakam, two years senior to her, does not know what "manhood" is. The girl-narrator in "Valluṟukal" serves as a foil to the young Munrovian narrator in "Walker." In the latter story, the narrator recognizes the sexy woman in her father's old girlfriend, Nora, as she relates, "Nora when she laughs squeezes her large bosom under her folded arms" (Munro, Dance 15-16). She could remember how provocative her pose was as Nora asked her father to dance with her:

She stands in front of him, arms hanging loose and hopeful, her breasts, which a moment ago embarrassed me with their warmth and bulk, rising and falling under her loose flowered dress, her face shining with the exercise. (16-17)
The narrator in "Vallūṟukaḷ," on the other hand, could hardly make out the words passed between her mother and Gopal Babu in the absence of her father. She says:

Gopal Babu had come to our house. "Shylu, you go and play," said mother sending me out.

I hid myself under the doorsteps. They both spoke. I was too young to remember their words. As she threw back her head laughing loudly at something, father came near the door (Ambai, Cirakukal 84).

In a similar situation, it may be noted how the Munrovian narrator did not go out as her father said, "Do you want to go outside and amuse yourselves?" (Dance 14). The Ambaian girls in "Fifteen" betray their utter ignorance of sex as they look through the book pilfered from Katyayani's newly married uncle's bookcase:

They gazed at one particular picture for some time and gave a gasp of horror, "Ayyayyo."

Chellam had almost reached the point where she was certain she wanted no more details about love, when suddenly realization dawned: they were looking at the picture upside down. They stroked their necks. (Ambai, Purple 148).

Until a year before, Champakam had taken her mother at her word as she said "that the gods whispered in her
ears that she must take three days' rest every month" (148-149). Only on attaining puberty did she realize that it had nothing to do with divine whispers "in her ears." They tried to glean more information from the books in the circulating library:

After much hard work, Katyayani discovered what they were looking for, in the corner of the third row of a wall of shelves crammed high with books. They sat down on the narrow benches provided and read all three books in great haste, in the evenings.

The books had strange titles to different chapters, all about love games and positions. The girls did not find the details of what they were actually looking for, but thought that they understood that married men and women indulged in 'love play' twenty-four hours of the day. Chellam refused to believe that her parents could have anything to do with any of that. Champakam, however, couldn't come to any firm conclusion. (148)

Girls of their age across the world have the same curiosity to gain knowledge of sex. Del Jordan and her friend in Lives, who turn to similar books to enrich their knowledge of man-woman intimacy, go to prove how rapidly girls in the west progress from innocence to experience. Del says, "Naomi and I when we were
younger used to draw pictures of men and women with startling gross genitals, the women's fat, bristling with needly hair, like a porcupine's back" (Munro, Lives 120). While she is in her "first year in the high school," one hears Del saying:

Naomi and I held almost daily discussions on the subject of sex, but took one tone, so that there were degrees of candor we could never reach. This tone was ribald, scornful, fanatically curious. A year ago we had liked to imagine ourselves victims of passion; now we were established as onlookers, or at most cold and gleeful experimenters. (123)

They read a book that Naomi had found in her mother's old hope chest. It is a book like Kama Sutra, which Ambai's Chaya in "Ciṟakukal" says every woman has got to read before marriage. This book enlightens the two teenagers not only on what sex is but its different varieties as well. As they read, "The rear-entry position is sometimes indicated in cases where the female is considerably obese." Naomi guesses that this could be the method adopted by Mr. Chamberlain as "he does it to Fern. She's considerably obese" (Lives 123). In Kama Sutra the kind of posture described here is termed "Congress of a cow" (Vatsyayana 114). Even educated couples portrayed in modern Tamil stories do not seem to know what the Canadian girls here learn,
"Care should be taken during the initial connection . . . particularly if the male organ is of an unusual size. Vaseline may prove a helpful lubricant." They read on and gather what position of congress is preferred during the final phase of pregnancy, "Intercourse between the thighs is often resorted to in the final stages of pregnancy" (Lives 123). In "Jesse and Meribeth" of Progress, the narrator and her friend, who change their names from "Jessie" and "MaryBeth" to the forms given in the title of the story, remind one of Del and Naomi in Lives or Rose and her classmates in Who. Here the reader gets a glimpse of Beatrice's boyfriend coming in the afternoons to make love to her. The reader sees how inquisitive the girls are. The narrator says:

We would find Beatrice making up the bed. She took all the covers off and tucked in the sheet with a professional briskness. Then she laid an absorbent cotton pad across the sheet at a strategic place. . . . She plumped up the pillows, turned a corner of the top sheet down over the quilt. A queasy feeling of childhood lust came back to me, a recollection of bedclothes intimacies. (Munro, Progress 176).

The juxtaposition of the Tamil and Canadian texts shows how conspicuously absent juvenile sex in the
Ambaian world is. There is adult rape of a minor girl but girls are not seen seeking sexual satisfaction with boys as knowledge of sex is hidden and hard to come by. Alice Munro, on the contrary, sees it in most Canadian settings. One day as Del returns home after a jolly ramble with Naomi, she finds Mr. Chamberlain having "a real drink, whisky and water." The inquisitive girl asks for a drink saying, "All I want is to find out what it tastes like." The man tells her, "Well I can't give you a drink for nothing. I don't see you doing any tricks for me. I don't see you sitting up and begging like a good doggie" (Lives 133). Then she skilfully assumes the pose of a seal and barks to his delight. He tantalizes her first but allows her "lips to touch the rim of the glass which he held in one hand. Then with the other hand he did something nobody could see." The man then "rubbed against the damp underarm" of her "blouse and then inside the loose armhole of the jumper" she "was wearing." She says, "He rubbed quick, hard against the cotton over my breast. So hard he pushed the yielding flesh up, flattened it. And at once withdrew. It was like a slap, to leave me stung" (134).

The next time Fern's lover comes, she facilitates his erotic endeavours by "standing near him while he was getting his rubbers on in the dark hall" (135). Rasporich likens Del to a "Calvinist Lolita, who
idealizes and objectifies lust" as she "encourages the sexual advances of Mr. Chamberlain" (48). Like Vladimir Nabokov's celebrated heroine, Humbert's nymphet of nymphets, Del allows herself momentarily to be the "fire of" Mr. Chamberlain's "loins," but not the "light of" his "life" (Nabokov 11). Del graphically describes his sudden sexual assaults:

> He did not bother with a pinch on the arm or a pat on the arm or a hug around the shoulders, fatherly or comradely. He went straight for the breasts, the buttocks, the upper thighs, brutal as lightning. And this was what I expected sexual communication to be--a flash of insanity, a dreamlike, ruthless, contemptuous breakthrough in a world of decent appearances. (Lives 135).

Del's curiosity to explore the terrain of sex leads her into several escapades but she escapes unscathed until she meets a lumberjack named Garnet French. She could not make love to Frank Wales, Mr. Chamberlain and Jerry Storey. Later, when Del reports to Naomi that she has "done it too," her friend asks with curiosity, "You have? Who with? Jerry Storey. He wouldn't know how. Garnet?" (194). It is with her passionately sexy friend, Garnet French that Del gets her sexual "baptizing," as the title suggests. Barbara Godard writes:
Garnet, whose name refers to the blood-coloured stone . . . draws Del's blood when he breaks her hymen, spilling it on the ground among the peonies, creating a blood bond with the cosmic forces and with the Mother Earth. (67)

Del resists religious baptism by water but submits to this baptism of blood with absolute and unquestioning "surrender--not the woman's to the man but the person's to the body, an act of pure faith, freedom in humility" (Lives 181). In "Half a Grapefruit" of Who one hears the story of how Ruby Carruthers sexually serves Horse Nicholson and Runt Chesterton without knowing their identity "under the veranda" (Munro, Who 41). One day when Carruthers was alone, the three boys, Del Fairbridge, Horse Nicholson and Runt Chesterton, went to "see what they could get." The trick played by one of them is humorously described:

Del Fairbridge was a good-looking boy, conceited, and not very clever. He said he would go into the house and persuade Ruby with no trouble at all, and if he could get her to do it with all three of them, he would. What he did not know was that Horse Nicholson had already arranged with Ruby to meet him under the Veranda. (41)
As Del Fairbridge was moving around the dark house in search of Ruby, she was under the veranda doing it with Horse while Runt was sitting on the steps of the veranda keeping watch, "no doubt listening attentively to the bumping and the breathing." Before long, Horse came out saying he would go into the house to look for the girl. Interestingly enough, Horse found the deceived boy eating marshmallows in the pantry saying, "Ruby Carruthers wasn't fit to piss on." He felt "he could do better any day, and he was going home."

