CHAPTER III
EXOTIC INCONGRUIITIES

VICTOR WITTER TURNER
(28 May 1920 – 18 December 1983)
British Cultural Anthropologist

The attributes of Liminality are necessarily ambiguous... Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial.

- Victor Turner
Chapter III

Exotic Incongruities

The status of women in the present day world is a complicated issue. It proves to be very complex to define and remains unsolved. The issues and solutions for this gender, who have been branded as the ‘Secondary Sex,’ ‘a decorated object’ and degraded to the level of commodity continues to persist in all corners of the world. Women’s status and identity in each society and its culture differ in many ways. There are few countries where the status of women has gradually progressed. Even in the most developed countries either it has declined or remains to be static. There lie many reasons for these women to encounter the conflicts, for the conflicts are unpredictable. Most women are prone to face innumerable challenges, in spite of the tremendous, technological and materialistic advancements.

There are two areas in which women are judged that is, both in society and in their family. Women’s contributions to these two areas decide her identity as well as her ability to survive. The role of the traditional women in the family was that of the keeper of her home where she was the provider, according to the needs and expectations of the members of the family. A virtuous woman was identified with certain roles prescribed by society.

She has to make and provide a home cooked meal and had to nurture her children all by herself until her female children grew up to be of use to her. Almost she could be equated to be her husband’s slave. The commandments of the husband had to be meekly followed. To the contrary, after World War II, the roles of women both in the family and society have undergone an evolutionary change. Women have now transformed to be economic partners to their men. In spite of contributing to the progressive functioning of the family and meeting the challenges, the complexities of
modern women have not been eradicated. The economic independence has not given the women a moral and physical comfort to her. The complexities have increased and the modern women have been forced to enter a new sphere filled with inequality, marginalization, and humiliation which has resulted in the lack of basic values totally lost in the familial and the societal system. It has forced women to face innumerable conflicts.

As a result of all these innumerable conflicts, most of the families in contemporary societies all over the world have become individualized. The so-called nuclear familial system both in the east and in the west has become a challengeable one. The familial conflicts and the societal conflicts though have affected both the gender- Male and Female, ultimately the extreme sufferer to encounter the conflicts rest in the women alone. As a result, the solution to challenge all these conflicts also has been shouldered on the ‘Secondary sex.’ In all three situations the women have involved in fighting back and a few have succeeded in solving the conflicts and have transformed both their families and the societal spheres to which Alice Munro’s short fiction has contributed and continues to serve as an eye-opener and a guide for both men and women. Munro’s contributions have aided them to come out of the shackles of their conflicts and move towards a harmonious survival.

Arnold Van Gennep divides the Liminal Space Phase into three stages: Separation, Margin (or Lamen) and Aggression. The first phase Separation equates to a state of symbolic behavior wherein there lies a detachment of an individual or group from a fixed social structure or a set of structural conditions. The next stage after Separation is margin which is an ambiguous state which exists between the old and new state. The final state is Aggregation where the transformation is complete. It was Victor Turner who rediscovered Van Gennep’s theory a hundred years later and
developed it with a new term ‘Liminoid.’ The state of being Liminal and the theory of Triangular Love has been further illustrated intensely through the following image.

The basic component for a harmonious living both in the family and in the society should be based on mutual love which remains to be the universal truth from time immemorial till date. Varied theories on love have emerged right from Plato until the latest American Sternberg’s Triangular theory of love. The state of being ‘Liminal’ and ‘Liminoid’ has been further illustrated intensely through the following images.

**Fig.7 - Illustration of Liminality Theory**

**Fig.8 - Illustration of Triangular Love Theory**
This chapter titled ‘Exotic Incongruities’ analyses the select short stories chosen from Alice Munro’s three collections namely The Progress of Love (1986), Friend of My Youth (1990) and Open Secrets (1994). The nine short stories chosen from the three collections are ‘Lichen,’ ‘Fits,’ ‘A Queer Streak’ (PL); ‘Five Points,’ ‘Meneseteung,’ ‘Oranges and Apples’ (FMY); ‘Carried Away,’ ‘The Albanian Virgin,’ and ‘A Wilderness Station’ (OS). These stories have been examined from the point of view of Arnold Vann Gennep’s ‘Liminality Space Theory,’ Victor Turner’s concept of ‘Liminoid’ and Robert Sternberg’s ‘Triangular theory of love.’


In the short story ‘Lichen’, Munro portrays the solitary life of the alienated Stella in the summerhouse built by her father. Stella is a middle-aged, cheerful, short and fat woman. Her ninety three-year-old blind father is sick. He lived in a nursing home, where Stella used to visit him often. Stella and David after their marriage had lived for twenty-one years and for the last eight years they were living a separated life. David and his girlfriend Catherine visit Stella that summer for Stella’s father’s birthday. David brings a bottle of scotch for his father-in-law and they pay a visit to that nursing home to meet him on his birthday.

In the Balm of Gilead Home out, Stella’s father was found seated in his wheelchair with his blankets after his meeting with his daughter and son-in-law. Stella confidently utters to David that her father would always support her and she strongly
believed that he would not be on David’s side. After returning home Stella prepares the dinner. David informs Stella about his thought of getting separated from Catherine, as he had created an interest in a twenty-two year old girl from Toronto named, Dina. David showed the picture of Dina to Stella. In that picture, Stella noticed the dark blot in Dina’s leg. It looked like Lichen. David did not disclose the picture to Catherine and tried to talk with Dina after dinner. He could not converse with her as she was not in her home. David and Catherine left as usual. After some days, Stella found something behind the curtains of the window. David had hidden the picture of Dina there. It was left in the sun and got faded. Though the short story is an open-ended one, yet it vividly depicts the gendered behavior of men who objectify women and treat them as ‘Objects of desire.’ The main characters Stella and David are middle-aged. In spite of being a middle age husband, the man refuses to accept his age. To the contrary, he criticizes the women particularly his own former wife Stella. His anger is towards women in general at the aging process. Having left his wife and gone on to live with his new lover Catherine, who is also forty years of age, is also being humiliated by David as,

Catherine, dropping over her, is a tail, frail, bony woman with fair and sensitive skin. Her skin is so sensitive it won’t stand any makeup at all and is easily inflamed by colds, foods, emotions. Lately, she has taken to wearing blue eye shadow and black mascara, which David thinks is a mistake. (PL 34)

David’s anger and misogynistic views towards aging women reveal the patriarchal attitude of men. Aging is a common process for both men and women whereas David’s attitude even to his aged father in law proves to be egoistic and overconfident which he ironically states it as,
To get used to looking at his father-in-law, David tried to think of him as a post-human development, something new in the species. Survival hadn’t just preserved, it had transformed him. Bluish–gray skin, with dark-blue spots, whitened eyes, a ribbed neck with delicate deep hollows, like a smoked-glass vase. (PL 51)

This depicts that men tend to exploit, humiliate both men and women until they reach that old age where their physic may not cooperate according to sexual desires. The middle-aged men’s attitude in visiting the former wife and commenting on her physic to the existing lover Catherine reflects the derogatory attitude towards women. After visiting Stella, David presents the photo of the new lover, yet to be- Dina to Stella for which Stella thinks from the point of view of David as,

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. The dark silky pelt of some unlucky rodent. (PL 42)

After having left his first wife and coming home like a prodigal son and submitting the pornographic photograph of Dina, David’s behavior exhibits the sadistic pleasure in the male chauvinistic community who consider them to be symbols of eternal power and youth in the guise of David. The man’s attitude in shifting from Stella to Catherine and seeking the advice of Stella his legal wife to move onto Dina expresses the male fantasy. The man is trapped by his own luminal desires for he rejects aging women in spite of his middle age.

