OPEN SECRETS: AMBIGUITY AND IRRESOLUTION IN THE AUSTRALIAN, NEW ZEALAND, AND CANADIAN SHORT STORY

by

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Graduate Program
in
English

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
April, 2000

Abstract

The short story has acquired a privileged status in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Critics such as Frank O'Connor, Clare Hanson, W. H. New, and Lydia Wevers argue that there is a congruence between the short story genre and the cultures such as these in which the short story flourishes. These critics suggest that authors writing from a particular cultural position, one that includes the history of settlement, are especially attracted to the short story because the capacities of the form offer an appropriate way of conceptualizing their thematic interests.

This thesis examines the correspondence between the short story genre and the kinds of societies, people, and themes the stories reveal in the work of six settler society writers: Australian authors Peter Carey and David Malouf, New Zealand authors Katherine Mansfield and Owen Marshall, and Canadian authors Alice Munro and Mavis Gallant. The introductory chapter establishes a theoretical context for the connections to be made between the structures and devices of the short story form and the postcolonial issues explored by individual authors. Each subsequent chapter examines select stories by a single author. Close readings of the chosen stories explore how the authors convey meaning through the short story, and demonstrate the compatibility between the genre's form and these authors' perspectives.

The thesis also pursues the unifying themes that exist across the chapters and that link the authors' work. Carey, Malouf, Mansfield, Marshall, Munro, and Gallant all explore the influence the settler past has upon the present; in this context, they examine questions of identity, the defining traits of culture, and the significance of place. In

taking up these concerns, they cultivate the resources of the short story in similar ways, though Carey and Gallant are distinctive in their use of allegory and irony respectively. All six authors maximize the potential of the genre to generate ambiguity, uncertainty, openness, irresolution, and complexity.

Keywords: short story, settler society, genre and culture, structure and content, formal openness, formal irresolution, plurality of meanings, Peter Carey, Mavis Gallant, David Malouf, Katherine Mansfield, Owen Marshall, Alice Munro.

Acknowledgements

Because I work with language, I am keenly aware of the limitations of words. And nothing I can write in this space can adequately convey my thanks to the people who have helped me, both academically and personally, during the preparation and completion of my dissertation. Given this opportunity to at least acknowledge their assistance, I will attempt to convey my gratitude to them.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Professor Thomas E. Tausky, for his unwavering commitment to this undertaking. His guidance and advice along the way have been critical, and his constant support, caring, and patience have been invaluable. It has been an honour and a privilege to consult him on this thesis, and I thank him for giving to me so generously of his ideas and of his encouragement, both of which he has in abundance.

Professor Stan Dragland, my second reader, provided careful and sensitive editing of my work. His astute observations and insightful comments helped shape my writing and my critical analysis, and I am very grateful for his input.

The gratitude that is perhaps the most difficult to convey is the gratitude that I owe to members of my family. My parents, James and Janet Caskey, have encouraged and supported me in this endeavour from the very beginning, and perhaps more accurately even before its inception, when they fostered my interest in reading, literature, and writing. Their confidence and pride in me is both humbling and motivating; their love and support have been two of the sustaining elements during this period, and indeed throughout my life. I simply could not have written this dissertation without their influence.

Through the fortitude of their own characters and through their own achievements, my three sisters, Andrea, Susan, and Jane Caskey, have been a critical source of my inspiration. Their love, support, and humour have given me tremendous strength. I am indebted to them for their caring and thoughtfulness.

And closest to home, my husband, Richard Swan, has shown an abiding faith in me, and demonstrated an amazing commitment to and interest in my work. His caring and encouragement have been extraordinary and I feel blessed to have had his support throughout this undertaking. Above all, though, he has given me his unconditional love, and that has made all the difference. Thank you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

There is an established tradition of asserting the centrality of the short story in the literary canons of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. The Australian writer and critic Murray Bail claims that the habit of story-telling, beginning with an oral tradition, "has always been strong in Australia" (xiii):

> Oral stories were a constant from the first morning of the European settlement when words must have made an especially loud noise and travelled long distance. There was so much to tell, so much emptiness to fill.... It would be hard to imagine another country built upon so many hard-luck stories. (xiii)

Carmel Bird, as an author and as the editor of a collection of Australian stories, indicates that she has even heard the remark that "there are too many short stories written in Australia, and that there are too many short story collections" (xiii). She admits that because she "loves short stories," she does not agree with the argument, but her comment nonetheless suggests the richness and abundance of short fiction in Australia's literary culture (xiii).

In the "Introduction" to Some Other Country: New Zealand's Best Short Stories, New Zealand critics Bill Manhire and Marion McLeod speak of the "vigorous life the short story form has had in New Zealand," and suggest that "the form itself readily accommodates 'the lonely voice', tending . . . to 'filter down experience to the prime elements of defeat and alienation'" (viii). In another essay, Manhire again stresses the prominence of the genre in New Zealand: "It is a truism to say that the short story has flourished in New Zealand. Writers here have given it their full attention" (Six by Six 7).

He concedes that "Perhaps most writers of fiction try their hand at the short story when they first start out. All the same, the popularity of the form here does not indicate a nation of apprentice writers" (Six by Six 8). He further asserts that,

> The unusual vitality of the short story in New Zealand . . . must also stem from the fact that this is the form in which our very best writers have done much of their best work. The example of overseas fame (Mansfield) and local doggedness (Sargeson) have been a powerful combination in shaping the imaginative ventures of many later writers. (Six by Six 8)

Mark Williams similarly observes that there is a "longstanding preference for the form in New Zealand writing," with the result that "the short story is a form in its own right, with particular strengths arising from its compression and its history of distinguished practitioners in this country, not a kind of lesser novel" (194).

Examining Canadian and New Zealand literary practices, W. H. New stresses the vitality of the short story in these two countries. He writes, "Nowhere else within the Commonwealth have the major English-language prose writers of the society been so consistently drawn to write in the genre; nowhere else has the novel figured so tangentially (until recently) among the major fictional accomplishments" (24). He suggests, furthermore, that "[i]n these two societies, the short story is one of the most central . . . cultural adaptations of literary form" (24). As New implies, Canadian authors have made an outstanding contribution to the short story field and, as in Australia and New Zealand, this achievement has generated comments about the skill which Canadian authors bring to the genre. Robert Kroetsch refers to the "success of the Canadian short story" and its "gifted practitioners" in his "Foreword" to Simone Vauthier's book on the subject (xii).

W. J. Keith's judgement that "some of the most notable fiction in modern Canada is written in the short-story form" is another sample of the very positive opinions expressed (170).

While critics remark that the short story genre enjoys privileged status in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, they have also been inclined to consider why so many authors from these settler countries are drawn to the form, and whether there is anything culturally significant in that choice. The Irish short story writer Frank O'Connor emerges as an influential figure in the context of such speculation. In The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story , O'Connor says that there is a correspondence between marginalized societies and the short story. Referring to Gogol's "The Overcoat," he observes that "[t]here is no character [in the story] with whom the reader can identify himself.... There is no form of society to which any character in it could possibly attach himself and regard as normal" (17). O'Connor suggests that Gogol's story exemplifies a larger tendency in the modern short story, which is that it lacks a hero. Instead, he asserts, the modern short story deals with a submerged population group, but one that is "not submerged entirely by material considerations; it can also be submerged by the absence of spiritual ones . . ." (18). He claims that "[a]lways in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society, superimposed sometimes on symbolic figures whom they caricature and echo--Christ, Socrates, Moses" (19). As a result, O'Connor writes,

> there is in the short story at its most characteristic something that we do not often find in the novel--an intense awareness of human loneliness. Indeed, it might be truer to say that while we often read a familiar novel again for companionship, we approach the short story in a very different

mood. (19)

O'Connor notes a "peculiar geographical distribution of the novel and the short story," a distribution that suggests to him that "Czarist Russia and modern America seem to be able to produce both great novels and great short stories, while England, which might be called without exaggeration the homeland of the novel, showed up badly when it came to the short story" (19). Ireland, he also points out, had "failed to produce a single novelist," but had produced many terrific short story writers (19). This observation suggests that O'Connor does not count James Joyce and Flann O'Brien as Irish novelists, but it must be pointed out that others surely do. This overstatement aside, O'Connor traces the difference between countries that produce novelists and countries that produce short story writers to "a difference in the national attitude toward society" (19-20). His impressions thus encompass the idea that the differences between the novel and the short story are not so much formal as ideological; "I am suggesting strongly," he writes, "that we can see in [the short story] an attitude of mind that is attracted by submerged population groups, whatever these may be at any given time--tramps, artists, lonely idealists, dreamers, and spoiled priests" (20-21). He indicates, for example, that the success of the American short story can be attributed, among several considerations, to the fact that America is largely populated by sectors of marginalized peoples.

Thus O'Connor implies a connection between the short story genre and the kinds of societies and people the stories reveal, as well as a correspondence between form and content. In this thesis I examine the short story writing of Australian authors Peter Carey and David Malouf, New Zealanders Katherine Mansfield and Owen Marshall, and Canadian writers Alice Munro and Mavis Gallant. Given that the authors all write from a position

grounded in the settler experience, one might be inclined to think that the short story genre offers an especially appropriate way of conceptualizing the settler society themes and issues with which they are concerned. This view is central to my thesis.

Some critics have pointed to the fact that the short story genre shares characteristics with marginalized or postcolonial communities. W. H. New, for instance, outlines a congruence between the inferior status of the genre in its hierarchical relation to the novel, and the marginalized status of postcolonial communities in relation to imperial, metropolitan centres:

> A colony is not only dependent on another society's metropolitan centre but is presumed by definition to be incapable of developing metropolitan centres of its own . . .`novels' are `books,' `books' are substantial, therefore `novels' must be a high artistic achievement, though once again we know that many books are nothing of the kind. A `book,' moreover, is claimed as a `complete' unit, an `autonomous' text--explicitly pointing to the fact that the short story, as physically published, is usually only one element in a larger collection of some sort (anthology, magazine, miscellany), and implicitly suggesting that it is therefore of lesser substance than a `book'/`novel' and incapable itself of expressing the `wholeness' which mankind desires. (17-18)

While he does not say so explicitly, the logic and flow of New's paragraph implies that this is not just coincidence, but that there is some meaningful connection between the short story's perceived lack of stature and the perceived lack of autonomy and independence in the postcolonial communities where the short story flourishes.

Norman Friedman answers the question of whether one can confidently relate form to content in a very different way. In "Recent Short Story Theories: Problems in Definition" he warns that

> the notion that form should be appropriate to content can never really be demonstrated in general. The suitability of form to content can only be demonstrated in individual works, and the fact that certain structures and devices embody certain potential powers and limitations cannot be used a priori to predict how they can be used in any particular case. (28)

To critics who generalize about the short story's subjects, themes, and structures, Friedman points out that the conclusions are necessarily

> based on the assumption that there is something inherent in short fiction other than its shortness; this is what I have been calling an a priori assumption in that it causes us to rule out (or rule in) examples which common sense tells us belong (or do not belong). (23)

As if responding to O'Connor's charge that the short story attracts a certain kind of subject matter, Friedman thus argues that the genre is not restricted, but can accommodate any topic of an author's choosing. Indeed, in response to suggestions that the short story, because of its shortness, must deal with a brief experience, an episodic experience, or an impressionistic one, he counters that he can think of no empirical or logical reason "why an action of larger magnitude cannot be condensed down to the length of a short story, so long as it seems to serve some formal and artistic purpose" (23). Jorge Luis Borges comes to mind as a writer whose stories reflect an encyclopedic scope and an immeasurable depth, regardless of the length of the individual narratives.

Friedman concludes his essay by arguing that

> we cannot either logically or empirically specify that the short story, because of its shortness, deals with epiphanic sorts of actions, or with human experience at the boundary, or with arrivals and/or departures, or with romance more than realism. Nor can we specify that it deals with certain sorts of themes or that it embodies a certain kind of life vision. We cannot even specify, as our reader-response critics are attempting to do, that it has a certain effect upon the reader because of its shortness, for it does, after all, share this trait with other forms as well--the longer lyric poem, for example, and the essay. We must be prepared to recognize the wide variety of possibilities that can fall under the heading of short fictional narrative in prose, and we must be careful to distinguish among features which are exclusive to the form, features which are independent of the form, and those which are accidental and historically conditioned. (30)

One of the distinctive features of Friedman's essay lies in his very refusal to limit or restrict the structural and thematic possibilities that the short story can accommodate. Notably, traditional short story theorization, such as Edgar Allan Poe's contention that short stories must strive for a certain unity or single effect, failed to recognize the genre's ability to behave in such an adaptable and versatile way (188). But theorization of the short story by critics like H. E. Bates, and more recent theorization by critics like Susan Lohafer and Thomas Gullason which takes current literary innovations into account, stresses the infinite flexibility and variety of the genre and its ability to carry a range of technical and thematic possibilities. Bates, for example, like Friedman, reiterates the dynamism of the form,

emphasizing its protean nature. He observes that

> the short story can be anything the author decides it shall be; it can be anything from the death of a horse to a young girl's first love affair, from the static sketch without plot to the swiftly moving machine of bold action and climax, from the prose poem, painted rather than written, to the piece of straight reportage in which style, colour, and elaboration have no place, from the piece which catches like a cobweb the light subtle iridescence of emotions that can never be really captured or measured to the solid tale in which all emotion, all action, all reaction is measured, fixed, puttied, glazed, and finished, like a well-built house, with three coats of shining and enduring paint. In that infinite flexibility, indeed, lies the reason why the short story has never been adequately defined. (73-74)

Gullason, moreover, suggests that much of the negative reaction to the short story is owing to the word short:

> Readers are almost conditioned to find in it something of only transitory value.... Too often, a short story still suggests something artificial, involving subtle or unsubtle manipulation of a plot (with a definite beginning, middle, and end) for a certain effect (or twist, or trick ending), something flat and one-dimensional, something without any real density or longevity. ("The Short Story: Revision and Renewal" 223)

In his own close readings of various short stories, Gullason identifies the movements, expansions, ricochet effects, density, layerings, and scope that the genre can accommodate. He thus dispels the notion that there is something mechanical, standard, and static about the

form's essential nature. And in that infinite flexibility lies the reason why it is difficult to generalize about the internal behaviour of the genre.

Flannery O'Connor, in an essay on the short story, calls attention to the size--the dimension, depth, and breadth--of the experience that the story portrays. She remarks that, "Perhaps the central question to be considered in any discussion of the short story is what do we mean by short. Being short does not mean being slight. A short story should be long in depth and should give us an experience of meaning" (94). Moreover, she states that,

> A good short story should not have less meaning than a novel, nor should its action be less complete. Nothing essential to the main experience can be left out of a short story. All the action has to be satisfactorily accounted for in terms of motivation, and there has to be a beginning, a middle, and an end, though not necessarily in that order. I think many people decide that they want to write short stories because they're short, and by short, they mean short in every way. They think that a short story is an incomplete action in which a very little is shown and a great deal suggested, and they think you suggest something by leaving it out. (93-94)

The short story theorist Mary Rohrberger also offers a flexible perspective on the matter of how the genre should be approached. She suggests that "What we need to do as theorists of the short story is to avoid throwing out theories because we see exceptions or because boundaries between categories are fuzzy" (34). She stresses that "every aspect of the short story that is described more fully or named differently can lead us to increasingly more fruitful investigations" (34). Rohrberger's comment indicates that she, like other critics, is less concerned with tracing generic purity than with exploring the capacities and

the workings of the genre.

Perhaps the enduring interest in understanding how a story conveys meaning through its form explains why, despite its problems, the essence of Frank O'Connor's thesis resonates so strongly in the work of contemporary critics of settler society short story writing. Clare Hanson, for example, makes the claim for a congruence between genre and culture when she comments that the short story "seems to be the mode preferred by those writers who are not writing from within a fixed and stable cultural framework" (Short Stories 12). Lydia Wevers agrees that the short story, more than the novel, is the genre "in which the preoccupations of a colonial and postcolonial literature have worked themselves out" (Oxford 203). These comments, like O'Connor's, would seem to imply that there is something culturally significant in the settler society author's choice to write short fiction, or that there is something about the short story that makes it especially suitable to authors writing from, or about, a marginalized position.

In her work on the New Zealand short story, Lydia Wevers develops these observations further. She proposes that the short story is an appropriate choice for settler society writers precisely because the form inherently embodies so many of the characteristics of the settler culture--especially since "short fiction never constructs meaning on its own terms" (Southerly 121). For Wevers,

> The New Zealand short story inscribes marginality and centrality simultaneously; its shortness, the not-novelness of the story suggests the incompleteness of our culture, the marginality of New Zealand writing to the great Anglophone traditions.... As a generic choice it is an expression both of what we do and do not have, and as itself, it can be read as a metaphor.

(Southerly 120-21)

As Wevers points out, the short story does offer an alternative to the traditional form of the novel; in the simple fact of what it is not, the genre acquires status as a non-novel. The authors of The Empire Writes Back state that "In settler colonies the first task seems to be to establish that the texts can be shown to constitute a literature separate from that of the metropolitan centre" (133). Since the dominant form of expression in the imperium has, since at least the 19th century, traditionally been the novel, the short story has the potential to position itself strategically as an alternative genre, one separate from that of the imperial centre (Ashcroft 133). In this same essay Wevers quotes from Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism to develop an interesting comparison between the nineteenth-century European novel as an expression of imperialism, and the twentieth-century New Zealand short story as an expression of the identity of its settler society (Southerly 122).

In Culture and Imperialism, Said asserts that the novel and imperialism

> are unthinkable without each other. Of all the major literary forms, the novel is the most recent, its emergence the most datable, its occurrence the most Western, its normative pattern of social authority the most structured; imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible, I would argue, to read one without in some way dealing with the other. (71)

With its "highly regulated plot mechanism" and its "entire system of social references," Said suggests that the novel can be considered "an incorporative, quasi-encyclopedic cultural form" (71). He promises that, "[W]e shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and, on the

other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism" (70). Said does not argue that the novel caused imperialism, but he suggests that British power was "elaborated and articulated in the novel" (73) and, to this end, that the novel "contributed significantly to these feelings, attitudes, and references [about imperialism] and became a main element in the consolidated vision . . . of the globe" (74).

With Said's comments available as points of reference, Wevers is also careful about the nature of the claim she makes for the short story genre. She does not contend that the short story initiated the development of a distinct cultural and literary identity for New Zealand, but she does ask us to read its textual space "metaphorically as an expression of cultural identity" (Southerly 122). Moreover, she asserts that

> If the nineteenth-century European novel reveals structures of attitude and reference which delineate a distinctive cultural topography, then the short story, as the preferred generic choice of many of the writers who construct New Zealand literature, also reveals attitudes and structures which constitute a distinctive topography.... (Southerly 122-23)

Wevers claims that in New Zealand writing it is the short story that best offers resistance "to the more usual practice of writing `Home' for a British readership" as one does with novels (Oxford 203). She privileges the short story over other genres in this regard because of what she makes of the abbreviated length of the story form and, to her mind, its concomitant suggestion of incompleteness. She proposes that the brevity "speaks for the absence of other, larger certainties, encoding the problematic context of colonial and post-colonial literatures" (Oxford 203). And she wonders whether

> the problematic questions of separation, race, culture, and identity which

> constrain and shape an emerging national literature can be more comfortably articulated in a genre which does not imply resolution. (Oxford 203)

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin suggest that settler society literature, "defined within the literature of the mother country, as a `branch' or `tributary', [sic] was unsure of itself from the beginning, and the result was self-consciousness" (137). Their general point supports Wever's identification of the pervasiveness of uncertainty as a general theme in New Zealand writing.

Wevers laments that "there still doesn't seem to be much of a hypothesis about why the New Zealand writer again and again makes that generic choice" [to write short stories] (Southerly 118). Wevers refers to the appeal the short story holds for authors writing from within an emerging national literature because it "does not imply resolution" or larger certainties (Oxford 203). But one must acknowledge that while the shortness of the short story can signal irresolution, novels, poetry, and drama can also all accommodate irresolution. James Joyce's Dubliners provides a wonderful example of the way the short story form, with its ability to inscribe ambiguity and indeterminacy, so suitably captures the uncertainties and perplexities of people on the fringes of Dublin life. But if Dubliners supports Wever's theory, Ulysses demonstrates that the novel is equally capable of exploring the difficult questions surrounding a character's and a culture's identity--in a most open and unresolved fashion.

Still, even though novels, poems, and short stories can produce similar effects, they function differently from each other and achieve their effects in distinct ways. Wevers' theory is based on the assumption that short stories are not simply long prose poems and

short novels. Mary Gerhart indicates that, in genre theory, it is the Aristotelian argument that holds that

> different genres mediate distinct meanings, themselves capable of being analyzed systematically. From this position, literary forms are distinct and require an interpretation that is species-specific and that has as its ambition an explanation of how the literary work operates. Instead of asking, "Whence comes the power of this work?" this . . . [Aristotelian] critic asks, "How is the power of this work generated through its particular form and meaning?" (55)

It is with a similar emphasis on the formalist approach that Northrop Frye, in his "Theory of Genres," advises that an author "should be examined in terms of the conventions he chose" (305), a view which lends itself to taking into account the choice of genre, and how the genre affects and conveys meaning.

Wevers adopts a formalist approach herself in asserting that the New Zealand short story reveals "attitudes and structures which constitute a distinctive topography" (Southerly 123). And she and other critics are right to speak of the compatibility between the short story form and its content in specific instances. Commenting on the work of New Zealanders Katherine Mansfield and Owen Marshall, Bill Manhire, for example, insightfully indicates that their shared preoccupation with memory, which he labels an anxiety, is well suited to the genre in which they write:

> Such an anxiety is hardly surprising in a land which often thinks itself lacking in `history'--`a little land with no history' was Mansfield's phrase in 1909. But worry about memory is also appropriate to the short story form

> itself, which finds its roots in rootlessness, in the instabilities of experience, which works best with the moment and cannot, like the novel, easily accommodate the process of time passing. (Six by Six 8)

Theorists like Barbara C. Ewell and Gerald Lynch share with Wevers a desire to make a connection between the resources of the short story and representations of a culture. In "Southern Women Reconstruct the South: Limit as Aesthetic in the Short Story," Ewell examines how three Southern American women writers, Kate Chopin, Alice Walker, and Eudora Welty, have strategically used the short story to confront the story of the old South. She contends that

> In this otherness--as a "limited" genre, typically defined in terms of its inferiority and difference from the novel--the short story parallels the otherness of women (as well as the South) in offering valuable spaces for criticism. (66)

Ewell argues that, for these writers, the decision to write within the short story genre is rich with opportunity and potential:

> In the confines of the short story, that act of reconstruction [that the authors engage in] is intensified, exaggerated by the deliberate partiality of the form. Unable to contain the whole story and unsuited for the novel's totalizing claims of authority, the short story reveals in its limits the partiality of any story. Demanding silences and gaps . . . the genre offers its practitioners a congruous way of undermining the authority and universality on which hierarchies depend. Moreover, as a "lesser genre," the form also lends to its subversion the disguise of insignificance, its destabilizing challenge always

already contained by its devaluation and difference. (66)

In concentrating on women writers from the American South, Ewell pursues a direction different from my own focus on writers from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. But her insistence on the congruence between the genre and the kinds of issues these writers confront is directly relevant to Wevers' assessment of the genre's potential not only to articulate a particular cultural or regional perspective, but also to reinforce or encode that perspective within the structure of the genre. Ewell does identify the short story's capacity to reflect a specific aesthetic and ideology, one that is subversive, anti-authoritative, different, marginalized, devalued, and partial. However, in her failure to acknowledge that the novel, poetry, and drama are equally capable of issuing the kinds of challenges that she sees embodied by the short story form, she insinuates that the short story is uniquely capable of carrying such traits. But, significantly, Ewell examines one representative story by each of Chopin, Walker, and Welty, and, in limiting her focus, avoids implying that their writing reveals defining traits of the short story as a genre. She makes it clear that she wants to examine how these three Southern women have used the short story--with ruptures, silences, discontinuities, gaps--in specific instances to challenge the partiality of all narrative and cultural authorities, and to reveal how no perspective can be definitive (Ewell 70).

Gerald Lynch also relates the form of the short story to its substance. Focusing on Canadian short story writing, he argues that because the short story offers the possibility of an alternative to the novel's impression of completion and its promise of closure and totality, the story cycle is "well suited to the concerns of Canadian writers intent on portraying a particular region or community, its history, its characters, its communal concerns" (36). Lynch's argument, like Wevers' and Ewell's, hinges on the idea that the form complements

and reinforces the content. He writes,

> Even such early cycles as Scott's Viger and Leacock's Sunshine Sketches portray the struggles of small communities for coherence and survival under contrary pressures from metropolitanism and modernity, and they do so in a form that mirrors the struggle between cohesion and a kind of entropy, or between solidarity and fragmentation, between things holding together and things pulling apart. (37)

As the work of critics like Lynch and Forrest L. Ingram indicates, story cycles are a subgenre within the short story, and function differently than single stories. But I think the tension between cohesion and fragmentation that Lynch sees within linked stories is present, admittedly in a modified way, within individual stories. Because of its brevity, a single story may well embody incompleteness and ambiguity on some level, and these elements generate tension as the reader attempts to integrate omissions into a pattern of narrative coherence. Lynch does not argue that the short story is uniquely capable of reinforcing this tension between wholeness and disunity, presumably because too many examples suggest otherwise: Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and the Yeats poem implied by Achebe's title, for instance, exemplify how both a novel and a poem can structurally reinforce a thematic tension between order and disorder, between things coming together and things unravelling. Indeed, Lynch does not even invite a comparison between the capacities of other genres. Instead, he focuses on select short story authors and examines how they work with the short story cycle in specific instances.

The stories of Peter Carey, David Malouf, Katherine Mansfield, Owen Marshall, Alice Munro, and Mavis Gallant variously explore questions of identity, the significance of

place, and the defining traits of culture. While these themes do not necessarily find their provenance in the settler experience, each author has some engagement with a particular culture and, in the stories by each author that I examine, the culture is clearly defined by its ties to a settler background. In William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!, Quentin Compson is a character obsessed with the meaning of legacies and with the implications of inheritances from the past. He thinks, "*Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed . . .*" (210). This very poetic passage expresses the very sense of attachment, connection, influence, and exchange between the settler past and the present that permeates the authors' works that I examine in this thesis. For these authors, the settler experience extends its reach, like ripples from one pool of water spreading into another, into experiences in the present day. Carey, for example, interrogates the imperialistic control America exercises over Australia. Malouf is equally concerned with Australia's settler legacy, as shown in his exploration of conflicts between Old World and New World sensibilities. Mansfield focuses on her characters' efforts to settle into new environments and into new lives and, in so doing, she gestures to the settler experience that is so much a part of New Zealand history. Marshall's focus on characters' growth and development often implies a connection to the maturation of New Zealand's cultural identity. And Munro's quest for the meaning of such terms as a life, an identity, home, and culture confront provincial and colonial definitions that allude to the settler background from which her characters emerge. Gallant tests what it means to be Canadian at various times in the twentieth-century, and her explorations stress that not only is

individual identity fluid and flexible, but so too is the nation's. Each author, at some point, invites the reader to interpret a textual moment as being distinctly Australian, New Zealand, or Canadian, in the attitudes, values, anxieties, issues, and ironies exposed. Furthermore, each author, at some point, relates a textual moment to the circumstances of the country's early settlement.

These six authors' stories tend to expose the falseness of definitive, authoritative, and hermetic ideologies, and this attitude is reflected in their narrative structures. As varied as their writing is, the authors all display an affinity for irresolution surrounding central themes and conflicts, for an openness in terms of defining meaning, and for plurality in representing elements such as narrative voice, point of view, temporal relations, and endings. While they use the resources of the short story in different ways, they maximize the potential of the genre to generate ambiguity and uncertainty on many narrative levels, to stress multiplicity and diversity in their meaning, and to resist any single, authoritative story. These authors' stories could be used to illustrate the dynamism and flexibility critics like Bates and Gullason speak of as being possible within the genre.

Frank Davey argues that traits that challenge the idea of a "unified" and "autotelic" story are characteristics of "most writing in the Canadian short story" (i). In "Genre Subversion and the Canadian Short Story" he proposes that "the development of the Canadian short story . . . occurred almost entirely outside this early twentieth-century Anglo-American critical emphasis on the unified and autotelic story" (10). Because of this isolation Davey contends that "[a]n examination of the Canadian short story requires a much more pluralistic and eclectic view of the short story, and a more `generous' sense of its generic language, than that which accompanied the development of the Anglo-American

short story" (10). Davey concentrates on the interweaving of genre codes--parable, legend, anecdote, essay, and short fiction--in Canadian short stories and suggests that this mix "in many cases obliges a reader to recognize in the text a distinct resistance to classical genre theory, reference and transparency" (13-14). Davey's admonition to see Canadian stories as demanding a pluralistic and eclectic understanding of the genre as opposed to a unified and autotelic one is relevant to my reading of these six authors' works. Their work prompts a recognition of the potent nature of the form.

Wevers suggests that the problematic questions that so often arise within settler societies "can be more comfortably articulated in a genre which does not imply resolution" (Oxford 203). Frank O'Connor, we may recall, observes that for the short story writer, these "problematic questions" may relate to a focus on marginalized peoples, as well as a concentration on the experiences of loneliness, alienation, and defeat. There are indeed many isolated figures in the stories of the six authors I examine, including Malouf's lecturer in Australian culture; Mansfield's unmarried lady of society, Beryl; Marshall's painter, Mr. Van Gogh; Munro's nineteenth-century poet, Almeda Roth; and Gallant's young orphan, Linnet Muir. In my reading of the stories, the alienated characters are set apart from the community because of their differences, their individuality, their eccentricities, but also because of the self-awareness and the self-consciousness they display in examining the meaning of their own lives, their relations to the culture in which they exist, and to the place where they live. In Mansfield's "At the Bay," Beryl and her sister's family move from the city to the country. She feels isolated and very lonely as a result of this change, and she expresses her unhappy feelings about her plight in terms that capture the uncertainty of her situation. She indicates that, "It is true when you are by yourself and you think about life, it

is always sad. All that excitement and so on has a way of suddenly leaving you, and it's as though, in the silence, somebody called your name, and you heard your name for the first time" (244). Her statement emblematizes the kind of connection that so often emerges in all six authors' writing between the assessment of identity and the estimation of the culture and place in which a character finds him or herself. Beryl's statement also reflects the uncertainty and ambiguity that so typically surround and accompany a character's efforts to sort out these relations.

To be clear, Carey, Malouf, Mansfield, Marshall, Munro, and Gallant are not restricted to the medium of the short story in exploring "problematic questions" surrounding issues of identity, culture, and place. While their stories often revolve around these themes, such themes are not unique to the genre, nor limited to it. However, in focusing on the short story writing of these six authors, I assume that when they choose to write in the short story mode it is because the genre offers something to them as writers and serves some purpose—aesthetic, structural, thematic, strategic, personal, or other. Lynch speaks of the "formal appropriateness" of the genre to certain subjects and themes (40). His identification of a correspondence between form and content is directly relevant to my thesis. I explore the way these authors cultivate the potential of the short story to accommodate their thematic interests. The formal capacities of the genre allow the six practitioners the opportunity to subvert the impression of certainty, unity, closure, completion, and totality (Lynch 38-40). The authors' chosen form is thus appropriate to their explorations of complex issues relating to identity, culture, and place because the ways in which they explore these issues, as well as the issues themselves, lend themselves to an aesthetic predicated on openness, irresolution, and indeterminacy.

The stories typically deploy in an ambiguous way some of the traditional aspects of the genre: epiphanies produce multiple effects as opposed to a single and unifying one; meaning is multiple and shifting; the stories overall lend themselves to a plurality of interpretations; and endings lack unity and closure. While the authors all bring innovations and adaptations to the short story genre, they also all share the common preoccupation of establishing a correspondence between the kinds of stories they write—complex, open, ambiguous—and the kind of people and societies the stories reveal. As Lynch implies, the short story can not only accommodate the examination of identity, culture, and place, but it can also reflect the failure of identity, culture, and place to unify, to cohere, and to provide stability (39).

With the exception of Katherine Mansfield, all the authors I have chosen are writers of the late twentieth-century. Peter Carey, with his postmodern sensibility, and David Malouf, with his interest in generating psychological depth, strongly contrast with each other. Such contrast is productive because it highlights the flexibility of the genre and demonstrates the different ways in which settler-society themes are figured by contemporary writers. Mansfield's name is synonymous with short story writing in New Zealand, and she provides a critical standard with which Owen Marshall's more realistic, contemporary writing can be compared. As well, critics highlight the opposition between the Mansfield school of impressionistic writing and the Frank Sargeson school of realistic writing. By examining Mansfield's work, I am able to acknowledge that important literary model, and by examining Marshall's work, I am free also to move beyond it. Alice Munro experiments with the capacities of the genre to be dense, concentrated, and subtle, and, in her handling of it, the short story can be characterized as complex, multi-

layered, textured, and dynamic. She highlights the genre's ability to convey indeterminacy surrounding core issues and themes, as well as ambiguity surrounding single tropes and images. The title for my thesis, "Open Secrets," comes from a Munro short story by that name; the title links a characteristic of her writing, its openness, with the same potential characteristic that she enhances within the genre itself. (Munro typically writes about the mystery, the secrets, of the ordinary, too; thus, her story title is very relevant to her aesthetic). Finally, Mavis Gallant's stories provide a partial contrast to the other five authors' work. While she does favour ambiguity and openness in her writing, I argue that her emphasis on openness lies more clearly in her aim to generate uncertainty within her readers. Indeed, she places an enormous stress on asking the reader to interpret the tone, the point of view of the narrator, and the key textual moments, in individual stories. She provides only brief background material and only sketch-like details about her characters, and yet she typically places her characters at some kind of critical moment. She asks the reader to determine what that critical moment represents. Frank O'Connor suggests that there is "no such thing as essential form" for the short story writer: "Because his frame of reference can never be the totality of a human life, he must be forever selecting the point at which he can approach it . . ." (21). Gallant's distinctive representation of her observations of society and culture only heightens the awareness that each author's form is in fact unique and original.