"Meanwhile Runt had crawled under the veranda and got to work on Ruby." The funniest part of it is reached when Ruby heard Horse Nicholson overhead and asked Runt "Then who the hell are you?" (41).

The situation portrayed here shows how girls get duped and how boys are out to get only gratification of their carnal cravings. Flo warns Rose against getting into such trouble, but that is exactly what she does. It may be noted here how scrupulously Ambai puts sex outside the domain of the doctoral scholars she portrays in "Mīḷēccaṅ" and "Trisanku" which are set in academic centres. The reader is not given any peep into the sexual orientations of the protagonists. One could sense how devoid of sensual pleasures their lives seem when set against the Canadian context. One remembers here how the author's attitude has been culturally conditioned by the Tamil concept of how
female sexuality needs to be repressed so as to keep it from spilling over into the illicit territory. Munro in Ambai's place might have made the need for sex in the heroine of "Trisanku" overpower the demand for the sense of decorum when her professor propositioned her in the privacy of his room. Anjana here would rather rage like Kannagi of Cilappatikāram when her father's boss gives a lift and carnally caresses her. But she only "weep silently for her lips which had been bitten and her breasts which had been kneaded in return for the money her father had stolen long ago" (Ambai, Purple 59).

The difference between the Canadian and the Tamil cultures comes to the fore through the rather cold and cautious reactions of some of the Tamil women to male overtures of intimacy. In "Vāmanaṅ" of Cirukkāḷ, Vanaja first meets Partho Bhattacharya at a party in the house of a German student named Maria. When he gets drunk, the iceberg in him gives way to the sensual lover who seeks to set out in his sexual quest with memories of Beethoven and Mozart. The narrator here says:

I remember Partho touching my toes every five minutes and trying to play piano on them saying, "These are not toes but piano keys."

Every time he did that, he would add, "This
is Beethoven. This is Mozart." (Ambai, Vittin 82)

A similar piano-playing scene is seen in the title story of Munro's third book, where one is told that Char's husband, Arthur:

squeezed Et's waist as if to stress their companionable puzzlement, involuntary obeisance, before her sister. She felt afterwards the bumpy pressure of his fingers as if they had left dents just above where her skirt fastened. It had felt like somebody absent-mindedly trying out the keys of a piano. (Something 14)

In Munro's "Wild Swans" of Who, the reader witnesses a clergyman playing a tune on the piano of Rose's private parts during her journey to Toronto on a train. At Brandford a man asks Rose if she will mind his sitting beside her. He claims to be a United Church Minister, but he is dressed like a layman. He is rather short and childish in appearance. He talks to her casually about sighting some Canada geese and swans during his drive through the country. The central episode here is the manual intimacy that he deftly manages to have with her under the newspaper spread on his lap. The sensitive protagonist's natural response and mock modesty, instinctive curiosity, connivance and her orgasmic excitement are
realistically and symbolically portrayed. The progress of the player's questing fingers and the outcome of their movement are metaphorically linked with the places that the train passes through. Commenting on the legs that instinctively open, Blodgett writes:

One has the sense that what is happening is "as old as the hills," for their opening is a view down upon "the preglacial valley, the silver-wooded rubble of little hills" of the Niagara Escarpment, upon a world, presumably, that existed before frigidity and heavy snows. (93)

One is struck here by the sensual use of the words describing the intimate things that are suggestive of what Rose experiences:

Victim and accomplice she was borne past Glassco's Jams and Marmalades, past the big pulsating pipes of oil refineries. They glided into suburbs where bedsheets, and towels used to wipe up intimate stains flapped leeringly on the clotheslines, where even the children semed [sic] to be frolicking lewdly in the school yards, and the very truckdrivers stopped at the railway crossings must be thrusting their thumbs gleefully into curled hands. (Munro, Who 63)

Rose is a typically sensitive Munrovian protagonist who could be looked upon as a reincarnation
of Del Jordan. Rose falls in love with Patrick, but
finds little passion in him to sustain the kind of
intimacy that she conceives of. As the rift between
fact and fantasy widens frustrating her, she teases and
torments him outside Dr. Henshawe's back door trying
"to make him open his mouth" (78) as well as "his fly"
(79). The female fury in her fit of frustration comes
to the surface as she rudely asks him to "go in and
deflower," the old lady, adding, "I'm sure she's a
virgin" (79). But she succeeds in getting him to have
premarital sex inside his apartment when his fellow
students are out. "They undressed quickly and got into
Patrick's bed. Now was the time. They clung together,
shivering and giggling. Rose was doing the giggling."
She was afraid they would bungle it and be humiliated.
He "managed, in spite of gigantic embarrassment,
apologies; he passed through some amazed pantings and
flounderings, to peace." However, she "was pleased
when it was accomplished. ... They had done what
others did, they had done what lovers did" (81).

The Canadian writer's characterization shows the
reader what a deeper insight she has into the feelings
and fantasies of boys and men as well. Sam and Edgar
in "The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink" of
Munro's sixth book would talk of the girls and women as
boys in their teens do. Edgar prides himself on being
a non-virgin. They imagine ravishing all the women they leer sparing only old Mrs. Cruze:

Teachers at the business college--mannish-looking Miss Lewisohn, who taught accounting, and brittle Miss Parkinson, who taught typing. The fat woman in the post office, the anemic blonde in Eaton's Order Office. Housewives who showed off their behinds in the back yard, bending over clothes baskets. The grotesque nature of certain choices excited them more than the grace and prettiness of girls who were officially admired. Alice Peel was dismissed almost perfunctorily--they tied her to her bed and ravished her on their way down to supper. Miss Verne was spread quite publicly on the stairs, having been caught exciting herself with her legs around the newel post. (Munro, Progress, 144)

They would fantasize:

the Bible salesman doing it in place of themselves, plugging old Miss Kernaghan. Over and over, the Bible salesman rams her, tears her ancient bloomers, smears her hungry mouth, drives her to croaks and groans of the most extreme need and gratification. (144)
Before long Callie is seduced by them with Edger staying away from school to have it many times with her. Later he is in a funk about Callie getting pregnant.

Jessie's aborted affair with Cryderman in "Jesse" reminds the reader of the love Mrs. Gannett's cousin tries to make to Alva in "Sunday" of the first collection. Jessie one day finds the Crydermans having a nice time after a drink. The man goes away to get his cigarettes. On his way back, he enters the kitchen where Jessie stands "at the sink, filling up the ice-cube tray." Rummaging noisily in the kitchen cupboard beside the sink, he makes advances to the maid, "He presses against me, side to side. He puts his hand on my shoulder, squeezes. He moves that hand across my back, touches my bare neck" (Progress 181). On her next weekly visit, Jessie is enticed into a summer house by Mr. Cryderman. He sits with her inside the bower stroking her like the airman in "How." What surprises one is his moralizing lecture and his rebuking her for venturing into a place like this with a man like him. One is here reminded of Munro's Jerry in "Baptizing" or Ambai's Partho in "Vāmanan," who, when sober, suppresses his passion and puts down his piano playing to Vanaja's fantasy (Ambai, Vittin 83).