On the other hand, the portrayal of Stella depicts a gradual process of liberation. She is no longer at the mercy of any man’s desire. She has not shifted herself to other
men like David. Positively she creates a busy, protective and realistic world by growing vegetables: “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 blackberry bushes” (PL 32).

She states that she prepares jam and proves herself to be an active member of a community. She is strong enough in asserting herself by stating to David and Catherine of a woman, who weaves her own cloth. The protective and creative nature in Stella exhibits the gradual transformation of a woman to lead a life of her own when the man had deserted her. David, unlike Stella, continues to live in the world of male fantasy and has not realized the meaning of love. David represents the men who prove to be lichen which depends on the host.

As Ildiko Carrington states of Munro’s work as “An attempt to control what cannot be controlled,” this short story Lichen portrays the ambivalent attitude of men and a gradual transformation towards liberation on women until the middle-aged men continue to fall prey for sexual desires. To the contrary, women like Stella once deserted by the husband have shifted themselves to a world of liberation and creation yet are unable to discard their former husbands. This liminal state in women to accept the aging father and to console the deserted husband portrays the monumental courage in the women to accept men and also the motherly weakness in forgiving men.

The concept of love has been considered as a primary concern by feminist thinkers. It has been identified as a Socio-Psychological requirement where the expectations of love remain to be persistent only in women. As Brownmiller states,

The territory of the heart is admittedly a province that is open to all, but women alone are expected to make an obsession career of its exploration, to
find whatever adventure, power, fulfillment or tragedy that life has to offer within its bounds. (158)

Munro’s heroines with all the expectations and desires move beyond the boundaries of love. Whether they have been satisfied by their expectations or not as Alice Munro states these protagonists have discovered themselves in their struggle for love. Whether they have received it from the other end or not, they have sustained their love and have lingered in a liminal space for a particular period, and have later, decided to continue their love even they have not received it. Alice Munro, in Canadian writers at work: interviews (1987) states this liminal state of her protagonist as,

Well, they move towards discoveries. Because everybody does, I think. But some people don’t admit their discoveries and turn aside from them … they come up against discoveries but don’t discover them. That’s what the characters do sometimes. She goes on to talk of how there’s still some expectation that women will find a solution to her life. The solution used to be married. Then in recent years, it’s been walking out on your husband… I don’t have these resolutions because they seem quite ridiculous to me. What I have is people going on. Just as it every day had its own pitfalls and discoveries and it doesn’t make much difference whether the heroine ends up married or living in a room by herself. (213)

The twenty years of marital life between Stella and David and later the separation of nearly eight years and their continual visits on the father-in-law’s birthday exhibit love and bonding between the once husband and wife relationship. The visits of David to meet Stella every year on his father-in-law’s birthday transcend sexual passions though he is caught with the immature fantasies. Yet the thought to visit the father-in-
law and Stella lingers forever in him. This is proof of a conjugal love that exists between marriages. On the other hand, though Stella is fully engaged with her community yet she encourages David’s visit. This continual visit for eight years proves the attachment and dependency which David has on Stella. He remains to be confident that Stella knows too much about him. Though on rare occasions this bonding gets exhibited physically to which Alice Munro states it as, “Nevertheless he put his arms around Stella. They embraced, both willingly” (PL 54). This episode provides contrasted modes of love for, there lies both sacredness and the profoundness between them.

The next short story ‘Fits’ deals with the suicide/murder of Mr. and Mrs. Weebles and the response of the people living in that small town Gilmore in Ontario towards that tragic episode. The plot mainly focuses on Peg and Robert, who were neighbors of the Weebles couple. In a winter morning, Robert found that their neighbors Walter and Nora, who were in the age of early sixties, had not cleared the snow in front of their house. Robert felt something unusual and left to work without thinking too much. Robert’s wife Peg though got divorced with two sons Kevin and Clayton from her first husband, at present lived with Robert.

Robert took care of his father’s stores and Peg was doing egg business in one of the stores in Gilmore. Peg realized something unusual in her neighbor’s house while delivering the eggs. She entered the house and saw the murdered Nora. She witnessed that Walter had turned the gun on himself after killing her wife, Nora. She went to the police and explained about the murder-suicide. After that, she returned to her shop and started continuing her usual work. She did not even inform this incident to her husband or to the clerk working in her shop.
Gilmore people were very curious to know of the cause of death. This news spread over the town easily. Most of them did not worry about the Weebles couple’s tragic end. Those people did not care about the tragic happening, but they were pondering over the tragic incident. The entire town went on to the debate over the cruel incident. Peg remained calm as she had witnessed the murder scene of Weebles.

Robert received this news from the local police constable. Robert and Peg had an argument about this murderous episode. Peg compared the relationship of the Weebles with her relationship on her first husband. Peg’s son said it was normal in a married couple. Robert disagreed but Peg did not render heed to any of these comments.

The boy accepting the misunderstandings amidst the married couple as normal reveals the day to day realities understood by the boy. The father disagrees as he has both fears and longings over these mishappenings. To the contrary, the woman Peg remained calm as she does not wish to enter into any conversation over the murder for she desires to remain an introvert.

The character of Peg with the unusual calmness and the bold silent attitude of a woman remaining unperturbed, even after witnessing a murder/suicide in her next door exhibits the shadowing nature in the women not revealing anything either to her friend or to her husband. Peg had been the first woman to climb towards the bedroom of the retired couples- the Weebles.

After witnessing both the husband and the wife is dead, she continues to work with all calmness, prepares coffee at the Gilmore Arcade, the store where she works after reporting the murder in the police station. Even when her friend narrates the news of the murder, Peg only replies “I knew you’d find out pretty soon” (PL 116).
This mysterious attitude terrifies Karen who gets reflected in the words of Peg as, “Karen said Peg hadn’t changed from what she always was. But after today she said, I always believed Peg and me to be friends, but now I’m not so sure” (PL 115).

When the husband Robert rushes along with Peg towards their home in order to gather the information of the murderers, Peg does not reveal anything. She states that she wanted her unusual lunch – a roll with ham and cheese. When Robert looks at Peg’s lilac-colored coat with the blood stain, he remarks,

He looked at Peg’s lilac-colored coat hanging beside Karen’s red coat on the washroom door. On the lilac coat, there was a long crusty smear of reddish-brown paint, down to the hemline. Of course, that wasn’t painted. But on her coat? How did she get blood on her coat? She must have brushed up against them in that room. She must have got close. (PL 118)

There lies a serene carefully camouflaged exterior in Peg’s character. Though Peg is the first one to discover the bodies of the middle-aged neighbor Nora and Walter Weeble, Peg’s confidentiality in revealing the details of the murder proves to be a contradiction to Robert. He had rushed in to meet the constable who investigates the deaths and finds out the details which prove to be contradictory. Peg has narrated that she witnessed clothed leg whereas the constable had revealed that what was left was Mr. Weeble’s head blow off by the force of the shotgun, after slaying his wife.

The secrets and mysteries shared by the couple Robert and Peg exhibit the liminal relationship between the husband and wife who do not trust each other. Both man and woman prove to be perverted. More than the mystery of death, ‘Fits’ is the story of the woman who takes the perception of death and her lack of responsibility and devaluing attitude in her perception towards the witnessed scene lead to suspicion.
The mystical attitude in not revealing both to her friend and revealing another notion of reality to her husband makes both Karen and Robert suspect Peg. This duality in a feminine perception exhibits the women’s nature which Bharathi Mukherjee experiences the space between reality and illusion in ‘The Moons of Jupiter.’ There lies in mysterious depths in the nature of women for, the painful reality in the women’s perception related to human relationships has created a shadowing attitude in every woman as they do not wish to reveal or rely on human relationships. Peg in a way through this mysterious and in her individualistic attitude might have reasons of her past to be so. The women’s attitude in not revealing experience of awareness either to her friend Karen or to her husband exhibits the wavering attitude which could exist only in a liminal space that rests on women. Mainly women prefer to live the life of solitude or loneliness and desire to live in a liminal space gets portrayed through Peg by Alice Munro.