I begin each chapter with a general introduction, followed by a detailed analysis of one representative story. The authors write on a wide variety of themes and issues, but I have deliberately chosen to examine stories that reflect their postcolonial interests because I want to investigate how form can help to strengthen the articulation of those

themes, and how the form can encode or inscribe them. In the remainder of each chapter, I demonstrate how the aesthetic that I identify in the one representative story works itself out in two or more other stories, stories to which I give shorter treatment.

In Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991, Salman Rushdie comments on the way people in general and writers in particular perceive the world. "Human beings do not see things whole;" he tells us, "we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings in all senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved . . . " (12). He claims that, furthermore,

> Writers are no longer sages, dispensing the wisdom of the centuries. And those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us. We can't lay claim to Olympus, and are thus released to describe our worlds in the way in which all of us, whether writers or not, perceive it from day to day. (12-13)

The stories I examine in this thesis suggest the authors' awareness of cultural displacement, whether it is the result of settlement, immigration, transition, or a shift in cultural orientation. Cultural displacement also comes from the undercurrent of intolerance that can breed in communities that continually look to larger, more dominant centres. As Rushdie implies, the stories themselves can display a sensitivity to the ambiguous and fractured quality of experience: the characters from the works examined in this thesis explore their own identities, their own sense of culture, and their own sense

of place, and they do so within the open, ambiguous, and complex narrative structures of the short story.

Chapter Two: Peter Carey

With his six novels to two books of short stories, Peter Carey is better recognized as a novelist, and especially so as the author of the Booker-prize winning Oscar and Lucinda (1988). Indeed the chronology of Carey's published works suggests that his preference for the short story genre prevailed at the beginning of his writing career, from around 1974 to 1980, and the recent publication of his sixth consecutive novel, Jack Maggs (1997), clearly shows a sustained commitment to the novel. Yet for my purposes the short stories will provide the lens through which I assess Carey's aesthetic as they offer a wonderful example of the innovation that can be brought to the short story form, and of the suitability and flexibility of the genre in conveying anxieties inherited from a settler background. Carey's short stories are interesting, imaginative, and challenging, and while the same may be said of the short stories of the other authors considered in this thesis, Carey's work offers a vivid contrast in form and style to them in the ways in which he handles and explores postcolonial themes.

Carey's short story writing has been described by Kerryn Goldsworthy as exemplifying the "new" fiction of the 1970s in Australia, fiction noted for its "break from realist stories and nationalist preoccupations" of the kind found in the tradition of Henry Lawson's bush stories (541; see also Woodcock 1-15). According to Goldsworthy, this new fiction is also characterized by its heavy influence from contemporary European and American writing (including Joyce, Borges, Faulkner, Kerouac), especially its tendency to incorporate elements of fantasy and surrealism, its experimentation with narrative

chronology and narrative voice, and its display of self-referentiality (541). With other practitioners of this style such as Michael Wilding, Frank Moorhouse, and Murray Bail, Carey is identified by Goldsworthy as having "an acute and articulated consciousness of there being no simple, uncomplicated relationship between language and experience" (541). Carey's reliance upon fantasy and surrealism in his writing can be linked to the challenge he faces in making the language of narrative adequately communicate the incoherent, the strange, and the unnatural elements of his imaginative worlds. He questions society's willing acceptance of the ideology that structures images, representations, and narratives, and he critiques society's unexamined materialism and consumerism--proclivities which justify the emphasis critics such as Karen Lamb and Anthony J. Hassall have given to what might be considered his postmodernist preoccupations. An approach to his work that focuses on his style as a "new" writer is enriched, however, by attending to the postcolonial issues in his narratives. I would argue that, instead of breaking from nationalist preoccupations entirely, Carey presents postcolonial issues relating to cultural identity in a complex context, complex because it is informed by both postmodern and postcolonial impulses. His stories reflect the (postcolonial) desire to find compatible terms with which to conceptualize and project a stable Australian cultural identity, as well as a (postmodern) critique of the totalizing images and explanations that circulate in the culture.

Hermine Krassnitzer has identified the potential richness of a reading of Carey's work that focuses on the postcolonial as well as the postmodern; in Aspects of Narration in Peter Carey's Novels: Deconstructing Colonialism, Krassnitzer initiates a reading of Carey's novels that is informed by both aesthetic movements. Graham Huggan also contributes

useful insight to the debate about how to classify Carey's writing, postmodern or postcolonial, as does Bruce Woodcock. Woodcock, like Huggan, refuses to see "easily decoded narratives" in Carey's work and presents him instead as a "hybrid who exploits the literary, formal, and thematic ambiguities" afforded by fabulism, surrealism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism (119). My study adds the connection between the generic capacities of the short story and the way in which Carey depicts his social world.

Carey's Collected Stories illustrates the way the short story form, specifically, captures and conveys especially well the thematic preoccupations of an author whose cultural background includes the central fact of British colonization and settlement. The short story can contain the episodic, the ambiguous, the uncertain, and the self-conscious; its ability to embody these traits relates to Carey's fictional realms where the elements of certainty, closure, continuity, are rendered indeterminate, ambiguous, and fragmented. Form and substance work together to insist on a shift in emphasis, a questioning which undermines established order and which, by extension, implicitly challenges the dictates of imperial heritage. The radical uncertainty surrounding the meaning of central representations in Carey's fictional realms works to create this disruption and this openness.

In Orientalism, Edward Said makes the point that in cultural discourse and in exchange within a culture "what is commonly circulated by it is not `truth' but representations" (21). He writes that

> It hardly needs to be demonstrated again that language itself is a highly organized and encoded system, which employs many devices to express, indicate, exchange messages and information, represent and so forth. In any

> instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation. (21)

Said refers to the techniques of representation inherent in written language. Carey's stories draw attention to the techniques of representation involved not just in narrative, but in a variety of forms including cartography, architecture, art, movies, dreams, miming, and politics. In "A Windmill in the West" a soldier discovers that, contrary to military rationale, there is no visible difference between the territory to the East that he defends and the territory to the West that he invades; in "The Puzzling Nature of Blue," Vincent realizes that the colour blue is not seen as part of a neutral or natural colour spectrum. Instead the colour is inflected with political meaning, a meaning that changes depending on whether one is affiliated with the colonizers or the colonized. And in "The Fat Man in History," Carey suggests that even obesity is not a neutral condition but a sign of one's political affiliation. To be overweight is equated with being one of the "fat Americans" of the revolution and immediately suggests being "grotesque, greedy, an enemy of the people" (Collected 183). In these stories Carey investigates "how we represent, how we construct, our view of our reality and of ourselves" (Hutcheon, Politics 42).

While Carey repeatedly examines how a futuristic, capitalist, cosmopolitan culture represents itself, he also explores specific instances when Australian culture absorbs and reflects conventions fashioned in America, which is something that he does especially pointedly in "American Dreams." One can't help but speculate as to whether Carey's working background in the field of advertising sharpened his perceptiveness about the constructed nature of images. At any rate, the focus on what images and narratives signify

in terms of cultural attitudes relates to his aesthetic concerns. For Carey, this means that his consciousness of a story as a constructed artefact corresponds to the recognition that the stories and images of Australian culture are also cultivated. And often, he suggests, the imported models Australian culture adopts to represent itself are inadequate or inappropriate. One way of reading Carey's critique of various representational strategies would be to consider, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin do, that for a postcolonial writer, unease with the gap between imported language and local world can become a radical questioning of the relationship between language and world (137). This is another way of stating one of Carey's central interests: the complicated relationship between sign systems and experience, especially in relation to representing the complex experience of colonization.

Carey does not introduce the subject of Australia's colonization with anything so literal as the fact of the British Government's 1787 decision to send a fleet to colonize Australia and, in so doing, to transport the unwanted felons from England. But Carey's preoccupation with the theme of physical and psychological imprisonment seems connected to the concept of a continent becoming a jail. Critics have argued that a sense of powerlessness and subjection extends throughout Australia's national mythology because of its experience as a penal colony (Hassall 116). The characters' situations in Carey's stories gesture towards this history as they are often trapped, either physically, by walls or prisons, or psychologically, by elements which are related to aspects of imperialism, such as the imposition of cultural attitudes from a dominating centre and the importation of cultural representations. Entrapment of this kind no longer comes mainly from Britain as it did in

the days of Australia's settlement. Edward Said makes the point that imperialism lingers "in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices" (Culture 9), and Carey understands this aftermath of imperialist influence.

In many of the stories Carey identifies the United States of America as the modern-day oppressor in its pursuit of profit and its building of a global empire, and he uses symbols of American political, economic, and social culture--automobiles, drive-in movie theatres, the tourism industry, and revolutionary political will--to suggest the ways in which America exerts dominance over Australian cultural life. When asked by Ray Willbanks about the polarity between Australia and America which he sets up in his work, Carey admits that, "I did have a thing about Australia being on the edge of the American Empire. . . . One can feel a great deal of reservations about American political actions in the world, the actions of American companies" (48). In the same interview Carey also suggests that the focus on entrapment in his short stories may well originate from his growing up in a parochial setting: "As an adult I've always felt a great deal of potential, but as a child in a country town I felt trapped, with denied possibilities" (52).

If Carey's stories are thematically engaged with the theme of entrapment, one of their stylistic features is that they dispense with what Said calls "the confident edifice that fictional narrative normally constructs" (Beginnings 137). As a result, they are characterized by an openness, an ambiguity, and an enigmatic quality on the level of meaning. The connection between the generic capacities of the short story and the way Carey depicts his social world emphasizes how form and context work together, and it is this dynamic between the two which is the focus of this chapter. The form, which is open,

ambiguous, exploratory, and which hints at the impossibility of containment, is a stylistic counterpart to thematic stress on physical confinement and emotional imprisonment. The stories are highly self-reflexive, raising problems about the representation of reality and logical sequential structuring. The stories are also episodic and fragmented; most of them are internally divided by numbered paragraphs. Many of them are only three to six pages in length, thereby highlighting what Susan Lohafer refers to as "the brevity of the reading experience and the consequence of the imminence of the end in this narrative [short story] genre" (Short Story Theory 110). These characteristics show the process of the story's making. Moreover, the narratives are spare in their provision of the traditional components of plot; they often lack character delineation and development, unity of action, ordered and connected structure, exposition, and resolution. Despite the skeletal nature of the stories, they do achieve complexity, in part, because form and context reinforce one another so meaningfully. As Carey exposes the artifice and mechanisms involved in his own story writing, he also explores the structures that prop up Australian cultural identity, such as the tourism industry, corporate capitalism, and consumerism.

Peter Carey's Collected Stories (1995) includes all of the stories from The Fat Man in History (1974) and War Crimes (1979), as well as four stories not previously collected. My discussion of Carey's work from this collection proceeds by way of selective, concrete, story-by-story analysis. The principle that guided the choice and ordering of the stories discussed relates to Helen Tiffin's advice to observe the direction of the "political valency" of narrative's devices (x). I begin by considering stories that are self-reflexive and inward looking, ones which comment on the construction of fiction or the act of mimetic

representation itself. I then consider stories that look outward and recognize the social and cultural context in which art is produced. These stories anticipate my eventual focus on works that can be seen to have clear postcolonial significance, works that draw attention to the political, economic, and even imperial factors that inform representations of Australian cultural identity. In these later stories Carey more forcefully asserts what is at stake when Australian culture is constituted by foreign values and beliefs.

"Happy Story" provides a good point of departure because it self-consciously raises questions about the capacities of the short story genre and highlights Carey's interest in looking at how things--in this instance short stories themselves--are constructed. This story is sketch-length at three pages and it is fragmented, with six numbered sections composing the whole of the narrative. The text is almost all dialogue with only a couple of descriptive sentences between the many quotations. The story features two characters, the anonymous male character and his friend Marie, and records six separate and brief conversations between them about flying. In the first conversation, Marie makes accusations to the man about his obsession with flying: "`It's an obsession,' she says, `all this talk about flying and birds. I think you're simply unhappy and want to escape'" (66). He replies "I'd be happy if I could fly" (66). In the fifth conversation Marie inquires whether the man could build something for flying that would accommodate both her and the dog, and she is happy when he explains that it could be done. In the sixth and final conversation, the man asks Marie, "Where do you want to go?" and after some deliberation she answers "Well . . . I've always wanted to go to Florence." "All right," he says (68).

It is an odd and cryptic story. Reason dictates that if being able to fly will make the

man happy, and he is about to fly at the end of the story, then he is also happy. The promise of the title "Happy Story" is thus realized, as the expectation for narrative closure of a specifically happy nature is satisfied. But the simple title and the simple story are so blatantly generic, and the numbers to the sections provide such a mechanical dramatization of narrative progression that they prompt consideration of the story as story, as something fictional and constructed. One might ask if this is really a happy story. In its brevity, sparsity, and episodic nature, one might consider whether the narrative achieves the coherence of a story at all. It is characteristic of Carey's aesthetic that the story should raise questions about its own form and its own construction in this way.

The first question hinges upon how the announcement of a happy ending as given in the title conditions the whole of the text and the experience of reading it. Theorization of reader-expectation and reader-response in the short story often attempts to analyze how the short story ends (unified and complete, or ambiguous and open), how the imminence of the end in a brief story affects the reading, and how the short story can be processed. Douglas Hesse suggests that titles of short stories play a fundamental role with respect to the reader's response. But he suggests that when we encounter an unlabelled text, "we engage a complexly recursive process of hypothesizing what kind of work it is (or is like) and reading in that light until we need to readjust our hypothesis" (88). Although "Happy Story" has a title, I suggest we still hypothesize about what kind of work it is. Indeed, precisely because the title "Happy Story" creates expectations for both happiness and closure, we search for elements within the story that confirm those expectations and, conversely, ones that could reverse or disappoint them.

If the expectations raised by the title prompt questions about how we read and interpret stories, then the actual style of the narrative raises questions about how to define what constitutes a short story in the first place. For example, there is a recognizable conflict between Marie and the male protagonist, and Carey provides enough information to provoke speculation about character and motivation. But he is so exactingly selective in the details he provides that each word acquires the density and symbolic weight of poetry. In his essay, "The Margins of Narrative: The Very Short Story, the Prose Poem, and the Lyric" John Gerlach remarks on the blurring between narrative modes that occurs in short stories:

> When do we finally reach the minimum unit of story, that is, a free-standing, complete, and satisfying prose fiction? Might a story even become something else--a poem, for instance? If that is possible, do such discriminations ultimately matter? Are we likely to look at a work differently if it is, or is not, a story? (74)

If we apply Gerlach's questions to "Happy Story" we may not come up with definitive answers. But the self-reflexive nature of the story suggests that questions concerning the minimum unit of narration required to compose a story, the demarcations between modes of narrative (like the sketch and the short story), and the demarcations between genres themselves, are relevant to it. The formal elements of the story work to draw attention to the story's own status as fiction. The way the narrative as a whole is divided into six sections asks that we consider how the discrete units of narration relate to one another. The logic and linearity of the numbered sections are set off against the ambiguity and circularity of the dialogue about flying. The tension between the two, which

is inscribed right into the structure of the narrative, tends to render other elements in the story (like the title, the state of happiness, the ending) ambiguous. Far from providing a definitive example of a happy story, this one prompts us to ask what constitutes a happy story.

If "Happy Story" looks inward in a gesture of short story self-reflection, "Report on the Shadow Industry" looks outward, emphasizing the way in which images and narratives are culturally produced. That there is a relationship between art and its social context is hinted at in the title. The modernist ideal of art's autonomy from the daily concerns of commercial culture is undermined by the reference to a report; a report connotes discourse of a utilitarian and public nature and thus subverts any idea of this short story as a disinterested, isolated art object (McGowan 585). Furthermore, the classification of a report detracts from the originality of the author's genius and suggests instead a narrative written according to format. It is thus appropriate that the narrative proceeds in a logical, progressive order of five numbered sections, with dispassionate language and documentary-like reporting style.

Shadows, once natural patches of shade, are described in the story as products of the culture: they are manufactured and available in supermarkets, "packaged in large, lavish boxes which are printed with abstract designs in many colours" (138). According to the report, people buy shadows with the hope that they will give them some pleasure. But as the narrator explains, there is no consensus on what the shadows actually mean:

> There are those who say that the shadows are bad for people, promising an impossible happiness that can never be realized and thus detracting from the

> very real beauties of nature and life. But there are others who argue that the shadows have always been with us in one form or another and that the packaged shadow is necessary for mental health in an advanced technological society. . . . [Others] . . . hold that the shadows are merely mirrors to the soul and that the man who stares into a shadow box sees only himself . . . . (138)

The story's preoccupation with the manufacturing, packaging, and analyzing of the shadows emphasizes both the construction of shadows and the effect it has on society. The story itself, however, reproduces the society's very obsession with production and manufacturing in that it provides three different interpretations of the meaning of the smoke coming from the shadow factories, three interpretations of the meaning of the shadows themselves, and an account from the narrator about the effect of shadows on three different people: his mother, his father, and himself. The narrator says that he bought his mother several of the expensive varieties of shadow for Christmas, but that they only made her sad. He implies that she suffers from a "feeling of emptiness, that awful despair that comes when one has failed to grasp the shadow" (139). His father left home after receiving a shadow box from his mother as a surprise present, leaving a note stating, "Words Cannot Express What I feel Because of The Things I Saw In The Box Of Shadows You Bought Me" (139). Finally, the narrator describes his own feelings about the shadows: "My own feelings about the shadows are ambivalent, to say the least. For here I have manufactured one more: elusive, unsatisfactory, hinting at greater beauties and more profound mysteries that exist somewhere before the beginning and somewhere after the end" (139).

One might wonder if this passage reflects Carey's artistic intentions. But Antony J Hassall suggests that "it is at best risky to identify the sentiments of the author with those of one of his characters, and not all Carey's fiction hints at beauties and mysteries that lie outside the confines of the narrative" (8). However, it is at least accurate to suggest that the terms of this passage could describe the story itself and it certainly describes the meaning of the shadows--ambivalent, elusive, unsatisfactory, even hinting at something else than what is on the page.

As I have suggested, the story dwells on packaging and constructing in various manifestations. Even at the end, when the narrator uses the verb "manufacture" to account for the report he himself writes--"For here I have manufactured one more . . ."—he explicitly places the narrative within the same context of manufactured goods as the shadows. Carey seems to be suggesting that his story is itself just another consumer product. But the story does makes another important point. The narrator explains that the shadows were manufactured in America first, and that the shadow factories then came to his country (137). The reality of a global economy makes the exchange of goods between America and Australia realistic, but this detail also carries meaning in the context of a postcolonial interest: that shadow factories originate in the dominant centre of America and spread to countries on the periphery can be read as a metaphor for the ways in which American products and images infiltrate Australian culture. The story is clear about the effects. The narrator reports that, "the popular belief is that the smoke sometimes contains the most powerful shadows of all, those that are too large and powerful to be packaged. It is a common sight to see old women standing for hours outside the factories, staring into the

smoke" (137). Old women, dazed and numbed by the smoke, stand as symbols of the negative effects of cultural infiltration of this kind from America.

"Report on the Shadow Industry" projects the potential numbing of Australian society if it continues to allow American companies to start manufacturing and producing American products, as well as an American value system, in Australia. "Crabs" makes a similar statement about the threat of an American cultural invasion in Australian society. The male protagonist takes his girlfriend to the Star Drive-in movie theatre where his main objective is to have sex with her in the back of his Dodge. Strange things happen while Crabs and Carmen are actually physically engaged, however, namely that "Karboys" steal the wheels off the vehicle, making it impossible for them to leave. Carmen and Crabs become literally imprisoned in the drive-in theatre, subjected to a routine of eating ice-cream sundaes at the drive-in's cafeteria, the Ezy-Eatin, and watching movies.

The world inside the confines of the drive-in inverts the idealistic image of American culture with its abundance of automobiles, movies, and concession stands, into a nightmare realm where people are saturated with and imprisoned by these same things. On one level, the bizarre elements of the story--car-jackings, police shootings, ghetto living--are actually recognizable components of contemporary society. But the story also operates on a more symbolic level with Crabs' standing for an American, and his penetration of Carmen standing as a metaphor for the American invasion of Australian culture. The time frame of the story is literally post-coitus and the play between post-coitus and postcolonial seems relevant; in the postcolonial context Carey asks what happens after this kind of cultural invasion. This story bleakly implies the inescapability of American consumer domination.

"Happy Story," "Report on the Shadow Industry," and "Crabs" offer examples of Carey's investigation into the production and representation of narrative structures. Each story with its brevity and episodic nature emphasizes its own fictionality, its own provisional and constructed nature. In "Do You Love Me?" there is similar dramatization of the story's own production as it is divided into numbered sections, fourteen in total. But the sections are also given titles, a device which is unique to this story in the entire collection. There are fourteen headings in the ten pages of text, stressing the fragmented nature of the narrative itself. A sample of the section titles includes "Some Theories that Arose at the Time," "A Contradiction," "An Unpleasant Scene." The final section is titled "One Final Scene" and while this, like all the titles, is accurate, it is also lacking in particularized meaning. Indeed, the titles are so generic that they subvert the idea of a meaningful relationship between form and content. Carey's use of titles reiterates the main point of the story, which is that the forms and structures we use to represent ourselves and our countries may only partially represent, or faintly indicate, the substance of that reality.

This story examines the cartographers of the present society and their task of precisely mapping out the country. Cartographers contribute to the yearly census and the census, as the narrator explains, is a "manifestation of our desire to know, always, exactly where we stand. The census, originally a count of the population, has gradually extended until it has become a total inventory of the contents of the nation, a mammoth task which is continuing all the time" (1).

We are told that the cartographer's role in the census taking is crucial, for the people of the nation "crave, more than anything else, to know the extent of the nation, to know,

exactly, the shape of the coastline, to hear what land may have been lost to the sea, to know what has been reclaimed and what is still in doubt" (2).

Possessing a coherent sense of place can be difficult in Australia for practical reasons, given the vastness of the landscape and topography. Bruce Clunies Ross points out that Australia is "hardly humanised, let alone urbanised, at all. . . . About two-thirds of [Australia] is still designated on maps as of `no significant use' and the urban centres of population form only a discontinuous fringe around the coast" (15). The cravings for knowledge about the nation thus highlight the desire to establish an identity, to develop an indigenous history of the land, and to create representations of the culture through one's own maps, lists, and festivities, such as the yearly "Festival of the Corn." However, the desire to know exactly the status of the nation converges upon the question of how one actually represents the nation. This problem quickly becomes a crisis when the cartographers start having difficulty mapping unused and uninhabited land, since the land itself has begun to disappear "like the image on an improperly fixed photograph" (2). An instrument called a Fisherscope is able to detect the presence of any object, "no matter how dematerialized or insubstantial," and it is in this way that "the Cartographers were still able to map the . . . nether regions" (3).

As part of its irony, the story stresses how vital it is that a nation possess complete maps of its territory. As the narrator explains,

> To have returned with blanks on the maps would have created such public anxiety that no one dared think what it might do to the stability of our society. I now have reason to believe that certain areas of our country

> disappeared so completely that even the Fischerscope could not detect them and the Cartographers, acting under political pressure, used old maps to fake in the missing sections. (3)

The link between blank maps and societal instability and that between completed maps and social stability reiterates the critical role cultural images (in the form of maps, stories, myths, census lists) play in defining the identity of a nation. The passage also provides some explanation as to why the society continues to try to create representations of itself, given that the results are often provisional and arbitrary. And the reason points simply to the human desire to place oneself securely in the world. The increasing incidence of "dematerialization," where people spontaneously disappear, is blamed on the work of the cartographers and, specifically, on errors or deliberate falsifications they made in representing land forms and accounting for people. Dematerialization is a serious consequence of making inaccurate representations on a map or census form. But if the concept is outrageous, it also clearly assigns a combination of power and fallibility to the representations of the nation that circulate within society.

In Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction, Graham Huggan observes that,

> The prevalence of the map topos in Canadian and Australian literatures clearly owes much to the close relationship in both countries between historical development and geographical discovery. Maps have provided Canadian and Australian writers with a means of coming to terms with, and of celebrating the (re)discovery of, their respective countries. (xv)

But as Huggan correctly points out, maps "inevitably differ from the reality they purport to represent." He notes,

> The provisionality of cartographic representation renders maps, and the areas or territories they claim to represent, incomplete, indeterminate, and insecure. Yet it is in that state of insecurity--potentially productive rather than merely debilitating--that the post-colonial societies/cultures of Canada and Australia may both reconceptualize their past and map out their different visions of the future. (xvi)

In Carey's story, the characters' fetishization of maps and census forms points to the irrational reverence given to such models and representations of society. In this regard, the story works to discredit the monolithic and totalizing European forms and epistemologies--such as the maps and census forms--that the society regards as sacred and exalted. Yet, as Huggan suggests, maps, for the very reason that they can be redrawn and reconstituted, can also reflect transformation and regeneration, and this is an especially important feature for the settler society which is interested in `mapping' the possibilities for change and for a re-conceptualization of identity. Indeed, Huggan's thinking is a reminder that Carey's own representation of Australia warrants exploration, and one wonders how to interpret Carey's depiction of Australia in this story as a disappearing and insubstantial landform, as well as his refusal to represent Australia, in other stories.

It is interesting to consider that Carey very rarely identifies Australia, or specific Australian cities, by name in the stories. Instead, geographical details or an unstated assumption suggest the Australian locale. In contrast, for instance, David Malouf locates

many of his stories in the specific city of Brisbane; his comfort with placing his fictional world so precisely is nicely emblematized in the title of his autobiography, 12 Edmonstone Street, which is the address of the house in which he grew up. Alice Munro, as well, frequently situates her fictional worlds in various precise, fictional towns, recognizable as being similar to those of the Lake Huron environs, in the region of Southwestern Ontario, Canada. Malouf's and Munro's stories are not limited or parochial in any sense, as both writers work through the rich tension between the particular and the universal elements, between the provincial and the cosmopolitan, that these specific locations suggest.

In the New Literary History of Australia, editor Laurie Hergenhan writes that when the "Australian" label is attached to literature, it "has either been equated with a version of national identity that becomes a determining measure of value . . . or it has been equated with a parochialism that needs to be kept in check" (xiii-xiv). Carey's decision to avoid identifying Australia by name in many of the stories might be part of a strategy to avoid presenting Australia, like Australian literature, in either such expansive or reductive terms. Given that many of his stories are projected into a future time where the fantastic, the fabulous, and the grotesque equally define the setting, the lack of specific geographical detail seems consistent with the other-worldly quality that the fiction evokes. Yet Carey's depiction of Australia in the stories that I consider might also suggest that the country is amorphous and nondescript, and that the geographical indeterminacy stands for other larger uncertainties.

Is it possible that Carey shows Australia to be a vacuum, shapeless and undefined, and thus vulnerable to the influence of American culture, or to disappearing altogether?

Huggan points out the balance in Carey's writing, the way in which his stories highlight "corporate exploitation of consumer desires and longing," but also show the "willingness of consumers themselves" to believe in and desire the American products they are offered (Oxford 19). Thus while Carey critiques the imperialism associated with an American influence, he also makes a statement about the frailty and susceptibility of Australian culture in its willingness to accept an imported identity.

Asked in an interview by Ray Willbanks to characterize Australian culture, Carey states that it is one of "fixing something up, making do with what's available, rather than creating something new. Ours is a failure of confidence" (53). Interestingly, Robert Hughes, in his introduction to The Fatal Shore, asserts that the lasting legacy of Australia's convict origins is an insecurity about personal and national identity: "What the convict system bequeathed to later Australian generations," he writes, "was not the sturdy, skeptical independence on which, with gradually waning justification, we pride ourselves, but an intense concern with social and political respectability" (xiii).

Carey's and Hughes' statements support the idea that the legacy of Australia's colonization and settlement is linked to the inheritance of a pervasive cultural uneasiness and uncertainty. A title like "Do You Love Me?" implies an uncertainty, and the very structure and technical qualities of Carey's short stories reiterate ambiguity and irresolution. The stories are marked by openness and indeterminacy, central characteristics of the short story genre which, as one critic suggests, are also the "tools for managing the ambiguous conditions of postcoloniality" (Esty 28). I quote Bill Manhire, a New Zealand writer and critic, in the Introduction because he stresses the suitability of the genre in relation to a

postcolonial context, asserting that the short story form "finds its roots in rootlessness, in the instabilities of experience" (8). It is interesting to consider the ways in which Carey's handling of postcolonial issues changes from the short story genre to the novel, as with Jack Maggs, for instance. What one finds in even a brief comparison is that the short stories, because of their very brevity, emphatically stress the episodic, the uncertain, and the ambiguous nature of the postcolonial world Carey presents.

In Jack Maggs, Carey takes Charles Dickens' Great Expectations as a literary antecedent, but rewrites Dickens' story from the perspective of the convict, Jack Maggs, who has illegally reentered England from Australia. Through the recuperation of this previously marginalized character's point of view, Carey offers a harsh critique of the treatment of the criminal class, of the system of transportation to Australia, of the experience of Australia's first convict settlers and of the failings of British society in general, and of imperialism specifically. If these points emerge clearly from the narrative, the novel still contains ambiguous elements; for example, Jack Maggs himself is a hybrid mix of the monstrous and the gentleman, the criminal and the victim. Moreover, much of the story revolves around his desire to seek out the gentleman he created with his wealth from Australia, and this quest takes shape very circuitously. But Jack Maggs has a fully developed plot, and by the end of the narrative the major issues are sufficiently expounded and resolved as to lead to a tidy resolution, the unity of which is symbolized by a marriage.

Closure is not something Carey's short stories readily provide. In fact, they have a habit of not providing an overarching pattern or significant centre, of frustrating the desire for narrative coherence, and of denying a resolution at the end (Huggan, Oxford 47).

Manhire finds that these kinds of differences relate to the genre's handling of the temporal, and specifically to the idea that the novel can accommodate time passing whereas the short story works best with the present moment (8). This is a view shared by Nadine Gordimer, who suggests that short stories deal with the present and the immediate, and that, as a result, short story readers have learned to do without explanation of what went before, and what happens beyond the point of the story (180). While the work of David Malouf and Alice Munro demonstrates the flexibility of the genre and the fact that it is not always restricted to a single temporal moment, these comments do offer an appropriate description of Carey's experimentation with the form. In the fictional worlds that Carey depicts in his short stories, the characters crave explanations about the past and future, as well as information about their cultural identity. Yet they constantly confront an inability to penetrate beyond their immediate, imprisoning reality. Interestingly, Gordimer's comments suggest how appropriate the short story genre is to capturing and depicting this kind of experience. And it is an experience that Carey codes as having some correspondence to a postcolonial culture.

When Carey's stories deal with explicitly postcolonial issues, like the consequences of foreign expansion and exploitation of Australia, he not only sustains his interest in how images and representations are constructed, but he also explores who controls these representations. "A Windmill in the West" and "American Dreams" critique some of the cultural symbols and representations which Americans use to define Australian identity and which Australians readily accept. As I mentioned, Carey questions Australia's willingness to let imported models stand as representations of its own culture. However, as these two

stories show, Carey also questions the systems of representations upon which the Americans rely (Huggan, Oxford 20). No perspective, it seems, is privileged. And indeed, this is a point that the stories stress. The stories work against an authoritative aesthetic, and they reinforce this theme by liberating the narrative itself: the stories raise questions and they explore issues. They do not presume to offer unified and coherent answers, and they do not provide any single, authoritative view.