Munro has portrayed juvenile sexuality in most of her early as well as later collections. The tale of
Maria related to Brenda by Neil in "Five Points" gives the reader an insight into how a teenager's lust turns into nymphomania. One sees how "Maria's needs increased" and "She is going to the shed every night" (Munro, Friend 39). The title story of Munro's eighth collection deals with the strange disappearance of Heather Bell during a camp organised by Miss Johnstone. One could guess how tart Heather Bell is as one hears of how "Heather Bell had been the worst one, the boldest, getting hold of the hose and shooting water on the rest of them in all the bad places" (Open 130).

"Spaceships Have Landed" is another story here where the reader has a graphic picture of the life of young people in an urban section of a modern country. Here one sees how teenagers tend to be assertive and clamour for a permissive ambience. Ambai's girls and boys do not even fantasize what some of the Munrovian youngsters factualize. Among the changes coming over life-styles is the attitude of the Canadian teenagers towards conventional marriage which they pass through more for convenience and out of necessity than for any emotional factor. Before the marriage of Rhea one finds her being taken to a kind of casino by her lover, Bill. Wayne here gets her cokes that seem to be drugged on purpose. He makes advances to her and follows her to the loo where he tries to have sex with her consent but puking prevents it.
Men and women with conventionally conditioned concepts are turned into voyeurs or peeping toms by Munro to make them see what the younger generation is like. The three hippies living downstairs in the rooming-house strike Mr. Lougheed as people who "have sprung up, armed as they were, from the earth. No doubt that was how they thought of themselves" (Munro, Something 56). Once as he came into the building, he saw the ground floor door open. Next he was shocked to see the unashamed copulation of the youngsters, "In the back of the hall--in full view though, not under the stairs--were two figures tangled up with each other. Rex and Calla" (56). They were seen adopting the method that Naomi in Lives supposes Mr. Chamberlain employs during his intimacy with Fern Dogherty. One reads on, "He was apparently the one to be laughed at, for having witnessed, for being shocked at, their copulation" (Something 57). But he wanted to tell them it had not shocked him as he had watched a similar scene in his school days as part of a paying audience. In "Marrakesh" of the same volume Munro makes an old woman view with a shock the scene of her sophisticated grand-daughter mating with her neighbour. When it is past for bedtime, Dorothy goes back to sleep. But the sight of herself in the glass as an old repulsive figure makes her go down to have a cup of tea. Then
she is made to play the role of a voyeur. Rasporich, commenting on Jeanette's behaviour, says:

One of Munro's most damning portraits of the modern woman is that of the career type. . . . As she juxtaposes the old school teacher, the grandmother Dorothy, with her granddaughter, the college professor, Munro addresses the old feminine pattern of immaturity and posturing. (57)

The act of love performed here is a factual fulfilment of her fantasized seduction by the Arab in the romanticized city. Unlike Lougheed, the puritanical woman of the older generation is taken aback. As she recovers from the shock of the sight, she realizes, "Strength is necessary, as well as something like gratitude, if you are going to turn into a lady peeping Tom at the end of your life" (Munro, *Something* 140).

Et in the title story of the same collection becomes a "peeping Tom" when she discovers how Char and Blaikie meet at night and mate behind their house. Et wakes up one night and remembers she has left her organdy dress on the line after washing it. Going downstairs, she opens the back door:

standing on the stoop pulled the clothesline towards her. Then almost under her feet, from the grass right beside the stoop, where there was a big lilac bush that had grown and
spread, untended, to the size of a tree, two figures lifted themselves, didn't stand or even sit up, just roused their heads as if from bed, still tangled together some way. The back kitchen light didn't shine directly out but lit the yard enough to her to see their faces. Blaikie and Char. (8)

The sight of their erotic union surprised Et who fled back to bed with the picture of their "swollen" "mouths" and "their cheeks flattened, coarsened, their eyes holes" (8).

In the title story of her second collection, Ambai implicitly points out how in a joint family like Papaji's, there is no privacy for sexual intimacy for young couples. The repressed sex urges of the heroine here and her man are subtly contrasted with the free and natural outlets of passion that the peacocks have. The couple witnessing their fulfilment could only have a quick kiss which "indicated the passion aroused within" (Vittin 33). There is even here interruption from Badijiji who comes to collect charcoal from the drum there on the roof, becoming thereby a kind of "peeping Tom."

In some recent stories, however, the reader is given a quick scanty glimpse of the intimate union of a man and his wife. In "Mallukkaṭṭu" the writer shows
how the jealous husband of Chenbagam seeks to satisfy her sexually:

Sometimes when she wakes up she finds him still walking up and down the veranda. She would quietly go and touch him from behind. He would at once stretch back his hands and hug her. She would stand leaning on his back her face, breasts and shoulders. Sometimes after a while he would walk with her to bed holding her in a warm embrace. This sometimes happens when they have sex. Then he strives hard to help her have orgasm. He would reassure himself about her satisfaction. (16)

A sexually considerate and understanding partner portrayed in a similar context is Isabel in "White" of Munro's sixth collection. Martin points out how she placates "Laurence by consenting to sex on his birthday morning despite the danger of imminent interruption" from children (184). The reader becomes here a voyeur in retrospect through the recollection of how Isabel gratified his desire:

When she woke up this morning, Laurence was wanting to make love to her. She knew that the children would be awake.... The best thing to do seemed to be to hurry him up, and she did that, encouraging him even when he
was momentarily distracted by the sound of heavy-footed Sophie, prowling around downstairs, banging open some kitchen drawer.

"What the Christ is the matter with her?" he whispered into Isabel's ear. But she just stroked him as if impatient for further and faster activity. That was effective. Soon everything was all right. He lay on his back holding her hand. . . . (Munro, Progress 297)

The protagonist who is made to view male sexual self-gratification under duress is Del, for instance, back in the second collection. He takes her to the banks of a river and gratifies himself at her expense, "leaving her disappointed and depressed," as Rasporich puts it (49). She is here made a passive voyeur. The sight does not turn her on at all as there is no participation. Munro, in Jerry storey of the same collection, portrays a male character who prefers to be a passive onlooker. He is a mother's boy like Manohar in Ambai's playlet, "Payañka!" ("Fears"), whom the Tamil writer pictures as an impotent husband tied to his mother's apron strings. A provocatively pictorial scene that Munro paints is found in Who on the occasion of a dinner. Among the dinner guests here, one finds Cyril, a self-styled poet, who "can't think of anything to do but hang around the John and upset people"
kissing "any girl who came out, saying 'Welcome, sweetheart, so glad you come, so glad you went'" (Munro, Who 107). There is next a couple standing in a narrow hall giving each other French kisses, "Whenever anybody wanted to get through, this couple had to separate, but they continued looking at each other, and did not even close their mouths" (106-107).

The dinner party here shows one how different the Munrovian women's reactions to sexual overtures are, particularly when juxtaposed with the Tamil feminist's response to the advances made by Partho at a dinner party in "Vāmanan." The next morning the reader only learns that Vanaja and her German friend, Maria, "bundled him into the car and dropped at the hostel" (Ambai, Wittin 84). The situations serve to set off the naturally human instincts focalized by Munro without inhibitions. Even in her latest collection, Open, the reader is made to peep into the intimate lives of men and women. The missing girl, Heather Bell, could have been seduced and silenced by Marian Hubbert's husband or got abducted by someone else. What surprises the reader more than the loss of the girl is old Lawyer Stephen's sudden surge of sexuality after the visit of the couple to consult him.