The prime suspicion or the degree of love between Peg and Robert gets exhibited in ‘Fits.’ Though Peg happens to be the first to discover the suicidal-murder of the middle-aged neighbor, Nora and Walter Weebles, Peg does not reveal the truth of being the witness to the murder to her second husband Robert. The contradictory version of Mr. Weeble’s leg with the foot in its shoe is false information that she submits to Robert. To clarify the suspicion Robert rushes to the police constable who had investigated the deaths. Peg’s disruption not only reveals the domestic violence encountered by the long-married older couple but also the falsity in the narration which makes one suspect her relationship with Robert. Sometimes in the process of love, there has to be certain secrets and mysteries between the couple. For these secracies at times might either bring the couple closer together or the time might distance them when Robert states that now he felt more like going home, conveys his
feelings of hope in Peg, for he would have thought that the narration of the older couple might bring disharmony in their mental relationship. Robert hopes that Peg would have thought of their love triangle wherein such disturbances should not cause an obstacle to them for she had to the contrary been separated by her former husband which she did not wish to continue. It is the strong bond of love that makes women conceal their thoughts which Kernberg states it as,

> Secrets and mystery shared by the couple increase their freedom from the surrounding conventional social world and secrets and mystery of each partner maintain and create new boundaries in the couple's relationship. Secrets and mystery derive from the continuing redefinition of life in the present as new tasks, challenges, and crises reactivate conflicts and needs from the past and bring about subtle changes and actualization of unknown potentials, which may bring the couple closer together or distance them. (50)

The psychologists and researchers have identified women who maintain secrets for many reasons. The first and foremost reason identified by the researchers is that they and reluctant in hating their partners are do not wish to damage the relationship. For married people maintaining secrets permits them to avoid their partner’s disapproval. As Peg had already been disapproved by the former husband maybe she would have thought of not disclosing the murder to Robert. Easterling Sally, a psychologist points out, “Spouses keep more secrets because the culture scripts demand a higher level of honesty” (206). It is not the bodily passion according to Sternberg that had evolved in the relationship between Stella and David or between Peg and Robert. There lies a sort of a mind intimacy, a liking which could be identified as either romantic love or companionate love between them.
In Plato’s three-part soul, mind and body, the mind is the reason and proves to be
the rational part of the soul. As the mind is the focus of one’s consciousness and
proves to be the space for an individual’s knowledge to solve many problems and
utilize plans and goals more than a body it is the mind that has to be molded which
could be identified in Stella and Peg. The love in ‘Lichen’ and ‘Fits’ could be equated
to companionate love where the passion has gone out of the relationship. Alice Munro
has created a deep affection and commitment in both couples. Though there lies a
physical separation in ‘Lichen,’ yet Stella and David had created a companionate love
which proves to be stronger than friendship which could be equated to the additional
element of commitment in love.

The next short story taken for analysis is ‘A Queer Streak’ from the short story
collection *The Progress of Love*. The story begins with the loss of the past. Aunt Ivie
and King Billy had three baby boys and three baby girls. They lived in South
Sherbrook Township. She lost all the three boys and the loss caused a queer streak to
her and she lost her feelings of motherhood. The three girls were named Opal Violet,
Dawn Rose, and Bonnie Hope. This story is narrated by the eldest girl Opal Violet.
She recalls the journey of the loss of her family.

The story is divided into two parts as ‘Anonymous Letters’ and ‘Possession.’ The
first part ‘Anonymous Letter’ deals with Violet and Possession is about Dane, Violet's
sister's son. The first part of the story is about Violet’s school days. Her family
belonged to the poor part of the country. She was not happy and she was searching for
places to get lost. She got engaged with Trevor, a respectable training pastor. Violet’s
father had received anonymous letters with cruel notes which threatened their life.
Violet came to know about the letters and easily found the perpetrators to be her
younger sisters both Down Rose and Bonnie Hope.
Violet always had shared all the information with Trevor. She sent a letter to him about this total situation including the letters of her sisters. Owing to a sudden change in his attitude, she wanted to defend her sisters from Trevor. She rushed to the town to stop the mail but she failed. Trevor suspected the attitude of opal to be similar to her sisters. This unhappy reunion of Violet and Trevor made him end their relationship. Violet finally decided to live for her family and others.

The second part ‘Possession’ deals with the next generation of Violet. The plot mainly depicts the life of Violet’s nephew Dane. Violet is now an old happy woman playing a minor role in this plot. Wick Tebbets, a married man had an affair with Violet and maintained a lifelong conversation with her. In her old age, Violet talks and fights against patriarchy to her young nieces. She recalls the anonymous letters to her non-abusive father from his own daughters itself. She declares that the letters had changed her life. She lost her fiancé, love, and future.

Dane is a hardworking and a good man. He is gay or Queer. He was angry with Violet because of her affair with Wick. Violet’s grandniece, Heather was interested in women who ruled society. Both, Heather and Dane, who was nice to Violet showered compassion towards violet in her old age. The story ‘A Queer Streak’ ultimately reveals two important elements for life: Forgiveness and Compassion.

‘A Queer Streak’ by Munro could be termed as a Novella for it spans characters representing three generations. The first half of the story titled ‘Anonymous letters’ reflects the protagonist Violet to return to her home to investigate anonymous threatening letters her father has been receiving. Initially, she suspects her mother and later identifies that her adolescent sister Dawn Rose initiated by Hope was responsible for the letters.
The second half of the book entitled the ‘Possession’ shifts to Rose’s son Dane who lives with Violet. It is from the point of view of Dane. The readers are informed that to her nephew – Dane, Violet has narrated the stories which are informed as, Violet told him stories about her own childhood on the farm, with his mother and the other sister, who lived out in Edmonton now, and their mother and father, whom she called “characters.” Everybody was a character in those stories; everything was shaped to be funny. (PL 236-237)

When Violet is later informed of the anonymous letters, in order to safeguard the sisters, she utters her feminist ideology as, and “It is a classic story of anti-patriarchal rage. Your gift to us, can we give it to others? What is called Female Craziness is nothing but centuries of Frustration and Oppression” (PL 248). There lies an ironic twist in this family when Violet gets engaged to her handsome minister Trevor. When Trevor hears of the queer behavior of her sisters the minister immediately breaks the bond of engagement. It is at this moment of disappointment that Violet portrays the life of a deserted woman. She states it as ‘Her life is tragic’ (PL 234). He steps seeing her of blaming the queer attitude as, “female insanity that strikes at that age.” Later, Normanza enters into the family, when Dawn Rose is born. The queerness later in Rose’s family is that the son Dane proves to be gay. Munro’s stories revolve around family histories, maternal care, emotional queerness and at times madness too. Yet women like Violet transform to be historians of their own tradition, who continue to preserve the reverence of that family.

The second part of ‘Possession’ is narrated from Dane’s point of view, His mother and his grandmother have passed away. Violet had sold the farm and moved to the town and was working with Bell Telephone Company. The period in which the plot takes place is during the II World War. There was a shortage of men, Violet
immediately elevated in her profession to be the manager. Dane in his narration recalls her Aunt Violet as a professional woman. Violet has transformed her life according to the ethics of care. As theorist agrees with the term ‘care’ to be, “relational and interactive, necessary involving and entanglement of the motto, intention, performance, and effect,” similarly Violet with all care has passed on the lives of the ancestors to the next generation.