In its obsession with windmills, "A Windmill in the West" carries all the absurdity that is found in Cervantes' Don Quixote. The story focuses on an American male soldier who is posted on the border between America and Australia and who must defend the American territory from any foreign invader. He has been instructed that no one "with the exception of U.S. military personnel carrying a special pass" should be permitted to cross the line at the point which he guards (94). If the soldier's duties seem clear and straightforward, nothing else within the story world is that simple. For example, the narrator indicates that the soldier was told "that the area to the west could be considered the United States, although, in fact, it was not; that the area to the east of the line could be considered to be Australia, which it was" (94). This phrase alone contains many of the elements that are problematized in the story: how to differentiate between nations, how to interpret boundary zones, how to understand cultural difference, how to read cultural signs and symbols--when the identity of nations seems to shift unpredictably and arbitrarily. The narrator dwells on the fact that the soldier doesn't know how to interpret or contextualize the border line:

> No one anywhere has told him if the line is part of a large circle, or whether it is straight; no one has taken the trouble to mention the actual length of the

> line. The line may go straight across Australia, for all the soldier knows, from north to south, cutting the country in half. And, even if this were the case, he would not know where, would not be able to point out the line's location on a map. (94)

The soldier suffers from some of the same anxieties as the characters in "Do You Love Me" who also want to be able to place their country on a map with precision and accuracy. As if to take the confusion about place to an extreme, there is almost no sense of place in this story, as the desert surrounding the soldier lacks any distinct features: "no mountains, no grass, nothing but a windmill on the western side of the line" (96). With the punishing heat, the scene is dense and claustrophobic and in this surreal situation, the soldier becomes preoccupied with trying to define the difference between east and west:

> Perhaps the area to the geographical east is to be considered as part of the United States, and the area to the west as Australian. Or perhaps it is as he remembered: the west is the United States and the east Australian; perhaps it is this and he has simply misunderstood which was east and which was west. (99)

Given that the soldier is not certain "about the line, about what the line divides, encircles, or contains," one might consider that the division itself is arbitrary and inconsequential (100). The story is disturbing precisely because the consequences of crossing this line are deadly. When a civilian pilot, requiring fuel, lands his plane on the "outside" of the line, the soldier summons a fuel truck and gives him help. But when the pilot takes off, he flies across the "inside" of the United States boundary, and, because of

this passing, the soldier "levels his carbine and shoots" the plane down, leaving the civilian dead (103). The soldier knows that "it is his job to prevent this," "this" being any trespassing on the inside of the line, but he also reveals that he doesn't actually know which side is the "inside." The narrator suggests that "It is impossible to know which is the `inside.' It would have been impossible to ask a captain. They could have court-martialled him for that" (103).

The story offers an indictment of the military ethos to follow orders, to avoid asking questions, and to respect authority by rendering that rationale illogical and absurd. An innocent man dies as a result of the soldier's inability to interpret the situation on his own, to take into account the specific circumstances. The defining traits of the military training the soldier receives are his unquestioning and robotic response to authority, his respect for hierarchies, and his ability to work within a closed system and to resist seeking solutions from outside of that system. The death of the civilian acts as a warning against the passive acceptance of ideas.

The form of the story also reflects Carey's desire to make active and questioning readers of us; its surreal elements are disorienting and this instability forces the reader to be alert, active, and thoughtful. As in so many of his stories, he takes advantage of the flexibility that the genre permits. The narrator is an ambiguous figure and the narrative voice shifts between the narrator's and the soldier's consciousness. Verbal motifs recur throughout the narrative, creating circular movement as opposed to linear progress or continuity in the prose. The story itself emphasizes openness as opposed to closure, as explanations for the pilot's action, the meaning of the border between East and West, and

any sense of an ending, remain ambiguous.

Without defining East and West, Carey makes it plain that assumptions about East and West exist. While the soldier cannot tell the territories apart, the story emphasizes how superficial or unsustainable assumptions about the differences (and similarities) between them are. East and West are not such fixed or given designations; rather, as the soldier literally straddles two nationalities, the story stresses how boundaries, nationalities and identity can shift unpredictably. Notably, in this story, the American soldier, a symbol of American power and domination, struggles as much as any character to place himself in the world with assurance. However, the story also hints at Carey's familiar thesis that the boundary between America and Australia is so indistinct because Australia has become totally Americanized.

In "American Dreams" Carey explores the way in which inhabitants of an Australian city construct, for their own pleasure, images of an idealized America, an idyllic place about which they dream. He also explores the way American tourists, in turn, create expectations about Australian culture and even demand that the Australians reproduce that culture for their pleasure. It is a fascinating and complex story and it is interesting to note that Carey himself chose "American Dreams" as his favourite short story for the collection of Australian stories Personal Best. In the "Author's Note" Carey writes that "I am, of course, no longer the same person who wrote The Fat Man in History, but this story by that other person is one that I still feel comfortable with" (57). And it is a story that clearly illuminates the way Carey's interest in how things are represented intersects with his interest in whose reality is being represented.

The story begins by describing the self-image of the inhabitants of a small Australian town and the American life they imagine having. The narrator's father is of the opinion that people have "treated the town badly in our minds. We have used it, this little valley, as nothing more than a stopping place. Somewhere on the way to somewhere else" (171). He explains that the townspeople would rather be somewhere else, specifically in a place that is more central and metropolitan than the marginalized place where they live:

> For years we have watched the films at the Roxy and dreamed, if not of America, then at least of our capital city. For our own town, my father says, we have nothing but contempt. . . . we all have dreams of the big city, or wealth, of modern houses, of big motor cars: American dreams, my father has called them. (171-72)

In Philip Larkin's poem "The Importance of Elsewhere," the speaker implies that "elsewhere underwrites my existence" even when he is at home in England with his "customs and establishments" (34). The characters in Carey's story experience a similar longing for "elsewhere." It is a longing that stems from the sense that life on the margins and the periphery is inferior to life at the centre.

While the inhabitants of the valley create fictions about American living, one individual, Mr. Gleason, actually goes in another direction and constructs a realistic model of the town itself. He hires Chinese labourers to build a wall around his property on Bald Hill, and the townspeople "expressed frustration at this inexplicable thing" (174). Years later when Mr. Gleason dies, his widow hires Chinese labourers to destroy the wall, revealing an exact model of the town, two feet in height. The narrator recalls his reaction to

the discovery:

> I can't remember ever having felt so uplifted and happy. It was perhaps a childish emotion but I looked up at my father and saw a smile of such warmth spread across his face that I knew he felt just as I did. Later he told me that he thought Gleason had built the model of our town just for this moment, to let us see the beauty of our town, to make us proud of ourselves and to stop the American dreams we were so prone to. (177)

Mr. Gleason had not only built the houses and the shops of the town, he had also peopled it: "As we tiptoed into the town we suddenly found ourselves" (178). The narrator concedes that the modelling was crude and the handiwork was a bit sloppy, but he finds the expressions on the people absolutely perfect. The model provides a replica, representation which validates and affirms something of the town's collective identity, an identity they had disavowed up to the point of discovery.

The accuracy of the model becomes a problem, however, when the narrator takes off the roof from the Cavanagh's house and discovers the evidence of an infidelity--"Mrs. Cavanagh in bed with young Craigie Evans" (178). The town council orders the model to be destroyed, but the minister of tourism steps in and orders that it be preserved once any indiscretions are removed. He calls the model a work of art and promises the townspeople that it will become "an invaluable tourist attraction" (179). The townspeople equate tourism with the opportunity to become more American. And their understanding of America revolves around material objects, celluloid images, and new technology: cars, bright city lights, expensive nightclubs, Kim Novak, Rock Hudson, cocktails, refrigerators, huge

television sets, American movies (179-80).

The degree to which the town is affected by the influx of Americans is measured in the number of tourist-related industries which develop: townspeople now sell film for cameras, ice cream and soft drinks; they work as drivers and monitor the admissions to Mr. Gleason's model. The proliferation of these jobs all highlight what Karen Lamb calls "the culturally parasitic aspects of investment and tourism" (18). But perhaps the most potent symbol of the American influence is the way in which the townspeople end up modelling themselves after Mr. Gleason's model in order to satisfy the American tourists' expectations of them. It is a "game" they are getting sick of:

> I watch my father cross the street slowly, his head hung low. He doesn't greet the Americans any more. He doesn't ask them questions about colour television or Washington, D. C. He kneels on the footpath in front of Dyer's bike. They stand around him. Often they remember the model incorrectly and try to get my father to pose in the wrong way. Originally he argued with them, but now he argues no more. He does what they ask. (181)

In an article on Flann O'Brien's At Swim-Two Birds, Joshua D. Esty comments on a dynamic involving Britain and Ireland similar to the one Carey describes involving the Australian and the American tourists. Esty writes that "The deforming effects of the colonial encounter meant that certain practices and conventions, rooted perhaps in some `authentic/ native culture, become part of a self-conscious repertoire of Irishness" (28).

Esty suggests that this might be called "`enforced provincialism' to indicate the persuasive power of the metropolitan audience's demand for an Irish culture that is quaint,

picturesque, different" (28). I would suggest that Carey depicts a similar scenario wherein the Americans are enforcing a kind of provincialism on the Australians, to use Esty's language, by demanding to see a representation of Australian culture that matches their expectations of it. As Huggan observes, Carey makes the additional point that a national culture can be myth, deriving in reality "from local adaptation of imported forms" (Oxford 2). The Australians, in response, perform a self-conscious repertoire of themselves.

Lamb responds to this story by suggesting that it shows "Australia's eagerness to adopt the superficiality of American materialism as a banner of success" (18). Her comment implies that the problem has its origins in Australian attitudes as much as in American influence, hinting that there is something in Australian character that leads to a willingness to accommodate American exploitation. In his article, Esty refers to the "deforming effects of the colonial encounter" and it is a phrase which seems relevant in interpreting Carey's depiction of Australia as vulnerable in this way (28). So many of Carey's stories emphasize the degree to which Australian culture is conditioned by a colonial-like experience with the United States, and also by the general pressures of consumerism and capitalism, to name only two major influences.

With their brevity, their episodic and fragmented nature, Carey's short stories stress the ambiguity and uncertainty of the fictional worlds he presents. Such openness and irresolution are well suited to the depiction of a culture constantly in the process of examining itself, and constantly in the process of comparing itself to another. In Carey's stories, Australian identity and culture do not stand alone, but are, in part, constituted and shaped by an awareness of American identity and culture. When Carey's characters think of

Australia, they implicitly compare Australian culture to an idealized version of American life. When they think of America, they are reminded of what is wrong, inadequate, and insufficient about life in Australia. Such a perspective, he implies, is part of the settler society condition.

David Malouf also looks beyond the borders of Australia in order to assess Australian identity and culture. He looks to Europe, to the international context evoked by the Old World, to evaluate the relationships between Australia and Europe, between the New World and the Old. But Malouf's stories emphasize the tremendous potential for self-discovery and self-realization that come from working through difference, dichotomies, and oppositions. Moreover, he places a greater stress than Carey does on the possibility of locating the meaning of identity, culture, and place in the exploration process itself.

Chapter Three: David Malouf

Talking about his novella Fly Away Peter (1982) in a radio interview for the BBC, David Malouf comments on the persistence of Europe in the Australian consciousness:

> If you live in Europe, you know which part of the world you're living in and you don't have to think always that at the other end of the globe, there is another hemisphere. If you live in Australia you live in that hemisphere, but you're always aware that there is the other half of the globe; that is, that Europe is always part of the consciousness of your being in Australia.

In another interview, one with Julie Copeland, Malouf reiterates the significance for Australians of the "notion of a polarity between some place which is central and some place which is on the edge," suggesting that,

> whether you call it Europe and the new world (and the farthest reach of that world would be Australia) that notion of a polarity really only exists for those who are at the edge; the people at the centre just think of the centre, they don't think of there being an edge out there. (35)

Malouf's comments unmistakably point to the importance of other places in his own thinking about Australia and Australian identity. It is interesting to note that a similar sentiment emerges in Carey's work as his stories insist that America is always part of the consciousness of being in Australia.

The title of Malouf's short story collection in itself highlights his interest in Australia's status as an outlying subject. Antipodes (1985) has a clear literal meaning--

British antipodes, with Australia understood--but one can also extrapolate further from so allusive a word and see the title as indicating the general thematic principle which organizes the narratives; an exploration of places situated diametrically opposite to each other. The stories themselves, moreover, expand upon the title's suggestiveness in their examination of the apparent oppositions which emerge not just between places, but also between people and values. "Southern Skies" shows the gap between youth and maturity; "Sorrows and Secrets" juxtaposes a middle-class boy with a working-class man; "A Change of Scene" depicts the difference between an idealized memory and the harshness of reality, between a wife's perspective and her husband's. If these relations seem opposed on the surface level of the stories, however, the subtext complicates them by emphasizing the more supple nature of the dichotomies, and, hence, the connections and associations among them. While the antipodes remain intact, the youth, for example, comes to feel an affinity with the older person; the Australian establishes some kind of attachment to a place in Europe; or, as in "The Traveller's Tale," the sophisticated academic may learn about himself from a seemingly uneducated woman. Malouf's interest in antipodal relationships, then, serves as a means of recasting the way in which these antipodes are constructed and perceived.

In a discussion with Ray Willbanks, Malouf confirms that his interest in oppositions might very well define the thrust of his fiction. He comments:

> I think all the writing I do has to do with this sort of opposition between two complementary or oppositional types, involvement and withdrawal, action and contemplation. I go back and back to that kind of opposition. In some ways I've always found that the most interesting thing to write about. (147)

I make connections between Malouf's aesthetic, especially his thematic focus on oppositional types, and the capacities of the short story genre in particular, based on a close reading of five of the stories from Antipodes: "A Trip to the Grundelsee," "Southern Skies," "The Sun in Winter," "Medium," and "A Traveller's Tale." Malouf's questioning of the stability and fixity of antipodes, and of other models of opposition, seems very suitably explored in a genre that permits ambiguity, irresolution, and complexity on both the technical and thematic level. In this way, the dominant traits that prevail throughout Malouf's stories seem especially well accommodated by the short story genre. The stories consistently deal with a preoccupation with Europe in the Australian consciousness, and, as a kind of extension of this interest, with an exploration of the meaning of identity and place. Stylistically, the stories all generate multiple meanings and complexity surrounding these issues by playing with metaphors and other tropes, with epiphanies, and the resolutions within each work.

Malouf himself has commented about the generic characteristics of poetry and novel-length prose, suggesting that "there are ways in which they are very different, in terms of rhythm more than anything else, and concentration; but, what a story and what a poem can do may not be all that different. The boundary is not so clear that it can't be crossed" (Interview with Barbara Williams 90).

Malouf's short stories also cross generic boundaries and can be seen to share many of the qualities of both poetry and novel-length prose in the sense that the stories realize the potential allusiveness of concentrated language, as in poetry, and yet they are also lyrical in their expression of a complex state of mind or a process of perception, thought, and feeling.

This kind of musing and development is suitably expressed in the more relaxed tempo of prose. Writing on the modern Australian short story, Michael Wilding, a short story writer himself, identifies one of the appeals of the short story genre as being its variety of "formal procedures," and its capacity to cross generic boundaries:

> The story is in dialogue with novels, poems, plays, essays; it is not sealed off from other genres. It can contain the verbal concentration of a poem, the documentary transcription of the case-study, the sensuality of reverie, the awful authenticity of the confessional, the clarity of the exemplary, and the exhilaration of the inspirational. (112)

The stylistic complexity of Malouf's short stories corresponds to the complexity surrounding the fundamental theme of his work: the relations between seemingly oppositional places, people, and values are never represented as simple or unquestionable. The title of the collection may suggest that there is a single way of reading each story--that is, to find in it a common unifying theme about antipodes--but the focus on oppositions only helps to identify the variety of antipodal relations and the variety of ways in which antipodal relations are structured. As in my analysis of Peter Carey's work, I also explore the relationship between the story form and the kind of society and people Malouf reveals based on a reading of these stories.

"A Trip to the Grundelsee" is the second story in the collection and begins in Austria with a focus on what is described as an "ill-assorted party" of friends (26). The foursome consists of Gordon and Cassie, friends since their childhood in Australia, Anick, the elegant and beautiful French girl, and Michael, a "soft," "wide-eyed and impressionable" American

youth (27). Michael's parents are Austrian and he has hired a car to drive to the Grundelsee to visit two middle-aged women who had been friends of his father in Vienna before the war. Anick was invited by Michael to join him because he had fallen in love with her; Gordon and Cassie were invited along by Anick because "she hadn't wanted to spend a whole day alone with Michael," and Cassie agreed to come because she was secretly in love with Gordon (27).

While driving along the mountain road, Michael explains that the women, Elsa Fischer and Sophie, were once in the same Socialist political group as his father. Elsa and Sophie spent seven years in concentration camps while Michael's father escaped to America just before the Nazis came. "They sound fascinating, these old women," Anick says. He replies, "`Well . . . they're sort of special--you know what I mean?' He added a more specific recommendation: `They've suffered a lot'" (28). Along with their suffering, Elsa and Sophie are also defined by their courage and defiance in the face of despair, and by their age. As soon as the young visitors arrive, the women narrate a "little piece of history" by which the Grundelsee lake district defines itself--the elopement, nearly a century before, of the post-master's daughter and an archduke. A local inn commemorates the occurrence with a painted sign. The narrator remarks: "Everything had been preserved, of course, and was properly kept up. . . . People came from all over to visit. . . . That gay fragment of not-too-recent history was what they came to savour and record" (29-30). The phrase "everything had been preserved, of course" registers the narrator's assumption about the women's, and the culture's, predisposition to preserving, commemorating, and honouring the past.

Lacking age and a deep sense of history, that "ill-assorted party" is described by the

narrator in very different terms: "They were all four young and their whole lives were before them" (29). Moreover, given the attention each pays to their love interests, their concerns are represented as personal and naive in nature. Of the four, Cassie in particular feels that her youthfulness and innocence pales in comparison to the impressive assurance that Elsa exudes, and she becomes anxious when she realizes that Gordon is taken with her. "Cassie was in anguish," states the narrator:

> She wanted her life, she wanted it at all costs. But she despised the means she had to use, and had been using to get it--the humiliations, the pretence that she had no passion, no ambition of her own, no sense of honour. Most of all she was afraid that if it came to the point she might not be willing to suffer. (30)

The ambiguity surrounding the possessive pronoun--"her life"--confuses the issue of whose life she wants--"She wanted her life"--but whose, her own, or Elsa's? Despite this lack of clarity, the question of what kind of life she does have is implicitly articulated. Ruminating on notions of passion, ambition, and honour, elements which Cassie considers critical to an identity, she wishes to ask Elsa about suffering in particular: "How do you know if you can face it? Do you just go through it and come out the other side? Does time dull the pain and anger of it?" (32). These questions reflect the uncertainty and self-questioning of a youth who has not yet been tested by life, and they thus suggest the differences, if not the absolute opposition, Cassie perceives between herself and Elsa. As Gordon takes out all his "little talents" and makes them "shine" for Elsa (31), the narrator tells us that "Cassie's cloud refused to shift" (32). But within a paragraph, the entire focus of the narrative does shift, as

we are catapulted forward ten years and moved to Australia, where Cassie is married to another Australian, and with three exuberant daughters. The weather, and her life, have clearly changed.

> [S]he would not recall this particular gloom [the narrator reports] or its cause, and had lost contact with all the members of their trip but Anick, who had started up a correspondence and then kept it going long after Gordon, the original reason, had departed from their lives. (33)

The few remaining pages of the story describe the nature of her correspondence with Anick, and Cassie's recent luncheon with Anick while she is in Paris.

"Who is Anick?" Cassie's little girls ask in chorus as they look at a photograph of their mother from years back when she was in Austria. It is a question readers might echo: we know who she is but might wonder why she is suddenly privileged over Gordon, Michael, Elsa, and Sophie in the narrative. Gordon, after all, as Cassie's love-interest, was the "original reason" for the story's telling. The title of the story, "A Trip to the Grundelsee" suggests, moreover, the centrality of the trip to the story's plot. However, the details of that excursion quickly recede in Cassie's memory and the sense of the trip's overall importance changes as Anick supersedes the others. Beyond the title, the opening paragraphs of the story also suggest that the story will be about a lot of things that it doesn't turn out to deal with--about Gordon and Cassie, about this "ill assorted" group of friends, about the aftermath of the war, about youth even. The story concerns a sharply defined event--a trip--but at the same time Malouf makes the story play off that event's attending issues and speak to many others.

In "Thematics and Historical Evidence," Thomas Pavel asserts that a text, "[a]s a structure purposefully designed to captivate our attention . . . tempts us into caring about certain things and overlooking others. It embeds various mechanisms for appealing to our interest, one of which being, precisely, thematic structure" (130). Pavel theorizes the act of reading , looking closely at the battle that often occurs between a text that forces the reader to notice and accept its priorities, and the reader who subjectively looks in a story for what confirms his or her own thinking. While Pavel's interest lies in trying to understand hermeneutic acts, his identification of the way in which a thematic structure can try to mold the reader's attention and lead his or her gaze is useful in the context of exploring Malouf's short stories. The opening paragraphs often signal or shorthand themes and organizing principles that the reader expects to find embedded within the narrative. But Malouf almost always plays with the expectations that these opening paragraphs create by expanding and modifying the thematic scope that they suggest. As suggested, "A Trip to the Grundelsee" provides an excellent example of the extended scope a story can achieve by being primarily focused on one plot event, yet continually gesturing out to other issues, themes, and events that relate to it. Indeed, Malouf's stories achieve complexity and ambiguity by developing layers of meaning, by representing a plurality of viewpoints and perspectives, and by generating ambiguous meaning surrounding symbols and metaphors. In "A Trip to the Grundelsee," for example, the shifts in the narrative that take us from Austria, with the visit to Elsa and Sophie, to Australia and then to Paris, with a focus on Cassie and her reunion with Anick, generate much of the story's ambiguity, breadth, and complexity.

Peter Knox-Shaw writes that the "art of layering" has become the most recognizable

"fingerprint" of Malouf's writing (79). "The superimposed layers," he proposes, "enable him to hold a number of meanings in suspension: their tendency is to stall narrative by withholding resolution" (79). With Knox-Shaw's comment in mind, the different locations in the story can be seen to embody different textual layers. The first part of the story is set in Europe and focuses on a youth-age antithesis, as Cassie measures her own identity against Elsa's. She sees herself as young, inexperienced, uncultured, and ugly, as compared to Elsa, who is mature and experienced, cultured in European ways, and striking looking. These initial oppositions are modified by the introduction of different ones once the story shifts to Australia and focuses on the relationship between Cassie and Anick. In Austria, Cassie and Anick had their youth in common, especially in contrast to the age of Elsa and Sophie. Ten years later when they meet in Paris, the fact of sharing a common age matters less since they are now different in other, seemingly more important, ways.

Anick is unmarried, "a hard discontented girl of thirty, still strikingly good-looking, she had that mixture of slovenliness and chic that Cassie, to whom chic would be forever foreign, thought of as uniquely French" (33). Cassie is still conscious of her personal appearance. But now her own vision of herself grows out of more meaningful pursuits: she is married with three daughters and enjoys bouncy good health while Anick suffers from digestive troubles. Cassie feels extraordinarily liberated; Anick, in contrast, is restrained and recognizes Cassie's exuberance as a "form of behaviour she couldn't have indulged in herself but which pleased her in others" (34). Cassie and Anick now seem diametrically opposed. The description of their meeting is telling: "They continued to face one another for a whole hour in the mutual perplexity of their national styles and from the vantage point

of different lives, while Cassie tried to give some indication of the close web of her life . . . " (34).

Here the narrator suggests that the differences in their characters might actually stem from the difference in national identities--between French and Australian perspectives. Cassie, for her part, projects an insecurity about her level of sophistication and worldliness that can be detected in her compulsion to tell Anick that "Sydney's a big place" (35). As she describes her life with her family, she senses that the "particulars of domesticity told nothing" to Anick (34); that "They were flat, uninteresting" (34). Moreover, she feels that her answers to Anick's questions depict her as coming from a "dead ordinary place-'orreebly provincial"-as Anick would say, "where she had settled for a quiet, an ordinary fate" (35). The sentence shows the method of a poet working in prose with its attention to allusive language. Cassie has "settled for a quiet, an ordinary fate," in, significantly, a settler colony, whereas the Parisian Anick is as unsettled as her symbolically shaken and fizzy Perrier water. While Anick does not actually say anything condescending to Cassie, it is significant that Cassie assumes that Anick must see her as living on the periphery, literally and metaphorically, while she lives at the centre of things.

> But I am happy, [Cassie] wanted to protest. I almost lost my life. And then, by the skin of my teeth, I saved it.
>
> But there was no way of explaining this. They had no shared language, most of all when it came to the smaller words. She began to wonder, as her high spirits evaporated, what she and Anick had ever had in common. (35)

Cassie's protest that she is happy, along with her admission that she and Anick have

little in common, provides a kind of epiphany. The epiphany, the single illuminating moment, has become a central principle in short story composition since Joyce first theorized it in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. The epiphany in Malouf's work, however, is a nexus of forces rather than a single effect, and very often creates disunity as opposed to unity. In this story, Malouf's epiphany reveals something confounding in its ordinariness--which is Cassie's pleasure in what Anick envisions as an "orreeble place," and her pleasure with the conventions of family life, including family trips to "resorts Anick would never have wanted to visit and could never find on the map" (35). Malouf has said, in an inteview with Barbara Williams, that art itself can transform

> ordinary moments into epiphanies. Things which belong to ordinary people's lives, and which in ordinary lives are repeatable and hardly noticed, can become in poetry moments in which the real nature of a thing shines through, or the real nature of a person .... (85)

This epiphany does reveal something about Anick's happiness with her ordinary life, yet it also dispels an easily identifiable revelation, a single effect, and generates complex questions about the terms that constitute their respective identities, the ways in which they are constructed as opposites, and the nature of what they have in common. What is it, the story asks, that Cassie nearly lost her life to? Did she nearly succumb to Gordon, or to feeling inferior to Europeans and to European influences? National characteristics, individual choices, cultural circumstances as well as personal ones all emerge as relevant principles by which the characters define themselves. The story is open on these technical and interpretive levels.

Cassie and Anick do correspond, but only in the literal sense that they write letters back and forth to each other. And even so, the narrative suggests that this correspondence is largely symbolic and habitual, motivated by and constructed around the *illusion* of a meaningful connection between each other. Their luncheon in Paris testifies to the many differences--in terms of lifestyle, culture, family status, personal behaviour--between them. Yet they each claim that this is their "oldest and most satisfying correspondence" (35). In this way they are not unlike the coming together of the post-master's daughter and the archduke, an equally unlikely pairing, and one which prompts questions as to what qualities bring people together, given their various personal and national differences.

Cassie's children provide a perspective on this matter. They no longer ask, "Who is Anick?" Indeed, the narrator reports that they do not, "not even to have the pleasure of hearing the known answer and of closing, with a rhythmic question and response, one of the gaps in their world" (35). This is ironic; "A Trip to the Grundelsee" lacks closure precisely because of the openness, the gap, that surrounds that question of Anick's identity and, by implication, Cassie's own. Despite the reader's perception of ambiguity and irresolution in this context, the children see none. They know who Anick is: "Anick [is] our mummy's best friend--in Europe" (35). The story then concludes with the line: "Europe was a place they would visit one day and see for themselves" (35).

"Europe is always part of the consciousness of being in Australia," according to Malouf, and Cassie's correspondence with Anick would seem to support Malouf's claim. The two women appear to have nothing in common, yet the relationship persists, making one wonder if Cassie's letters to Anick provide a necessary connection to Europe, even if it

is not, at heart, a particularly meaningful one. The last sentence of the story implies that such a trip is a natural and even a necessary part of their development in understanding who they are as Australians, and who they are in relation to Europe. There is a hint of irony in the statement, as well as the promise of a revelation, but just what they will see in Europe remains unknown, as the story ends ambiguously.

"Southern Skies" is equally focused on a general opposition between Australia and another place, specifically between the Old World and the New World. These antipodes are reproduced in the figure of the Professor, a middle-aged man born in Europe, and the young male narrator, born in the Old World but having moved immediately to Australia with his parents. The Professor, having emigrated to Australia and having been able to secure a job teaching mathematics to apprentices, "was proof that a break-through into the new world was not only possible, it was a fact" (7). The narrator explains that although his own parents were trained in medicine and law, they were forced to work as "labourers or factory-hands or to keep dingy shops" (7).

Speaking collectively of the immigrant experience, he comments, "For our parents there was a deep sorrow in all this, and the Professor offered hope. We were invited to see in him both the embodiment of a noble past and a glimpse of what, with hard work and a little luck or grace, we might claim from the future" (7). As an embodiment of both the past and the future, the Professor himself symbolizes one of the dichotomies within the story. But, as in "A Trip to the Grundelsee," Malouf further complicates the simple representative of the old and new world, highlighting the uncertainty surrounding the Professor's symbolic status.

The Professor's character generates so much complexity partly because he is perceived from different viewpoints, each reported by the first-person narrator. To the narrator's parents, the Professor represents the Old World and all its civility--its emphasis on intellectual pursuits, history, culture, and the arts. For the narrator's father in particular, the Professor's ease with philosophical arguments and his familiarity with Beethoven and Mahler are the "sole consolation on the raw and desolate shore where he was marooned" (8). But for the young narrator himself, the Professor represents a variety of conflicting roles. He is "an intimidating presence, a heavy reminder of that previous world" (9), "a family nuisance" (11) and, more kindly, "something [he] had come to depend on" (12). The narrator suggests that, as time passes, the children of immigrants are "released from restriction," and with this new situation the professor comes to symbolize something slightly different:

> We no longer went to examination weighed down with holy medals, or silently invoked, before putting pen to paper, the good offices of the Infant of Prague-whose influences, I decided, did not extend to Brisbane, Queensland. Only the Professor remained as a last link. (9)

The question of influence, from Europe, Brisbane, his parents, and the Professor, is critical to the young boy as it determines how he constructs his own identity and how he works out his own behaviour. He does not want to look or talk differently from his own Australian peers, and he therefore makes a deliberate effort to become "indistinguishable from the roughest of my mates at school . . . with my broad accent, my slang, my feet toughened and splayed from going barefoot" (9). As the boy explains, to assimilate with or

adapt to his Australian life in Brisbane involves cutting his ties with the Old World. The Professor's presence in his life is thus a "stumbling block":

> What [the professor] practised now was a formal courtliness, a clicking of heels and kissing of plump fingers that was the extreme form of a set of manners that our parents clung to because it belonged, along with much else, to the Old Country, and which we young people, for the same reason, found it imperative to reject. (7)

Confronted by the Professor on a number of social occasions that his parents host, the narrator thus struggles with a contradictory attraction to and antipathy towards him.

From the outset of "Southern Skies" the issues which emerge seem to be postcolonial in nature as they revolve around immigrating to and settling into a new place--a very Australian theme. In this regard, the narrator asks how one lives in the society of Brisbane while maintaining ties to a homeland in Europe, how one can assert independence while honouring an inherited tradition, and what constitutes a coherent identity, given a bifurcated past. In this context the narrator's struggles to find a basis of contact with the Professor can be read as a metaphor for his divided feelings about the Old World. Questions like these with respect to identity and place are consistently important ones for Malouf's characters, characters who, as Australians, must explore the terrain of their new country, as well as test their sense of personal identity. But at one point in this story the narrator explicitly dismisses the importance of the particular time and place in which he lives in Brisbane, and instead offers another reading of the story he is telling:

> But what I am describing, of course, is neither a time nor a place but the

> mood of my own bored, expectant, uneventful adolescence. I was always abroad and waiting for something significant to occur, for life somehow to declare itself and catch me up. . . . I was sick of myself and longed for the world to free me by making its own rigorous demands and declaring at last what I must be. (12-13)

The boy's statements express an uncertainty about who he is and what kind of life he will lead, but the uncertainty seems conditioned more by the general fact of youth awaiting maturity than by the specific need to come to terms with an Australian identity in the new world. The passage, therefore, invites us to place the narrator not simply within a postcolonial context, but also within an adolescent one. His identity, Malouf implies, is more complicated than one term can communicate. This emphasis on the multiple facets of the boy's identity is similar to the emphasis Malouf places in "A Trip to the Grundelsee" on the variety of principles by which Cassie and Anick define themselves, principles which include both national and individual characteristics, cultural circumstances as well as personal ones.

The narrator next visits with the Professor unaccompanied by either of his parents, a sign of his increasing independence and maturity. Inside the Professor's living room and looking at a picture of him in military uniform, the narrator considers that "The proud caste no longer existed. Neither did the army nor the country it was meant to defend, except in the memory of people like the Professor and my parents and, in a ghostly way, half a century off in another hemisphere, my own" (17).

What the narrator sees in this instance is the possibility of an affinity between

himself and the Professor that reduces the generational gap and the distance of a hemisphere. The initial geographical opposition between Old and New Worlds that structures the story now operates like a metaphor, expanding at this point to signify other differences: youth and maturity, past and future, hope and despair, even loss and inheritance. Moreover, these oppositions move a little closer to one another as the narrator concedes that his New World can accommodate the Professor and his past even if in a "ghostly way." While they are still relevant, the `antipodes' now seem less clearly delineated and less fixed than they did at the beginning of the story.

Near the end of the story, the narrator drops in to visit the Professor once more. It is a moonlit evening and the Professor invites the boy to look through his telescope; he has found Jupiter with its four moons. The experience of peering through the lens produces an overwhelming sensation for the boy, and his description of the event can be read as signifying how he sees his own identity coming together at that very instant:

> I felt a power in myself that might actually burst out at my ears, and at the same time saw myself, from out there, as just a figure with his eye to a lens. I had a clear sense of being one more hard little point in the immensity--but part of it, a source of light like all those others--and was aware for the first time of the grainy reality of my own life, and then, a fact of no small significance, of the certainty of my death; but in some dimension where those terms were too vague to be relevant. (24)

The description accommodates his recognition of his own power and presence and, at the same time, his small place in the immensity of the universe. The hermeneutic model

for conceiving this epiphany seems to be based on a principle of unity--yoking together opposites (or antipodes) from nature and the cosmos and making them cohere to form a whole identity. Martin Leer observes that many of Malouf's novels suggest that a "moment of touching" is possible in the "ceaseless flux" of life and that these "break-throughs into consciousness" (12) are very positive experiences. Leer writes that, "Although language and even the body habitually fail to grasp the `other'--be it a continent or another consciousness--we live for exactly those miraculous moments of touching" (12).