Scenes of sexuality in most of Ambai's fictional world seek to be staged behind psychic screens or are shown as dreams, reveries or metaphors. In "Cila
Maraṇañkaḷ" ("Some deaths"), Ambai surrealistically paints a dream with unconnected images. The orthodox reader is not outraged as one is not governed by moral laws in the land of dreams and so there need to be no inhibitions. There is in this story an old critic appearing with nothing on like Laurence's mother in Munro's "White" of Progress. He gets described thus:

A light red body. The hairs of his head and chest had all turned grey. The hair growing about his member was also entirely white. His backside had shrunk like a toothless mouth. His sexual organ hung sagging. He struggled trying to sit or walk as if he had held something between his thighs. (Vittin, 143)

There are in the stories of both the writers images of nudity, that remind one of the sacred statuary of the Greeks and the Hindus or the sculptures of the Florentine artists of the Renaissance. Both the writers portray nude figures but while Munro makes them out to be artistically ludicrous, Ambai manages to make her pictures or their backgrounds ridiculous or pitiable as the satirist in her emerges more prominently than the artist. Their presentation of Sophie in "White" and Jiji in "Vittin" bears this out. The most memorable figure in the former story is the profane professor, Sophie, the mother of Laurence, who
is proud of proclaiming that she bore him out of wedlock. On her son's eventful birthday, she "is trapped swimming naked, and subsequently arises out of the water" like Venus "to parade her nakedness with absolute assurance and shamelessness" (Rasporich 87). As her bathrobe was torn and thrown into the lake by some teenagers, she struts home with nothing on and greets her son terribly embarrassing him and his wife, Isabel:

This was the first time Isabel had ever seen an old woman naked. Several things surprised her. The smoothness of the skin compared to the wrinkled condition of Sophie's face, neck, arms, and hands. The smallness of the breasts. (Seeing Sophie clothed, she had always perceived the breasts as being on the same large scale as the rest of her.) They were slung down like little bundles, little hammock bundles, from the broad, freckled chest. The scantiness of the pubic hair, and the color of it, was also unexpected; it had not turned white, but remained a glistening golden brown, and was as light a covering as a very young girl's. (Progress, 300)

Sophie does not cover her breasts or her privates with her hands, "She stood in the sunlight, one foot on the bottom step of the veranda--slightly increasing the
intimate view they could all get of her . . . " (300).

Commenting on this part of the story, Blodgett feels:

This scene is juxtaposed with another that Sophie recalls from her past of visiting another family down the lake while getting the milk. By the conclusion of the memory it has become linked with an affair with her German teacher, the outcome of which is her illegitimate son, Laurence, whose birthday is now to be celebrated. (142)

Strikingly similar is Ambai's description of Jiji's nudity in "Vittin" when her clothes are taken off as she lies in a fainting fit:

Her body looked like a ripe fruit whose juice had dried up. The lines of her palms and the veins on their backs stood out with the skin shrinking. The scars of childbirth on her lower abdomen looked like marks of deep ploughing. Her pubic hair, dry and white, was sporadically missing. The backside and the thighs, once plump, now sagging, hung with wrinkles. The upper portion of her inner thigh looked like a withered banana skin. The drooping nipples hung low like dried grapes. (Vittin 45)

Both Ambai and Munro began to exhibit their love of art and beauty enshrined in their own female bodies.
Their narcissistic urges could be discerned particularly in the attitudes of the heroines who project their authorial image. The Ambai-like narrator in "Ammā" says "After father leaves, I close my door. I take off my chemise. The mirror reflects my black body. My hands run over my shoulders, arms, breasts, waist and my soft thighs" (Cirakukal 146). This element of female narcissism is found to be more evident in Ambai's playlet "Muṭivillā Uraiyāṭal":

> Your body is beautiful. Look at it in the mirror without clothes. Untie your hair. Run your hand through it. Touch your forehead with the tip of your fingers. Stroke your eyebrows. Touch your earlobes. Fondle your eyes. Touch your cheeks gently. Round your lips. Bite them with your teeth. Slowly come down to the neck. Fondle the breasts with your hands. Caress your nipples. Place your hands like cotton on your stomach. Look at the silk-like hair at the lower part. Press your thighs. This is your body. It is for you. Your property. Enjoy this property of yours. (33)

The Munro-like protagonist, Del, has not only the propensity to see in the personal self beauty of the female body in general, but also to be exhibitionistic. The lamb-like Jerry storey asks to see Del in the nude
as he has "never seen a real live naked woman." Del "pulled off everything . . . and lay down on the bed" as she felt that "The words 'naked woman' were secretly pleasing" to her and made her "feel opulent, a dispenser of treasure." She says, "I thought my body handsomer than my face, and handsomer naked than clothed; I had often wished to show it off to somebody" (Lives 169). With his usually "Scientific curiosity" Jerry stands by the bed and looks down at her figure astonished (173). "He put a finger against one of" her "nipples as if he was testing a thorn" (169). He "is too abstracted to touch the flesh he uncovers . . . ." (Carscallen, "Three Jokers" 133).

Most of Munro's memorable protagonists speak the language of the body. Their libidinal drives prompt them to tear down the barriers between premarital, marital and extramarital sex. Critics like Derrida have pointed out that all cultural institutions have been associated with the male, but the territory of the natural has been associated with the female. The terrain of sex resists enclosure as much as the female foxes in the pens of Ben Jordan in "The Flat Roads" who resent their capture and confinement and "decide to kill" their young ones obviously to prevent their being caught (Lives 18). The disenchanted Munrovian heroines stray into the illicit territory as the terrain outside enclosures is exotic as there are no barriers to bind
those who traverse it. The Ambaiian heroines dream of the terrain of sex outside marriage but stray into the illicit territory only when they sexually boycott their spouses as in "Vallūṟukal" or separate from them as in "Piracurikkapati." The licit territory looks initially exotic to the lonely female protagonists of both the writers who travel through life looking for male companionship; but this territory turns out to be as prosaic as a terrestrial terrain that leaves long trudgers terribly tired. In the Munrovian world monotony is found to be a menace to their merriment. Sexual variety vitalizes the Munrovian women but the heroines of Ambai find it hard to break free of their sexual mores. Ambai, for all her progressive views, would hesitate to describe the kind of bawdy jokes and rumours that one finds freely floated in Munro's *Who*. For instance, Munro in the very first story here gives voice to the rumour rife in the neighbourhood of how Old Tyde has made his daughter perform for him. The subsequent stories in this book show how Rose tears down barriers as she finds it dull to bear the banality of love and sex inside the orbit of wifehood. She courts Patrick but the novelty wears off even before marriage. Her disenchantment with him results in her sexual friendship with her friend Jocelyn's husband, Clifford. As Rose parts from Patrick, at the dinner party, Clifford follows her through the backdoor, "For
five minutes or so they were kissing, murmuring, shivering, pressing, touching" (Who 109). Rose finds her impulsive lover in Clifford and their intimacy develops illicitly. But they have not been able to consummate it for "six months" although they try to do it at the back of a shoe store (112). They are interrupted by Anna from behind them. Anna's startling them while they are caressing each other turns out to be a disastrous experience for Clifford. Once before this futile rendezvous, she goes to Vancouver saying that she wants to meet her dentist and meets her lover at a cafe but they could not go beyond hugs and kisses. Finally, she gets an opportunity to meet him at Powell River by secret appointment. She saves money for this trip. While she has a bath in preparation for it, she pours on herself by mistake at first nail polish remover. But later she finds the body oil and uses "too much of it and" gets "oily spots on her new brassiere" (116). She meets with a series of obstacles before her next meeting with Clifford. Finally, she is disappointed to find that he is a different man. He longs to return to his wife and children and thinks that this extramarital affair is "only mischief" (122).

Years later, Jocelyn gives a party, and when all the guests leave, Rose, Jocelyn and Clifford are seen sitting drunk. Clifford makes love to both the women initially but Rose is the final partner:
When everyone had gone home the three of them, Jocelyn and Clifford and Rose, sat around on the living-room floor, all fairly drunk, and very comfortable. The party had gone well. Rose was feeling a remote and wistful lust; a memory of lust, maybe. Jocelyn said she didn't want to go to bed.

"What can we do?" said Rose. "We shouldn't drink any more."

"We could make love," Clifford said.

Jocelyn and Rose said, "Really?" at exactly the same time. Then they linked their little fingers and said, "Smoke goes up the chimney."