In most of Munro’s stories almost all the women, girls, men and boys are found to be trapped in situations that had not been owing to their choice or freedom. Even her thought of jumping from a bridge is not by her own will but compulsion. Instead of forcing herself to this compulsion, Violet listens and feels around. This type of receptivity parallels ‘Buddhist receptivity’ which is not an internal emotion but an ‘elliptical movement of sensory perception.’ When Trevor dismisses her, the revelation in Violet exhibits the maternal ethics of caring. Of all the characters in ‘A Queer Streak’ men are kept in a safe position. Women tend to be responsible particularly Violet who takes up the entire family to her custody. It is this ethics of caring to which Alice Munro visualizes her characters particularly women to attain.

While analyzing The Progress of Love in the three stories ‘Lichen,’ ‘Fits’ and ‘A Queer Streak’ there lies a state of Liminality in all these three female characters who have landed up to by being separated from their loved ones. Stella’s separation from her husband, Peg’s separation from her former husband and Violet being deserted from the loved one- all exhibit a state of Liminality in which they have entered into. The French Ethnographer, Arnold Van Gennep argues that an individual’s grief owing to separation or loss could be considered to experience this pattern of separation-liminal period and reassimilation. When one feels that loss they get inducted into a liminal transition period and finally reassimilate themselves with other people or
another society. Stella reassimilates herself by growing vegetables in her garden and selling them and turns out to be economically independent.

Peg lingers over the loss of her previous husband and has a fear of losing the second husband to which she hides the secrets but in turn, to compensate that loss or fear of love works in an egg store and she too thrives economically. While the two characters could turn out to be economically independent Violet in ‘A Queer Streak’ after losing her family members incurs the loss of her father and the demise of her sisters and later reassimilates herself with her sister’s son and daughter, Dane, and Heather and shifts herself to a new space too. It was only during the second half of the twentieth century there arose a transformation in the concept of Liminality with the writings of Victor Turner. In his work *The Ritual Process* (1996), in the chapter *Liminality and Communitas*, Turner defines liminal individuals as “neither here nor there, they are bitwise and between the positions assigned arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (114).

Turner contradicts Van Gennep by giving hope to these individuals in the state of bitwise and between through the concept of the ‘Realm of pure possibility.’ When one experiences loss, they are thrown into a liminal state of uncertainty. Losing a loved one creates a void which leaves an emptiness so heavily wherein a few characters look through their inward self in order to move forward. It forces them to regroup and in turn transform their inner self. The loss might take a long emotional time and during that time these individuals in their liminal space search for a life force. With the aid of core belief support from the near and dear ones and daily routines, a few individuals retrieve their lives. Munro attempts to retrieve the lives of female characters who have entered into this liminal space. Owing to their separation or loss, Munro tries to alter their life by making them realize that even in that space of
Liminality there lies limitless opportunities. They are recovering themselves from their liminal state with the hope and anticipate for a new life. It is this liminal new transformative space that could be witnessed even in Munro’s other collections too.


The first short story taken for analysis is ‘Five Points.’ There are two stories linked in this short story. The primary story deals with the life of a married woman, Brenda who had a desire for lust and freedom with Neil Bauer. Brenda was deceiving her husband Cornelius. They were running a second-hand appliances and furniture showroom. Brenda was not happy with the life which she shared with Cornelius. She felt trapped in the role of a wife and mother. She had an affair with Neil, not only for physical pleasure. She wanted to be free and express herself. She enjoyed the company of Neil. On the other hand, Brenda felt guilty and shameful for her illegal relationship. She was always afraid of being caught by others. Even though she was enjoying with Neil, she worried about the gossip which might affect her family. When she felt the affair getting serious with Neil, she found that all the relationships had responsibilities and burdens. Consequently, Cornelius met with an accident.

The secondary story deals with a Croatian family in a small town named Five Points. It was a town where Neil lived. The story is about a thirteen-year-old girl, Maria. She was the eldest daughter of the Croatian family. Neil was narrating about Maria, an unattractive young girl, who took over the responsibility of the sweet shop. Maria wanted to get the attention of young boys. She also wanted illicit sex similar to Brenda’s desires. She wanted to escape from the world of reality for a while. Both
Brenda and Maria were afraid of discovery. Maria lost her anxiety and money as the boys demanded more money. Finally, she was caught by her family and by her mother. Her whole family got ruined and she felt ashamed of her act.

Brenda’s fear arose after hearing the story of Maria. She took Maria’s story as a warning for herself for if she continued her illicit relationship with Neil, she would also ruin her life and family.

This story ‘Five Points’ is narrated by Neil, the lover of Brenda who is already a married woman. Brenda has been married to Cornelius, who has the business of selling appliances, furniture, and household goods. When Neil comes to enquire for a second-hand bicycle, Brenda creates a relationship with Neil. This illicit relationship continues. It is at this stage that Neil recollects his childhood days wherein he had gone towards a store nearby which was taken over by a Croatian couple. The store was looked after by one of her two daughters who develop a side business at the store. She is Maria, who with all responsibilities monitors the business dealings. It might be to have a relaxation or to satisfy her desires she takes the money from the store to pay to the boys to have sex with her. Later Neil reveals that Maria was sent to a place for young offenders. It is this illicit relationship that Neil narrates to Brenda which creates fear in Brenda. Brenda sympathizes with Maria for, at the age of thirteen, a girl had been given responsibilities above her age to be in charge of the store and of its financial dealings. Through Neil, she understands that Maria would go to school and work late in the night. This physical exertion would have lead Maria to seek relief through sex. The boys who had been with Maria had not been held accountable even by Maria’s parents. This overtly sexual behavior on the part of Maria and the boys had ultimately resulted in victimizing only the female gender. The exploitation by the patriarchal order gets exhibited here by Munro.
She is going to shed every night. And if that isn’t bad enough for her, some boys start refusing. They want the money first. They take the money and then they say no. They say she never paid them. She paid them, she paid them in front of witnesses, and all the witnesses deny that she did. They shake their heads, they taunt her. (FMY 39)

The society has judged the women to be a whore, including the parents wherein men have found an easy escape. Equal partners in the adulteress deeds are not victimized. This creates an awakening in Brenda, which leads to a verbal conflict thereby bringing an end to the illicit relationship. Munro’s women initially fall prey for sexual desires, and live in a world of hallucination for a certain period and later through reception or an observation get transferred which could be witnessed in ‘Five Points.’ The age of adolescence has victimized Maria. The middle-aged maturity has awakened the consciousness in Brenda. Munro’s mission of transforming only the women and not blaming the patriarchal order asserts Alice Munro to have adhered to the womanist ideology. The gradual realization from the liminal space filled with illicit sexual desires is brought to a consciousness in the middle-aged women which Munro initiates the women to transform themselves.

Alice Munro has created gothic protagonists too, who enter into a state of ‘pleasurable fear, unknown dread, unnatural silence, guilt, repression and at times turned out to be historical too.’ Yet Munro shifts the gothic fear from the protagonist and brings out the realization with surprise wherein they understand the realities and complexities of life. After having listened to a pathetic life of Maria from Neil, she decides to stick on to Cornelius, her husband. This subtle transition is being narrated by Alice Munro through focalization from a state of guilt she has reached a state of realization which gets exhibited:
And finally she was in; she was into the tunnel of trees. Cedar, hemlock, farther back in the wetter ground the wispy-looking tamarack, lots of soft maples with leaves spotty yellow and brown, No standing water, no black pools, even far back in the trees. They’d had luck, with the dry summer and fall. She and Neil had bad luck, not the farmers. (FMY 35)

Brenda becomes aware of the betrayal to her husband. On the other hand through Neil, the readers realize that Maria through her illicit relationship has entered into a state of madness and was placed in an asylum for young offenders. By confronting the existential fear, Brenda is made to enter into her initial state and there she meets with a realization of the existential life. It is this state between imagination and reality that Turner fixes as ‘Liminoid.’