While the young boy experiences an incredible epiphany, the strategies of the story prevent the reader from taking total comfort from his enlightenment. For while the boy is looking through the telescope and contemplating his own place in the world, the Professor stands behind him, fondling him and ultimately masturbating him. The epiphany and orgasm occur simultaneously. The narrator gives us his mature interpretation, mingled with his feelings at the time, when the sexual encounter seemed incidental to his awakening about his own dimension and existence: "Too many larger events were unfolding for me to break away and ask, as I might have, `What are you doing?'" (24). Leer does not allude to this literal instance of touching in "Southern Skies"; his interpretation of such moments as being totally positive and miraculous corresponds with the narrator's reaction to the Professor's advances. The boy explains that "We were on opposite sides of the occasion," but only because in this awkward situation, he is unable to articulate his gratitude for what he understands as the Professor's gift: "But what I had seen--what he had led me to see--my bursting into the life of things--I would look back on that as the real beginning of my existence, as the entry into a vocation, and nothing could diminish the gratitude I felt for it"

(25). With this testimony the narrator invites us to see that by literally crossing a kind of moral, physical, and sexual barrier, the Professor has facilitated the boy's breakthrough into consciousness and being.

However jubilant the narrator feels about awakening this sense of self and this connection to the world beyond himself, his moment of illumination does cast a shadow on the Professor. At the beginning of the story the Professor is described as embodying the nobility of the Old World with his "formal courtliness," and his "extreme form of a set of manners" (7). But the incident under `southern skies' suggests something darker in the Professor's life that the narrator had not perceived, namely loneliness and frustrated desire. The Professor may be "proof that a breakthrough into the new world was not only possible, it was a fact" (7), but this incident detracts from the absoluteness of his achievement.

The subject matter of Malouf's stories is various, but their underlying psychological dimension does not radically change. They are all probing, questioning, reflective, and explorative in nature. "Southern Skies" is striking for the way in which it takes up, like "A Trip to the Grundelsee," so many questions about the stability and meaning of antipodal relations, and about the persistence of Europe in Australian consciousness. The story displays the same preference as "A Trip to the Grundelsee" for leaving answers to these questions open and unresolved, as well as modifying the terms of the questions that are asked. The narrator tells a story about himself growing up in Brisbane, but the subtext of that disclosure reveals that the Professor's settlement in Australia is of equal interest. Indeed, the nature of the epiphany at the end of the story, the ambiguity surrounding the Professor's actions, and the irresolution in the final paragraph, allow room for the reader's

questioning of what the story is really about; it shifts its focus from the concept of immigrating to and settling in Australia, to the development and maturation of the narrator, to questions about the Professor's personal character.

While the specifics of plot differ, "The Sun in Winter" is remarkably similar to "Southern Skies" in its establishment of Old World/New World, youth/age dichotomies, as well as in its employment of a startling plot device to awaken a different way of perceiving these antitheses. At the beginning of the story, a young Australian man meets an older Belgian woman inside a church in Bruges, Belgium, and the woman initiates conversation. Her reaction to hearing that the young man is from Australia intimates that she has definite preconceptions about the New World. The third person narrator notes that "her `Ah, the New World' was no more than a breath. She made it sound so romantic, so much more of a venture than he had ever seen it. . . . No Australian in those days thought of himself as coming under so grand a term" (87).

The young man, for his part, also reveals that he has his own expectations about Europeans and Europe when he observes that the woman moved "with a certain old world grandeur and largesse" (87) and that her city of Bruges was "old and impressively dead" (88), "crumblingly haunted and picturesque" (89). While the story sets up these kinds of static oppositions (New World adventure, allure, and youth; Old World grandeur, history, and decay) it is like "Southern Skies" in its complication of such fixed visions of the two realms. In this case it is the woman who facilitates this revision. She insists on giving the man a tour of Bruges. As she points out places of historical significance, she also explains that it is equally important to observe the ordinary and the everyday:

> To see what all this really was, she insisted--beyond the relics and the old-fashioned horrors and shows--you need a passion for the everyday. . . . And for that, mere looking got you nowhere. `All you see then,' she told him, `is what catches the eye, the odd thing, the unusual. But to see what is common, that is the difficult thing, don't you think?' (89)

The woman's narration of the town's history is exemplary, because she infuses it with her own personal story "in the gaps between centuries," so that the young man ultimately learns two histories, "her own and the city's, rather mixed" (88). Her final act is emblematic of this mixture of the everyday and the personal: she takes the young man to peer in the front window of a funeral shop and shows him the coffin she has picked out to be buried in. It is an odd and curious thing to do and the young narrator is surprised and dismayed. But his shock (quite like the shock the young narrator in "Southern Skies" experiences with the Professor's advances) quickly passes and translates into appreciation for the way different values and customs govern people's lives: "His shock, he saw, was for an impropriety she took quite for granted and for an event that belonged, as she calmly surveyed it, to a world of exuberant and even vulgar life" (91). Finally, the young man feels moved, "for all his raw youth, by an emotion he could not have named, not then--for her, but also for himself--" (91).

In showing the young man something as ordinary as the coffin she hopes to be buried in, the woman paradoxically exposes something deeply personal and unique. In this way she moves beyond presenting herself as simply a European and instead invites the Australian visitor to see her as a person, someone who lives and who will eventually die.

While the Professor's sexual advance towards the young narrator in "Southern Skies" is more disquieting and problematic, it produces a similar effect in prompting the boy (and the reader) to see the Professor as human and flawed instead of as a romanticized and idealized symbol of Old World courtliness and manners. These two stories show Malouf exploring the antipodes in such a way as to highlight the subtle, nuanced shades of the stark oppositions.

In "A Medium," the conclusion of the story creates the familiar ambiguity and generates a similar degree of narrative complexity. In this story the first-person male narrator begins by recalling his eleventh year when he took violin lessons from a Miss Katie McIntyre. But what he actually tells about is the spiritualist, Miss. E. Sampson, who occupied one of the higher floors in his violin teacher's building. As is common in these stories, the narrator details certain oppositions that structure the tale: the separation of music "from the more mundane business that was being carried on below (the whizzing of dentist's drills, the making of passport photos for people going overseas)" (157); the contrast between his own sensible teacher and the "quack" Miss Sampson; and the contrasting worlds of Miss Sampson's tranquil meditative room and the sweltering city outside (159). One occurrence during the young narrator's visits to his teacher's office stands out; while ascending the lift, he manages to look through into Miss Sampson's room and get a glimpse of her in one of her trances. At that instant he also hears the voice she assumes when taken over by another presence: "It took the form of a child's voice, treble and whining" (159). The narrator recalls that minutes later he was playing his scales, arpeggios, and pieces for Miss Katie. The story then ends with the following passage:

> There is no story, no set of events that leads anywhere or proves anything--no middle, no end. Just a glimpse through a half-open door, voices seen not heard, vibrations sensed through a wall while the trained ear strains, not to hear what is passing in the next room, but to measure the chords--precise, fixed, nameable as diminished fifths or Neapolitan sixths, but also at moments approaching tears--that are being struck out on an iron-framed upright, and the voice that names them your own. (160)

"A Medium" is really a catalogue of impressions of what the narrator sees, hears, and senses, and it is full of details of small incidents that do not motivate or advance the plot, but rather linger as moments of insight or illumination. The phrase, "There is no story, no set of events that leads anywhere or proves anything," (159) is an eloquent description of Malouf's aesthetic in this decidedly non-linear and inconclusive narrative. The same description could also be adapted to "Southern Skies" for the way in which Malouf complicates a character like the Professor so that he is not fixed or easily pigeonholed. He is of a nature opposite, in other words, to the chords on the piano in "A Medium." That same ambiguity also characterizes Cassie's relationship with Anick and her relationship to Europe in "A Trip to the Grundelsee" and the male narrator's meeting with the older woman in the church in Bruges in "The Sun in Winter." The ambiguity surrounding the status of these meetings and relationships generates multiple meanings on other levels. "The Sun in Winter" is about a young Australian visiting Bruges, for example, but his meeting with the older Belgian woman is a trope for the meeting between Australia and Europe, an examination of what constitutes an identity, a questioning of preconceptions about Europe

and Australia, and an exploration of how far apart, or how close, the antipodes might really be.

The connection between short story form and the kind of society and people the story reveals is based on the fact that ambiguity, irresolution, and complexity exist on both technical and thematic levels of the narrative. "A Traveller's Tale" illustrates especially well Malouf's sense of the short story form as flexible, complex, and open, and corresponds to his theorization of individual identity and Australian identity as being complex and multiple. The story's narrator, Adrian Trisk, has a professional stake in Australian culture. As Projects Officer with the Council for the Arts, it is his job to "bring news of our national culture to this slow back-water" (131). His national culture job involves showing "slides of contemporary Australian painting and sometimes a film . . . or I lecture on the life of an Australian poet. Nothing rigorous" (131-32). He calls this the "culture business" and concedes that there are problems with disseminating information about one brand of Australian culture when the population of Australia is so hybrid:

> Most difficult of all are places like Karingai where the population is 'mixed'--that is, part Australian, part Italian, part Aboriginal, part Indian. . . . Bridging the gap is all very well, but there is a limit to what a man can do with the discovery poems of Douglas Stewart and a slide evening with William Dobell. (132)

Adrian's words and tone imply that the communities he visits are parochial, provincial, and intellectually unsophisticated. For example, he seems to patronize his audience in the "backwater" consisting of "the wife of the Methodist minister, a retired

timbergetter who is rewriting the works of Henry Lawson and the hapless two-year incumbent of the one-teacher school" (133). Regardless of its make-up, the group always retires for supper and it is on one particular occasion that a Mrs. Judge approaches Adrian and requests to see him the following morning, "t'do with that article you writ on Alicia Vale" (134).

Mrs. Judge is described as "diminutive," "battered looking," "odd," "slatternly," and "ungrammatical" and when the narrator asks the Minister's wife about her status, her comment is curtly dismissive: "Oh that, poor soul, was our Mrs. Judge. She's quite a character. Lives out near the Indians" (135). The Alicia Vale referred to, on the other hand, is in Adrian's words "an "extraordinary woman," "very grand and baleful," with a glamorous career as a singer that took her to international stages in South Africa, Vienna, Budapest, Warsaw, Berlin, and London, and earned her constant doting from powerful and prestigious men. While it is a source of amusement to his colleagues in the arts, Adrian admits that Alicia Vale is one of his obsessions and that he had been tracking her career through newspapers, reviews, programmes, and opera-house accounts for the last twenty years. His monograph on Alicia Vale is evidence of his passionate interest in this woman's life. Part of her appeal comes from her humble origins; Adrian is astonished that "a common farmgirl from the South Coast had been transformed by her own genius . . . into a creature of mythical power and beauty, a princess" (139). He is thus especially surprised to hear Mrs. Judge claim the following morning that she is Alicia Vale's daughter. According to Mrs. Judge, Alicia Vale was in Melbourne in 1906 staying at the Hotel Australia, and during that time gave birth to twins--a little boy and herself.

With Mrs. Judge's admission, the tale that began with a focus on the cultural life of Australia in the town of Karingai rapidly multiplies into tales about the lives of many characters. In this regard, "A Traveller's Tale" encompasses many tales about the search for and validation of many identities--the narrator Adrian Trisk's, Australia's, Alicia Vale's, and Mrs. Judge's. The expansion highlights one of the central characteristics of Malouf's short stories, their ability to embody the complexity and heterogeneity of Australian society by presenting multiple themes and perspectives in his narratives.

To substantiate her claim, Mrs. Judge provides a captivating account of the time spent in her famous mother's company, including fleeing from St. Petersburg to the Polish border and losing her twin brother in the swarming crowds during the journey. Her recollections lead into Adrian's divulgence of what he knows about Alicia Vale's life, with his conclusion that "Mrs. Judge's story, improbable as it might be, was not irreconcilable with the known facts" (145). And because Mrs. Judge tells Adrian flatly that she is "trusting [him] with me life" (146), the story then returns to a focus on Adrian. As Mrs. Judge's husband says, "she wants people t'know at last. Who she is" (153) and the person to make her family origin known is Adrian.

While ruminating on the persuasiveness of the evidence, Adrian says that "this is Mrs. Judge's story, not mine--or it is the man's [Mrs. Judge's husband]. He was after all the first of her believers" (154). He further undermines his own role by suggesting that "compared with his part in all this my own is trivial. I am the messenger, the narrator" (155). Despite these protestations, the story *is* also his own as he must wrestle with the way in which to "judge" Mrs. Judge's "passionate certainty that she was something other than

what she seemed" (155)--and Malouf's play on the name is clearly deliberate. As someone concerned with his reputation, Adrian risks ridicule and skepticism from his colleagues by announcing Mrs. Judge's "problematical birth." But even more importantly, he also assumes the risk involved in simply being honest and expressing one's convictions. Integrity is something new for him as he has operated in his professional life according to less honourable values, using "comfortable cliches, small white lies to convince the holders of the country's purse-strings that big things are being achieved out there in the wilderness" (152). So, as he explains, "[Mrs. Judge] puts me to the test--not of belief but of the courage to come out at last from behind my clown's make-up, my simpering and sliding and dancing on the spot, to tell her story and give myself away" (155). The question of who Mrs. Judge is thus produces a desire to know who the narrator really is, who Alicia Vale is, and what constitutes Australian culture.

In an interview with Nikos Papastergiadis, Malouf suggests that the need to place oneself in the world is a decidedly Australian urge. He explains that in a country like Australia

> explanations and comforts are taken away. . . . This absence makes [people] ask the question: what is man's place in the world? Whereas if you live in a little village in England or Ireland or Scotland, where you know the name of every field, where every part of the landscape has events and a story related to it, where you know every steeple on the horizon, where the churchyard has all your forebears in it going back a thousand years, then you can comfortingly tell yourself that you absolutely belong in that landscape and

> there is no problem, no metaphysical problem. Take the same people out and put them somewhere where all of those things are gone, and then, yes, they are in a kind of void. This opens up the question of what it is we need as humans to place ourselves in the world and how difficult it is to achieve that. (87)

As Robert Hughes points out in The Fatal Shore, for the white settlers of Australia and the generations that followed them, "the essence of colonization was that they could claim no history of their own" (599). Hughes writes that

> the obsessive cultural enterprise of Australians a hundred years ago was to forget [their history] entirely, to sublimate it, to drive it down into unconsulted recesses. This affected all Australian culture, from political rhetoric to the perception of space, of landscape itself. (596)

Written in the 1980s, Malouf's short stories continue to reflect an irresoluteness around issues of identity and place, the kind of uncertainty, as Hughes suggests, that so often characterizes a settler society.

Within the context of the story, Karingai is described as being a place in flux: "Nothing is ever finished here, but nothing is done with either. Everything is in process of being dismantled, reconstructed, recycled, and turned by the spirit of improvisation into something else. A place of transformations" (131). The characters too seem to go through various metamorphoses in the course of the narrative. Mrs. Judge changes from an unsophisticated and uneducated woman to a fascinating and remarkable woman; Alicia Vale changes from being a catalogue of performance dates, costumes, and other possessions to

the mother of unacknowledged twins, and Adrian Trisk is himself changed as he goes from thinking about Australian culture in very narrow and static terms to thinking about it in more expansive and dynamic ways. Indeed the sheer variety of experiences he is exposed to during his visit to Karingai produces a telling contrast to the monologic approach to Australian culture that he normally takes in his lectures such that, he admits, "The routine is always the same" (131).

My thesis is based on the premise that there is a correspondence between the short story form and the kind of society and people the stories reveal. "A Traveller's Tale" is a wonderfully complex and energetic story, with a dynamism that comes from the multiplicity and eclecticism of characters represented, as well as from the number of issues that their stories attend to. Mrs. Judge's struggle to account for her biological origins can, to take only one example, be analyzed according to several codes simultaneously to produce a plethora of readings--personal, feminist, national, postcolonial. While all of the stories revolve around antipodes and other dichotomous pairings, they also expand, explore and challenge the basis of those relations. William Blake's proclamation in "The Argument" to "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" that "Without Contraries is no progression" (86) is an apt way of expressing how productive the interaction between opposites can be.

Chapter Four: Katherine Mansfield

The association of Katherine Mansfield with the New Zealand short story is immediate. But for many critics, her status as a New Zealand writer is riddled with complications that an easy connection belies. In Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand, W. H. New indicates that Katherine Mansfield is a "problem" in terms of trying to neatly categorize her work, or to place it within the context of New Zealand literary history (113). New explains,

> [Katherine Mansfield] not only produced a substantial body of high quality work, she also produced much of it while living abroad in England and France, was claimed by English criticism and so given honorary English literary citizenship. . . . Yet to acknowledge these facts about Mansfield's career is to risk mistaking the particular facts for other kinds of general principle. Transforming Mansfield into an `English' writer is as misleading as claiming her to be a quintessential New Zealander . . . . (113)

As New's comments demonstrate, the fact of Mansfield's expatriate status frequently provokes discussion about what kind of New Zealand author she represents. Inquiries which pursue the question of what is local and what is European in her writing, as well as analysis which highlights Mansfield's realist impulse to depict a recognizable New Zealand, or which stresses her modernist, metropolitan sensibility, are all implicitly engaged with the question of how to define the quality of Mansfield's New Zealandness--or her lack thereof.

New, for his part, concludes that there are "almost as many Katherine Mansfields as

there are critics," and indeed her writing, journals, and letters have given rise to a number of critical approaches: thematic, formal, biographical, historical, feminist, symbolist, modernist, and cultural (130). The one thing critics uniformly do is warn against approaching Mansfield too narrowly. In one study, the authors, using Mansfield-inspired imagery, concede that: "It is difficult to find a central organising principle for assessing her achievement that does not lead to neglect of some aspect of her work. She shines out through too many lantern-faces for any single perspective to give an adequate view" (Hanson and Gurr 14). New's approach involves studying Mansfield with the aim of maintaining a balance between "individual artistic commitment and an unfolding social context" (25). My analysis is informed by a similar desire to examine Mansfield's literary impulses while attending to elements of the larger cultural sphere in which she was writing. Her consistent choice to write short fiction suggests that the form is particularly well suited to conveying her thematic interests, especially the persistent issues that relate to a settler background. Mansfield did try on at least three occasions to write a novel [Hanson and Gurr 19-20; Kaplan 82-102], but she consistently came back to the short story. This chapter explores the connection between the literary and the social in Mansfield's work, between the short story form and the nature of characters and social circumstances depicted in four of Mansfield's New Zealand stories.

Mansfield is a wonderfully complicated subject for an exploration of the connection between the literary and the social, between the short story form and the kind of society and people the story reveals, considering that her depiction of New Zealand life is itself often contested. As Bridget Orr documents, some critics see in the modern and impressionistic

elements of her writing a necessary omission of specific details about everyday New Zealand living (48-49). Modernism, with its stress on inward states of consciousness and its questioning of a stable surface of reality, and aspects of realism, like the depiction of local colour, are seen to be incompatible. Lawrence Jones, author of Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose, is especially interested in examining Mansfield as a subjective, impressionistic writer who shows no tendencies towards realism. He sketches out a "predominantly feminine mode" (163) in New Zealand writing that reaches back to and includes Mansfield, Helen Shaw, and others. According to Jones, this mode focuses "not on what Vincent O'Sullivan calls the `shared common life' of the New Zealand realistic tradition, but rather on the uniqueness of the private worlds of author and/or character" (164). Jones labels this fiction the `other tradition' because it dwells on the realm of ideas or on the psyche of the characters and can thus be set in opposition to the central literary tradition in New Zealand, that of realism (164). Jones' brand of realism is marked by "concreteness, particularity, probability, ordinariness, and inclusiveness: individualized characters from ordinary life, caught in specific manners, speech, and gestures," and is epitomised by the writing of Frank Sargeson (16). This approach helps Jones in his project to carve out two neat, discrete literary traditions in New Zealand: Mansfield's subjective short story writing, and Sargeson's realist short story legacy.

But as Orr points out in her essay, "Reading with the Taint of the Pioneer: Katherine Mansfield and Settler Criticism," much of the discussion about Mansfield's interior-oriented writing "brackets[s] [her] evocation of a complex and conflicted colonial society" (50). Orr contends that this kind of oversight turns "on the assumption that regional realism is the only

really adequate way in which New Zealand `reality' [can] be represented" (50). In this regard, Orr comments that Jones' interpretation of Mansfield's writing "reinforces the claims of a predominantly masculine regional realism to represent New Zealand in history" (51). In her reading of Mansfield's stories, Orr finds settler thematics as well as technical innovation, an observation which has the potential to deconstruct the regional/modernist opposition which she feels offers a limited approach to Mansfield's work (49). Throughout her essay, she admonishes readers to check the assumption that Mansfield's stories represent something "radically other to the `common phenomenal world'" (51).

Mark Williams contributes to the discussion about how to view the Sargeson/Mansfield literary traditions in his "Introduction" to Leaving the Highway: Six Contemporary New Zealand Novelists. Williams, like Orr, cautions against categorizing either author as representing a single realistic or impressionistic aesthetic, suggesting that both labels are restrictive and inadequate. He writes,

> the complexity and contradictions in both [Sargeson and Mansfield] are more important than any tendencies towards realism or impressionism which may be isolated to show the debts owed them by other New Zealand writers. To characterise Mansfield as an `impressionistic' writer, as Sargeson does slightingly, is to ignore her concern with the ways in which social experience is registered within the consciousness of the individual. The hard force of precise social observation is present everywhere in her work, not only in isolated stories like `The Woman at the Store' or `Millie.' (21-22)

Williams implies that Mansfield is subtly documenting social experience. In this

way Peter Carey and David Malouf's stories offer a contrast to her style, as certain details in their work immediately and clearly establish a context of social observation. Carey's depiction of the United States as a monolithic, economic power signals his interest in exposing the imperialistic implications of the American, capitalistic ambition of consumer domination. Similarly, David Malouf's thematic and structural emphasis on antipodal structures reinforces the point that Australia sees itself as an "other" in relation to a colonial centre. The evaluation of the New World by the standards of the Old World--and the reverse--is explicit.

Williams' confidence that the "hard force of precise social observation is present everywhere" (22) in Mansfield's work invites the reader to look carefully for it there as well. "Millie" (1911) and "The Woman at the Store" (1911) offer good beginnings for this exploration, since they are considered instantly recognizable as New Zealand stories. Lawrence Jones himself sees them as presenting clearly the faults of a frontier society as "raw, anti-aesthetic, materialistic, puritanical" (Culture 193). In the first paragraph of "Millie," Mansfield emphasizes the heat and the harshness characteristic of the New Zealand terrain: the narrator exclaims, "Oh, my word! It was hot. Enough to fry your hair!" (34). The sun is depicted as oppressively strong, hanging in the "faded blue sky like a burning mirror," causing sweat to pour down Millie's face, and making her feel languid (34). The environment, Mansfield hints, has the power to destroy.

The emphasis given to the external elements obliquely signifies Millie's struggle to adapt to these living conditions--not just physically, but also psychologically. The bleakness and emptiness of colonial life on the frontier are registered in Millie's fractured personality.

If the heat appears to melt her face, Mansfield suggests that the fact of loneliness can make her sense of self uncertain, and then unravel. As Millie stares at herself in a fly-specked mirror, she conveys the impression that she no longer recognizes herself, or her own temperament. The narrator indicates that

> She didn't know what was the matter with herself that afternoon. She could have a good cry--just for nothing--and then change her blouse and have a good cup of tea. Yes, she felt like that! (35)

While the bedroom is the location for this moment of introspection, it also contains clues on its walls as to why Millie feels so depressed and so dislocated. Moving away from the mirror, she then stares at a coloured print on the wall called `Garden Party at Windsor Castle,' depicting an idyllic English scene:

> In the foreground emerald lawns planted with immense oak trees, and in their grateful shade a muddle of ladies and gentlemen and parasols and little tables. The background was filled with the towers of Windsor Castle, flying three Union Jacks, and in the middle of the picture the old Queen, like a tea-cosy with a head on top of it. (35)

The contrast between this lush, civilized, and refined scene, and Millie's own poor situation, is striking, emphasizing not only the differences in class, standing, and material comfort between the two worlds, but also differences in the crucial sense of existing within differing social communities. Staring at the flowery ladies in the picture, Millie indicates that she "`wouldn't care for that sort of thing'" (35). But the story emphasizes the implications of the fact that Millie has no community, no companionship, and no sense of belonging, as the

people gathered in front of Windsor Castle so emphatically do. Although Millie may not have any meaningful connection to Windsor Castle personally, the picture of it nonetheless emphasizes her dislocation from what is familiar to her. Indeed, the story attests to the paucity of social contact which was a fact of New Zealand settlers' lives.

Miles Fairburn, in The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900, writes that it was very common for settlers to decorate their walls with English papers and with pictures of English scenes, "literally surrounding themselves with representations of social life" (202-203). Fairburn defends this gesture, stating that it was not a "neurotic response to an alien environment, a manifestation of a provincial mentality" (203). Rather, he explains, "it was a natural reaction to the dearth of associations" (203). He suggests that,

> colonists remained emotionally tied to the Old World because their atomised society could not satisfy the human need for gregariousness. They revered their imported cultural forms not for their own sake but because these represented social interactions that had once been enjoyed at `Home' and that New Zealand took a long time to duplicate. (203)

The wedding photo of Millie and her husband Sid also functions in this symbolic way. Fairburn suggests that, for settlers, everyday contact with personal mementos like a wedding photo "was supposed to stimulate remembrance and offset the new land's inability to sustain real forms of association" (202). With Mount Cook in the background, Millie looks genteel and refined in the picture of her wedding day, "sitting down in a basket chair, in her cream cashmere and satin ribbons, and Sid, standing with one hand on her shoulder,

looking at her bouquet" (35). But if this picture helps Millie to offset the "land's inability to sustain real forms of association" (Fairburn 202), it also emphasizes Millie's lack of real forms of association, including human contact and conversation. She reveals that "She had almost forgotten her wedding day; time did pass so, and if you hadn't anyone to talk things over with, they soon dropped out of your mind" (35).

Alone on the farm for the day, Millie ends up hiding the young English "Johnny," Harrison, who is on the run, having shot and killed the man who was teaching him how to farm a settlement. Acting on instinct, she tries to feed him and vows to protect him, declaring that "`They won't ketch him. Not if I can'elp it. Men is all beasts. I don't care wot'e's done, or wot'e'asn't done'" (38). But when her husband and his companions return and discover the fugitive on their premises, Millie suddenly joins them in the cry for violent revenge:

> . . . at the sight of Harrison in the distance, and the three men hot after, a strange mad joy smothered everything else. She rushed into the road--she laughed and shrieked and danced in the dust, jigging the lantern. `A-ah! Arter 'im, Sid! A-a-a-h! Ketch him, Willie. Go it! Go it! Sid! Shoot'im down. Shoot'im!' (39)

The drama of the story is supplied by the discovery and chase of Harrison, but the real focus, as the title intimates, is on Millie. Her radical shift from maternal protector to violent avenger only reiterates the instability of her own identity. Mansfield prepares the reader, however, for her display of a fractured persona: Millie does not identify with the British subjects at the garden party at Windsor Castle, yet she still clings to their image; she no

longer remembers herself as the delicate bride who was married at Mount Cook, yet she still reveres the memory of that time. Mansfield implies that Millie is literally and metaphorically displaced; her identity is now constituted by her immediate environment, an environment which is bleak, empty, crude, and unyielding. To emphasize this symbiosis, the environment's isolation and infertility are mirrored in Millie's loneliness and her inability to have children. Moreover, the violence of Harrison's murderous act is mirrored in the force with which Millie calls for his punishment and death.

Like "Millie," "The Woman at the Store" offers a portrait of the unsettling effects of geographical isolation. The story is told in the first-person; Mansfield's decision to write from a single, male perspective reinforces the solitude and emptiness of colonial life at the time. Yet, as in "Millie," Mansfield stresses how the unnamed woman in particular is reduced by the settler-circumstances in which she is forced to live (Tomalin xxi). Just as Millie no longer resembles an earlier picture of herself, the woman too appears transformed. The narrator describes how she used to be as pretty as a wax doll, but that now her yellow hair was "ugly": "She was a figure of fun. Looking at her, you felt there was nothing but sticks and wires under that pinafore--her front teeth were knocked out, she had red, pulpy hands and she wore on her feet a pair of dirty Bluchers" (42). Jo's explanation for her deteriorated looks focuses on her isolation: "Gone a bit off'er dot. . . . Too much alone" (42). While the woman does not contradict this assessment, she is more specific in detailing the hardships she has endured: four miscarriages in six years of marriage, a husband who broke her spirits as well as spoiled her looks, and being alone for weeks at a time minding the store and her child. "`It's the loneliness,' said the woman . . . `and bein' shut up 'ere like a broody

'en'" (48).

The child's "extraordinary and repulsively vulgar" drawings ultimately reveal that, owing to solitude and despair, her mother was driven to shoot her father with a rook rifle and then bury him in the ground (48). The woman's action is violent and extreme, and the narrator's discovery of it provides him with an epiphany about how pronounced, how desperate, her suffering had become. The men discuss the fact that the woman's looks have been altered and that the coach has stopped coming by her store, but clearly her ability to cope psychologically with her situation also deteriorated.

There are even more subtle elements within the story which reiterate the devastating effects of an isolated existence like hers. As in Millie's bedroom, the woman's walls are "plastered with old pages of English periodicals. Queen Victoria's Jubilee appeared to be the most recent number" (43). Fairburn's assessment that reading English periodicals and newspapers allowed "a mental escape from a socially arid world into one of community events, celebrations, recreations, and endless opportunities to chat, exchange opinions, and ideas," (202) still applies in this context. While it is not clear that the woman has read the periodicals, just having them plastered on the walls suggests her desire for vicarious participation in a community of readers, and for the very stimulation the periodicals represent. The "mad excitement" of the woman's child, whose mind is thought to be "diseased" (48), also hints at the pervasive effects of isolation. Furthermore, that the woman could not breast-feed the child until she was one month old suggests something unnatural about the process of giving birth to new life in the devastating environment.

While the story stresses the loneliness faced by the woman in these circumstances,

Fairburn's study provides a context by which a reader may interpret the men's way of responding to their own peripatetic lifestyle. He shows that the bulk of lower-class men "expressed and compensated for their loneliness through excessive drinking" (203). His research indicates that alcohol was used to "blot out the psychic pain of social isolation" and to help "break down the barriers that separated people and prevented intimacy in an atomised society" (203). In "The Woman at the Store" this behaviour is registered through Jo, Jim, and the narrator's need for "embrocation," their need for it specifically in aid of softening the woman up for an evening in one another's company. Details of the men's activity indicate their own feelings of isolation and solitude. As the narrator implies, their wanderings are filled with silence and emptiness: "There was nothing to be seen but wave after wave of tussock grass, patched with purple orchids and manuka bushes covered with thick spider webs" (40).

Both stories suggest that loneliness and the desperate responses to it displayed by these characters (an estranged sense of self, violent behaviour, drunkenness) are produced by the environment in which they live. In "The Woman at the Store," there is one description of New Zealand that especially highlights the sense that the country is not just difficult and inhospitable, but actually preying and monstrous. The narrator comments that "There is no twilight in our New Zealand days, but a curious half-hour when everything appears grotesque--it frightens--as though the savage spirit of the country walked abroad and sneered at what it saw" (43). The same story ends with an equally haunting line, stressing once more the insubstantiality of a place when set against a vast and unpopulated landscape: "A bend in the road, and the whole place disappeared" (50).

As works which document deprivation of social contact on the New Zealand frontier, these narratives are intensified by the capacities of the short story form. Frank O'Connor asserts that the short story carries an "intense awareness of human loneliness" (19). In an essay devoted to surveying short story criticism, Charles May tries to understand why loneliness is so pervasive in the genre, and in his effort to do so he places O'Connor's remarks beside those of Nadine Gordimer. I quoted from Gordimer's essay earlier, in the discussion on Peter Carey's work, but her comments on the short story's unparalleled ability to capture the present moment are equally relevant to Mansfield's "Millie" and "The Woman at the Store." She suggests that the short story, more than the novel, can convey that quality of human life "where contact is more like the flash of fireflies, in and out, now here, now there, in darkness" (180). Moreover, she claims that in the short story, the writer has "the art of the only thing one can be sure of--the present moment"--"A discrete moment of truth is aimed at--not the moment of truth, because the short story doesn't deal in cumulatives" (180).