Following which, Clifford removed their clothes. They didn't shiver, it was warm in front of the fire. Clifford kept switching his attention nicely from one to the other. He got out of his own clothes as well. Rose felt curious, disbelieving, hardly willing, slightly aroused and, at some level she was too sluggish to reach for, appalled and sad. Though Clifford paid preliminary homage to them both, she was the one he finally made love to, rather quickly on the nubbly hooked rug. Jocelyn seemed to hover above them
making comforting noises of assent. (Who
132)

The feminist in Ambai would hardly bear this kind of mistreatment meted out to women like Rose and Jocelyn. Her sense of female honour would be outraged to see it even in the fictional world. Ambai would probably here quote the words of Simone de Beauvoir and say, "Women still dream through the dreams of men" (qtd. in Morris 58). In her famous classic, *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes, "she is treated like a live doll . . ." (22). Ambai throughout strives to drive home the fact that most men continue to construct their images of women on stereotypical and sexist assumptions like the librarian in "Añil" ("Squirrel"), when he speaks contemptuously of the magazines of women, or like the male-programmed computer, Kalki, in "Vāmanaṇa" who considers women to be just brainless objects of sex. The feminist researcher, Vanaja, here asks it, "Can you tell me about the position of women?" Kalki sardonically says, "I just know of a single position of theirs. . . . Lying on their backs" (Ambai, *Vittin* 82).

The agony of the suffering and suppressed woman in the Ambaian country strikes a responsive chord deep down in the sympathetic hearts only of women. One finds suggestions of homophilia in a few of Ambai's stories. The journalist in "Veṭippätu," for instance,
feels irresistibly attracted towards the silently suffering woman, "She felt like stroking her cheek. She wished to untie her firmly braided hair and to see it fall down loose. She wanted to touch the part of her neck bearing the heavy gold chains" (Vittin 7). This intimate female instinct is seen in a more ardent form in the urge of Abhilasha of "Karuppukutirai" at the time of her parting from Rosa when she went behind the partition to change her clothes. Remembering something, Abhilasha followed her. Rosa had got out of her clothes that lay in a pile near her feet. There were on her breasts scars of searing. Her nude figure looked like an unbowed arrow. Abhilasha rushed towards her and hugged her. She sat on the floor and drew her towards her bosom. Tears began to wet Rosa's closed eyes. (Vittin 79)

During her brief stay and chat with Rosa, Abhilasha succeeds in empathizing with the outraged woman. The narrator here wants each woman to caress the sensitive parts of another woman in order to understand and appreciate her inner self (59). These sympathetic urges that border on homophilia could be put down to their desire to turn away from their oppressors and find comfort and companionship in the members of the same sex.
There are in the Munrovian world spinsters and divorcees or widows living together and forming friendships but they do not extend so far as to encompass this kind of sensual attraction. Munro implicitly portrays male gay instincts in stories like "The Turkey Season" of Moons in which the climax of the story is seen in the sexual triangle of Gladys, Herb and Brian. The two men here might be homophiles, for the narrator says, "I don't want to go into the question of whether Herb was homosexual or not, because the definition is of no use to me. I think that probably he was, but maybe he was not" (Moons 76). Gay relationships are not so common or preferred in the Munrovian world although gays in the real world today look upon Toronto as their haven. The narrator here remembers, "There wasn't any idea then . . . about homosexuality's going beyond very narrow confines. Women, certainly, believed in its rarity and in definite boundaries" (75). Munro seems rather to pity gays and poke fun at "sexless spinsters" alike.

Referring to the role she acted in a play staged to raise funds, Alice Munro says: "I was an aging but still sexually voracious professor of English" (qtd. in Turbide 46). Turbide writes:

There are many stories of adultery, affairs that end badly and the sexual wilderness felt especially keenly by women entering middle
age. Her heroines are often sensualists, overwhelmed by desire, longing for intimacy. . . . (48)

Unlike most of Ambai's disenchanted housewives, Munrovian heroines do not hesitate to be carried away and carry on with their lovers overtly when familiarity with their spouses becomes oppressive. Munro makes mismatches the material for the major stories of the third book. The miscarriage of Char's marriage with Arthur and the disillusioned woman's straying into the illicit territory seeking solace in sex with Blaikie are dealt with in the title story. As one strays into the illicit territory, one seems to regain one's sense of humour and adventure that one misses when passion cools inside wedlock. Munro presents in frigid women like June of "Memorial" the exact antithesis of passionately sensitive and sympathetic women like Char. Wives of June's temperament are those disqualified by Chaya's sixth law (Ambai, Cirakukal 98). The sexual society of a woman like Eileen is "The natural thing for a man in pain to look for, who loves and fears his wife." June's husband, Ewart, here strays into the illicit territory for "The brief restorative dip" (Something 180). It is to attend the memorial service of her nephew, Douglas, that the "hospitable woman," Eileen, visits June who is a phlegmatic and bossy kind of woman. June keeps her heart free of feelings as the
old widowed sisters in "Winter Wind" keep their house free from dust and dirt. Eileen comes expecting to be of help to her bereaved sister, but she sees no need of her presence as June has put everything in neat order. She drinks Vodka and goes to sleep while the function is on. She gets up late at night and finds June sleeping sedated. She goes down to the garage fumbling in the dark. Ewart returns from watering the shrubs. Here she succumbs to the overtures of the man, who, unlike his wife, needs her generous service in terms of sex. He warmly embraces her, "such an embrace could always be predicted. And she permitted, she almost welcomed it, how could she extricate herself without gross unkindness?" (179). Eileen believes herself to be easily aroused. At the moment, not very much so; she did not anticipate great pleasure from her brother-in-law Ewart—who was now maneuvering her, with more determination and adroitness than she would have expected, toward the back seat of the larger car—but she did more suffer him. Nearly always she did more than that. (179)

The Munrovian humour spices the situation. One sees with what kind of discomfort it is accomplished with "one leg crooked and held against the back of the seat in danger of getting a cramp. . . ." the man here is said to have "burrowed" in her "with every sign of
Terribly disillusioned with his unattractive and unsociable wife, Greta, Ted Makkavala in "Accident" of Munro's fifth book ventures into the terrain of sex out of wedlock. He is passionately carrying on with Fances, a music teacher. The scene of their love-making is made memorably picturesque. The reader sees Ted's sensitive mistress anxiously waiting for him to join her in the small dark room. The mood of suspense mixed with memories of their past meetings, her standing there carrying her coat and shoes, his coming, their hugs and kisses, his putting out the shoes, his kneeling to spread her coat on the floor together with recollections of their earlier performances are humorously portrayed. How he gets her to "Take everything off" and practise oral sex is seen (Moons 97). Another story that maps the Terrain of sex outside marriage with nostalgia is "Bardon." The narrator here, a writer at work on a book about a rich family, briefly visits Australia in connection with her literary project. There she meets an anthropologist, a man she first met in Vancouver, who is now married to his third wife. He is a strangely eccentric philanderer. His friend, Dennis, compares the bevy of X's girlfriends to the "terra-cotta soldiers" of China. The narrator's life lived with X outside marriage is
described as one "without responsibility, without a future in freedom, with generosity, in constant but not wearying celebration" (132). Their liaison is said to have led them to the kind of "familiarity" which is "not oppressive but delightful" (131). Her life back in Toronto seems to be prosaic devoid of the delights that the Australian Terrain afforded her. Her mood of despair is in sharp contrast to the case of her friend, Kay, who falls in love as soon as she gets out of her painful entanglement. One reads, "Her trust is total, her miseries are sharp, and she survives without visible damage" (135). She is at the moment getting over Roy, the estranged husband of another woman. She attributes disillusionment to "self-love" (136).