The short story ‘Meneseteung’ depicts the life of a Victorian Poet, Almeda Joynt Roth. She has written a book of poems titled as Offerings written in 1873. The unknown narrator of this story describes the poetess’s portrait in the book. Almeida was a fourteen-year-old eldest child in her family. Her father brought the family to the wiles of Canada West. Her sister and brother became ill and died after three summers in Canada. Her mother also died three years later. Almeida lived with her father for 12 years until his death. Almeda lived alone in the house built by her father from the year 1879. She never slept in her father's big room. She preferred to sleep on the back side of the house where she could see the sky, the moon, and the trees. She wrote poems to compensate for her loneliness.

A prosperous widower, Jarvis Poulter, who was a neighbor to Almeda came to the town looking for oil and found salt, started a business and settled there. Though there was no relationship between Almeida and Jarvis, Almeda imagined him to be her husband and admired him.
One night, Almeida heard a quarreling sound between a husband and wife outside. The next morning, Almeda found that woman laying half-naked in Almeda’s backyard. Jarvis Poulter came and realized that she was not dead but drunken. Jarvis was attracted by Almeda’s appearance for the first time and noticed her innocence. He asked her to meet in church and had an idea to propose her. Almeda realized it and wrote to him a note that she was not feeling well. She left the note in Jarvis’s door. After that incident, she became more eccentric. The narrator concludes with the discovery of Almeda’s tombstone along with her family members in the graveyard. “I looked for Almeda Roth in the graveyard. I found the family stone. There was just one name on it—Roth. Then I noticed two flat stones in the ground… One of these said, Papa, the other, Mama” (FMY 72).

Alice Munro’s Meneseteung depicts the story of a nineteenth-century Ontario Poetess named Almeda Joynt Roth, who proves to be hysterical in her anxieties. The poetess’s hysterical body gets distracted by observing the environment with its complexities. This short story was written during the 1950s when the Psychological Revolution started in 1950s. It was during that period Prozac; a financially successful drug for psychic disorders was prescribed. Almeda Roth is a middle-aged spinster who lives in Ontario Meneseteung. The short story with the poetic lines of Almeda’s frustration depicts her grief at the demise of the family members. She grieves it as

I dream of you by night,
I visit you by day.
Father, Mother,
Sister, Brother,
Have you no word to say? (FMY 71)
With the doctor’s and neighbor’s advice to settle in marriage, Almeda decides to marry the man Jarvis Poulter who is her neighbor and a widower who owned the salt mines. He too courts Almeda. One night when Almeda hears of the man and woman violently fighting, the next morning she suspects the bruised woman to be dead at her backyard and informs Jarvis. Jarvis confirms that she is a poor drunken woman and walks off by placing a note to Almeda to meet him in the church that morning. Physically Almeda begins to menstruate and leaves a note to Jarvis that she is not available.

Later Munro informs the readers that after many years Almeda died from Pneumonia after walking the bark. Almeda is portrayed as a woman with a hysterical illness. The traumatic family life with all the members lost, the conflict in the interpersonal relationships have triggered Almeda to a physical and mental breakdown. The gradual decline in the body and mind in Almeda gradually leads herself to leave herself through the menstrual blood. The body gets relieved but the mind had continued to grow with hysterical anxieties. Had it been like Brenda in the ‘Five Points’ who could rest on Cornelius after a realization, Almeda is left with no member of her family for her. She had not created a family which further leads to a confined life.

Almeda is not offered a space to heal herself. Almeda associates the women at the gate with the sexual act and compares the women to an animal which she narrates as,

There is a bare breast let loose, brown nipple pulled long like a cow’s teat, and a bare haunch and leg, the haunch showing a bruise as big as a sunflower. The unbruised skin is grayish, like a plucked, raw drumstick. Some kind of nightgown or all-purpose dress she has on. Smelling of vomit. Urine, drink, vomits. (FMY 65)
Though not married, Almeda would have aesthetically lead a successful life as a poet. It is poetry that has proved to be a healing therapy through which Almeda has sort a solace. The hysterical Almeda will be recognized and acknowledged by the world as an archival subject forever. It is the hysterical body that has deteriorated but the mind has awakened from the sexual and marital desires which had later transformed Almeda to be acknowledged as a poetess.

By presenting the gothic realities Munro’s short fiction exhibit the Southern Ontario communities. Typical to Brenda in the ‘Five Points’ is the portrayal of Almeda Roth in ‘Meneseteung.’ More than sexual repressions Almeda observe the deceptive nature of Jarvis Poulter. The terrific noises and the verbal conflicts in Almeda’s neighboring couple and the aftermath of the drunken state of the women lying down in the backyard expressed by Almeda prove the existential fears lurking women.

When she wakes up, the night seems fiery hot and full of threats. She lies sweating on her bed, and she has the impression that the noises she hears are knives and saws and axes- all the angry implements chopping and jabbing and boring within her head ... usually the noise centers on a fight. (FMY 63)

The fear creates a longing in her by seeking a companion to console herself. When she calls Jarvis and later his negligence leads Almeda to a state of doubt. As Jarvis is a wealthy and powerful member of the upper-class society, his views on marriage exhibit the patriarchal values which he states it as,

A man may 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 own
nature- from frigid parsimony or a luxuriant sloth, from squalor, and from excessive sleeping or reading, drinking, smoking or freethinking. (FMY 57)

On the other hand, Almeda is an unmarried middle-class woman who possesses unnatural desires and seeks independence when Jarvis ignores in the helping the drunken woman and does not exhibit either a sympathy or empathy. Almeda Roth denies to oblige him and refuses to visit him in the church. She considers that the true self of Jarvis has been revealed in that mysterious drunken episode. Jarvis considers that his dominant attitude would be accepted by Almeda. To the contrary, Almeda’s fear of being dominated results in deserting Jarvis. Almeda Roth is torn to a Liminoid state – a desire either to fit into her everyday world or to fix herself in an artistic and sexual world. As writing had been her innate desire, she rejects the institution of marriage and goes back to the world of creativity and independence. It is this psychological duality either to marry Jarvis or enter into the world of writing that gets decided by the drunken lady episode. Later Alice Munro states that Almeda had collapsed into a state of hysteria and madness and in the cemetery, she is found nearer to Jarvis. It is this going back to the same status quo which Victor Turner termed it as ‘Liminoid.’

Turner’s Three Stages (1967)

- Separation
  - Characterized by individual or group movement away from a fixed point in social structure towards something unknown

- Liminality
  - Placed ‘outside of society’
  - ‘Clean off’ earlier status of individual

- Reintegration
  - Candidate returns as virtually a new person
  - New status, rights, duties

Fig.9- Illustration of Victor Turner’s Three Stages
The next short story in this collection is ‘Oranges and Apples.’ It is based on two characters, Victor Sawicky and Barbara Zeigler. Barbara was married to Murray, who was the owner of a Departmental Store. Murray’s father hired Barbara for her beauty as she would be the reason for more customers for their store. Murray married Barbara and they had two children.

Barbara was much interested in reading books other than her responsibilities as a mother and store owner. Victor Sawicky was a foreigner and who visited Murray’s departmental store often. Murray had a homosexual feel towards Victor and easily they became friends. Victor was interested in talking negatively to the reading habit of Barbara. Barbara and Victor were having an affair with each other.