May integrates O'Connor's theory with Gordimer's, suggesting that "modern man's realization that he can depend only on the present moment is precisely what makes him lonely, and his sense of loneliness is best manifested in a form that focuses only on the present moment" (11). While I do not agree that the short story always focuses only on the present moment, the form is certainly capable of doing so. But May's comment still provides an interesting way in which to understand the suitability of the short story genre for expressing the loneliness and solitude of such figures as Millie and the woman at the store. The sense of the transient and isolated quality of these characters' lives resonates with the

fleeting and brief glimpse the short story itself gives of their circumstances.

"Prelude" (1917) and "At the Bay" (1921) are also stories set in New Zealand, yet in them Mansfield depicts aspects of New Zealand life less directly than in the two earlier works. In these two later stories Mansfield's style seems more overtly concerned with an interior world and less engaged with attempting to evoke a publicly recognisable New Zealand (Jones, Barbed 174). C. A. Hankin's insightful reading of "Prelude" and "At the Bay" correctly highlights the psychological complexity, the intricate patterning, and the nuances of association and symbol, in the two stories (12). However, Williams' earlier proposal that social experience is registered in the consciousness of Mansfield's characters provides a clue as to how one might read the stories in order to detect the thematization of settler culture and other underlying social elements.

In so doing, I do not find a "self-conscious private fiction cut off from the public or social world" (Orr 51). Rather, characters' interior thoughts prove to be provoked by the reality of New Zealand cultural values and social beliefs. As Williams affirms,

> Mansfield's sense of the minute details of which life is composed, grasped as epiphanic moments of consciousness, is always controlled by her acute awareness of life as social being, by her awareness of the immersion of humans in the codes and rules and determinants of social existence. (22)

As the title of "Prelude" suggests, this story is about fresh beginnings, depicting the Burnell family as they move from Wellington, New Zealand's capital, to a home in the country. The omniscient narrator describes the move away from the city in terms suggesting that the country landscape represents unfamiliar and marginal space: "Now everything

familiar was left behind. Now the big dray rattled into unknown country, along new roads with high clay banks on either side, up steep hills, down into bushy valleys, through wide shallow rivers. Further and further" (90). If this paragraph registers the psychological impact of the move, one involving feelings of withdrawal and recession, throughout the story there are details that refer to the practical and mundane aspects of it as well: Stanley Burnell cannot locate his slippers in the various packing boxes; Beryl has to work all day to get things "straight" (93); sheets have not been found for the children's beds.

Within this context of physical dislocation and change, many of the Burnells are preoccupied with the need to find personal items and to find a sense of personal space for themselves. In this way Mansfield suggests that moving and the accompanying transitional phase prompt a kind of emotional uprooting that generates uncertainties and anxieties. The story is characterized by an openness on the level of meaning that arises out of the ways in which various characters question themselves in their new surroundings. For example, Linda Burnell contemplates the constancy of her emotions for her husband, and Beryl muses on her own falsity and self-deception. As such moments of introspection recur, Mansfield implies that settling into a new environment, whether it be a new house or a new part of New Zealand, involves examining one's identity, one's culture, and one's space.

If "Prelude" raises questions about the meaning of these terms and relations, it does not provide clear answers. And it is this kind of open exploration that is so well expressed in a form which can accommodate irresolution and complexity. Mansfield's representation of multiple viewpoints, as well as her use of ambiguously defined tropes and symbols, exemplify her resistance to any monolithic aesthetic with an inherent appeal to a definitive

plot, strict linear development and progressive order, and a stress on unity and resolution (Bradbury 393). Her writing, in other words, challenges patterns of narrative authority. Significantly, multiplicity on the level of theme and meaning reflects upon the diverse make-up of the Burnell family. They are depicted as a family whose members offer various conceptions of identity and place, conceptions that are determined by such factors as age, gender, and class, but also upon the codes, rules, and values of New Zealand social existence.

By juxtaposing a variety of voices, "Prelude" does not restrict itself to one authoritative, central narrative persona (Head 117). Instead, the story's focus shifts from the consciousness of one character to the next. Beryl's musings often trail off with a dash or ellipsis, as when she is alone at night in her room and imagines that a handsome young man inquires about her at the Government House ball (95). In this instance, her meditations before bed both connect and collide with the next sentence in the following paragraph, which is spoken by Stanley to Linda as they turn in for the night. Here, the ellipsis overtly signifies the open and ambiguous qualities of the prose as the two subjectivities flow seamlessly into one another.

As the narrative shifts from different temporal realms, as well as in and out of different family members' thoughts and conversations, the story alludes to a variety of topics, and reflects a diversity of impressions, moods, and sensibilities. On his way home from work, Stanley plans how he will pass his Saturday and Sunday afternoons with his family and his male friends. While Linda and Mrs. Fairfield take an evening stroll through the garden, Linda contemplates her own very mixed feelings for Stanley, how for "all her

love and respect and admiration she hated him" (123). The servant Alice reflects on Beryl's "low" treatment of her.

The range of topics indicates the way in which the family can be read as a metaphor for a complex and eclectic community, a community, significantly, in which societal norms and values emerge as relevant factors in the formation of each character's point of view. Indeed, Mansfield probes the thoughts and feelings of the individual characters, but she also frames these thoughts with ordinary details that relate to the common world. Linda Burnell's conflicted feelings for her husband comment on the expectations made of her in her role as a wife and a mother. Linda's understanding of how gender restrictions limit the possibilities her own life holds is revealed in her statement that "'I shall go on having children and Stanley will go on making money and the gardens will grow bigger and bigger, with whole fleets of aloes in them for me to choose from'" (123). As a woman, Linda is assigned to the role of bearing children and remaining within the domestic sphere, while Stanley is expected to work and to provide financially for his family. Even while Linda questions the static nature of these gender roles, the story implies that such divisions have been sanctioned and approved by her society.

Although Beryl is very different in personality from her sister, she too struggles to come to terms with the reality of her situation. And again, it is in the details of her confession-like thoughts that Mansfield inscribes the attitudes, values, and uncertainties that accompany a place in this colonial society. Beryl's "cruel thought"--"ah, if only she had money of her own" (95) registers her desire for independence and autonomy. One of the reasons Beryl does not have money of her own and that she lives with Linda and Stanley is

that she is not married herself. Mansfield hints that Beryl's restlessness, as well as her yearnings and desires, are linked to this central fact. When Linda asks Beryl whether or not she likes the new house, Beryl's response is expressed in terms primarily social:

> `I like the house immensely and the garden is beautiful, but it feels very far away from everything to me. I can't imagine people coming out from town to see us in that dreadful jolting bus, and I am sure that there is not anyone here to come and call. Of course it does not matter to you because--' (102)

Interpreting the ellipsis, the narrator suggests that "there was something at the back of Beryl's mind, something she did not even put into words for herself" (102). Indirect references, as well as tropes and allusions, are characteristics of Mansfield's style. Moreover, the function of tropes in Mansfield's critical writing is relevant to her use of tropes in a fictional work such as this one. Clare Hanson remarks that in Mansfield's critical writings, she achieves two major objectives through her use of tropes. First, she leads the reader into an acknowledgement of "relationships and suggestive analogies of whose existence we had previously been unaware," (Critical Essays 214) and secondly, she is able to "utilise the wider, less well defined attributes or associations of a particular image in order to suggest indirectly a point of view" (Critical Essays 215). In her short stories, Mansfield also works to convey theme, meaning, and abstract states of mind indirectly through the texture of the story, rather than through direct description or overt explanation (Hanson and Gurr 50). In "Prelude," for example, it is through indirect means that Mansfield generates multiple associations surrounding Beryl's disposition. Because the reader is left to interpret and to read through the story's gaps, meaning is more indeterminate. The "something" that

Beryl will not even put into words may well concern her status as a dependent, as an unmarried woman, or equally concern her feelings of loneliness in a place remote from Wellington.

Beryl's letter to her friend, her "darling Nan," also carries multiple associations, one of which relates to her expression of loneliness and isolation. Owing to her higher class standing and greater material comforts, Beryl's situation is superior to Millie's or the woman's from the store. However, in her letter to Nan, Beryl reveals that she struggles with belonging to the culture and place in which she finds herself. She confesses that she feels "buried" because there are no suitable neighbours with whom she can associate, she is certain no one will visit, and the men Stanley invites to come and play tennis with her are unsuitable to her taste. Fairburn points out that one of the ways settlers coped with loneliness was through the reading and writing of letters: "The function of this," he says, "was to allow settlers to live vicariously in a community, to feel as if they were engaging in its gossip and rituals, to act out in their imaginations the relationships that were forbidden to them by the new desocialised environment" (201). Mansfield makes it clear that Beryl is lonely because she feels isolated in her class and because she longs for male companionship. But the framing context of her letter-writing also suggests that she is lonely because these circumstances are exacerbated in a geographically isolated place and a place of sparse population--facts of settler existence.

If Beryl registers some of the negative aspects of living outside of Wellington at this time, such as being denied a sense of community and having too few opportunities for women and male friends, Stanley's character highlights the positive side of the move. Some

of the blessings attributed to settler New Zealand--the prosperity and opportunity of its economy, natural abundance, and natural harmony--can be seen to inform Stanley's whole essence. He is consistently associated with appetite and hunger, business and the economy, as well as with aspects of societal progress and growth. While Linda and Beryl reel with the changes the move to the new home brings to their sensibilities, Stanley focuses on the thrilling fact that he purchased the land cheaply. He sees himself well positioned with this investment to benefit from future development of the area: "'The thing that pleases me . . . is that I've got the place dirt cheap, Linda. I was talking to little Wally Bell today and he said he simply could not understand why they had accepted my figure. You see land about here is bound to become more and more valuable . . . in about ten years' time'" (95).

In his essay on "Land and White Settler Colonialism," Rob Steven confirms that land was the key to New Zealand identity since it provided capitalist wealth and thus shaped ideologies about race, gender, and class (30). Stanley exhibits just such a preoccupation with investment and development. His total immersion in the capitalist paradigm is revealed in his thinking that he was able to purchase the lovely weather as part of his bargain for the house--"He felt, somehow, that he had bought the lovely day, too--got it chucked in dirt cheap with the house and ground" (97). However, if Stanley stands as representative of a society predicated on a belief in economic progress and growth, his own insecurities also imply how tenuous such progress is. Stanley's personality is divided between his robust, energetic businessman persona, and an innocent, sensitive, vulnerable sensibility that constantly requires support and affirmation from his wife. As Linda correctly assesses, "for all his practical experience he was awfully simple, easily pleased and easily hurt" (122). On

a symbolic level, Stanley displays the tension between a society with bold and ambitious visions for itself, and a lack of confidence and certainty about its identity at the core.

Like "Prelude," "At the Bay" features the extended members of the Burnell family and while the story focuses on the psychological complexity of each character, it also offers further reflections on what Bridget Orr identifies as a "conflicted and complex colonial society" (50). "At the Bay" is structured similarly to "Prelude," in twelve numbered sections, each focusing on certain characters' activities during the course of one day, and each contributing a piece to an over-all impression of the flux of living. The story is not told directly by one narrator, but rather unravels with interjections from the omniscient narrator and from the voices and thoughts of various characters. This story is more broadly based than "Prelude," canvassing more widely certain values and beliefs that structure the characters' lives. The capaciousness of the story form faithfully renders the multiple views that the characters espouse about their sense of belonging to this Crescent Bay society.

W. H. New comments that despite the pressure of conformity within Mansfield's fictional society, there persist impulses to independent life (136). Jonathan Trout, speaking to his sister-in-law, Linda Burnell, confesses that to return to work Monday morning feels like a kind of imprisonment: "'To spend all the best years of one's life sitting on a stool from nine to five, scratching in somebody's ledger! . . . Tell me, what is the difference between my life and that of an ordinary prisoner?'" (240). He cannot even explain his reluctance to try to change his life, choosing instead to endure a kind of mental paralysis: "'Why? Why indeed? There's the maddening, mysterious question,'" he says (240). Linda is sympathetic, for while the tedium of work imprisons his romantic soul, the "dread of

having children" (227) weakens her own. Earlier in the day when she was alone, she admitted to herself that, "Yes, that [having children] was her real grudge against life" (227).

Jonathan and Linda raise issues that are broadly related to considerations of gender and economics as they question the assumptions of their society about the role men and women are expected to fulfil. However, the questions they raise are not necessarily specific to a settler culture or to New Zealand. In contrast, the servant Alice and Mrs. Harry Kember do offer perspectives on the difficulty of belonging in a colonial society. The class themes which surround these two characters can be read as New Zealand settler preoccupations. In "At the Bay," Beryl mocks Alice's efforts at refinement and civility as she goes out to have tea with a friend, noting the stains on Alice's white gloves and supposing that, instead of possessing a female friend, Alice had in reality "picked up some horrible common larrikin and they'd go off into the bush together" (232). More pointedly, Beryl emphasizes Alice's mispronunciation of "perishall" (232). Mansfield's use of colloquial speech within this story has a kind of political significance in the context of postcolonial thinking that endorses local idiom as against the standard English of the imperial power. But Beryl's reaction to Alice's speech also has another significance. In Culture and Identity in New Zealand, Bill Willmott notes that upper-class New Zealanders frequently expressed disgust at "colonial twang" or wrong or defective English. Willmott theorizes that

> Part of their motivation may have been the fact that economic differences between working and business classes were less marked in New Zealand than in the British Isles. . . . With higher wages, workers might aspire to styles of life more akin to the upper-class elite . . . . (4)

The response of the elite to this movement, Willmott suggests, "may well have been to emphasise as strongly as possible the difference between themselves and those `beneath them'" --and one way of doing this was by maintaining their identity with English culture more strongly than the working classes, especially through language (4-5).

Willmott's social theory seems quite relevant to this story because Beryl stresses the class distinction between herself and Alice, if not for the purpose of strengthening her ties with English culture, then clearly for the purpose of preserving her own sense of superiority over Alice and the other domestic servants. But Mansfield also shows the possibility for upward mobility for the working classes in the Crescent Bay society, as Willmott states was the case in New Zealand at the time. While details are subtle, Mrs. Stubbs, the friend Alice visits with, appears to own and operate her own store, a fact which can be meaningfully linked with Willmott's observation that because of an egalitarian ethos, there were greater opportunities for the working classes in New Zealand (3) [see Fairburn 45]. Moreover, Mrs. Stubbs' cry at the end of the tea that "`freedom's best'" resonates with the class issues--upward-mobility, the possibility of obtaining an improved, more comfortable life--that the scene raises (235). Alice's response, however, of feeling awkward and wanting to be back in her own "kitching," highlights just how complicated and complex the issues of class and belonging are in the settler context. Alice seems ambivalent towards the idea of achieving "freedom," an ambivalence that is mirrored in the ambiguity of the story. What kind of freedom is Mrs. Stubbs suggesting? How can any freedom be achieved when people like Beryl show disdain for the upward mobility of the working classes? These questions remain open.

Class issues, and by extension the codes and rules for social behaviour, are equally important in Mansfield's depiction of Mrs. Harry Kember, another member of the Crescent Bay community. Significantly, she flaunts and ignores the protocol that the women of Crescent Bay observe: Mrs. Fairfield disapproves of her as a result (223); Beryl is both shocked and fascinated by her. The narrator, who seems to reflect Beryl's consciousness in this respect, remarks that the women at the Bay thought she was "very, very, fast" (223):

> Her lack of vanity, her slang, the way she treated men as though she was one of them, and the fact that she didn't care twopence about her house and called the servant Gladys `Glad-eyes', was disgraceful. (223)

That Mrs. Kember smokes incessantly, lies in the sun, shows a disregard for the condition of her underclothes, is frank about sexuality, and has an unconventional marriage, are also held against her. While Mansfield does not comment explicitly, I would suggest that she invites the reader to ask what is at stake in the nature of these criticisms. Such judgements clearly indicate that the upper classes hold expectations about conduct that include a stress on refinement and civility in manners, dress, sexuality, and the maintenance of the household. But what is most interesting is the way in which Beryl and the women at the Crescent Bay colony, while they proclaim disgust for Mrs. Kember, also feel threatened by her bold disregard of their notions of social conduct. Indeed, Mrs. Kember makes Beryl feel shy and silly. Beryl's uneasiness suggests a quiet subtext to the story, that Mrs. Kember brings a cosmopolitan world to a provincial one, and that she tests the character not just of Beryl, but of a whole Crescent Bay society that reveals itself to be more naive, petty, and insecure than its own self-image of sophistication and refinement would claim for itself. On

this level of the story, then, Mansfield suggests what might be some of the dynamics and determinants of a New Zealand social existence, a clash between cosmopolitan and parochial values being one of them.

If part of the focus of my analysis of these four New Zealand stories has been to explore and uncover what might be considered Mansfield's settler themes, another aspect of my analysis is intended to underscore the suitability of the short story form to Mansfield's handling of these themes. Umberto Eco asserts that an open work denies a conventional view of the world and offers instead a world based on ambiguity, "both in the negative sense that directional centers are missing and in a positive sense, because values and dogma are constantly being placed in question" (9). "Prelude" and "At the Bay" display the kind of openness and ambiguity Eco defines in Mansfield's handling of complexities within the Burnell family and the society in which they live. The stories problematize ideological conflicts surrounding class and gender, and yet refuse to resolve the core issues at stake. Eco makes a further distinction between a univocal statement and a plural, ambiguous, more flexible one constituted by a web of suggestions (95) which also provides a good description of Mansfield's writing. Because Mansfield does not privilege any one point of view, and because she does not provide one authoritative voice, the stories remain open in terms of the diversity of the characters' views and values. The openness of the form corresponds to the expansive, questioning nature of the prose.

In her letter to Nan, Beryl pronounces that the Burnell family is considered "settled" into their new house. The choice of diction is suggestive given that the notion of being "settled" or "unsettled" is central to the thematic and formal concerns of the narrative. The

elderly Mrs. Fairfield is notably the most settled character in the Burnell household, and she provides a contrast with her two unsettled daughters, Linda and Beryl. Owing to her comfort with her life and her place as matriarch within the family, Mrs. Fairfield is at ease. Mansfield suggests, however, that her daughters confront a different social world. As a result of the move, Linda and Beryl now live outside Wellington, and while their society still operates by the rules, values, and codes that govern more formally organized communities, their social sphere is also built upon the less stable and predictable foundation of life in what is still a country district.

Orr remarks that Mansfield's writing continually unravels notions of a unified identity, whether national or personal (49), and this thematic point is stressed in the technical aspects of the story form. With its technical range, the genre is able to capture the irresolute, the uncertain, and the fragmented. "Prelude" and "At the Bay" end with a focus on Beryl's still unsettled state of mind about the move and about her resulting loneliness, a state of uncertainty captured in her conviction that if she "goes on living here . . . anything may happen to me" ("At the Bay" 245). Beryl's final musings are as unfixed in suggesting a definitive meaning as the stories themselves are open and ambiguous in suggesting a single resolution. For Beryl and Linda especially, their confidence in their individual identities, and their feelings of belonging to their new home, remain unsettled. Mansfield's interpretation of the short story form captures and embodies their uncertainty.

Chapter Five: Owen Marshall

Katherine Mansfield and Owen Marshall represent two different time frames in New Zealand's literary tradition. Mansfield, born in 1888, wrote and published her short stories during the first quarter of the century; Marshall, born in 1941, published his first collection of short stories, Supper Waltz Wilson, in 1979, and has continued to issue collections of stories throughout the 1980s and the 1990s. The status of the New Zealand short story has changed in this span of time, and, accordingly, so too have the ways in which critics approach the work of a contemporary New Zealand short story writer like Marshall.

New Zealand author and critic Vincent O' Sullivan explains that thirty or so years ago, "the New Zealand short story was thought to fall, obviously and neatly, into two more or less exclusive modes" (ix)--"the perceptively feminine, middle-class, stylish manner of Mansfield, or . . . the working-class, masculine, no-frills directness of Sargeson" (vii). This perspective is reminiscent of Lawrence Jones' categorization of two definitive modes in New Zealand literature, realist and non-realist, as discussed in the previous chapter. O'Sullivan suggests that anyone coming to the form as it now stands would find "prescriptive loading of that earlier kind, or even arguing for an appropriately distinctive New Zealand kind of story, as irrelevant, if not bizarre" (ix). He claims that while "literary boundary riders from time to time trot out directives on how fiction should proceed, most writers don't seem too fazed" (ix). He elaborates:

> The proliferation in the number of stories written in the last decade or so especially, and the corresponding extension of narrative methods, argues an

> ear quite as attuned to international writing as it is to closer pressures. Owen Marshall, pre-eminently, shows how much might still be drawn from the mainstream realism of New Zealand fiction, and how richly it may be turned to new ends. (ix-x)

While Lawrence Jones' own assessment of Marshall's work still presupposes a sharp division between two literary modes, he supports O'Sullivan's sense of the flexibility of a contemporary realism, especially as seen in Marshall's work. Specifically, Jones sees in Marshall the "strength of the Sargeson tradition" and also "its adaptability" (Barbed 85). He writes,

> Dealing mostly with provincial New Zealand and its more traditional aspects, Marshall has been able to use and adapt the Sargeson tradition to his present needs, while transcending some of its limitations of attitude and method and even bringing in elements from the `other', non-realistic tradition. (Barbed 85)

In an interview with Patrick Evans included in the volume In the Same Room: Conversations with New Zealand Writers, Marshall himself makes a claim for the complexity and subtle workings of his writing. Responding to a question concerning literary antecedents, he replies,

> People seem to think that I belong in the broad category of Sargesonian realism, and I suppose to some extent that's correct. I think it's more an accident of sex and nationality rather than a direct influence. I admire Sargeson's work. . . . But I don't honestly see very much direct authorial

influence. (67)

Marshall goes on to assert that, "perhaps people overlook in my work an element of experiment in construction and even in postmodernist forms and so on, which is quite strongly there" (67). He sees his own work as being constitutive of elements from a range of literary styles including realist, postmodernist, and, more generally, experimental. Indeed, what emerges from this interview is the sense that the categorization and labelling of a story is much less important to him than the successful working of a story, whatever its mode.

Marshall's attraction to the short story genre in particular may be partly explained by his admiration of the work of T. F. Powys and H.E. Bates. During the same interview with Evans he recalls,

> . . . I looked to them for two elements that interested me. First of all, a stress on the short story form, which I increasingly found was giving me the greatest sense of response as a reader, and, secondly, because they were dealing with country issues and rural people. (65)

In H.E. Bates especially, Marshall discovered "a wonderful ability to evoke countryside, to evoke climate, natural description and country people, as well as relationships and mood" (65). Moreover, Marshall credits Bates with encouraging him to see that "the devices of compression and brevity and imagery that characterise poetry to some extent also characterise at least one major branch of short story writing--for the same reason of economy--and such poetic elements attract me very much in the short story" (68). Given this comment, it is not surprising that Marshall's own stories evoke the concreteness and the

particularity of the New Zealand landscape and its country people, and that he establishes the setting by maximizing the poetic elements within the prose.

It is interesting to consider that a writer like Katherine Mansfield, with a style so different to Marshall's, also exploits the resources of the short story form to highlight the mood, tone, tempo, and imagery of her story world inhabited by the Burnells. Mansfield and Marshall also occupy common ground thematically in their stress upon characters' feelings of alienation, and their endeavours to understand their isolated situations. Mansfield's characters Millie, Linda, Beryl, and Stanley struggle for a sense of belonging in an environment that is rural, socially arid, and just developing in terms of social organization and commerce. Marshall's characters also confront a changing social world, but, writing as he does with a focus on present-day rural communities, it is one in which his characters are leaving the farm and moving to the city. Although this transition is associated with progress and modernity, his characters nonetheless contend with feelings of displacement and a sense of loss. Both writers respond to a country which is not totally formed, a country which is still developing and is in many ways unsure of itself, yet in the end they each produce very different bodies of work.

Marshall has indicated that he gets a lot of pleasure from reading "the wonderful Canadian writer, Alice Munro" (Interview 66) which is interesting considering that his style is similar to Munro's in placing an emphasis on examining the details, texture, and rhythms of a character's life. Like Munro's stories, Marshall's continually depict characters on the cusp of change, whether it is in terms of shifts of attitudes or values, or in terms of a new awareness. In both authors' works there is a common theme of alienation. Marshall's

characters typically possess a degree of self-awareness and self-consciousness that others around them do not; their understanding and acumen make them ask questions of their environments, and inquiry and curiosity render them isolated in communities that stress conformity. Munro also frequently depicts characters who challenge or subvert the conventions of their society. They exist on the fringes of their peer groups, slightly set apart from the centre of social activity. Both authors are interested in examining the pressures of rural life and the kinds of social issues that people living in smaller communities confront. They also explore their characters in a similar way, by examining the incremental movements, the rhythms, of their day-to-day activities.

While Marshall most often casts his examination of rural New Zealand life in a realist mode, as he himself points out, his writing also displays stylistic variety. "Monologue and Absent Friends" challenges generic expectations of the story form, working as it does as a monologue that reveals the inner thoughts and impulses of the speaker's mind; "The Divided World" is structured like a long poem in free verse, cataloguing a multitude of oppositions within the universe ("between the superstitious, and the unimaginative; between those who love men, and those who love women . . . " (Divided 121). In Marshall's latest collection of stories, Coming Home in the Dark, works like "Recollections of MKD," "The Lenny Fudge Bibliography," "Genesis," and "Clivo Sudamus in Ino" show his penchant for wicked social satire, fantasy, and, again, unexpected uses of the short story form. These are different kinds of stories, and such range suggests that Marshall does not have a single solution to the artistic problem of representing a particular society.

In the realist-oriented stories I examine, Marshall places his characters in the small towns of the North and South Islands, and it is this landscape that provides his characters with a source of personal history, and a strong sense of themselves as New Zealanders. The physical surroundings are saturated with the traces of settlement history and new beginnings, and the rawness and innocence of the land often objectify the characters' hopes and ideals for a better life. In the example of the character Cass Robbins in the story of the same name, the splendour of one acre of good land with a view of the sea proves to be transformative, prompting Cass to dispense with materialism and open himself up to a simpler and more meaningful life. In this story and others, cities like Wellington, Auckland, Dunedin, and Sydney, Australia, are depicted, in contrast, as centres of capitalism lacking meaningful affiliations. With this kind of dichotomy, Marshall's stories resemble David Malouf's in the emphasis Malouf places on negotiating between Old World and New World experiences. And like Malouf's stories, Marshall's fiction generates greater complexity than what any two oppositional terms like rural\urban, pastoral\anti-pastoral, might suggest, deepening and broadening the terms of relations to explore multiple and related issues.

In a single story, Marshall might reveal a number of perspectives in relation to provincial and rural New Zealand, such that a particular way of life appears as neither ideal nor underprivileged. For example, if there is a nostalgia for a simpler, traditional way of life in the provinces, such sentiment is often balanced by suggestions of the narrowness of mind, the parochial attitudes, the lack of opportunity, or just the dullness, that can accompany small town existence. Cass Robbins becomes poetic when discussing his old farm cottage between Kakanui and Moeraki, but he ends up leaving his haven of one acre with the view

of the sea to take a job with greater responsibilities in Dunedin. "`I'm quite looking forward to the greater challenge of the city,'" he declares to his real estate agent (Divided 122). Thus in "Cass Robbins" and elsewhere, Marshall provides a spectrum of viewpoints in relation to his characteristic physical geography.

Marshall's interpretation of how the short story can work renders the genre congenial to the kind of social world and the kind of people he depicts. As Austin M. Wright observes, the shortness of the form confers an intensity upon the level of detail: "In general, the shorter the work, the more prominent the details. Words and images, as well as characters and events, stand out more vividly than they would in a larger context" (120). Wright further suggests that attention to the parts of a story or a poem implies "the arresting of notice at every significant point" (120). For Marshall, the attention to detail brought about by the brevity of the genre helps to depict the New Zealand landscape in realistic terms. And again, conciseness allows the prose to acquire the symbolic weight associated with poetry. Thus the landscape may also function as a trope, representing natural abundance and beauty, and even a state of purity and innocence. In the right context, single words can radiate a variety of meanings.

Like Mansfield's epiphanic moments, Marshall's epiphanies provide a revelation, but they also typically deny the character complete understanding. Dominic Head observes that in the modern short story, the significant moment in the narrative may be a point where different impulses converge and conflict (110). However, Head contends that at this point, "there is usually no simple `solution' to the ambiguities of the characterization, but rather a denial of a solution" (110). Marshall's characters tend to be confronted by a revelation

which either differs from their expectations, or is beyond their grasp of understanding. As a result, the epiphanies are frequently followed by a character's sense of disillusionment or display of frustration. In "The Day Hemingway Died," Mrs. Ransumeen's response to the realization that she has a lazy and defiant husband, not enough money, and tenants demanding more heat, is ineffectual and even languid: "The situation was beyond her response. She was struggling with a crisis the significance of which didn't provide her with any greater means to confront it. Smashing eggs and crying were the only outlets she could think of" (Divided 130).

Whereas Head might see the ambiguity surrounding Mrs. Ransumeen's epiphany as the trademark of the modern condition, Marshall's fiction implies that the character's confusion, and even her obtuseness in grasping the meaning of what has been revealed to her, are the product of the New Zealand environment. The story suggests that Mrs. Ransumeen's lack of acuity in perceiving the world around her--Hemingway's death does not register with her--has some basis in the provincial and marginalized life she leads. Wright suggests that an epiphany that generates ambiguous meaning produces an "effect of incompleteness requiring the reader to look back, recalculate, and reconsider, so as to satisfy the expectation of wholeness that he has brought to the story" (121). Wright explains that the very lack of coherence and clarity "forces us to seek a unifying principle subtle enough to bring the details into a single compass" (121). In the case of Mrs. Ransumeen, the reader may wonder how geography, economics, education, gender, and New Zealand culture itself, inform this character's immediate behaviour and her general disposition.

While the reader may seek a unifying principle, ambiguity nonetheless surrounds

many of the core issues that Marshall's stories expose. This is partly owing to his preference for stories that have less to do with plot mechanisms than with conjuring something intangible like the mood and rhythm of a place. Marshall comments: "often what I'm trying to get across in a story isn't so much an explicit message as a mood, a sense of life. Almost a sort of fragrance of experience rather than experience itself" (Interview 64). Interestingly, this statement could also apply to Mansfield and to Munro. By extension, Marshall's endings are also characterized by openness and irresolution, just as Mansfield's and Munro's are. To be clear, short stories can accommodate any kind of ending that the author can produce--closed and highly determined, open and ambiguous, or some version in between. Critics, however, suggest that because of the imminence of the end in the short story genre, the style of the ending itself takes on prominence and expressive possibilities. In Marshall's case, the kinds of ambiguous and open endings he favours can be meaningfully linked to the way he allows the focus of the story to expand outwards and take on greater dimension than what the initial scope would suggest.

"Effigies of Family Christmas" takes place during the course of one Christmas day in rural New Zealand, as three grown sons gather at their parents' farm to celebrate the holiday. David, the favourite son, lives with his wife Deirdre and their child near his parents. David has followed in his father's path and become a farmer, and, in addition to working his own land, he has recently assumed responsibility for the maintenance of his parent's farm. Meredith, unmarried, lives in Auckland, and travels to his parents' home with his brother, Alun, along with Alun's wife, Margaret, and their two children.

While there is much happiness on the occasion of the family coming together, the

third-person narrator registers that there is also tension since the brothers initially feel awkward with each other. David, for instance, thinks his brother Meredith "lives too far away, and has forgotten what things were like. That he absorbs new things into the pattern of the old" (Divided 57). More specifically, David finds Meredith guilty of forgetting aspects of the farm's history, like when the open hayshed was built or what improvements have been made, facts which David remembers perfectly. But it is Alun who is the focus of an especially strong rebuke from his mother for accepting a job promotion that will take him even farther away from the family--to Sydney. His mother's censure first expresses itself during dinner when Alun's wife reveals that he bought her a new car for Christmas. As the narrator explains, the mother is "angry for some time afterwards" because "She wants no glimpse of a way of life that is not her own (58), and she is "determined [Alun] shall not outgrow the old relationships" (58). The mother's bitter dismissal of lofty ideas--Alun's job in Sydney, a car for his wife, talk of a sauna bath in the house--is her response to the "threat to old values and established patterns" (63). Marshall makes it clear that the mother's pride is not just a form of personal insecurity, but encompasses a genuinely protective attitude towards keeping the closeness of the family, the farm, and New Zealand, intact. At the table she spitefully tells Alun, "You were always difficult to please, . . . Maybe Sydney will please you if your own country doesn't" (59).

After dinner, the mother raises the issue of Alun's job in Sydney once more. She tells him, "Your father and I hoped that you'd be happy in Auckland. . . . I thought at least you might have considered your father. I thought your own country would satisfy you" (64). In this sentence she again reiterates that father and country, family and nation, are

inextricably linked. She also reveals a dominant theme in Marshall's fiction, the fear that a life in New Zealand is insufficient. Alun explains that it has not been an easy decision, but that the job opportunity is too great to refuse. And indeed throughout the story Alun shows tremendous affection for the farm and its landscape, the physical remembrances of his roots. When he and Meredith first arrive and look over their father's land to the sea, the narrator assures the reader that their silence is meaningful: "The brothers feel no need to comment on what they see, for superimposed upon it is their common experience. They have long before made any communication that mattered with this landscape" (56).