The narrator in "Hard-Luck" remembers lunching one day with Julie and Douglas Reider at a lovely restaurant overlooking a lake. Here Julie gets a bit drunk and comes out with the two stories of her encounters with a loony lover, a student of psychology, and with Stanley, who ran a phony kind of Encounter Group. Straying into the illicit territory, she used to meet her lover once a week at the beach and then they would neck each other lying behind the rocks. Their love does not progress as she discovers him to be a lunatic coming out of his asylum once a week. Then she persuades her husband to move to another place where she joins the Encounter Group. Here Stanley
pursues her praising her beauty and writing her letters. Later the discovery of the psychologist's liaisons with various women members is made with one husband flying into a rage and the women chortling. The meeting of the women, the attitude of the victims, the feelings of the women left out by him and the delegation that met him and his confession of it for the sake of their therapy are all humorously portrayed. The meeting takes place in the house of one of the members. Julie says:

She had a lovely kitchen with a big chopping block in the middle and I remember thinking, did they do it on that? Everybody was too cool to say they were shocked about adultery or anything like that so we had to say we were mad at Stanley's betrayal of trust. Actually I think some women were mad about being left out. (Munro, Moons 221)

Julie used to see Stanley's wife, "a nice-looking rather nervous girl with lovely long legs." Julie would ask in her mind, "little do you know what your husband's been saying to me." Other women also might think so. Julie adds, "maybe she was thinking; little do you know how many others there are" (221).

Blodgett points out how the stories related here focus on the "use men make of women. It is a use that places them clearly on a margin, outside a core of
sense" (120). It is not "the intelligent sort of love" which is valued but the passionate kind which "isn't rational, or in one's best interests, it doesn't have anything to do with normal preferences" (Moons 226). The irrationality of the passion possessed by Douglas's rich mistress Caroline, is seen when he describes her and characterizes her as "a sexual monster" (225). Julie here hungers for it while Douglas and the divorced and ditched woman in the narrator have seen the seamy side of it. Yet "the fantasy that the three of them entertain of running away together to Nova Scotia" to establish a "menage a trois" shows how the illicit territory continues to hold a special charm even for the worst victims of loveless unions (Martin 153). Martin comments:

That "Visitors" must appear somewhere on the same chart that plots the stories that involve sexual passion is clear from the brief history we are given of Mildred's apparently lengthy affair with a married man. (155)

His relationship with her was purely sexual. It brought her neither love nor lucre. However, she looks back "cozily" on her sexy past and playfully adds, "You know I'm secondhand goods?" (Moons 237).

Isabel in "White" of Munro's sixth book ventures into the illicit territory when her conservative and
sarcastic man, Laurence, loses his power to placate her passion. On the birthday outing Isbael responds to the "bold eyes" of the pilot. The look of the man sweeps her off her feet:

She imagined that they turned at the same time, they looked at each other, just as in some romantic movie, operatic story, high-school fantasy. They turned at the same time, they looked at each other, they exchanged a promise that was no less real though they might never meet again. And the promise hit her like lightning, split her like lightning, though she moved on smoothly, intact. (Munro, Progress 305).

Love and its sweetest part are discussed by Denise years later with her mother, Isabel, who testifies to how "the best part is always right at the beginning." She confesses how her first extramarital "love affair" with the pilot turned out to be "the most passionate. Also the most sordid" (308). She could then hardly believe the possibility of people "making their perilous plans, moving into illicit territory" (307).

Most of the stories in Friend and Open deal with sexual intimacies inside as well as outside the territory of marriage. The adulteries portrayed in the former book prompted Entertainment Today to call it "Sex lives of Canadians" (qtd. in Ross, Double Life
The title story deals with the illicit sex that Robert has with his fiancee's sister, Ellie, and later with Audrey Atkinson, which destroys Flora's second chance to enter into wedlock and dooms her to the lonely life of a sexless spinster. "Five" tells of how Brenda falls for Neil behind her husband's back. She secretly meets him at a secluded "dead-end spot in the swamp" (Munro, Friend 32). Everytime they meet, she lies to her husband, Cornelius, of going away on some errand. One finds that "they have a history of passion . . ." (37). It is a story of insatiable passion that parallels the tale of Maria related to Brenda by Neil. Brenda loves the sight of Neil's bed—badly made, with a rough plaid blanket and a flat pillow, not a marriage bed or a bed of illness, comfort, complication. The bed of his lust and sleep, equally strenuous and oblivious. She loves the life of his body, so sure of its rights. She wants commands from him, never requests. She wants to be his territory. (Friend 41)

"Oranges and Apples" is the story of a disenchanted wife, a tall and well-developed woman with thick black hair. One day Murray gets back unexpectedly in the middle of the day and finds his wife lying provocatively on a "faded quilt, stained
with suntan oil, that they used when they went to the beach" (125). He gets his binoculars and sees Victor clearly sitting by his window on the third floor evidently in the nude and watching her compromising posture with excitement. James Carscallen writes:

If, for instance, we set it beside the closely related "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You," we see that the mischief between Barbara and Victor, for all its intensity, is not the passion that brings Char and Blaikie together again after a lifetime. "Oranges and Apples" takes added intensity from the fact that Et's role of spy is played here by the wronged husband himself, but once again we do not have erotic passion: Murray's love (like Arthur Comber's, for that matter) is adoring but domestic. (The Other Country 347-348)

The next story here, "Pictures of the Ice," has more pathos than passion. The dominant theme in "Goodness and Mercy" is seen to be the need for free expression of human sexuality. Human relationships and responsibilities are broken and forsaken so as to seek satisfaction of sensual urges. Jeanine's husband turfs her out in favour of a "sexpot moron" (Friend 172). The professor's dalliance with Leslie and his divorce from his wife prove it as well. The artist here is
carrying on with the cook of the ship and is "infatuated with Averill" (163). Averill was engaged to several persons and got seduced by "four others" and is evidently carrying on with the captain as well. Her terminally ill mother is obviously a hindrance to her promiscuity. One can visualize Averill going to Edinburgh to see him and it is there that she parts from him shaking hands in that unforgettably sensational fashion which is referred to in the last section. On her way back to Toronto with the body of her mother she strikes up an acquaintance with an apparently kindred spirit. Their relationship turns out to be a case of the worst disenchantment. She marries him precisely because he looks like the kind of man that her mother would not approve of. She later has a shotgun wedding with a much older drama teacher, a very cautious man who gets accidentally hooked. She relies more on his talent than on his goodwill, which experience probably has taught her, he will run out of before long.

The "two strains" of reality that Munro refers to in Quill & Quire can be discerned here. In her parallel existence she allows her mother to die and hurriedly without loosing even a moment makes love to the captain on the bed occupied till then by the departed woman. The captain senses what goes on at the parallel level of Averill's existence and gives her
back her own story without description of the part that she knows he would play. The finale here is the secret knowledge of Averill that is indirectly related. But there is in "Oh, what Avails" a pathetic picture of human beings with their endeavours to relate to one another with little success.

The two wives in "Differently," Georgia and Maya, break their marital cages and go out in search of sexual adventures. Their friendship is broken when they share a lover named Miles. Georgia separates from her husband, Ben, and lives with her instructor. She visits Vancouver where her sons live in the present of the story. Her friends, Maya and her man, Raymond, are remembered. After the death of Maya, Raymond lives with Anne, a thirty-six year old woman working in his office. Another character introduced here is Hilda who writes to Georgia about Maya's death. Hilda was first married to Harvey, a gynecologist; but she is now with another doctor. Ben is now married to another lady. The reader is told about the friendship between Maya and Georgia at two different levels and chats about their husbands, their visits to two restaurants and their pastimes. They would talk of what weighed on them. It was the innocence of these husbands--the hearty, decent, firm, contented innocence. That is a wearying and finally discouraging thing. It makes intimacy a chore. (Friend 228)
One is given a glimpse of Maya's flirtation with Harvey and another man. Georgia gets a job in a bookstore where she strikes up an acquaintance with Miles whom Maya nicknames "the motorcycle sheikh" (239). Georgia's familiarity with him before long breeds in her contempt for him. Neither is able to retain the warmth of their friendship. The gulf between them is widened until they break up finally as they make love late at night in Clover Point. As Miles suggests the idea of a swap with Ben and Lora joining them thus, she feels "bitterly striken." "He described the generous exchanges that would take place among the four of them abed. He asked whether she was getting excited" (234). She only feels disgusted and he feels hurt. "with a hard squeeze" he asks her, "What is so special about you" (235). She indeed carries out her threat to "lean on the horn" to stop him going ahead with it. However, Maya's friendship with him later makes her more miserably jealous. The story is again a journey into the world of memories--of the aching pleasures and pangs of youthful love outside the orbit of marriage--and a return to the present realities of the parody of passion in the autumn of life. That in youth experience of rejection and dejection does not shut the door against love is made manifest here. What Miles does here or what Harvey looks like doing helps one figure out what lovers under such circumstances are
like. What Munro tries to put across here is the irresistible urge in women to look for "what is not" (Shelley, "Skylark" 87).