However, Victor refused Barbara later because of Murray’s good human and kind nature. He felt guilty for having an affair with his friend’s wife. Moreover, he was not interested in possession of a relationship with the mother of two children. The third reason for refusing Barbara was he could not be struck with one woman forever. At last, he moved to Montreal. He traveled a lot to conquer more women.

This short story ‘Oranges and Apples’ depicts two contrastive characters Victor Sawicky, the husband Murray Zeigler, who creates a relationship with Barbara Zeigler, the wife of Murray. After continuing the relationship with the wife of another man, Victor refuses Barbara for he is of a character who cannot continue his relationship with one girl or one woman. Though Victor, the husband has virtuous qualities, he is a disturbing personality. He is a foreigner and for this reason, Victor and the people of his class were not welcomed in the city of Walley.

Many reasons have been depicted by Munro for Victor’s refusal of Barbara. Victor feels guilty for having had an affair with his best friend’s wife. Moreover Victor rejects Barbara because she resembles him of his other women as she
represents the same group. While comparing the story ‘Five Points’ with ‘Oranges and Apples,’ Munro presents the change of attitude in both men and women. After listening to the Maria episode narrated by Neil, Brenda changes her decision for she feels guilty of her attitude and fear lurks in her of the aftermath of an illegal relationship if she creates with Neil. The societal fears and her guilty consciousness-force her to a state of realization. It is the same state of a moral consciousness that Munro presents in ‘Oranges and Apples’ where the guilt is presented through a male character Victor Sawicky. It is not only for the reason that Murray is his best friend, but Victor is also of a wavering character who utilizes his male physic to attract every woman as he would move on from one woman to the other.

Victor was tall and light-boned and looked polished. In the coffee shop of the British Exchange Hotel, where he and Murray got in the habit of going, a waitress said to him one day, ‘you mind telling me? Because we kind of have a bet going on? How tall are you? (FMY 115)

There lies yet another reason for Victor in discontinuing his relationship with Barbara as she is a mother of two young children. Victor does not have a desire to continue the relationship with the woman who is a mother. Victor attracts everybody even male members including Murray. The women’s attitude in shifting her desires to another man in spite of being a mother of two young children gets reflected in Barbara.

The mutual bonding between Murray and Barbara is to be found fault with for, Murray is a man who cannot accept any change. Owing to the business when the need arises to renovate the store which he inherited from his father, the change which he had brought in the store later led him to become a laughing stock of the town which later force him to sell the store. It is the same failure in his attitude that he finds in his
marital relationship too. He creates Paranoia every day when he suspects his wife with Victor. He expresses his own disappointment and pain in his life for he sympathizes himself for his wife’s lack of passion. It is the paranoid behavior in men that disrupts a harmonious family. On the other hand, Barbara is not an easy woman to fall prey for the desires. Barbara is equally suspicious and critical of Victor’s attitude. She has a superiority complex that she is better than everyone else. Victor is a Polish man who arrives in Canada with his English wife after the war. He states that he fought in the war and traveled to Turkey to help the refugees. When Victor narrates these to Barbara, Barbara claims not to accept the stories. It is the man Victor who decides to break the relationship with Barbara for he does not consider love to be a virtuous one. It is a fantasy which he wishes to dwell upon only for a short time with one new woman.

While presenting existential fears and paranoid characters in ‘Five Points’ and ‘Menesetung,’ Alice Munro offers conflicts in love and reconciliation in ‘Oranges and Apples.’ From the state of conflict to reconciliation, Munro presents the Liminoid state which the characters experience which heightens the awareness of the darkness in human behavior which ultimately leads to reconciliation. Illegal love relationship has been successful only temporarily and when they realize that they are trapped between the old and new, the oppressed characters descend to the initial state of a formal living. When Barbara realizes the fluctuating attitude in Victor, she decides to live with the paranoid husband than dwell in an insecure life.

Almost all the characters – Brenda, Maria, Almeda, and Barbara all have landed up in a Liminoid state. That is the original state yet with awareness after experiencing the existential fear.

The first story taken for analysis from this collection is ‘Carried Away’ which covers the five decades of a typical librarian, Louisa. She is introduced as a twenty-year-old young woman who lived in Carstairs, a town in Alberta, Canada. The life of Louisa is divided into four phases in this plot such as ‘Letters,’ ‘Spanish Flu,’ ‘Accidents’ and ‘Tolpuddle Martyrs.’ The main character Louisa had lost her parents and was living alone. Initially, she was working at Eaton’s departmental store in Toronto, and there she led her life as a saleswoman. She suddenly got an opportunity to be a librarian in Carstairs. She was connected by an epistolary relationship with Jack Agnew- a soldier of World War I. Louisa received letters from Jack for more than a year. He had stated that he has admired her by seeing her once in the library. Louisa never met Jack in person. In her early eighteen, she had a relationship with a Tuberculosis doctor while undergoing treatment but it ended as and when the treatment was over, Louisa felt the soul’s connection to Jack with steady correspondence. After the war was over, all the soldiers were returning home.

Louisa used to fill her imaginative bond with the mysterious Jack. She hoped that Jack would come one day to the library to meet her. She kept the library open even after the working hours. She continued this even in the worst period of ‘Spanish Flu’ which spread all over the country. She was praised for her heroic act but she did that only for Jack’s arrival. Later she realized his marriage with Grace after he returned from war. She came to know about the betrothal of Jack and Grace which was held
before he went to the war. This could be the end of the story but Louisa remains possessed with Jack even after his tragic death in the sawmill at the local piano factory. Later Louisa got married to the owner of the factory where Jack died. Later Louisa realized that she was still in the imaginary relationship with Jack in the form of her boyfriend Jim and her husband Arthur Doud.

The final plot of the short story follows the widowed Louisa, sixty-five year old, who has taken over the responsibilities of the factory after her husband’s death. She has devoted her entire life for the factory. Louisa compares the heroism of the Tolpuddle Martyrs with the dead Jack. Louisa went to consult her heart doctor for her ‘wonky’ heart. The doctors warned that it may cause mini strokes for Louisa. Louisa decides to sit and hear the labor demonstration speech in Tolpuddle Martyrs memorial.

This first short story ‘Carried Away’ in the collection Open Secrets depicts an epistolary relationship between Louisa, a librarian and Jack Agnew, a resident of Carstairs who has gone to engage himself at war. After receiving a letter from Jack who has met Louisa in the library, but not known to Louisa, Louisa responds to the letters and the regular correspondence between the two continues. Jack requesting a photo of Louisa and Louisa’s infatuation with Jack all lead to the world of fantasy where the love develops in the absence of the individuals. Not knowing that Jack has already been engaged to Grace even before he went to wage war, Louisa continues the corresponding relationship. When Jack stops corresponding to Louisa, it is through Jim Ferrah, the traveling salesman, who stays at her hotel she derives the truth. She realizes that in spite of having been engaged to another woman, Jack had continued to be after other women too. Jim reasons out Jack’s attitude as,
No, no. Don’t you think such a thing. Far more likely he was sincere. He got a little carried away. It’s all just the way it looks on the surface. He was engaged before he went overseas, he never expected to get back in one piece but he did. And when he did, there is the fiancée waiting- what else could he do? (OS 18)

Louisa carried away by her fantasies, later is forced to marry Arthur of whom she does not portray any understanding. It is an unlived life that Louisa had continued with Arthur.

The last section is titled as ‘Tolpuddle Martyrs.’ This title is based on the historical incident in a village Tolpuddle, in England during the year 1834. The issues of the laborers from Tolpuddle and the brave actions of these men had paved the path all over the world for the formation of trade unions and the rights of employees’ protection.