Alun initially interprets his mother's anger as being part of a classic mother-son dynamic in which the mother "must punish a son who can succeed without her" (59). During the Christmas meal, when the mother expresses a resentment towards city workers, the narrator cues the reader to approach her sympathetically, explaining that "Mother hasn't been educated to expect two sides to every situation; and the lifetime here hasn't suggested it" (63). But by the end of the visit, Alun is not interested in understanding where his mother's viewpoint comes from. When it comes time for his family and Meredith to leave, David accompanies them along the road to the first turn-off. There Alun announces that he may have had his last Christmas here, not because Australia is so far away, but because he has found their mother too difficult to deal with: "'Mum's getting worse. All this compulsive manipulation of other people. We seem to have lost patience with each other. It's difficult for Margaret [my wife] too'" (65). David explains that that is why he has accompanied his brothers this far: "'Not Margaret, but mum, and what she's been trying to tell you both all day, and couldn't. The more difficult it was, the angrier she got'" (65).

What exactly the mother has been struggling with is the news that their father is going blind, and will be completely blind in only a matter of time. David concludes: "`There's nothing can be done they say; nothing can be done"' (65).

As an epiphany, the revelation of the father's impending blindness is complex in its implications. Blindness provides the name for the father's condition, and it provides an explanation for their mother's anxious mood. But blindness also functions as a metaphor for the way in which the mother and sons have been looking at each other's lives. And in terms of Alun especially, the epiphany reveals his own myopia in interpreting his mother's concern over his move to Australia as the product of a provincial and narrow mindset. In this way the epiphany allows the reader to place her bitterness in a fuller context, and thus in a more sympathetic light. This revelation shifts the narrative from a focus on Alun's frustration with his mother to a consideration of the validity of her concerns, and also places new emphasis on the father's condition. Instead of uniting all the different threads of the story, the epiphany serves to highlight and encompass narrative strains that were previously obscured. At a point where another story might be striving for resolution and closure, Marshall's story opens up and expands outwards, gesturing towards stories which exist--like the father's--but which have yet to be expressed. Thomas A. Gullason considers that flexibility in a story is owing to the narrative's ability to work "simultaneously on several levels and in several directions" ("What Makes a 'Great' Short Story Great?" 72): Marshall's story is dynamic in this way, gesturing towards a variety of issues and themes which surround the core narrative.

The characters' responses to this development are instructive to the reader. Meredith

immediately suggests that they should go back down to their parents, but David counsels otherwise: "`It'll only upset them both. Dad won't talk about it, even to me. Like everything else it's left to Mum. And this time she can't do it. For blindness she can't find a beginning'" (66). The narrator adds that "David doesn't find it easy himself. So little is words; so much is feeling" (66). Thus on David's advice, Alun and Meredith do not "go back," but decide it is more sensitive to write to their parents when they get home. However, the notion of returning to the parents, of going back to them with this knowledge of the father's blindness, is a real possibility for the reader, if not for the sons. The language of the scene provides a clue as to how one might go back, figuratively, and accommodate this new dimension into the structure of the story.

The narrator's comment that "So little is words; so much is feeling" explains the family's inability to talk about an emotional topic, but it also suggests a critical aspect of Marshall's aesthetic and a potential resource of the short story form, one where meaning is suggested as opposed to asserted. Critics postulate that one of the key characteristics of the short story is that the brevity and intensity of the genre can become manifest in the tendency to leave significant matters to inference. Hilary Siebert, for example, writes about the way the discourse of the genre encourages its readers to "move from a world in which meaning is spelled out and documented to one in which meaning is felt and inferred" (37). Siebert argues that, epistemologically, this movement takes the reader "from a world which is knowable . . . to a world which, though verbally mediated, is seemingly `beyond words,' perceived, like a poem, through suggestive connections of meaning" (37). I do not wish to suggest that the father's blindness in "Effigies of Family Christmas" can be discerned

through inference, but rather that his importance to the overall meaning of the story is only signified at the end, and even then is constituted through "suggestive connections of meaning" (Siebert 37).

The father symbolizes a traditional, rural way of life, but up until the end of the story, his character appears as part of the background, overshadowed by his wife and sons, and even by his brother Llewelyn. Details of the father's life are sprinkled throughout the narrative, but they lack context and seem vague. For instance, the boys conclude that glasses and hats don't suit their father, and the narrator then muses,

> [The father] has greater idiosyncrasies; with half a life of another way, and not even a letter since his parents died. Uncle Llewelyn can join in tacit reminiscence. Nothing is regretted it seems, but something sacrified nevertheless for the new life. (61)

In this same context, the narrator refers to the constitution of Welshmen and to the father's "celtic heart," signifying that the father himself is Welsh. Such details, combined with the Welsh names, the allusion to "half a life of another way," and to sacrifices made for the "new life," indicate that the father, along with his brother Llewelyn, immigrated to New Zealand from Wales. Norman Friedman's contention that because of its brevity, a short story binds us more closely to each sentence, is entirely relevant in this reading, as individual words gesture to larger areas of meaning (27). Marshall avoids the blunt instrument of explicitness, and instead allows the subtle reference to a "new life" to connote something of the circumstances in which the father chose to come to New Zealand, and to suggest that a hope for change, betterment, and prosperity informed his decision. Those two

words imply that there is a whole other story that might have been told about this man; the discussion of his blindness at the very end of this one brings both him and what he symbolizes into sharp focus, broadening the scope of the narrative by making his perspective more conspicuous. With this new prominence, the allusions to the father's commitment to building a "new life" can be meaningfully connected to his quiet pride at the abundance of food that graces the Christmas table. Mother comments, "`All our own, as your father says,'" and the narrator adds, "His father's smile refuses credit for what he has achieved, and what he hasn't said" (58).

The father does not say much, and he certainly does not openly express his thoughts on Alun's move so far away from the farm. Instead, as meaning accrues to his character, he becomes a radiating symbol of a rural way of life that is unpretentious and honest, built around the solid tenets of family and hard work. The father sought opportunity in New Zealand to continue a traditional life under better circumstances. But his blindness symbolizes that this kind of life is waning and in these circumstances it is not surprising that Alun seeks a radically different life in Australia. The multiple perspectives within the story engage each other such that the mother's perspective is countered by Alun's, which, in turn, is contextualized by the father's. David's perspective and Uncle Llewelyn's also contribute to the dialectic. The title, "Effigies of Family Christmas," nicely hints at the plurality of perspectives and images that the Christmas gathering generates.

The multiple viewpoints relate to two other significant characteristics of Marshall's writing, irresolution at the end, and a complementary openness surrounding the narrative's core issues. At the conclusion of "Effigies of Family Christmas," Meredith and Alun remain

poised at the turn-off, paralyzed by the news David has told them. They are stalled by uncertainty, uncertainty about their father's prognosis, and about their mother's ability to cope with him. Their equivocation about whether to go back to their parents implies that they are also unsure about their roles as sons, and what responsibility they should assume towards their parents. The reader can imagine that the question of going versus staying reproduces a major dilemma each son faced in the past, in their respective decisions to leave the family and the farm and to move to Auckland. The relevance of such a debate for the members of this family is established earlier in the story when David tells Alun that, "Sometimes I feel I'd like a change myself. Living and dying where you were born isn't so wonderful a prospect" (61). Alun and Meredith made a different decision, but the story nonetheless remains ambivalent about their choice, as the the final line insists on the aching permanence of their connection to their roots: "The wind blows in from the sea as ever; and the seagulls cry our lives away on those long New Zealand beaches" (66).

In the immediate sense, the story reveals the happenings of a family Christmas. But the narrative gestures towards other themes: capturing a moment in New Zealand's history which witnesses a transition from a rural society to an urban one; depicting how a family copes with such a demographic shift; and exploring the family's more intimate trials of separation, change, and loss. The relations between fathers and sons, mothers and sons, as well as between brothers, also emerge as significant elements within the story. In Marshall's hands, the story balances a depiction of a specific, particular occasion, and an evocation of larger, general experiences. Gullason argues that characters and themes are reinforced and heightened in the short story "by the cyclical, spiraling, and advancing structure of the work;

and by a variety of motifs and images that echo and reecho as musical counterpoint" ("Revelation and Evolution" 348). In the same article, Gullason suggests that these generic elements reveal the "art of ricochet" (353), a term which points to the form's ability to expand and broaden, and to reverberate with meanings. Marshall's story produces a similar effect: it begins as a story of one family Christmas, yet it is marked by the exposure of different viewpoints, by shifts in its moral centre, and by these turns the story encompasses many other issues related to New Zealand life. It is true of the stories of Malouf, Munro, and Marshall especially that the form develops and expands in ways that the initial, ostensible subject does not suggest. This approach seems significant in the context of their depiction of marginalized or provincial communities. Culture does not typically define itself in the places these authors explore. Yet the complexity of the narrative form stresses the complexity of the characters' lives and of the communities in which they live.

"Mr. Van Gogh" is thematically linked to "Effigies of Family Christmas" in its exploration of the effects of change in a rural community. Specifically, the story examines how the decision to go forward with the expansion of a bridge clashes with the values of one of the town's inhabitants, Mr. Van Gogh. The first person narrator, the son of a town parson, indicates that Mr. Van Gogh is different from the other townspeople, and that he is treated like an oddity as a result. With his war pension to support himself, Mr. Van Gogh lives in an unremarkable wooden bungalow beside the bridge. He never lets anyone in his house and he rarely socializes with others, except when he comes to town on Sunday afternoons to "ask if there were any coloured bottles to carry on the work of Mr. Vincent Van Gogh" (Divided 46). As his name suggests, he is obsessed by the life and work of the great artist,

and, if permitted, he could stand by a back door and talk about the work of Van Gogh until the "tears ran down his face" (46). Like his namesake, he is an artist himself and while he used to paint in oils, the cost of the paint forced him to switch to working with glass:

> No-one saw any of his art work, but sometimes when he came round on Sundays, he'd have a set of drinking glasses made out of wine bottles, or an ash tray to sell made out of a vinegar flagon. My father was surprised that they were no better than any other do it yourself product. (47)

Despite the fact that Mr. Van Gogh is clean, clean-shaven, and not particularly odd looking, most of the townspeople view him as a loner, a freak, someone to mock. When Mr. Souness, the narrator's neighbour, has relatives visiting from Auckland, he encourages Mr. Van Gogh to talk about his passion, "as a local turn to entertain visitors" (46). Mr. Souness goads Mr. Van Gogh into a state of agitation by questioning whether the Dutch artist really had talent; the narrator observes that "Mr. Van Gogh never realized that there was no interest, only cruelty, behind such questions" (46). For both Mr. Souness and his Auckland visitors, Mr. Van Gogh conforms to their expectations of the kind of character one might find in a small community--a living example of eccentric, quaint, local colour.

The narrator and his family recognize that Mr. Van Gogh is special, and that he certainly does not deserve the callous and insensitive treatment he often receives:

> My father said that Mr. Van Gogh's only problem was that he'd made a commitment to something which other people couldn't understand. My father had a good deal of fellow-feeling for Mr. Van Gogh in some ways. Mr. Van Gogh would've been all right if his obsession had been with politics

or horse-racing. He wouldn't have been a crack-pot then. (48)

Mr. Van Gogh's ardent and evangelical preaching about the genius of Van Gogh reinforces his characterization as a Christ-like prophet or visionary. The diction and imagery used to describe him support this connection: standing before a laughing audience, his arms are "outstretched like a cross, and talking all the more urgently" (46). His work habits are described as fervent: "Mr. Van Gogh worked as though the day of judgement was upon him" (47). And when an ambulance attendant first sees Mr. Van Gogh's stained glass art work, he is amazed, and utters the prophetic words, "`Christ Almighty'" (50). The narrator's father, as a priest, understands the concept of devoting one's life to a particular belief. Comments by townspeople that the parson needs to find something to do for the six days of the week that he has free suggest that he, like Mr. Van Gogh, has suffered from a lack of appreciation from others about his own religious calling. The father's identification with Mr. Van Gogh is thus reinforced by the empathy he feels towards someone whose beliefs--whether artistic or religious--are not respected by others.

The young narrator, whether as a result of his father's influence or owing to his own sensitivity, reveals strong insight into Mr. Van Gogh. He notes that his "humility was complete on anything but art. He was submissive even to the least deserving. On art though he would have argued with Lucifer, for it was his necessity and his power. It was what he was" (48). While the narrator appreciates this devotion, he realizes that other people in town simply didn't understand (48). Mr. Van Gogh might have gone on being a familiar target of the town's mockery were it not for the Council's decision to expand the bridge beside his house into two lanes. He was told that his house had to be demolished to accommodate the

development, but he ignored the request to move and steadfastly refused to respond to the efforts of the Council or the Ministry of Works to relocate him.

Mr. Souness, a man who symbolizes the narrowness of mind that exists in the town, felt the "`old bugger was holding up the democratic wishes of the town'" and he looked forward to some "final confrontation" to resolve the matter (49). The Council pleaded with the narrator's father to try to "explain the business" to Mr. Van Gogh; the parson said he would speak with him, but that he wasn't sure "he could justify it" (49). As it turns out, Mr. Van Gogh is unable to protest much longer; he becomes ill, presumably from a heart attack, and is admitted to the intensive care unit at the hospital.

The narrator and his father are the first people called to his aid and they find him lying on his back in the hallway of his house. While they attend to him and call an ambulance, neither can ignore the spectacle that the inside of his home reveals:

> Except for the floor, all the surfaces of the passage and lounge were the glass inlays of a Van Gogh vision. . . . The glass interior of Mr. Van Gogh's home was an interplay of light and colour that flamed in green, and yellow, and Prussian blue, in the evening sun across the river bank. Some of the great paintings were there: Red Vineyard, Little Pear Tree, View of Arles with Irises, each reproduced with tireless, faithful hues one way or another. (49-50)

The narrator concedes that this stunning and beautiful vision "bore no more relation to the dross of glasses and ash trays that Mr. Van Gogh brought round on Sundays, than the husk of the chrysalis to the risen butterfly" (50). Yet in the end the entire house is

demolished; Mr. Van Gogh, sick and infirm, is incapable of stopping it, there are not any funds to preserve it, and there isn't much interest in keeping something only made of glass anyway--a town ruffian has already smashed a lot of the pictures. The desire for the wider bridge is far stronger than any thoughts concerning Mr. Van Gogh's home. Standing with his father to witness the demolition, the narrator notes that "The house collapsed like an old elephant in the drought, surrounded by so many enemies" (51). He comments to his father, "`All the time Mr. Van Gogh spent. . . . All that colour; all that glass'" (51).

The first line of the story tells the reader that "When he went into hospital our newspapers said that Mr. Van Gogh's name was Frank Reprieve Wilcox, and that was the first time I'd ever heard the name. But I knew him well enough" (46). The narrator and his family, of all the people in the town, knew Mr. Van Gogh the best, and best understood his passion for art. Yet even they are shocked to find that his artistic expression took such an awesome and spectacular form. The narrator's mother had suspected that Mr. Van Gogh did not let anyone in his house because it was filthy: she said she could "imagine the squalor of it behind the blanket. An old man living alone like that she said" (49). While the father and son better appreciated Mr. Van Gogh's artistic inclinations, neither one of them thought he was especially talented or creative. The narrator and his father learn a great deal more about this man when his artwork is revealed.

But the story suggests that the narrator learns even more about the townspeople with whom he lives as a result of observing their treatment of Mr. Van Gogh and his house. Mr. Van Gogh does choose to live a solitary life. But Marshall implies that his ostracism and alienation are also imposed by small-town attitudes where familiarity and conformity are

celebrated, and difference and individuality are condemned. In particular, Mr. Van Gogh's fellow townspeople seem too narrow-minded and too illiberal to appreciate an artist and his art. The narrator makes it clear that when Mr. Van Gogh talks about "the religous symbolism of Van Gogh's painting at Arles, his genius in colour symbolism," (46) he does not connect with his listeners. Bridges repair gaps, but in this story the debate surrounding how the bridge will affect its closest inhabitant creates a chasm that does not close by the end of the story. Questions emerge about the level of tolerance and acceptance in this provincial town, as well as the stress on conformity and convention, that remain unanswered. One can surmise that the townspeople can so readily demolish Mr. Van Gogh's home and his art because they see both as pure spectacle.

Although Peter Carey's "American Dreams" is in many ways a very different story than this one, it too exposes a small town artist who goes unappreciated, and whose art gets perverted. Both stories offer a portrait of provincial life, and it is telling that in both drawings, artists, art, and local culture go undervalued. Marshall's townspeople are so eager for an expanded bridge, and Carey's so keen to lure American tourists, that neither group values what is indigenous. In both stories there is the implication that these communities are susceptible to preferring what is foreign, American, and modern to what is local, and especially susceptible to denigrating local art as a result of that value system. In "Mr. Van Gogh," there is the further complication that the local artist reproduces a Dutch artist as part of his aesthetic. Marshall invites the reader to consider whether Mr. Van Gogh's adaptation, translation, and reproduction of another artist's work affects the originality of his final designs.

"Valley Day" is focussed on examining an even more subtle change in values and attitudes in one part of rural New Zealand. The story captures the Sunday activities of a minister and his son, Brian, as they drive through the `valley' so that the minister can provide services to two communities that are not large enough to warrant the appointment of permanent clergy. Marshall offers a vivid portrait of the rituals and traditions that are observed by the parishioners of the region on this day. Interestingly, his depiction of the customs and practices observed by the valley people, especially in relation to the reception and treatment of a visiting minister, takes up material and themes familiar in Munro's work, in a story like "A Real Life" from her collection Open Secrets. In such a story, Munro, like Marshall, explores the large and complex question of what constitutes a life by examining the details of the local experience.

The minister and his son travel to the little church in Hepburn and carry on from there to hold a service in the Sutherlands' house. The third person narrator explains that Hepburn "was a district rather than a settlement" (Divided 214): "The cemetery was the largest piece of civic real estate, and the greatest gathering of population that could be mustered in one place" (214). Along with its small scale, the lingering presence of the past is felt acutely in this region, especially within the church:

> Even such a small church maintained its fragrance of old coats and old prayers, or repeated varnish and supplication, and insects as tenants with a life-cycle of their own. The air was heavy with patterns of the past: shapes almost visible, sounds brimming audible. An accumulated human presence . . . . (214)

The day itself is steeped in ritual, including the prescribed order of service, prayers, sermon, and hymn singing; the custom of the minister standing at the doorway to greet and talk with the adults as they exit the church; and the tradition of one of the families having the minister and his son for lunch afterwards. Even the talk during this meal is predictable in its focus on local affairs. Invited to the Jenkins' home, the minister inquires about which families came to farm the land first, which was the first European family to come to the valley, and who has recently moved away, or passed on. When the minister and his son depart the luncheon and resume their travels, the father remains caught up in reminiscences, wistfully telling his son, "`I was born in country like this'" (219). He comments: "`It's awkward country to farm. . . . It looks better than it is. . . . They tried to make it all dairy country, but it didn't work'" (219).

While the church literally contains the odours and shapes of the past, the churchgoers also seem to dwell on, and in, an earlier time. The careful observing of certain social rituals and traditions, as well as the discussion about the initial settlers, the war, and those who have died suggest that their present is constituted by actively preserving the past. In this context, Marshall offers Brian as a counterpoint to this retrospective mode. As an adolescent, Brian represents a younger generation and a different perspective. In the story his consciousness mediates between how the descendants of the settlers see their lives, dwelling on past hopes, and how he perceives them, focussing on the present.

While his father conducts the service, Brian waits outside the church, and he feels a sense of privilege at being alone and isolated from those inside:

> He felt a tremor almost of wonder, but not wonder, a sense of significance

> and presence that comes to the young, and yet is neither questioned by them nor given any name. All the people of that place seemed shut in there singing, and he alone outside in the valley. (215)

During the service Brian makes a pile out of pine needles and stands on it, "as king of his pine needle heap" (216). Later in the day, his feelings of invincibility and self-sufficiency are reflected in his plan to live in a pine tree on the Jenkins' property: "There would be a hut in his pine, and a rope ladder which could be drawn up so that boars and bulls would be powerless below. Tinned food and bottles to collect the rain" (219).

The narrator notes that amongst the families gathered for the service at the Sutherlands' house, there is a "social ease amongst them, arisen from a closeness of lifestyle, proximity, and religion" (219). From young Brian's perspective, the news that one of the families' cousins is Catholic thus stirs him with interest: "There was a mystery and power in catholicism he thought; a dimension beyond the homespun non-conformism that he knew from the inside. Surely there was some additional and superstitious resource with which to enrich life" (220). But Brian is also interested to overhear that the cousin is "`Absolutely riddled with cancer'" (220). When Brian meets the cousin outside the Sutherlands' home while the service is taking place, the man's appearance is grim. He is wearing carpet slippers, a green woollen jersey--"despite the heat" (220)--and "he was almost bald, with just a rim of coarse, red hair, like the pine needles the boy had heaped up in the morning" (220). The man starts to cry spontaneously and his unchecked emotionalism suggests to Brian that "He didn't seem interested in maintaining an adult dignity any more" (221). Listening to some of the prayers being recited inside the house,

the cousin tells Brian that "These things are at the end of my life . . . and the beginning of yours. I wonder if they seem any different for that" (221).

The cousin's statement is unclear: what does he refer to when he speaks of `things' at the end of his life? Is he referring to his sense of religious difference, to the appreciation of the religious prayers and supplications, or to the customs of his family, serving cake and watercress sandwiches after the service? Despite the uncertainty surrounding his specific meaning, his musing acknowledges his closeness to death. Brian has been fascinated and emboldened by the more lurid stories told to him during the day; how Mr. Lascelle lost an arm in the war, how Mrs. Patchett was charged and killed by a bull, how a gravestone near the church reads "Called Home." But the cousin's cancer and intimation of mortality shake Brian's sense of youthful selfhood and thwart his confidence in his invicibility. Notably, Brian's pine needles that he had heaped up in the morning, initially a symbol of his youthful power, become a symbol of the man's decline as they are used as a simile to describe the man's diminished rim of coarse, red hair. The story's rush of haunting images at the end, culminating with the "grand, poppy-red bull cantering with its head down from the top of the valley towards them all" (222), clearly originate from Brian's consciousness and indicate the nightmarish quality he has projected onto the valley.

Brian's father refers to their tour of the valley as "The Big Kick," as if it is a day of fun, carefree adventure. But part of what Brian experiences during the day is an intimation of death, a hint of the settler's disappointment, and a sense of the region's paralysis and quiet decline. Like so many of Marshall's stories, this one generates layers of meaning through indirect means. Indeed, the casual allusions to the initial settlers, the subtle reference to the

failures met in dairy farming, and the recurring intimations of death, create dissonance with the idyllic pastoral scene and ask the reader to look beyond the ease of the social gatherings at the church and at the Sutherlands' home to explore a source for such darkness. As one of the worshippers leaves the Hepburn church, he asks the minister about the poem he read during the sermon. The minister replies that he wrote it, and the man seems pleased: "`Is that so. I thought it a fine poem of our own country. I'd like some day to have a copy of it'" (217). The man's statement conveys the sense that he takes pride in having a poem reflect something of his own experience. But his satisfaction can be contrasted with Brian's devastation at realizing that the same valley that inspires poetry and contains pine needles, tractors, and pleasant church services also contains cancer, amputees, and tombstones. While Brian's recognition of these elements constitutes part of his maturation, the reader's recognition of these elements similarly prevents any naive idealization of the settler experience, or of rural life.

"Valley Day" does not have a tidy ending. Brian's catalogue of frightening images are all drawn from the past and stress his mediation between the way he lives now and the way the valley people lived then. But the ending does not suggest any clear meaning surrounding the settlement experience in the valley, or Brian's experience of the valley on this day, and this is part of the subtlety and complexity of Marshall's writing. The endings of all of the Marshall stories I have discussed are enigmatic in their refusal to proclaim explicit themes of meanings. Moreover, the endings sound a note of ambiguity and uncertainty that reiterates the openness of the entire narratives.

"A Part of Life" is the title of a story in Marshall's Coming Home in the Dark.

While the story is complex and fascinating, the title alone is interesting because it suggests some of the salient features of Marshall's writing. As "Effigies of Family Christmas," "Mr. Van Gogh," and "Valley Day" demonstrate, Marshall explores the people and the issues that take root in provincial New Zealand, but capturing or cataloguing the entirety of rural experience is not the way he engages in that task. Instead he focuses on detailing certain aspects of character, select moments in a character's existence, and chosen scenes from a character's evolving day. His selectivity insists on the incompleteness of his representations of New Zealand life, and this very partiality highlights the existence of a plurality of lives, a plurality of interests, that constitute "part of" New Zealand identity and culture. Marshall's stories offer a glimpse into "a part of" the dynamics and concerns of life in New Zealand. Yet with their stress on openness, ambiguity, irresolution, and uncertainty, the stories hint that there are other stories that may be told about these people and places, and that may be told about this culture.

Chapter Six: Alice Munro

Alice Munro's commitment to working within the short story genre is steadfast: from her first book Dance of the Happy Shades in 1968 to the recent publication of The Love of a Good Woman (1998), she has published nine collections of short stories. Lives of Girls and Women (1971) is the only book Munro published as an episodic novel, and since that time she has offered the view that "the most attractive kind of writing of all is just the single story. It satisfies me the way nothing else does" (Interview with Geoff Hancock 190). Yet despite her predisposition towards the genre, she also reveals that for years she tried to convince herself that she had a novel in her working material: "I would take these ideas I had and bloat them up and I would start writing them and they would go all—they would just fall. . . . So it took me a long time to reconcile myself to being a short-story writer" (Interview with Geoff Hancock 190).

Such initial reluctance to embrace the genre is evident in her response to readers who ask her why she prefers to write short stories over novels. In the "Introduction" to her Selected Stories Munro explains that

> I did not 'choose' to write short stories. I hoped to write novels. When you are responsible for running a house and taking care of small children, particularly in the days before disposable diapers or ubiquitous automatic washing machines, it's hard to arrange for large chunks of time. . . . You're better to stick with something you can keep in mind and hope to do in a few weeks, or a couple of months at most. . . . I took to writing in frantic spurts,

> juggling my life around until I could get a story done, then catching up on other responsibilities. So I got in the habit of writing short stories. (x)

Munro adds that, "In later years my short stories haven't been so short. They've grown longer, and in a way more disjointed and demanding and peculiar. I didn't choose for that to happen, either. The only choice I make is to write about what interests me in a way that interests me" (Selected x).

One of the things that clearly fascinates Munro is the geographical territory of small-town southwestern Ontario. Indeed she confesses that "The reason I write so often about the country to the east of Lake Huron is just that I love it" (Selected x). Munro grew up in Wingham, Ontario, and lived in Clinton, Ontario most of the last two decades; the landscape she depicts, with her many references to the lake, the farms, the flat fields, the swamps, and the unpredictable weather systems, is thus familiar territory (Selected xi). While towns like Jubilee, Hanratty, Carstairs, and Walley figure prominently in Munro's stories as fictional places recognizably set in these parts, she does set stories in other locations. But as Coral Ann Howells observes, even though Munro's stories travel "outside" to Toronto and Vancouver, and more recently take excursions to Australia, Scotland, and Albania, "her work is situated within a long tradition of Canadian small-town fiction where anywhere else is outside and alien . . ." (2).

In Munro's stories, characters are constantly trying to find a place for themselves, to figure out how they fit into their environments, and how to assimilate themselves to foreign ones. In their struggles towards self-definition, they frequently negotiate between oppositional realms, between here and there, inside and outside, and between the familiar

and the foreign. In "The Beggar Maid," Rose becomes ever more conscious of her working-class background and lower social status when she leaves Hanratty to attend university and subsequently meets the wealthy and refined Patrick. "'We come from two different worlds,'" Rose says to him (Who 75); her exposure to him and to his "world" has the effect of destroying the "naturalness, the taken-for-granted background, of home" (Who 67). And in "The Jack Randa Hotel," Gail travels all the way to Brisbane, Australia in pursuit of her former partner, Will, and his new love interest, Sandy, to discover the "real scene that was hidden from her" back home in Walley, Ontario (Open 168). In these stories, as in so many others, the characters struggle to connect disparate realms, to uncover worlds once hidden from them, and to assimilate different strains of their own identities.

Thinking back to the work of the Australian author David Malouf, readers may recall that one of his major preoccupations lies in exploring the relationship between oppositional realms, and specifically between the Old World and the New World, between the colonial past and the postcolonial present. His young characters sense that the settlement of Australia, generations ago, affects and defines the values, beliefs, and views that give form to their present situations. While Malouf's handling of these kinds of themes and issues places greater stress on the settler-society context from which they emerge, both authors explore the possibility of bringing unity and connection to dichotomous elements.

While settings and locations can transcend the literal, Munro's realistic detailing of a particular countryside means that she must respond to being labelled a regional writer, a title she interprets as having a perjorative connotation. In an interview with Geoff Hancock, she makes the point that "I don't think the setting matters at all. A lot of people think I'm a

regional writer. And I use the region where I grew up a lot. But I don't have any ideas of writing to show the kind of things that happen in a certain place. These things happen and the place is part of it. But in a way it's incidental" (200).

She offers another kind of defence of her material when she counters the suggestion that her focus on this region imposes certain limitations on her fiction, such as restricting the depth of its meaning: "When I write about something happening in this setting, I don't think that I'm choosing to be confined. Quite the opposite. I don't think I'm writing just about this life. I hope to be writing about and through it" (Selected xi).

My approach to Munro's short stories takes root from her own statement that she only tries to write about what interests her and to do so in a way that interests her. Her reference to content and form leads me to examine a thematic area that recurs in her work, and to explore the way she writes about and handles this material. One of Munro's preoccupations lies in examining the lives of characters who live in small towns. I am interested in certain of those stories wherein Munro investigates the meaning of a character's life, and asks attending questions such as how one constructs a life, how one defines a life, and how one evaluates a life. The story "A Real Life" from the collection Open Secrets provides an example of the way Munro handles such issues, offering a direct exploration of the terms that constitute an identity.

Munro plays with different points of view as the story urges a reconsideration of the standards by which a life is judged and then, subtly, a reconsideration of the assumptions and rationale that inform those standards. Munro's interpretation of the capacities of the short story genre allows her to expand and complicate the scope of the life she examines,

and the fictional world she constructs. Her storytelling methods generate a plurality of meanings, as well as multiple and shifting perspectives. In this narrative in particular, ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy surround the core issues and themes. While the story has a plot and things happen in it, it is in fact difficult to summarize what exactly the story is about [see Munro, Selected xiii].

Munro herself can be ambiguous when trying to pin down the meaning of her stories; she comments that "I think there should be a queer bright moment . . . in every story, and somehow that is what the story is about" (Moons xv). She also admits that she only determines what the story is "by working around the different ways of telling it. . . . Generally speaking, these don't seem to be very straightforward ways. But I think they're necessary" (Munro, Selected x). "A Real Life" exhibits the elusive, complex, and dynamic qualities associated with Munro's fiction, and with her interpretation of the short story genre. Notably, Flannery O'Connor reiterates Munro's sense that a story cannot be reduced to a simple theme or phrase. O'Connor observes that

> When you can state the theme of a story, when you can separate it from the story itself, then you can be sure the story is not a very good one. The meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it. A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate. (96)

I also analyze those stories of Munro's that revolve around the representation of a very specific kind of life--the settlement of southwestern Ontario and the life of the pioneer.

A sense of history generally pervades Munro's writing; retrospection, reflection, review, and a rewriting of the past figure in her stories as central acts. But readers may encounter an historical perspective more directly as stories frequently contain specific references to the settler background that conditions the characters' present lives. Such a background is especially relevant to the rural communities of southwestern Ontario that Munro likes to depict since the area was populated early by English, Irish, and Scottish settlers who were willing to clear and farm the land. In "Friend of My Youth," for example, the pertinence of settlement history is reiterated by the narrator's discussion of the Cameronians, a strict religious group with its origins in seventeenth-century Scotland, and one which has descendant members residing in southwestern Ontario at the time in which the story is set. In this context, Munro sketches the outline of a cultural profile of some of the settlers who came to the region to make a life for themselves, equipped with only their faith, self-reliance, pride, and hard work as their tools. Such a reference also adds another layer of meaning to the story. Munro has her characters question what their lives mean. At the same time, the reader is encouraged to think, often in a way that is unclear or unfamiliar to the characters themselves, of social cultural, and historical explanations for the characters' situations, values, and beliefs. While Munro does not overtly assert a comparison between the Cameronians and the characters in the present, the reader may nonetheless see a strong degree of "connection" between individual and group identities, between the present and the settler past.

Within Munro's body of work, "Chaddeleys and Flemings," "Meneseteung," and "A Wilderness Station" in particular demonstrate a sustained and direct focus on ancestral and

settler-society thematics. Howells identifies these three stories as ones which raise "wider issues of how to write about Canadian pioneer history . . ." (35) and she likewise categorizes these stories within a sub-genre of "pioneer narratives" (124). I see that in these three stories Munro examines the representation of the settler life and she also examines the way personal, familial, and local identity can be built upon the history (and fictions) of the past. Her exploration of the terms that constitute an identity or of the meaning of a real life take on a deep resonance within this context as the quest to define the self and to define a life converge upon the struggle to compose an account of one's ancestry and lineage. Once again, the stories suggest a connection between the individual and the ancestral identity. And the stories also suggest a correspondence between the dislocation that was part of the early settlement of a region and the characters' more modern uncertainties about their place in the town in which they live as dictated by gender, social, class, marital, and economic considerations. As in Katherine Mansfield's stories, the idea of settling into a place extends beyond the standard meaning of becoming dwellers to encompass the more speculative and philosophical idea of finding composure or clarity in establishing one's life.