Carscallen says, "In 'wigtime' the two friends have given up on earlier sexual hopes, and now sit recalling their adventures" (The Other Country 535). Here one learns in retrospect of Margot's terrible adventure and its upshot. Teresa's husband, Reuel, carries on with Margot during Anita's illness and convalescence. One day Anita's mother breaks to her the news of Margot's elopement with him to Kincardine. Thirty years later Anita hears from Margot how Reuel again strayed out of wedlock with another girl. In the course of her chat with Anita, Margot tells her how she got the present house as the result of a terrible event five years before. Reuel went away on a fishing expedition. Margot got an anonymous phone call asking her if she knew where her husband might be the following weekend. She was asked to "check it out" (Friend 264). Margot went to Wasaga Beach disguising herself with a wig and other things. She suspected that it might be with her babysitter Lana's mother, Dorothy Slot, that he could be with. She was a notorious slut with numerous affairs. What surprises her there is the sight of the terribly shy, unhealthy daughter of Dorothy Slot, "But she did have a chunky, appealing little figure, well developed front and back,
and chipmunk cheeks when she smiled, and silky, flat, naturally blond hair" (267). One would take them for father and daughter. She writes her angry comments on pieces of a Kentucky Fried Chicken bag and leaves them under the windshield wiper where he could not fail to see them. She gets back and sits up late into the night waiting for him. He takes Lana back to her aunt's house pretending to be a high-school teacher. On his return she embarrasses him with the discovery of his adultery and gets him to buy her what things she needs. Whenever he balks at anything, all she has to do is to mention "Wigtime" (270). It acts like a magic spell reminding him of his guilt.

The "Mishmash of Love" on the Shelleyan and Byronian lines could be seen in the outer story of "The Albanian Virgin" of Open. The inner story here is set in a mountainous region of Northern Albania where a woman tourist of Canada gets trapped while her guide gets killed. The inner tale of the "Albanian" is related by Charlotte during her hospitalization while Claire visits her. At the outer level of the story one sees the life that Claire lives with Donald, a dermatologist. The reader sees how she lets her tenant, Nelson, walk into her life and carry on with her while his wife, Sylvia, a nurse, is away. The discovery of this extramarital affair leads to the estrangement of the two couples. Donald has a liaison
with his secretary, Helen, on the same evening: the reader is told, "He went straight to the apartment of a young widow who worked as a secretary at his clinic." In a letter he wrote to Claire, he said that "he had never thought of this woman except as a friend until that night, when it suddenly dawned on him what a pleasure it would be to love a kind and sensible, unwrapped-up sort of person" (Open 112-113). Sylvia goes out of Nelson's life for good as she considers him to be a "skunk." Claire, the sensitive research scholar of "Mary Shelley's later novels" renews her intimacy with Nelson during her life as a bookseller (111). He returns to her as they both seem to be made for each other's carnal pleasures. The life she fantasizes with Nelson brings out her attitude towards marriage. It is said, "one of the nice things about marriage was that you could have real affairs--an affair before marriage could always turn out to be nothing but courtship" (111).

Commenting on the stories of Munro's eighth collection, Open, Turbide writes, "And there are the usual Munro elements: murders, marriages, horrible accidents, love, intrigue, surrender--and surprises at every turn" (49). The first story, "Carried," portraying Louisa's factual and fantasized existence could be dubbed a phantasmagoria as most of the figures seem to disappear out of her life as a dream. In the
second story, "A Real Life" one sees how "Marriage takes you out of yourself and gives you a real life" (Open 75). Marriage inevitably leads one to part with one's illusions or fantasies and uncovers the reality of human existence that is monotonously drab.

Muriel Snow here reminds one of Munro's Frances in "Accident," for both are music teachers with romantic dispositions. But they have very little in common with Chenbagam in Ambai's "Mallukkaṭṭu," who does not respond in an openly romantic way to the overtures of friendship made by her husband's acolyte, Somu. Muriel's friends invariably are "the uncles, the fathers, the grandfathers" of her pupils or men with "A bedridden wife, a drinking wife, a vicious shrew of a wife" (58). She looks on her flirtations to be "an innocent good time" although Millicent disapproves gently of her desecrations of marriages and her school board frowns on her escapades (59). In the title story, Heather Bell's mother, a fashionably dressed nurse, is made out to be a woman with loose morals. Frances characterizes her as "One for all and all for one, that's her" (136). The reader is given a peep into the rumoured perversion of Mr Siddicup with Maureen visualizing his wife's undergarments displayed in his house on purpose. Heather Bell might have been strangled or beaten to death by him "in a sexual fit" (152). In "Jack" of the same book one finds Munro
exploring the terrain of sex and exposing the pathetic part of a woman's life when she ceases to be sexually serviceable. "A Wilderness Station" gives the reader a graphic picture of the pathos of woman's life during the period of the pioneers as well as the feminist's life in an urban section of modern Canada.

The heroine of "Vandals," Bea Doud, is "an M.A. in English" who has had "what she herself referred to as a checkered career" of connections with men. She decided to settle down with Peter Parr "the principal of the Carstairs High School, where Bea had for a while done some substitute teaching." One reads, "his decency and good faith and good humor had brought her into an orderly life, and she thought that she enjoyed it" during the hospitalization of his wife, whom he "visited" "faithfully" (264). Her life of liaisons "started when she was married. Her husband was an English airman . . . during the Second World War. After the war she went to England with him, but they were soon divorced." She got back and pursued her studies but "love affairs were the main content of her life, and she knew that she was not being honest when she belittled them" (265). The novelty of her attachment to Peter had obviously begun to wear off when she first met Ladner and compared the fierce-looking man with Peter and "she realized . . . that she was on the wrong track with Peter Parr" (268). Her
ties with the "thin-lipped" and "shy" man turned to "dust and ashes." It is a typical case where "some brute gets the woman tingling and then it's goodbye to Mr. Fine-and-Decent." What "she did think was that some women, women like herself, might be always on the lookout for an insanity that could contain them" (268).

Literature down through the ages has been the traditional space for the exploration of male-female intimacy and the forum for the arguments for and against the taboos that communal customs have constructed. Nelly Furman writes, "While sex is an anatomical fact, sexuality is culturally devised; it is the manner in which society fictionalizes its relationship to sex and creates gender roles" (73). The inhibitive Indian socio-cultural system and its reflection in its literature could be discerned in the way illicit sex is generally treated. Even in Ambai one does not find explicit portrayal of the scenes of sexual intimacy, particularly when the disenchanted heroines stray into the territory outside the licit terrain.

The sexual patches in Ambai are not so sultry throughout. The Tamil writer nowhere condones male aggression either at the individual or official level. A feminist like her could not help being a campaigner against sexual violence on women in the seventies and eighties when rape emerged as a woman's issue. Her
story "Karuppukutirai" of her second collection highlights the atrocities perpetrated on Rosa and her lover, Prabhakar Shinde. After the torture and death of her man, Rosa is picked up as an accomplice of the culprit who set fire to the godowns. Rose tells Abhilasha:

What happens when a woman goes to the police station? That is precisely what happened. They fell on me like logs. They springled water on me every time I fell senseless. Whenever I woke up, I found a man on me. When they were fed up with me, they used things like a twig, stick and wire or whatever could be thrust in. Then they seared my breasts with cigarette butts.