Plate VIII. Six men of Tolpuddle Martyrs
In this section, Louisa imagines Jack’s existence. She creates a fluid liminal space where she believes Jack to be seated beside her. Though it is Jim who converses with, she fantasies it to be Jack. She merges with the unexpected encounter with Jack/Jim and experiences the life that she could have lived with Jack. Both in the past, present, and future, Louisa had lived a life of the imagination. Earlier in one of her letters when Louisa states,

I had a great deal of time to read and my favorite authors are Thomas Hardy, who is accused of being gloomy but I think is very true to life- and Willa Cather. I just happened to be in this town when I heard the Librarian had died and I thought, perhaps that is the job for me. (OS 6)
One can identify that Louisa had lived in a liminal fantasy. The superficial longings and the imagined fantasy with Jack and her conversation with Jack of his family, of Grace, Jack’s wife and Lilian, his daughter, all exhibit that Louisa had lived in a world of hallucination.

The timeline ‘Carried Away’ spans between the 1910s and the 1950s is divided into four parts: Letters, Spanish Flu, Accidents, and Tolpuddle Martyrs. The protagonist is Louisa who is introduced as a young woman in her early twenties. During the later years of World War I, she does not have parents or siblings or relatives. She had already been in a close relationship with the doctor who treated her illness of Tuberculosis. Unfortunately, the relationship came to an end and the readers are introduced to her as reading some letters she received from a soldier, whom she had never met, but he saw her in the library and developed a relationship. Typical of women, who expect to be flattered she receives letters, the war comes to an end and the letters also discontinue abruptly. Louisa expects that either he must be dead in the war or must be returning home to meet her. Louisa to her surprise notices in the newspaper that he is married and when he gets a one lined note from him stating that, “I was engaged before I went overseas” (OS 18), gets shattered.

Munro does not conclude the story as a sort of betrayal and the plot continues with news that he is dead in an accident. Though she is married she lives a life with the man yet with the imagination that he would be the soldier Jack. She becomes the mistress of the company after her husband’s accidental death she economically thrives. Though there lies a liminal state in Louisa for she has become the owner of the industry proving to be economically independent. Yet psychologically she stays only in a Liminoid state for it is with the same loneliness that she lives with the fantasy by imagining her husband Arthur Doud as Jack of the yesteryears. As most
women get psychologically depressed and are unable to come out of the shackles of the past so is Louisa. Psychologically Louisa cherishes the liminoid state of being with Jack through hallucination.

The next story ‘Albanian Virgin’ is between the past and present. The plot begins with the unnamed small girl who has been taken as a prisoner by the tribe while she was on a holiday in Dalmatian coast. The Tribe attacked the girl's guide, shot and killed him. The girl was injured in this incident and she was taken to the mountains, Maltsia e madhe. Before the girl uttered her name, the tribes named the girl as Lottar, which was easy to pronounce. Tima, one of the tribal women took care of Lottar. During her illness, Lottar was visited by a priest. Lottar had tried to communicate with the priest to escape from the tribes. The priest explained the reason for her kidnap, the guide being killed by the tribe for defending their tribes’ community because he had killed one of the tribal men. The tribes were not robbers and they did not have any motive to kidnap the girl. Lottar asked him to contact the British consulate or police. After getting better health, she was treated like a member of the tribes. She was taught to cook, make fern beds and to harvest tobacco.

This story is passed by Charlotte to the narrator of the story. Charlotte was a visitor to the narrator’s book store. The story continues with Lottar. The stone house is named Kula, where the tribes lived. Lottar learned the lifestyle of the tribes and realized that she was not willing to leave the tribes. She had grown up with the tribes. One day, the tribal women made Lottar dress well and shaved her head. Lottar was not aware of that until the priest came there. The priest told her that she was sold to a Muslim man for money. Lottar disagreed to leave and the priest rescued her by saying the tribes that Lottar wants to remain with her virginity so that they cannot sell her to anyone. Then she was allowed to live on her own. The priest takes her to the nearest
town, Skodra. The bishop and the priest have planned to send her back to her home through the British consulate. All the arrangements were made for her but she was not interested in leaving the priest. She called his name several times when she left in the boat with the British consulate members.

Back to the present story, the narrator goes to Charlotte’s house for dinner. After meeting Charlotte and her husband Gjurdhi, very shortly Charlotte had fallen ill and was hospitalized in St Joseph's Hospital in Victoria, British Columbia. Claire finally states that she heard the story from Charlotte in a hospital.

The short story ‘The Albanian Virgin’ depicts the hazardous life of the Canadian female character named Lottar who fails to assimilate to her alien identity amidst the tribes. The story is narrated by an elderly woman named Charlotte who befriends Claire the narrator. Claire has been separated from her husband and had been living a room of her own after setting a bookstore and is being visited by a couple of Charlotte and her husband Gjurthi. It is Charlotte who claims the attention of Claire owing to her idiosyncratic behavior and assertiveness. When Claire visits Albania and during her visit when she falls and wounds her leg, and invariably along with the death of her guide during travel results in her shift onto a tribal woman who dresses her wound. Claire is named Lottar by the tribes. Lottar is now placed in the liminal phase on a periphery of the tribal community.

When Lottar gradually recovers she is forced to adhere to the expectations of the tribal Albanian women. When Claire’s hair is dyed black and face is sprinkled with flower, she realizes that she is being transformed into an Albanian bride poised to marry a Muslim with the intrusion of the Franciscan. Lottar agrees to swear as a virgin than involving in a forced marriage. The wedding dress is taken off and Lottar is transformed physically with the Virgin’s cloth.
Slowly and sulkily the women removed all the rich clothes. They brought out men’s trousers, worn and with no braid, and a shirt and head scarf. Lottar put them on. One woman with an ugly pair of shears chopped off most of what remained of Lottar’s hair, which was difficult to cut because of the dressing. (OS 93)

She is freed from the burden of womanhood and also freed from motherhood which is the Albanian clan’s priority. She is now shifted to a shelter and assigned the job of minding the sheep. The life of Lottar alias Clare has not been of a women’s personal choice. It is the patriarchal society which determines her life. She is denied the normative sexual desire and is forced into a submissive practice of accommodating herself into a virgin’s life from a forced tribal exile. Lottar is shifted to a forced virgin exile. On the other hand, Charlotte and Gjurdhi who had been tribes, after arriving in Canada have disrobed their costumes. They have made a cultural transit. Later it is the Franciscan priest who sends Lottar to her native place.

The plot seems mystical as it is narrated by Charlotte it could be a dramatized version of her own life story which she would have narrated in the hospital where she has been lying seriously ill. Women are forced to live in liminal space and not even considered as a human being who would have her emotions of her own. Women are assigned a gendered role by the patriarchal society where she has to fall a prey according to the expectations of the societal norms wherein she lands up to. Women are neither accepted nor acknowledged according to their performance. Almost Munro’s women err by making the choices outside their hope Munro insists that they have to create a space of their own rather than hold down to the one that has been assigned for them.
In contrast to the previous short story, this short story ‘The Albanian Virgin’ shifts the readers from contemporary Canada to the Albania of the 20th Century. The patriarchal society which restricts women and confines them to an arrow space gets once again exhibited in ‘The Albanian Virgin.’ When Lottar meets her own virgin in Albania and she finds the woman just nodding her head which Alice Munro expresses it as, “Shock her head, not willing to speak, where men might hear them” (OS 111).