Critically, Munro's stories also suggest a correspondence between content and form. As in "A Real Life," these stories challenge the model of a single, authoritative, master narrative (one epitomised by the standard of official history) and offer instead different ways of constructing a story with circuitousness, gaps, ruptures, ellipses, and indeterminacy inscribed into the narrative (Howells 141). I make connections between the capacities of the short story genre and Munro's handling of these themes and lives based on a reading of these stories, as well as a reading of one of Munro's more recent ones, "The Love of a Good

Woman." The relationship between the short story genre and the kind of society and people Munro's work reveals is also explored; it is a relationship based on the recognition that ambiguity, uncertainty, pluralism, and eclecticism are elements that exist on both the technical and thematic level.

My more general theory about Munro's experimentations with the short story and about her work is that she prefers openness, ambiguity, and irresolution surrounding core issues, the inclusion of multiple viewpoints and shifting perspectives, and the accommodation of varying shades of consciousness in the characters' and the narrator's abilities to perceive the motivations and biases behind expressed opinions and performed actions. Munro's stories also invite a plurality of interpretations in relation to a single plot event, about a single character, and even surrounding isolated tropes and figurative language. While Munro's style is unique, I have written about other authors in similar terms. In my reading and analysis of the work of Carey, Malouf, Mansfield, Marshall, and Gallant, I note that they, like Munro, generate openness and plurality on both the technical and thematic levels of their narratives, and that they prefer irresolution and ambiguity over closure and certitude. Moreover, in each case I argue that there is a correspondence between these technical aspects of their writing and the themes and issues they engage with, and I suggest that the openness is well fitted for the purpose of exploring the difficult issues they relate to a settler-society context. While they share common ground, each author offers a specific variation on this common theme and Munro is no exception.

"A Real Life" is the second story in Munro's Open Secrets, her eighth book, and focuses on the life of Dorrie Beck. Dorrie is unmarried and lived with her brother Albert

until his recent death; she now lives alone in the same farmhouse they once shared. The third person narrator describes Dorrie as "a big, firm woman with heavy legs, chestnut-brown hair, a broad bashful face, and dark freckles like dots of velvet," but includes the suggestive detail that "A man in the area had named a horse after her" (Open 54). Dorrie is indeed different than the other women in the community: she "had a remarkable strength for lugging furniture about" (53); she doesn't pay much attention to housecleaning or to her own dress and presentation; and she enjoys the unconventional pastime of shooting groundhogs and rabbits, and trapping muskrats. Dorrie's friend is astonished that Dorrie actually thrives on this activity: "Millicent knew that Dorrie did these things but she had thought she did them to get a little money. To hear her talk now, it would seem that she was truly fond of that life. The blackflies out already, the cold water over her boot tops, the drowned rats" (66). Together these traits make Dorrie an eccentric within the community: she is thought of as "a novelty" (64), "a Canadian wild woman" (64).

To Millicent and Muriel, Dorrie's closest friends, the most significant fact of Dorrie's life is that she is without a husband. Despite the suggestion that Millicent was only persuaded to marry her own husband Porter because he promised her "a bathroom within a year, plus a dining-room suite and a chesterfield and chairs" (53), Millicent advocates the inviolability of marriage: "'a wife is a wife. It's all well and good to have friends, but a marriage is a marriage,'" she says (59). And for Muriel, although single, "[g]etting married was something she talked about openly, jokingly, and plaintively" (57). Thus when Dorrie announces that she is forsaking a proposal of marriage she had unexpectedly received from a Mr. Speirs, the wealthy gentleman from overseas visiting the town's Anglican priest,

Millicent insists that she follow through with the ceremony. Dorrie tries to articulate her misgivings, saying simply, "'I can't leave ... I can't leave here'" (74). But Millicent counsels, "'Marriage takes you out of yourself and gives you a real life,'" (75) to which Dorrie responds, "'I have a life'" (75).

Munro's questioning of the cultural and social conventions (like marriage) that Millicent and Muriel believe in, of the way in which Dorrie's identity is constructed, and of the value given to Dorrie's life, constitute a line of inquiry that recurs in her work. In "Forgiveness in Families" from Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You, for example, Munro questions the notion that an identity can be found, as if it were lost or misplaced, or that a "real" life can be claimed, as if life were more meaningful and more profound than the sum of daily living. The character, Val, contemplates her dying mother's existence, and she thinks that all the little mundane rituals like going to work every day, grocery shopping, going to the library, drinking coffee "'don't seem that much like life, when you're doing them, they're just what you do, how you fill up your days, and you think all the time something is going to crack open, and you'll find yourself, then you'll find yourself in life. . . . Then you're dying . . . and what you've had is all there is . . .'" (Something 99). Among many questions, this story asks what components make up a life, and how life can be fully conceived, realized, experienced, and lived.

"The Peace of Utrecht" from Dance of the Happy Shades similarly offers speculation as to whether life can arbitrarily begin with an epiphany, or with some other momentous occasion. Two sisters, Maddy and Helen, struggle to escape their home-life, which is a difficult task given that their mother had been ill with the degenerative

Parkinson's disease and required constant care up until her recent death. Maddy went away to college first: "You give me four years, I'll give you four years, she said" (Dance 195). But Helen got married and moved 2500 miles away; consequently, when Maddy came back from college, she was obliged to assume full responsibilities at home, conducting a "ten-year's vigil" with their "Gothic Mother" (195). A few months after their mother's funeral, Helen finally makes the journey home to Jubilee to visit Maddy. Helen feels guilty for having gone away in the first place, and for having two children to show for it "while Maddy is alone and has nothing but [the] discouraging house" (195). To assuage her own misgivings, Helen urges Maddy in turn not to feel guilty for finally committing their mother to a hospital for the last two months of her life. Maddy confesses, "'I couldn't go on. . . I wanted my life" (210). To which Helen responds, "'Take your life, Maddy. Take it,'" and she counsels her to go away from Jubilee (210). "'Yes I will,' Maddy said. 'Yes I will. . . . But why can't I, Helen? Why can't I?'" (210).

Maddy's plaintive question echoes the language circulating throughout "A Real Life" in its clear articulation of the desire to find a life--and in her case to break free of her imprisoning role as her mother's permanent caretaker and to release her own subjectivity. But it also contains the possibility that Maddy, "after all this time," may be unable to make this move (195). Even Helen, once home, is destabilised as her carefully constructed adult identity strains under the weight of assuming the roles of sister, daughter, and niece once more (Howells 20). In this story, as in many others, Munro explores the problems female characters confront in defining a life for themselves beyond the dictates of gender, family obligations, and social expectations. Maddy experiences a paralysis which in its symbolism

is not unlike her mother's physical condition and not unlike Dorrie's psychological one, one which prevents her from seeing herself outside of her house, outside Jubilee, and outside of the life defined for her by these structures. Munro asks the reader to consider why Maddy cannot conceive of taking hold of a different kind of life for herself. But she also asks the reader to note what kind of model of a "real" life is held up to Maddy by herself, by her sister, and by the townspeople of Jubilee as being more liberated, more complete, more satisfying, and more attainable than the one she already leads.

Munro's open modes of inquiry surrounding what it means to have a life are well suited to a genre that permits irresolution and uncertainty. Frank Davey's insistence that Canadian stories demand a pluralistic and eclectic understanding of the short story genre as opposed to a unified and autotelic one is thus directly relevant to an interpretation of Munro's aesthetic. For example, the title and key phrase of the story I wish to focus on here--"A Real Life"--remains ambiguous and so too does an answer to the related question about what signifies "a real life." The ambiguity is framed by the opposition between Millicent's conviction that "`Marriage takes you out of yourself and gives you a real life,'" and Dorrie's belief that she has a "life" without being married (Open 75). Muriel's rash marriage to a Christian minister with whom she appears to have nothing in common is another path for the reader to contemplate, providing an example of "a real life" constituted by marriage, but more emphatically by compromise.

Much of the complexity of the story is owing to the number of viewpoints expressed as the narrator continually shifts from Dorrie's, to Millicent's, to Muriel's perspective. There is also an absence of any one authoritative judgement as to whose life or what kind of life is

indeed most "real". Dorrie's, Millicent's, and Muriel's lives are all different from one another, constituted by different choices and conditioned by different values, and Munro resists claiming that any one of the three should stand as the ideal. Munro pluralizes "life" to lives to recognize more than one ultimate principle by which the characters define themselves. This plurality corresponds to the multiple effects achieved through the tropes. Throughout the story explicit meanings for "real," "life," "here," and "there" are denied to the reader and as a result the narrative gestures through the power of these metaphors to issues of representation, feminism, and postcolonialism. For example, the fact that Dorrie is a woman is as relevant to the meaning of her "life" as the fact that she lives in a provincial, countrified town. Moreover, her characterization as a marginalized figure is as much owing to her unwillingness to abide by patriarchal dictates, like the obligation to keep a tidy house and the steadfast desire to get married, as it is to her disregard for the customs of small town society. The story is open on these technical and interpretative levels, and this openness not only provides a nice resonance with the title given to the entire collection, Open Secrets, but also connects a quality of Munro's aesthetic to a characteristic of the genre.

Dorrie's view of her own situation is plainly articulated in her assertion that she has "a life" (75). In conversation with Mr. Speirs she mentions that she once thought of leaving her home to go trapping up north: "I thought I could live in a cabin and trap all winter. But I had my brother, I couldn't leave my brother. And I know it here" (67). Her reluctance to go away in this instance is filled with implications about her sensitivity to her brother, her competence at taking care of him and herself, and the pleasure she takes in what is familiar: the spring water courses, the system of creeks she follows, the townspeople, the seasons, the

customs. Later, when Dorrie explains to Millicent that she doesn't want to leave "here" to go marry Mr. Speirs and live on his property in Australia, Millicent understands "here" to be an empty signifier.

> [Millicent] believed what she had said, telling Dorrie that this was how she could have a life. And what did Dorrie mean by `here'? If she meant that she would be homesick, let her be! Homesickness was never anything you couldn't get over. Millicent was not going to pay any attention to `here.' Nobody had any business living a life out `here' if they had been offered what Dorrie had. (76)

But Millicent's opinion is contextualized by the glimpses we get into her own life. We are told that she and Porter "had not had much of a wedding - they had just gone to the rectory, deciding to put the money saved into furniture" (71). While practical, this lack of celebration characterizes her attitude to other aspects of married life. For example, she sees both attending the church of Porter's denomination and having any sexual contact with Porter at his discretion as the duties and obligations of a wife. These views correspond to her unquestioning acceptance of the convention of marriage in the first place. Her dilemma is not whether she will marry, but determining which of her three boyfriends would make a passable husband. Millicent's sense that Dorrie and Albert lived a "poor, somewhat feckless life" (52) is thus conditioned by her own notion of what constitutes a real life, one involving marriage and children, and the cultivation of social acceptance and some degree of social prestige as well.

If Millicent is aware of other people's opinions of Dorrie as "not quite a joke" (69),

or "a little unhinged" (54), and of Dorrie's pending marriage as "a freakish event, mildly scandalous, possibly a hoax" (69-70), she is also acutely aware that she herself has been relegated to the meagre status of a farmer's wife in the social hierarchy of the town. The narrator explains:

> Muriel Snow had not been Millicent's first choice for best friend. In the early days of her marriage she had set her sights high. Mrs. Lawyer Nesbitt. Mrs. Dr. Finnegan. Mrs. Doud. They let her take on a donkey's load of work in the Women's Auxiliary at the church, but they never asked her to their tea parties. She was never inside their houses, unless it was to a meeting. Porter was a farmer. No matter how many farms he owned, a farmer. She should have known. (56-57)

Millicent is subjugated to a marginalized position. In this light, her pity for Dorrie's life can be seen as part of an effort to justify her own social position to herself. Millicent's notion of "here" is thus tied up with class-consciousness and social protocol, and with an acceptance of patriarchal and provincial values, and is informed by her own disappointments in married life, and her own insecurities. Ajay Heble reflects that Munro's stories often "demonstrate the impossibility of objective or `innocent' representation: all representation, as Munro shows us, is motivated, conditioned by particular subject-positions, and determined by various flows and desire" (181). This kind of complexity emerges in Millicent's urging of Dorrie to seize upon Mr. Speirs' marriage proposal. Her advice reflects her own desire to abandon the fate in which she is mired for a freedom that her fanciful vision of their future together captures: "him and Dorrie mounted high, mounted on elephants, panoplied, borne

cumbrously forward, adventuring. A vision" (78).

After Millicent convinces Dorrie to go ahead with the wedding, Munro indicates that this decision was "At greater cost to herself, Millicent was thinking--greater cost than she had understood" (77). The sentence does not clearly identify which "she", Dorrie or Millicent, endures "a greater cost" that was not "understood" (77) and the ambiguity of the personal pronoun epitomizes the openness of the question as to what constitutes "a real life." Who has lost something in Dorrie's marriage and moving away to Australia, Dorrie or Millicent? The ending of the story only frustrates any attempt to assess whether Dorrie's notion of life "here," or Millicent's vision of life "there," is any more "real." We learn that Dorrie substitutes her love of southwestern Ontario soil for that of Queensland, occupying great property and growing sugarcane, pineapples, cotton, peanuts, and tobacco (78). The description of her life fits the profile of a frontier woman and pioneer--"She rode horses, in spite of her size, and had learned to fly an airplane. She took up some travels of her own in that part of the world. She had shot crocodiles. She died in the fifties, in New Zealand, climbing up to look at a volcano" (78)--which in the context of a story about "real" lives prompts consideration of whether her life sounds like a cliche, or totally original.

Millicent takes credit from everybody for getting Dorrie married: "She felt that she was the creator of a life--more effectively, in Dorrie's case, than in the case of her own children. She had created happiness, or something close. She forgot the way she had wept, not knowing why" (78). The qualifications that she created "something close" to happiness and that she "had wept" get expressed more clearly as feelings of real anxiety Millicent has about whether she was right to have developed a "stratagem" to push Dorrie away (78).

Remembering Dorrie's custom of gathering the walnuts up off the ground and counting them each fall, Millicent, in the story's final paragraph, considers "how Dorrie must have expected to keep it up until she died" (80): "A life of customs, of seasons. The walnuts drop, the muskrats swim in the creek. Dorrie must have believed that she was meant to live so, in her reasonable eccentricity, her manageable loneliness. . . . But I would not allow that, thinks Millicent" (80). The narrator echoes the sentiment, but credits Millicent with greater authority, stating, "She would not allow it, and surely she was right" (80). The narrator's conviction is still only tentative, however, as the word "surely" signals a disconcerting shift in tone from certainty to probable belief.

Ambiguity remains the only definite status in the narrative. Even Muriel's decision to forsake the "signature" features of her identity (57)--her dress, her hair style, her makeup, her perfume, her music, her smoking, drinking, and swearing--in order to marry a Christian minister must be considered in light of her own admission that "A lot of my former life turns my stomach just to think about it" (79). Wearing any unflattering colour of clothing and without any colouring in her graying hair, the unfashioned Muriel prompts another consideration of the meaning of real--as in genuine, unaffected, untouched, natural--in "a real life."

The short story form, with its capacity for ambiguous meaning in its tropes, for irresolution and uncertainty surrounding its core issues, and for its ability to represent multiple and eclectic points of view, seems particularly well suited to the issues of this story. These aspects of narrative form also relate to the kind of fictional world Munro reveals, one in which characters are firmly rooted in a particular reality, yet in which other characters'

views continually expand and challenge the basis of that existence. The resulting impression is one of pluralism and eclecticism, to echo Davey's terms, where there is no single, unquestionable representation of "a real life," but rather a depiction of lives which are constituted by a variety of individual circumstances. The manner in which Munro describes Dorrie's married life with Wilkie Speirs in Australia highlights this correspondence between the openness of the form and the context.

Whereas the narrative dwells on the details of Dorrie's unmarried life, a scant paragraph describes her life in Australia and even then the prose is fashioned like a list, enumerating the activities Dorrie engages in. On the one hand it rings true to Dorrie's character that she would enjoy such physical recreation as shooting crocodiles, climbing volcanoes, and managing various crops. On the other hand, the description is brief, impersonal, and less specific to Dorrie than to a stereotype of what anyone adventuresome might do while in rural Queensland. The lack of concrete detail, the lack of any personal testimony from Dorrie, and the generality of the description, all reflect the gap now present between Dorrie's life and Millicent's. Millicent is separated from Dorrie not only because of the physical distance between Ontario and Queensland, but also because of the limitations a reader may sense in her ability to know a place and a life that is so foreign to her own, where the conventions for living do not revolve around a well set Bavarian cream or having the Anglican priest for dinner (60-61). Millicent can no longer judge Dorrie based on her own standards and that means that her description of Dorrie's life can only be, by necessity, the vague and impersonal report that it is.

The dynamism of the story comes from its being primarily rooted in the customs and

values of the world inhabited by Millicent, and yet continually gesturing out to other locales, to other domains, to other lives. Millicent has definite opinions about the place of a husband, children, entertaining, religion, and even sex and alcohol in her life. But the narrative achieves greater complexity and ambiguity than Millicent's views alone contain because it moves from the centre of Millicent's world out, and from the centre of other spheres back towards Millicent's world. Porter tells a silly story about an Irishman who eventually immigrates to Canada; Dorrie mentions the hardships endured by the settlers on the Oregon Trail; and Muriel talks about all the unhappily married men in the community. As fleeting as the references may be, they connote lives that are unfamiliar and diverse, and this scope in the representation of a life serves to problematize any opinion that is posited as central, absolute, and "real."

Mr. Speirs functions in this regard as well. His written correspondence with Dorrie and their married life together in Australia exist outside the realms of Millicent's knowledge and that exteriority only highlights the fact that Millicent's perspective is shaped by the conditions of her life, and the fact that there are other realities shaped by different rules and conventions elsewhere. In different ways both Dorrie and Muriel transform themselves, and the changes made to their lives share the common element of sheer unexpectedness. But if Millicent is surprised by the turn of events, the reader is thoughtful, for Munro asks us to consider what assumptions Millicent, Dorrie, and Muriel all have about the way "a real life" can be made.

In Reverberations: Explorations in the Canadian Short Story, Simone Vauthier asserts that "The strength of many Canadian writers lies in their speaking out of more than

one locale and one self," an observation that Munro's aesthetic supports entirely (5). There is an awareness throughout the story that there are other perspectives besides those directly expressed by the characters and the narrator, and that there are as many lives out "there" as there are right "here." Beyond the strength of Canadian writers, David Malouf and Owen Marshall similarly develop complexity and multiplicity within their narratives by including a plurality of voices, exploring various identities, and highlighting the existence of other perspectives and different realities, all within single stories. Like Munro, they place their characters in settings that are very specifically circumscribed and then expand and challenge the scope of their characters viewpoints, and worlds. But Munro, perhaps to an even greater degree than Malouf and Marshall, amplifies the breadth of representation of her characters' lives by alluding to what lies outside the known and ordinary realm. Her stories ask what exists at the corners, on the margins, underneath the surface appearance, and in the background and recesses, of characters' lives.

In "Open Secrets," the character Maureen considers that she sometimes catches a glimpse of something other than "what she thinks of as her normal life":

> She might catch herself sitting on stone steps eating cherries and watching a man coming up the steps carrying a parcel. She has never seen those steps or that man, but for an instant they seem to be part of another life that she is leading, a life just as long and complicated and strange and dull as this one. And she isn't surprised. It's just a fluke, a speedily corrected error, that she knows about both lives at the same time. (Open 158)

Munro invites her readers to grasp those moments, like Maureen does, such that we might

perceive another life, contiguous yet different to the one immediately before us on the page, or that we might see a clearly defined life take on different contours and shapes, or unexpected possibilities. It is in this same spirit that Munro asks that we might see how the lives of ancestors, or of earlier settlers, relate to the lives of characters in the present.

In "Chaddeley's and Flemings: Connection" from The Moons of Jupiter, the emphasis on connections to one's settler-ancestors allows Vauthier's comment that a Canadian story speaks out of "more than one locale and one self" to take on another, more specific, connotation (5). The names Chaddeley and Fleming refer to the first person narrator, Janet's, maternal lineage from England and to her paternal lineage from Scotland, respectively. Thus the title immediately establishes that the story evolves from at least two importance spheres of influence, and from at least two important locations from the settler past. As in this case, a story can appeal to a name, a detail, an incident, a character, or an anecdote that invokes the social, cultural, or historical circumstances of early Canadian settlement. And such an invocation enlarges the circumference and the depth of the narrative such that it speaks out of multiple locations and with multiple voices.

The narrator acknowledges that she carries something of her family relations around in her (Moons 35). While this admission directly relates to the way she conceives of her self, it also relates to her storytelling methods in that the autobiographical story she relates also contains a story about her mother and father, her maternal and paternal aunts, her husband, Richard, and her ancestral relations in England. In this context, personal identity is built on the architecture of family history and local history, which in turn are built upon the foundation of settlement history (Howells 68). In Janet's case, the story she tells is

conditioned by other people's tales. In the related story, "Chaddeleys and Flemings: The Stone in the Field," Janet's father tells her how his grandfather's own two sons and his mother-in-law had died from cholera shortly after the family immigrated to the Huron Tract area in Ontario. The grandfather and his wife had to bury their loved ones in shrouds made out of lace curtains brought from the old country because, poor and struggling as they were to survive, they had nothing else suitable to use. Janet reflects that, "My father looked shy, as if he had given me a present, and said brusquely, `Well, that's the kind of a detail I thought might be interesting to you'" (Moons 32).

This scene is interesting to the reader as well because it provides a graphic example of how Janet's storytelling methods work. She accepts the gift of this insight from her father, and her narrative, like a palimpsest, includes not only this detail, but many similar ones that have been passed along in the form of official history, anecdote, snippets of conversation, and even gossip. The story she tells therefore contains a whole host of characters, reflects multiple voices and perspectives, encompasses many layers of meaning, canvases present and past temporal realms, and challenges, expands, and/or recasts visions of her own past, as well as different versions of family and settlement history.

The story begins as Janet recalls a summer visit paid by her four Chaddeley aunts, her mother's cousins, to Janet's family farm in Dalgleish, Ontario. Her memories of the visit exist alongside her thoughts in the present and she is therefore able to chronicle her shifts in perspective over time so that, as Howells indicates, "events are always being repositioned and re-evaluated" (69). Travelling all the way from Philadelphia, Des Moines, Winnipeg, and Edmonton respectively, the cousins are a formidable presence. Janet

describes them as "maiden ladies," women "girded into shapes whose firm curves and proud slopes had nothing to do with sex, everything to do with rights and power" (Moons 1). And to Janet, they did seem to have not only rights and powers, but a worldiness and an air of experience that exceeded the possibilities of her life in Dalgleish. She approves of their smoking, noting that "They made it a respectable luxury" even though in Dalgleish smoking was "a sign of possible loose morals" (3). She also assigns a sense of grandeur to the way they dress, indicating that they wore "getups"--silk jersey dresses, face powder, dry rouge, eau de cologne, and real or imitation tortoise-shell combs in their hair (2). The cousins inject the exotic into the household simply by using the American word 'pocketbook,' brewing American coffee, and bringing a five-pound box of chocolates. Their status as outsiders, as people living beyond the limits of Dalgleish, is crucial to Janet's perception of them. She states that "In the larger world, things had happened to them. Accidents, proposals, encounters with lunatics and enemies" (5). She explains further:

> Connection. That was what it was all about. The cousins were a show in themselves, but they also provided a connection. A connection with the real, and prodigal, and dangerous, world. They knew how to get on in it, they had made it take notice. They could command a classroom, a maternity ward, the public; they knew how to deal with taxi drivers and train conductors. (7)

The cousins derive much of their confidence from their background and specifically from their understanding of their grandfather's status before he immigrated to Canada. The cousins and Janet's mother know that one Joseph Ellington Chaddeley left England as a young man, and while they do not agree on the reasons for his immigration to Fork Mills,

Ontario, they cling to the belief that "whatever the details . . . there had been a great comedown, a dim catastrophe, and that beyond them, behind them, in England, lay lands and houses and ease and honor" (8). Thus Janet suggests that "The other connection [the cousins] provided, and my mother provided as well, was to England and history" (7).

England itself is held out by Janet's mother to be "all fresh and rural, ceremonious, civilized, eternally desirable" (10). And the connection in England to the grandfather is likewise romanticized, thought to be a noble and respectable one. Because of the grandfather's esteemed status, the narrator's mother and her cousins delight in telling stories about him. Apparently, the grandfather shamelessly quit work as a postal clerk in Fork Mills as soon as his children could support him, and he lost all his teeth. Despite these details about his life, the Chaddeley women impress upon young Janet that he was handsome and that he had the "air of a gentleman, was widely read, and full of rhetoric and self-esteem" (8). They do acknowledge that he was also an "old snob", a "pretentious old coot", a "leech on his children", and that he readily unleashed insults and scathing judgements against people whom he felt were of a lower class than himself (9). But as Janet notes, "telling these stories, laughing, they were billowing with pride themselves, they were crowing. They were proud of having such a grandfather. . . . They admired his invective . . . and his prideful behavior, which was lost on his neighbors, the democratic citizens of Canada" (9).

Janet claims not to understand the pleasure her mother and her cousins feel from being connected to someone so vain who claimed to be superior and who emphasized distinctions between people. She admits to being more strongly influenced by her

egalitarian, Scottish father: "I took the same tack," she observes (10). She also states that it was ultimately "not of much importance" to her, years later, to receive a letter from a member of the Chaddeley family in England who was seeking information to complete a family tree and in the process provided Janet with new information about the patriarch of the family (10). According to a marriage register, Joseph Ellington Chaddeley had been a butcher's apprentice, and he had married a servant by the name of Helen Rose Armour, in 1859.

The new information about the grandfather's background highlights the Chaddeley cousins' endeavour to construct a family history and family pedigree out of skeletal facts, and, moreover, out of much desire. Janet's mother and the cousins conjecture and ultimately create their own stories about the life of Joseph Chaddeley in England. In so doing they not only replace official history with their own, but they also create a meaningful connection for themselves to a life more privileged, civilized, and noble than what they posses in North America. Their desire for drama and their willingness to believe an assortment of theories about their grandfather's life--his privileged education at Oxford, the family estates in Canterbury, his connection to the Cholmondeley line, his prosperity and gentry status, his fatal gambling habit--tell more about their own lives than about his. They construct a fanciful and protective armour for themselves against reality, a response which may be familial given that Armour was their grandmother's maiden name.

Janet's story clarifies the romanticized and idealized vision her mother and the cousins had of their grandfather. But Janet's story also dramatizes her evolving understanding of the limitations and restrictions of her own perspective of the cousins, her

mother, and her childhood in Dalgleish. Janet's reaction to the revelation about her great-grandfather's past is instructive: "At one time I would have been shocked to discover this, and would hardly have believed it. At another, later, time, when I was dedicated to tearing away all false notions, all illusions, I would have been triumphant. By the time the revelation came I did not care, one way or the other" (10). Her ambivalence, her very ability to let opposite feelings coexist inside herself, is emblematic of her movement towards accepting the different strains of her inheritance, and also towards accepting the various elements that give form to her own identity. But she reveals that as much as she learned something about herself through this revelation, earlier she had had "her eyes opened to some other things, by the visit of Cousin Iris" (10). While the first section of "Connections" relates the aunts' visit to Dalgleish, the second section of the story features a visit that Cousin Iris, alone and retired from her job as a nurse, pays to Janet and her then husband Richard at their home in Vancouver. Cousin Winnifred has died, Janet's mother has become ill, and Janet herself has matured and changed. Perhaps most significantly, Janet's yearning for a connection to the cousins, to England, and to family history has dissipated.

The homonymic play between "eyes," "Iris," and "I" stresses the importance of how Janet perceives things during this visit, and specifically how she conceives of herself (her i-dentity) in relation to Cousin Iris and Iris' embodiment of the Chaddeleys' family lineage. The meaning of connection expands and takes on new connotations in this section of the narrative. In fact, instead of speaking of connections or of the way she relates to her family, Janet now speaks in a deprecatory manner of her "background," a word she adopts from her

husband, Richard: "Your background. A drop in his voice, a warning" (12). Richard's choice of diction signals his desire that Janet's upbringing in Dalgleish become obscure and recessed, that she put it quite literally behind her. Janet explains: "He wanted me amputated from that past which seemed to him such shabby baggage; he was on the lookout for signs that the amputation was not complete; and of course it wasn't" (13).

Janet reveals that Richard is a successful lawyer who comes from a wealthy and refined family. Together they own a home that reflects the vestiges of his propriety and her newly acquired, restrained good taste, complete with a rock garden and ornamental shrubs as part of the landscaping, and "elegant and dull" furnishings inside (14-15). While Richard considers it "vulgar" to discuss business and its attending successes within this domestic space (14), he is not subtle about showing his disdain towards his wife's having grown up under different--as in rural and poorer--circumstances: Janet reveals that "Richard always said the name of my native town as if it were a clot of something unpleasant, which he had to get out of his mouth" (11); that he was "stern about rural accents, having had so much trouble with mine" (12).

As Janet is narrating this story from a more mature perspective, she clearly signals that she no longer feels vulnerable to Richard's judgements. But she indicates that at the time of Cousin Iris' visit, she wanted Richard's approval: "I used to think that if I could produce one rich and well-behaved and important relative, Richard's attitude to me would change . . . I was not sure at all how Iris would serve, as a substitute" (12). When she is polishing the dessert forks and ironing the table napkins in preparation for Cousin Iris's visit, she wants to say to Richard "yes, and we had table napkins, even though the toilet was

in the basement and there was no running water until after the war" (12). She then checks herself and asks, "But surely none of this mattered to me, none of this nonsense about dessert forks? Was I, am I, the sort of person who thinks that to possess such objects is to have a civilized attitude to life? No, not at all; not exactly; yes and no. Yes and no" (12).

As the poet Molly Peacock notes, a question initiates a kind of quest. The root is from the Latin *quaerere*, to ask, to seek (100). And in the above passage, Janet openly asks a question concerning her own identity: "Was I, am I, the sort of person who thinks . . .?" (12) can be reformulated to ask what sort of person am I, and, more succinctly, who am I? Janet's answer to the question concerning her identity is not straightforward, but involves a quest into her past upon which the whole story about connections is predicated. Howells observes that Munro's narrative methods "have always encouraged a plurality of meanings as alternative worlds are positioned 'alongside' each other in the same geographical and fictional space . . ." (70). In this story, the focus on settler history adds another dimension to the story as Janet's questions concerning herself are overlaid by the questions concerning her ancestry, of which her great-grandfather's legacy is a crucial part. The aunts had said of their grandfather, "Just pride and vanity. That's the sum total of him" (9). But the cousins construct his life out of a projection of their own priorities in what makes a life meaningful, prideful, dramatic, and humorous, even. He is the sum total of what they make of him rather than what he really is. Janet's blatant equivocation surrounding the question of what kind of person she is--"Yes and no"--emblematizes the ambiguity, the ambivalence, and the uncertainty that surround her understanding of her own character. The story implies that she needs to figure out her connection to all these figures who circulate within her life story--her

great-grandfather, her aunts, her parents--as part of her larger struggle to determine who she is.

Janet longed for the visit with Aunt Iris to go well. She wanted "Cousin Iris to shine forth as a relative nobody need be ashamed of, and I wanted Richard and his money and our house to lift me forever, in Cousin Iris' eyes, out of the category of poor relation" (12). But she worries whether Cousin Iris "was too eager? Did she assume some proprietary family claim I no longer believed was justified?" (12). When Cousin Iris refuses a drink of sherry and proclaims instead that she would like a gin and tonic, "just like you folks," it is a sign that she desires to be thought of not as an old relation, but as an equal to Janet's new status (14). Janet also notices that Iris' "tone when she spoke of Dalgleish and my parents was condescending. I don't think she wanted to remind me of home, and put me in my place; I think she wanted to establish herself, to let me know that she belonged here, more than there" (15).

Readers will remember that the words "here" and "there" operate as central tropes in "A Real Life," and as in that story, Munro employs the words in "Connection" in a similarly allusive manner. The story does not provide any single, definitive referent for these terms. Instead they work as more ambiguous metaphors pointing towards the relevant location of family history, pedigree, class, money, and perspective in defining one's self. Janet claims that her mother was always looking back to Fork Mills where she went to high school with the cousins, or even further back to England, where her family connections lie. Her mother's indulgence in retrospection implies that she wants to distance herself from "here"--Dalgleish, poverty, a lower social standing, a severance from her roots, and the shame and

embarrassment of her circumstances. In a similar way, Janet realizes that she has to evaluate her life "here" with Richard against her life "there," which includes her "background" in Dalgleish with her family, the poverty, and the cousins.