(VTtin 68)

In Ambai's "Vayatu" ("Age") one gets through Gabriella's recollections a vivid picture of the students' insurrection in Chile and the tyranny of the police administration that quells it with a heavy hand. While she and her comrades are herded in a small room with common offenders like harlots, murderers and burglars, Gabriella could see the result of sadistic masculine sexuality:

It was in that throng that the five-month embryo came crushed out of the prostitute who had been raped by the policemen. She screamed once. Then her blood was splashed
on Gabriella and the others around her. Gabriella could not forget that sight. It was mushy like dough. Its bald and flat head had two tightly closed protruding eyes. It looked like a crookedly long hand. Its genital mark was a faint scratch. (Vittin 24)

One, however, finds in both the writers a marked tendency to luxuriate in the depiction of sensual imagery. Munro revels in descriptions of intimacies in most of her fiction. Ambai restricts them in most places to images or metaphors. Munro makes Del in *Lives* compare Mr Chamberlain's genitalia to "a mushroom" and to "some strong-snouted animal" with "grotesque simple looks" (141). Struthers says, "her response was that of an impersonal, distanced, and observant artist . . ." ("Reality and Ordering" 41). Munro's sexual imagery is often suffused with rich humour. It could be discerned at its best when Del tells her mother the morning after her initiation into the world of the "non-virgin," "I saw a cat there yesterday tearing a bird apart. It was a big striped tom, I don't know where it came from" (*Lives* 189). This explains away the patch of dried blood on the ground at the side of her house. Munro's imagery is spiced with humour while Ambai's is mostly shot through with satirical darts. There is a Popean element of
satire in Ambai's risque references to men who exploit women. She pokes fun at the Tamil bookseller in "Rat." The obscene gesture of the man and his hypocritical talk fill her with utter revulsion:

It looked as if the owner of the store would never remove his hand from within his dhoti [a long piece of cloth worn by men]. She couldn't think what great treasure was there inside. Whenever he saw a woman, his hand would go and hide itself there. With the other hand, he spoke emphatically about Tamil culture.

Bending forward, he continued, "Look, our entire culture is entirely in the hands of women."

His voice was full of the satisfaction of having given over the entire culture into the hands of women. It occurred to her that if this man's hand would give up its cultural searches and come out, we could burden it also with a little of our culture.

(Ramanujan 157-158)

Munro indeed bids "Goodbye" to "inhibitions" like Del and revels in ribald remarks and references (Grosskurth 17). In the first section of "Chaddeleys" one hears about "the wild-looking town in Northern Ontario where Iris wouldn't stop the car even to let
them buy a Coke. She took one look at the lumberjacks and cried, 'We'd all be raped!'" (Moons 2). The narrator's little sister asks them, "What is raped?" Iris answers, "It means you get your pocketbook stolen" (3). In "Lichen" of Munro's sixth book, behind his wife's back David shows Stella the erotic snapshot of Dina. Stella mistakes the prominently displayed pubic hair of the woman for lichen, "a plant mysteriously nourished on the rocks" (Progress 55). It is next likened to "moss on a rock" (41). When David asks her to look at the snap clearly, she peers at it. She could now see

a flattened-out breast far away on the horizon. And the legs spreading into the foreground. The legs are spread wide—smooth, golden, monumental: fallen columns. Between them is the dark blot she called moss, or lichen. But it's really more like the dark pelt of an animal, with the head and tail and feet chopped off. Dark silky pelt of some unlucky rodent. (Progress 42)

Martin comments, "France's sensations during the lovemaking in Ted's supply room—'a sort of pantry,' which reinforces the connection between food and sex in Hanratty—are graphically conveyed . . ." (139). The heroine in "Prue" looks upon "sex" as "dancing and nice dinners" (Moons 151).
In Ambai's review of *Listen to the Heron's words*, she points out:

Female eroticism has been a part of Indian literature, and in Tamil literature, which I am familiar with, it is an integral part of both the classical literary tradition and the folk tradition. There are some interesting folk-tales of female eroticism. In one of them, a woman is looking for a bigger and bigger male organ and finally sees a Shiva Lingam and sits on it and is satiated.

*(Hindu XXI)*

One is here reminded of Del and Naomi's reading "how peasants in Eastern Europe did it with Carrots and ladies in Japan used weighted spheres" *(Lives 153)*. There are in the fiction of the two women writers inimitable images of intimacy. Ambai's story, "Anil" shows what an avid reader and lover of books the heroine in it is. The delight she derives out of contact with an old book is compared to the climax of sexual excitement, "when my finger touched the spine of an old rebound nineteenth century book, an ecstatic excitement overwhelmed me right from the soles of my feet; it was like an orgasm" *(Vittin 133)*.

The sexual imagery used by Ambai and Munro suggest how they endeavour to create the kind of "feminine writing practice" in response to the call of feminists
like Helene Cixous. They "attempt to bring language close to the bodily materiality of emotion and to capture in syntax the rhythm of libidinal drive..." of the woman, as Morris remarks in the context of a general reference to "ecriture feminine" (Morris 123). The delight that the two writers derive from delineations of female sexuality through their erotic narratives remind one of Roland Barthes' use of the French term, "jouissance" to describe the sexual bliss that women writers experience. Ann Rosalind Jones points out:

In contrast to male sexuality, focused on the penis, Irigaray locates women's sexuality in the totality of the female body—including, for example the two lips of the vulva—which she defines as a diffuse erotic field affecting women's jouissance (sexual pleasure) as it subtends feminine psychic processes and responses to the discourses of the outer (masculine) world. . . . (84)

In their book, Critical Theory and Practice: A Course book, Keith Green and Jill Le Bihan explicate the term thus:

jouissance (conventionally translated as a kind of orgasmic pleasure) is beyond the phallus, beyond man, beyond representation and therefore can disrupt and undermine all
representation. It is the qualities of excessiveness and defiance that give it value within the symbolic system: it is lawlessness under an otherwise repressive legalistic regime. (173-174)

Alice Munro amply demonstrates how female sexuality blossoms out in a free setting where sex is not monopolized by the male. Freud's theory of woman's lack is disproved in the Munrovian world. Referring to the sexual difference between man and woman, Helene Cixous cites the verdict given by Tiresias when Zeus and Hera disagreed on whether the man or the woman enjoyed the greater sexual pleasure. When asked to arbitrate, the blind seer, "who had enjoyed the uncommon fortune of having lived seven years as a woman and seven years as a man" (479) and had been endowed with a second sight, pronounced his judgement thus, "If sexual pleasure could be divided up into ten parts, nine of them would be the woman's" (480). It may be noted that the element of pleasure predominates in the Munrovian text while cultural criticism outweighs jouissance in the Ambaian text. The Ambaian heroines loudly or silently make their disappointments known to their men, but they prefer resignation with their lot in marriage or separation to promiscuity. However, their creator has more progressive views than they reflect. The promiscuous part of modern life in the
metropolis, where the author lives, does not get prominently pictured with Munrovian candour probably because of the adverse comments that some of her stories drew from conservative quarters in Tamil literary circles. A male critic, Ambai confided to this researcher in her second interview, referred to her as a writer who did not seem to have had an "orgasmic experience in life". Munro did not feel discouraged or disist from delineating female sexuality even in all its unattractive aspects when adverse verdicts came her way with even demands for removal of her stories from school books. The sexual lives of Indians are not so freely and frankly portrayed by Ambai as they are done by some Indo-Anglian writers like Khushwant Singh or Shobha De. While most of Munro's protagonists are sensualists, those of Ambai are cultural critics and commentators on Indian male mentality. The typical Ambaian heroine has the yearning to break free of all trammels, but the desire remains only behind the psychic screen and manifests itself in dreams. But the stories of both the writers confirm the conclusion that their central female characters recognize and resist male subjugation. The patches of pathos painted by the two artists could vividly be seen in the lives of their subjects and felt by their sensitive viewers.