This is a story of a female traveler Charlotte, later named as Lottar who experiences a culture shock while seeing away from her state and later returns to the same geographical space. Owing to the death of her tourist guide, she is transported on a stretcher tied to the horses into the tribal’s territory. This woman is converted into a tribal one where she is forced to adhere to the tribal rituals. She is placed in the ‘Outbuilding’ which is already a transit place. Though it is a changed status forced on her it is a liminal state as she is on the periphery of the tribal community. This estranged space later becomes a habitual one for Lottar and she becomes accustomed to it with the help of the priest. She makes an escape to her native space yet with unwillingness. She discovers the social conversion of a virgin who has to renounce her traditional female role and wear on male clothes and perform male tasks without any sexual relationship. Lottar accepts it for there does not arise any gender discrimination here. As Judith Butler states the concept of ‘undoing gender had been adhered to.’ She is forced to enter into her previous identity by the Franciscan who arrives. She is forced to disrobe her costumes and there lies another cultural transit here. The girl is shattered and shunted from her own identity. She is not permitted to possess a fixed identity according to her desires. She too is placed in a ‘Liminoid’ state where she is forced by the patriarchal society to accept the former position.
The next short story in this collection is ‘A Wilderness Station.’ It is narrated in the epistolary mode. All the letters are related to the death of the main character, Simon Herron. The readers estimate him only through other characters and letters. The plot takes place in the winter of 1852-1853. All the letters were between Reverend Walter McBain, who was a Free Presbyterian minister in North Huron and the clerk of the peace in the town of Walley named Mr. James Mullen and the wife of Simon Herron- Annie Herron. The memoir published in 1907 by Simon’s brother George has also been included in this plot.

This story concludes with James Mullen’s letter written in 1959 from the granddaughter of Miss Christena Mullen to a historian Leopold Henry. He was doing his research on the political life of George Herron’s grandson named Treece Herron.

In the memoir, George had stated of his brother’s death as the accident of the falling branch of a tree on Simon’s head. George was far away at that time of the incident. After they found the body of Simon, he buried the dead body with the help of Simon’s wife Annie. As they were isolated from their neighbours in a winter storm, only the wife had to cremate the dead body.

Through the correspondence between James Mullen and Reverend McBain, Annie acted weirdly after the death of Simon. She was wandering in the town with a messy state of mind and depicted a hatred feel towards George. She confessed to Mullen that, she had thrown a rock on Simon’s head and murdered him when they were in the forest. This first confession of Annie was totally different from the account of George. After the investigation, Annie gave her second confession that he had not thrown but cracked down the rock into his head. James Mullen decided that Annie must be lying or deceiving herself.
Annie’s third confession was in the form of a letter between Annie and Sadie Johnston. She was an Orphanage home friend of Annie. To her, Annie had explained another version of her husband’s death. She had killed her abusive husband by an axe, on his head. George also helped her to bury Simon’s body and also she said to her friend about the reason for her earlier confessions. Annie wanted to be safe in the Walley Gaol away from George. The final letter between Miss Christina Mullen and Leopold Henry was about Treece Herron. It states that Annie went to prison and later she declared that George was a murderer.

Annie Herron, the protagonist of ‘A Wilderness Station’ had been orphaned right from her childhood and had been brought up in an orphanage. She has physical ailment where one of her eyes got malformed depicting her physic with an odd look. Having married to Simon, she was forced to lead a life wherein she was unable to meet the basic necessities of it. She had been a victim of marital violence as she had been physically abused by Simon for simple reasons. Mr. Mullin and the minister, as well as the doctor, concluded her illness to be as suffering from hysteria. When Simon dies and Annie is enquired, she gives three confessions of Simon’s death. In order to save her brother in law George who has been the actual murderer of her husband, she accepts that she has committed the murder.

In order to escape from the patriarchal shackles, she confesses that she has committed the crime and enters into the ‘Gaol,’ a confined space which she considers as a liberated one. Amidst the women victimizers in the gaol she feels herself to be liberal and admits that her flight in the Gaol to be a flight of liberation. The first confession stating that a falling tree limb had caused the murder, the second confession that Annie claims was that she herself killed him and the third confession in the form of a letter, Annie confesses that George killed Simon by hitting him with
axe on the back of his head reveal the mysterious attitude of Annie. Though this might cause the readers to question Annie’s sanity yet the final confession only to her friend reveals the ultimate truth that she desired to escape was from the liminal space to a liberated one. Though it may be the Gaol, a confined space to escape from the clutches of patriarchal society and also to free themselves from victimization, women like Annie land up as subservient women who do not wish to encounter the mighty patriarchal world.

Typical to the first short story ‘Carried Away’ from this collection *Open Secrets*, the final short story ‘A Wilderness Station’ also runs for thirty-five pages and spans over 100 years between 1852 and 1959. The plot is narrated through eleven letters written by six individuals with the seventh one passing a final comment. It is an epistolary tale filled with original documents. Along with the seventh comment is a memoir published in the 50th-anniversary edition of the *Carstairs Argus*.

The plot opens with a letter by a young man Simon about twenty-year-old to the matron of the house of the industry to send him a wife. He has a fifteen-year-old younger brother and for them, they need a woman, who could,

Cook and do for us and milk a cow when we could afford one ... He wanted one between eighteen and twenty – two years of age, healthy and not afraid of work and raised in the Orphanage, not taken in lately so that she would not be expecting any luxuries or to be waited on and would not be recalling when things were easier for her. (OS 194)

The desire exemplifies their expectations to be not a woman but an object, a mechanic who could serve their need. It is more or less a slave that he needs. Later by April, he is killed by a hatchet wheeled by his younger brother. The murder had taken place in the mist of morning amidst their work. Through the narration, it is clear that
the husband Simon had been beating Annie for mild annoyances. He had also been beating his little brother. After having understood that it would have been her brother-in-law George who would have cleaved his head, Annie immediately adopts the role of a comforter and also serves as a source of forgiveness. Both of them bury the body. Later with the fear that she might reveal him to be the murderer, his attitude towards Annie changes which Annie says, “Then he looked at me for the first time in a bad way. It was the same bad way his brother used to look. I never said anything more to him … it was never anything but the bad look” (OS 213-214). Fearing that George might kill her too she confesses that she had killed her husband Simon. The threat of murder disturbs her and she finally decides that only in a prison she could be safe, and hence she confesses in killing her husband Simon and pleads to be locked up in the prison. The doctor who examines her suggests, “a sort of delusion peculiar to females, for which the motive is a desire for self-importance” (OS 205). It is the doctor who diagnoses her unreliable state and states of her grip of her delusion.

The story of Annie reveals the ‘Liminoid’ state of women. She is a woman who has the intelligence to derive the truth and also has the right to reveal the truth. Yet as most of the women she too makes up unreliable stories about men and as the doctor states it as a ‘sort of a delusion’ and desire for self-importance that makes her be an orphan till the end as she had been before. From her narration and the documents, it is that clear Annie was leading an unhappy married life and later found the prison to be a safe resting place. Though she deeply valued familial happiness there lays a prolonged silence in her which could be equated to a silent sacrifice which many women endeavor in order to survive. For Annie, it is a mere survival that matters to her and fear of survival that makes her contradict. This state of ambivalence gets shifted to a resting place in the prison and there lies a realization in the secured place
yet it is not a space for new possibilities Annie embraces silence wherein, it is the same hysterical position as it was but with silence that she lands up to. From the cross-examination of nine individual stories in the three collections *The Progress of Love, Friend of My Youth* and *Open Secrets*, the analyses prove that, understanding the requirement of the temporal life and identification of the liminal phase, as humans pass through transitions in time is a important role to ensure that human society functions for the advantage of all have been justified. The female protagonists’ gradual understanding and transformation in attaining a soul’s happiness through a psychological development which gets examined in the next core chapter titled ‘Eudaimonic Feminist Vita Activism.’