With maturity comes perspective and Janet sees Cousin Iris in a more realistic light during this later visit. Janet observes that Iris' "lipstick, her bright teased hair, her iridescent dress and oversized brooch, her voice and conversation, were all part of a policy which was not a bad one: she was in favor of movement, noise, change, flashiness, hilarity, and courage. Fun" (16). Thus Janet no longer sees Iris as the worldly, sophisticated, and grand maiden lady she once idolized. Richard scrutinizes Cousin Iris as well during the visit, and after she departs, he declares, "'What a pathetic old tart'" (17), and he proceeds to criticize the pretentious things Iris had said, as well as point out the grammatical mistakes she made in her speaking. As a completely spontaneous response, Janet throws a pyrex pie-plate at his head; the plate misses, but a piece of lemon meringue pie catches the side of his face. In this dramatic act, one that significantly echoes the burlesque clowning of the cousins and Janet's mother, Janet implicitly passes judgement on Richard, Iris, and her connection to her family. As she says, she was amazed "that something people invariably thought funny in those instances should be so shocking a verdict in real life" (18). And it is a verdict. Janet tells the reader that she made a lemon meringue pie for Cousin Iris' visit because that is what her mother made when the cousins were coming. Richard, who wants Janet to be amputated from her past, now has a messy symbol of that connection stuck to his face.

In "The Albanian Virgin" (Open Secrets), the narrator observes that "Sometimes our connection is frayed, it is in danger, it seems lost" (127). Then the narrator poses a question:

"Wouldn't we rather have a destiny to submit to, then, something that claims us, anything, instead of such flimsy choices, arbitrary days" (127). Janet's connection to her family was not only frayed, it was unravelling. But even though Janet's response to Richard can be interpreted as a defence of her connection to Cousin Iris and to her background, she does not fully submit to a family destiny. Indeed, the scene is much more ambiguous and open in suggesting what kind of choice Janet has made. In throwing a pie at Richard she subverts her safe, conventional, restrictive role as Richard's wife and she steps into, instead, a different, yet less clearly defined space. Magdalene Redekop suggests that with "distance from the conscious cliché [of the pie in your face scene], we also gain a distance from the nostalgic yearning for unity and connection that permeates the story" (162-63). Putting aside the comfort and familiarity of Janet's clownish antics, the scene is disruptive because, like the shattered glass pie plate, it signals breakage and disintegration in a story that is all about connections and lineage. The story not only challenges the logic of a symbolic order that prescribes the union of man and a woman—it is implied that Janet and Richard eventually divorce—but it also challenges the logic of a narrative that is characterized by continuity, completeness, and closure (Redekop 163).

At the end of the story, Janet adopts the present tense when she recalls the sound of her aunts singing "Row, row, row your boat" as they would when they were going off to sleep during their summer visit to the farm. She thinks that "Life is transformed, by these voices, by these presences. . . . The mixture of voices and words is so complicated and varied it seems that such confusion, such jolly rivalry, will go on forever . . ." (18). The narrator's reference to the "transformed" "mixture" of voices, "varied" and "complicated,"

provides fitting language with which to describe Munro's depiction of the shifting, mixed, various, and complicated meanings that connections can take on. Connections, the story implies, can be definitive, unifying, and coherent. But they can also become provisional, discontinuous, and meaningless.

In the companion story to "Connection," "Chaddeleys and Flemings: The Stone in the Field," Janet discusses her paternal aunts and focuses on her disbelief that she is related to these austere, serious, barren women. Their behaviour conforms to their strict Scottish background such that "Work would be what filled their lives, not conversation; work would be what gave their days shape. . . . It would be something that could, that must, go on forever" (Moons 27). In this story the narrator comes to acknowledge that she cannot force connections between herself and these relations, nor can she impose neat conclusions on her story of their lives. "The Stone in the Field" thus ends with a resolutely open passage:

> Now I no longer believe that people's secrets are defined and communicable, or their feelings full-blown and easy to recognize.... Now, I can only say, my father's sisters scrubbed the floor with lye, they stooked the oats and milked the cows by hand.... That was their life. My mother's cousins behaved in another way; they dressed up and took pictures of each other; they sallied forth. However they behaved they are all dead. (35)

The narrator's statement, "That was their life," carries the weight of a final, authoritative pronouncement about the aunts' existence. Yet it defies this sense because the use of the ambiguous pronoun referent, "that," is too vague to denote meaningfully what the business of milking cows and scrubbing floors actually signifies. Unlike Millicent who sees

life as being bundled up in the idea of marriage and in the imperative of having "a real life," this narrator prefers to measure life by its quiet rhythms and movements, its day-to-day activities. This story highlights a central point Munro makes throughout her writing, which is that life is not a plot; rather, life unfolds and happens too incrementally to fit into a predictable arc.

Throughout the story Munro raises questions about how Janet can evaluate a life--Grandfather Chaddeley's, Cousin Iris', Janet's mother, even her own--as well as how Janet can assess various connnections--to Dalgleish, to England, to her relations, to her husband. However, as in "A Real Life," openness, ambiguity, and complexity surround these salient issues of the story. The temporal fluctuations between the settler past, the recent past, and the present; the inclusion of diverse viewpoints throughout the story; and the production of ambiguous and open meaning all reiterate the complexities involved in determining a real life. And the short story itself emerges as a form that can contain such a range of elements, that can give form and shape to such dynamic forces. As a genre, it ably captures the disjointed, the fragmented, the complicated, and the pluralistic qualities of Janet's "connections."

The first person narrator in "Meneseteung" from Friend of my Youth makes connections of another sort. Acting as a kind of literary historicist and speaking in the present tense, she recounts her efforts to trace the life of a nineteenth-century Canadian poetess by the name of Almeda Joynt Roth. Her investigations uncover various sources that provide biographical information about Almeda, and that also reveal the cultural assumptions regarding feminine behaviour, women's roles as daughters, wives, and

mothers, as well as the role of women as artists circulating during the late eighteen-hundreds in southwestern Ontario. This story maps out familiar Munro territory in that the author maintains her focus on questioning the cultural and social conventions that Almeda's society believes in. This is a society that places enormous importance on the sanctity of marriage, of the place of religion and the church in one's life, of duty to family, of civic-mindedness, and of social propriety. The story suggests that this is also a society that is so new and so fragile that its sense of itself, and its sense of its own culture, depends upon its male and female citizens conforming to the conventions expected of them: men are to work in an enterprising field, take an interest in the blossoming society, and to provide for their families; women are to be "partnered and fruitful" and assume a dutiful role within the home (Friend 59). With details abounding about life in the nineteenth-century, the story's core, as I read it, nevertheless revolves around a questioning of what constitutes a real life, and what establishes the basis of personal identity in a society that expresses firm dictates on the subject.

"Meneseteung" begins with the narrator listing the known facts about and the material evidence of Almeda's life. There is "Offerings," the book of poetry Almeda published in 1873; there is a photograph of the poet on the front cover of the book, taken in 1865; and there are her poems. The narrator describes and freely interprets these bits of evidence in turn. From the photograph, for example, she surmises that while Almeda is not a pretty girl, she is the sort of woman who may age well, who "probably won't get fat" (50). Noticing the poet's dress, the narrator comments, "It's the untrimmed, shapeless hat, something like a soft beret, that makes me see artistic intentions, or at least a shy and

stubborn eccentricity, in this young woman" (51). The narrator also quotes from the preface Almeda writes to her collection of poems, in which the poet explains that "From my earliest years I have delighted in verse and I have occupied myself . . . with many floundering efforts at its composition. . . . So I offer instead [of crochetwork or embroidery], as the product of my leisure hours, these rude posies, these ballads, couplets, reflections" (52). And of the poems themselves, the narrator notes that they mostly adopt the form of quatrains or couplets, follow a simple rhyme scheme of *abab* or *abcb*, and deal with traditional Canadian wilderness themes: "birds and wildflowers and snowstorms" (52).

The narrator also gains access to Almeda's life and to the life of her fellow inhabitants of this "raw, new place" (54) through the medium of the Vidette, the region's local newspaper. From its clippings and photographs of the time she observes that the town was "all bare, exposed, provisional-looking" (54). Aside from providing news, the Vidette also assumes the role of social observer and critic, commenting on people's behaviour, judging their actions, passing on bits of gossip, and offering up speculation: "This is the Vidette, full of shy jokes, innuendo, plain accusation that no newspaper would get away with today" (57). The Vidette takes it upon itself to wonder about Almeda, in particular, and the prospects of her marrying her next-door neighbour, Jarvis Poulter. As a Civil Magistrate, a churchman, and an employer with his own salt wells, a brickyard, and a limekiln, Jarvis is a man of enterprise and solid standing within the community; because he is a widower, he is also thought to be a suitable match for the unmarried Almeda. Thus the Vidette records that, *"Among the couples strolling home from church on a recent, sunny Sabbath morning we noted a certain salty gentleman and literary lady, not perhaps in their*

first youth but by no means blighted by the frosts of age. May we surmise?" (58). The narrator comments that "This kind of thing pops up in the Vidette all the time" (58).

Not only does the Vidette surmise about Almeda's marriage status, but the whole town engages in speculation as to whether Almeda will become engaged to Jarvis. The narrator's voice frequently shifts in tone and perspective to reflect the attitudes, expectations, and views of the Victorian culture of the time; under this guise, the narrator assures the reader that a marriage of this sort would be both highly desirable and valuable in a new and developing society. For the society clearly believes that marriage "forces [a man] to live with more ornament as well as sentiment, and it protects him, also, from the extremities of his own nature-from frigid parsimony or luxuriant sloth, from squalor, and from excessive sleeping or reading, drinking, smoking, or freethinking" (57). And marriage, for a woman like Almeda, is thought to be the cure to all her woes, including putting an end to inquiries as to why she was "passed over in her earlier, more marriageable years" (59). Thus "Everyone takes it for granted that Almeda Roth is thinking of Jarvis Poulter as a husband and would say yes if he asked her" (59). They take it for granted because they cannot fathom she would think otherwise. Just as the woodpiles, sheds, barns, and privies are an inseparable part of the rural landscape, marriage and children are, without question, an inviolable part of a woman's life.

Although unmarried, Almeda is still respectable and her status within the community is garnered and secured through the bit of money and the house that her father left her, and through her participation in feminine and domestic activities. Her penchant for reading and poetry raises eyebrows, although "it seemed more of a drawback, a barrier, an

obsession in the young girl than in the middle-aged woman, who needed something, after all, to fill her time (59). But any negativity associated with her artistic endeavours is offset by her civic mindedness in attending church regularly, helping clean the church, assisting friends when they wallpaper their houses, baking a cake for the Sunday school picnic, and making grape jelly to give as "Christmas presents, or offerings to the sick" (62).

Almeda for her part seems quite content with her life. She does not sleep as well as she would like to, and her fingers are "too clumsy for crochetwork" and embroidery is "beyond [her] skill" (51-52), but these are the only signs of restlessness or agitation in her. She does not even contradict the speculation that the Vidette works up about her marrying Jarvis Poulter: she thinks of it often and would say yes if he asked her to. But Almeda's outlook on her life, her poetry, and her place in this society change following a specific incident. Early one morning, Almeda finds the body of a woman lying near her backyard fence, on an area of her property that borders on the disreputable part of town around Pearl street. The woman is exposed: one of her breasts is showing, as is a bare haunch and leg. Recalling the sounds of people screaming and moaning from the back alley that she heard during the night, Almeda thinks the woman has been murdered. The narrator indicates that Almeda feels guilty, even responsible, for this woman's death, as she could have summoned help the previous evening when she heard her distressed screams. She takes action now. She summons Jarvis Poulter to the scene for assistance, and he ascertains that the woman is not dead, but only drunk and asleep.

The woman is covered in blood, vomit, and urine. And Almeda's physical response to her places such a similar emphasis on bodily fluids as to suggest some kind of symbiosis

between the two of them. At the scene, Almeda tastes bile at the back of her own throat, and she feels nauseated. Moreover, the moment Almeda takes leave of Jarvis Poulter and the woman, she rushes to her privy to relieve herself. It is at that moment that she realizes she is about to menstruate. The narrator later indicates that she is indeed "bleeding, her flow has started" (70-71) prompting a consideration of a connection between the woman's blood from her injuries and Almeda's bleeding from natural causes. Shaken by the morning's events, Almeda goes inside her home to compose herself. In time, the brief incident with the woman prompts Almeda to have an experience so dramatic as to constitute an epiphany. Sitting in her dining room and looking at the various coverings and surfaces around her, Almeda considers that there are "A lot of things to watch. For every one of these patterns, decorations seems charged with life, ready to move and flow and alter. Or possibly to explode. Almeda Roth's occupation throughout the day is to keep an eye on them. Not to prevent their alteration so much as to catch them at it-to understand it, to be part of it" (69). Picking up on the language of this very suggestive passage, one might say that the pattern of Almeda's life following this incident moves, flows, and alters in unexpected ways.

The experience of this day "begins to suggest words" (69) to Almeda, culminating in the poet's imagining a poem named "Meneseteung"—"one great poem that will contain everything" (70). The idea of an aesthetic vision predicated on inclusiveness is new to Almeda as the narrator had noted earlier that the countryside in Almeda's poems "actually takes diligence and determination to see" because "Some things had to be disregarded. Manure piles, of course, and boggy fields full of high, charred stumps, and great heaps of brush waiting for a good day for burning" (61). Almeda's new poetic vision is radical in the

scope and breadth of what it will contain:

> Stars and flowers and birds and trees and angels in the snow and dead children at twilight-that is not the half of it. You have to get in the obscene racket on Pearl Street and the polished toe of Jarvis Poulter's boot and the plucked-chicken haunch with its blue-black flower. Almeda is a long way now from human sympathies or fears or cozy household considerations. She doesn't think about what could be done for that woman or about keeping Jarvis Poulter's dinner warm. . . . (70)

Raised to have a disciplined and unspoiled mind, Almeda reveals that now nothing is excluded from her thoughts, except any ideas concerning her sense of civic responsibility towards the woman, and the old expectation of her marrying Jarvis Poulter. That the old customs seem to have been forgotten is emblematized in the state of the grape jelly Almeda was preparing as an offering to the sick; neglected, it spills from its cheesecloth and bucket onto the floor. Almeda displays a similar disregard towards Jarvis Poulter. He had offered to walk Almeda to church on this day, a clear sign, in the carefully choreographed exchanges between the sexes, of his interest in her as his wife. But Almeda pins a note to her door letting him know she is too unwell to attend church with him, an act which essentially signals her rejection of him as a husband.

The association between Almeda and the other woman strengthens when one considers that the beaten woman is "released" from the grasp of Jarvis Poulter and lets out something akin to Walt Whitman's "barbaric yawp" ("Song of Myself" 872) in her "openmouthed yowl, full of strength and what sounds like an anguished pleasure" (Friend

66). Almeda similarly releases herself from the dictates of marriage to the same man when she starts to compose her brand of vibrant poetry. Because I read Munro's "yowl" as a consciously constructed homonym of Whitman's "yawp," I cannot resist noting the suitablity of a passage from Whitman's "Song of Myself" as an expression of Almeda's poetic devices, devices which stress the reciprocal relationship between the poet and the unsanitized, unedited world around him or her: "And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them, / And such as it is to be of these more or less I am, / And of these one and all I weave the song of myself" (837).

"Song of Myself" offers a jubilant celebration of the poet's self-reflection and inward-looking perspective. Almeda's introspection relates to what is the poignant counterpart to this story. Almeda's radical and unique poetic vision, and her renewed enthusiasm for the creative act of writing, render her solitary and isolated in a community that stresses conformity to social convention. She is excited by her discovery of a whole new perspective on life, and yet she is essentially perceived by others as having lost a more desirable, more respectable life that she could have obtained by marrying Jarvis Poulter. There is little appreciation for her artistic endeavours in this society that believes she should be producing children, not poems. She dies, unmarried, in 1903 after catching a fatal cold from a "ramble in the Pearl Street bog."

The Vidette claims that in later years she *became "somewhat clouded"* in her mind, and her behaviour, *"in consequence somewhat rash and unusual. Her attention to decorum and to the care and adornment of person had suffered, to the degree that she had become, in the eyes of those unmindful of her former pride and daintiness, a familiar eccentric, or even,*

sadly, a figure of fun" (71). It is after reading this passage that one might hear a strong resonance between Vidette and vindictive. The Vidette does restore to Almeda something of her former respectability by recalling *"her labours in former days in the Sunday school, her dutiful care of her parents, her noble womanly nature, charitable concerns, and unfailing religious faith"* (71), thus reminding the reader of the standard of conduct by which her most recent behaviour as an artist is judged and found wanting.

There is a lot of judging of people's lives in a Munro story. Millicent and Muriel judge Dorrie's life, the Chaddeley aunts judge their grandfather's life, and Janet, in turn, judges theirs, as well as her own. Clearly Almeda's fellow townspeople make pronouncements on how she conducted herself. These stories carry the suggestion that rural societies tend to hold definite notions about what constitutes a real life. More specifically, it is implied that the communities dwell upon the adherence to convention and scrutinize the signs of non-conformism and free-thinking in their citizens' lives because they are anxious about preserving the stability and civility of their culture, precariously founded as it is upon the tenets of a younger, cruder, and therefore more vulnerable concept of society. In "Meneseteung," the narrator indicates that around the time of Almeda's life, the town was part of "A raw countryside just wrenched from the forest, but swarming with people" (61). And the narrator further notes that while "The town has taken root . . . it still has some of the look of an encampment" (54). Owen Marshall's story, "Mr. Van Gogh," suggests that a kind of collective insecurity about a social identity extends beyond Munro's fictionalized territory of southwestern Ontario all the way to New Zealand. As in Munro's story, the townspeople in Marshall's story feel threatened by the behaviour of one eccentric citizen, who is also an

artist. Partly, both authors suggest, a confrontation between an individual and a group, between a non-conformist and convention, can occur anywhere. But the stories also imply that the kind of anxiety that Almeda's society and Mr. Van Gogh's society exhibit flourishes in conditions that the settler-society situation sets up. Newness and a sense of impermanence can confer anxiety, insecurity, and uncertainty.

In "Meneseteung," the narrator observes that "So the Vidette runs on, copious and assured. Hardly a death goes undescribed, or a life unevaluated" (72). Indeed the Vidette evaluates Almeda's life, yet its assessment of her does not stand alone, as the narrator passes a different kind of judgement on her subject. She exposes the mechanics of the production of her own story about Almeda, revealing that she visited her graveyard in the hopes of finding any clues about Almeda's life and death, only to uncover the name "Meda" on her tombstone. Recalling that the name Meda appears in one of Almeda's poems, the narrator feels certain that it is the poet's childhood nickname.

> I thought there wasn't anybody alive in the world but me who would know this, who would make the connection. . . . But perhaps this isn't so. People are curious. . . . They will be driven to find things out, even trival things. They will put things together. You see them going around with notebooks, scraping the dirt off gravestones, reading microfilm, just in the hopes of seeing this trickle in time, making a connection, rescuing one thing from the rubbish. (73)

The full strength of the narrator's desire to produce a more continuous story about Almeda's life becomes evident when she concludes the narrative with the following disclaimer: "And

they may get it wrong, after all. I may have got it wrong. I don't know if [Almeda] ever took laudanum. Many ladies did. I don't know if she ever made grape jelly" (73).

If the newspaper clippings, the poems, and photographs provide an outline of Almeda's life, the narrator is clearly dedicated to filling in the gaps to produce a logical, coherent story based on their shape. But her efforts to complete the story in fact highlight the very incompleteness and provisional nature of it, shifting the narrative ground and opening up the story to questions about such things as the reliability of the narrator, the soundness of her reconstruction of Almeda's life, and the accuracy of her interpretation of the documentary evidence (the books, poems, photographs, gravestones) she refers to. Because this story involves reconstructing a particular historical time, it raises questions about the representation of the past given the contingencies that are built into any act of retrospection or reflection. But there is a further irony in the way Munro induces the reader into testing this fictional narrator's narrative for its verifiability, even though the story, as a story, insists on its status as invention.

The notion that Almeda might be drawn to poetry in nineteenth-century Southwestern Ontario actually has some foundation in historical fact. Margaret Atwood notes that "Under frontier and colonial conditions, poetry was the first literary form to appear in significant quantity and quality. . . perhaps because the imagination, confronted by geographical and cultural surroundings alien to it, begins with lyric description" (xiv). The narrator describes Pearl Street as "another story" (55). After being exposed to the vulgarities of Pearl Street, Almeda writes *another* kind of poetry, a kind that is no longer polite, sentimental, ordered, and domestic in its orientation, but rather bold, raw,

unrestrained, and wild. The story implies that this transformation better reflects Almeda's vision of the dynamic and complex world around her, a vision that ruptures and fragments the established world she encounters through the Vidette or a Jarvis Poulter. She sees a new, more flexible version of life and the open and ambiguous nature of the narrative only reiterates this sense of life possessing a "field of possibilities" (Eco 103).

In discussing characteristics of the Canadian short story, Atwood asserts that

> Canada shares with all of the New World ex-colonies, and with others such as Australia and New Zealand, the historically recent experience of a collision between a landscape and a language and a social history not at first indigenous to it, with each side altering the other. `The land was ours before we were the land's,' Robert Frost intoned, speaking of the American collision; but it's not the sort of statement a Canadian writer would be likely to make. For one thing the land—being vast, northern, and cold—is not as a whole nearly so possessible, imaginatively and otherwise. In relation to Canadian geography, Frost's confidence would appear misplaced. Is the land `ours' or its own? Are we the land's? Just what do we mean by `ours', and who anyway are `we,' multiple as we find ourselves? Just who really lives here, and what do we mean when we say `living here'? (xvi)

Atwood suggests that such questions are not far in the background of many Canadian short stories. In fact such questions about Canadian life, the way pioneers constitute a life in this country, and the basis for an identity are central to "Meneseteung." But Munro's handling of such questions defies expectation. Almeda is indeed devastated by

pioneer life in the nineteenth-century. But according to the narrator, she is not overwhelmed by the crudeness of the vast, barren Canadian landscape. Instead, she is crushed by the savagery of a newly founded society that values conformity in terms of values and behavior. The wilderness becomes her liberator and her refuge.

"A Wilderness Station" from Open Secrets reflects Munro's interest in working through many of the same thematic and technical issues that she handles in "A Real Life," "The Stone in the Field," and "Meneseteung," and they are the issues that can perhaps be best described by quoting one of Munro's own stories. In "Simon's Luck" from Who Do You Think You Are?, the narrator indicates that people watching a television series "trusted that they would be protected from predictable disasters, also from those shifts of emphasis that throw the story line open to question, the disarrangements which demand new judgements and solutions, and throw the windows open . . ." (Who 172-73). One of Munro's central aesthetic interests lies in confronting and examining precisely those "shifts of emphasis that throw the story line open to question," and the "disarrangements which demand new judgements and solutions" (172-73). My thesis argues that when Munro does so, she strengthens a correspondence, a resonance, between the form and content. That is, by stressing complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity, and plurality on the narrative level, she also makes a statement about and reflects something of the kind of society, the kind of people, and the kind of lives she depicts.

While many of the stories in Open Secrets contain transcripts of letters, "A Wilderness Station" is an epistolary short story, composed of eleven letters written over a hundred year period from 1852-1959, including one newspaper article from 1907 of a

pioneer's recollections (Howells 125). The epistolary form and the content of "A Wilderness Station" thus point to a literary antecedent like Frances Brooke's The History of Emily Montague which, on a different social level, chronicles the response of would-be immigrants to the New World through the medium of letters. In Munro's story, the letters combine to paint a portrait of life in the Canadian wilderness: the various authors collectively attest to the physical difficulty of clearing the bush and of building a log hut, the spiritual deprivations of such an under-populated and inhospitable landscape, and the mental anguish experienced by women pioneers, in particular, who were considered valuable only in their capacities to "cook and do for us and milk a cow" (Open 194). But these letters also offer multiple accounts of a death, or possibly a murder, that happened in rural Ontario in 1852 and it is the ambiguity surrounding the circumstances of this event that becomes central to the story.

In providing his recollections on his settlement to the Huron Tract area for the Argus newspaper, Mr. George Herron provides details of his brother, Simon's, death. According to George, early in 1852 he and Simon were chopping down trees in the farthest corner of their property when a branch fell on Simon's head, killing him instantly. The Reverend Walter McBain, the Minister of the Free Presbyterian Church of North Huron, writes to the Clerk of the Peace in Walley, and in his letter he tells this same story, offering his belief that the story is true, but warning the Clerk that Simon Herron's widow, Annie Herron, began to deteriorate in the state of her mind and spirit after this incident, and that she recently left for Walley Gaol to turn herself in for some unspecified crime. The Clerk responds to this letter, letting the minister know that Annie Herron did appear at the jail, and that she offered a

startlingly different version of the circumstances relating to her husband's death. According to Annie, she took lunch to the two brothers as they were clearing the bush, and when her husband became enraged at her because the preparation of his salt fish and oat-cakes was not to his liking, Annie threw a rock at his head, killing him. The Clerk adds yet another layer to this story when he offers his own opinion of the events narrated to him: "This is her tale," he writes, "and I do not believe it for a minute" (201).

The ambiguity surrounding Simon Herron's death intensifies when Annie Herron writes a secret letter from the jail to her old friend from the orphanage, Sadie Johnstone, wherein she reveals that it was actually George who killed Simon by striking the blow of an axe to Simon's head. In this letter, Annie implies that George was motivated to kill his brother because the latter inflicted physical violence on him, knocking him down, in the same way that he abused Annie herself. She also explains that she went to the jail to turn herself in because she was haunted by nightmares of George or Simon chasing her with an axe. In the Canadian wilderness, ironically, she finds safety and comfort in jail. Without this insight, speculation runs throughout the letters as the Minister, the Clerk of the Peace, and a local doctor all offer theories as to why Annie would confess to a murder that they believe never took place. They wonder whether remorse over unchristian behaviour towards her husband, madness, self-delusion, or a desire for self-importance brought on by reading fanciful books may be responsible for the mental state of this "self-styled murderess' (Open 206).

The epistolary form of this narrative means that there is no obviously coherent plot, and this lack highlights the existence of other ellipses and ruptures within the story. Indeed,

if one of the things that Janet learns in "The Stone in the Field: Connection" is that familial and narrative connections are provisional, this story insists, through its epistolary structure, that gaps, spaces, and omissions constitute part of the story's very composition. The letters are juxtaposed to one another without editorial comment or evaluation; there is neither an omniscient narrator nor the imposition of any overarching, authoritative judgement. The letters assume an equal value and precisely because one version of the events is not privileged over another, the story of Simon Herron's death takes on multiple accounts, and a plurality of perspectives.

Howells argues that this kind of complexity and dynamism are signature features of Munro's writing, where,

> Instead of depending on plots, her narratives depend on shifts from one point in time to another, from one point of view to another, covering and recovering the same ground from different angles. Such narratives do not annihilate differences or inconsistencies; they are full of disparities indicating different frames of reference—different interests of the tellers, different conditions of the telling—which render the truth indistinct and meaning indeterminate, like the direction of the story itself which is always shifting its ground. (87)

Howells' assessment supports my view that "A Wilderness Station," like so many of Munro's stories, is capacious and thereby generates a broad range of issues for the reader to contemplate. This story achieves even greater scope than the focus on the circumstances behind Simon's death would suggest, for just as there are multiple points of view about the

occurrence, each viewpoint points to a variety of other, substantial issues. Annie Herron's very survival in the Canadian wilderness constitutes a feminist reconsideration of the Canadian wilderness myth, one which traditionally focuses on the male's ability to conquer and dominate the wildness of the landscape. While her brother-in-law, George Herron, prospers because of his physical strength and his drive, Annie survives through her storytelling. True, her needlework is praised, but it is because she can weave a tale to suit her needs that she is able to escape the violence of her home, and secure a better place for herself in the jail. Moreover, with the subtle hints of the physical abuse Annie endured from her husband and the reference to the rape by two men of another female pioneer, the story implicitly asks whether men were as much a threat to the women's health as the harsh existence of life in the bush itself.

The story also exposes the various efforts to bring an orderly life to the wilderness by men who seek to clear their own plot of land, by the likes of Reverend McBain who wants to bring God's will and spirit to calm the foul "insolence" of early settlers, and by the Clerk of the Peace who wants to maintain the order of the law he has established in the "very fine new Gaol" (202). The story prompts a meditation on the kind of wildness that is denoted—external, spiritual, civic—by the term "wilderness station." The epistolary framework encodes a salient feature of Munro's aesthetic: just as some letters go unanswered, so too do answers surrounding these core issues remain open and ambiguous.

Moreover, the focus on the mystery surrounding Simon Herron's death camouflages the story's equal stress on establishing a suitable life, and on the struggles a woman like Annie faces in trying to create a life for herself in such crude circumstances. As an orphan,

Annie is supposed to feel grateful for having been married off to Simon Herron. But like Almeda Roth, Annie challenges the conventions of wifely submissions, and like Almeda, Annie relies on language and narrative, through her storytelling, as a means of escape from an intolerable life. It is interesting to note that both lives eventually become material for other women's stories, stories which ask the reader to consider what choices were available to female pioneers whose desires for a real life did not conform to convention. As a poet, Almeda is marginalized and thought to have gone insane, and Annie is described by Miss Mullen as a "character" (216), known for her unreliable tales. They are marginalized figures, and yet they are the focus of stories that explore diversity and plurality in the viewpoints expressed.

Talking about her approach to writing fiction around the time of the publication of Open Secrets, Munro comments that "It seems as if I want to get a lot of layers going. I want the story to have a lot of levels . . ." (Interview with Stephen Smith 24). She adds that "The older I get, the more I see things as having more than one explanation. I see the content of life as being many-layered. And in a way, nothing that happens really takes precedence over anything else that happens" (24). She admits to "circling back" from what may appear to be the initial focus of story, thus forcing the reader to take into account what else the story may be about (24).

In "A Wilderness Station," Miss Mullen, in writing to the Queen's University history professor, expresses contentment that a book on a local politician will "bring some attention to this part of the country—too often thought of as `deadly dull'" (216). In fact, the story of a possible murder in the backwoods of Ontario is anything but dull. It is full of

shifts in viewpoint, reversals in plot, and marked by uncertainty and ambiguity. In this regard, the story about a murder is equally a story about a woman's survival. "A Wilderness Station," like the other stories discussed, highlights the tendency for a Munro story to favour complexity and indeterminacy, a tendency she herself has explicitly acknowledged, commenting as early as 1984 that "The things I'm doing now are getting very open . . ." (Interview with Thomas E. Tausky 6).

In her latest collection of stories, The Love of a Good Woman, Munro exhibits even more interest in opening up the narrative to new and unexpected possibilities. This collection of stories is full of disquieting incidents, and each story reveals those "shifts of emphasis that throw the whole plot open to question" and "disarrangements" that force the reader to re-evaluate and rethink the narrative. Munro's preoccupation with exploring what exists beneath the surface appearance of things still persists and in "The Love of Good Woman," specifically, the story suggests that beneath the veneer of quiet, small town life lurk incidents of lechery, drunken abuse, wild jealously, and even murder.

At seventy-five pages and with five discrete sections including a preface, this story is the longest one Munro has published to date. In "Half a Grapefruit," the character Flo becomes enraged with a collection of poetry entitled Shorter Poems "because she opened it and found a poem that was five pages long" (Who 44). This little detail indicates that Munro is keenly aware of the expectations genres themselves can set up. In this case, "The Love of a Good Woman's" challenge to the definition of shortness in the short story offers evidence once again of Munro's experimentation and innovation with the form. Its lengthiness may also be interpreted as a function of Munro's desire to build multiple layers

and levels into the narrative: despite the single noun in the title, it is the story not just of one good woman and her love, but of two women, the dying Mrs. Quinn and her nurse, Enid. The narrative also contains portraits of many of the people who intersect with these women's lives in Walley, Ontario: the young boys who find the dead body of the town optometrist in the Peregrine River, Cece Ferns, Bud Salter, and Jimmy Box; the optometrist, Mr. Willens, and his wife; as well as Mrs. Quinn's husband, Rupert, and their two children, Lois and Sylvie.

In one especially self-referential passage in "Differently," the narrator indicates that the protagonist once took a creative-writing course during which the instructor told her: "Too many things. Too many things going on at the same time; also too many people. Think, he told her. What is the important thing? What do you want us to pay attention to?" (Friend 216). Munro for her part says she wants readers to pay attention to "[s]ome quality of life that maybe the stories are about, as much as being about this happened and this happened . . ." (Interview with Stephen Smith 24). As much as the narrative focuses on the mysterious and spectacular circumstances surrounding the optometrists' death, the story also revolves around everyday themes: love, marriage, and finding the ability to live with oneself. While this story does not deal with the question of settlement in the same direct way that "The Stone in the Field," "Menesetung," and "A Wilderness Station" all do, it does, significantly, pursue related questions about the terms that constitute an identity, the way in which a life is constructed, and the way a life from small-town Ontario in the 1950s can be conceived.

After the preface, the first section of the story, "Jutland," describes the springtime

discovery of the body of Mr. Willens and his submerged car in the Jutland Pond of the Peregrine River by three young Walley boys. This discovery would seem to be of monumental importance. But instead of focusing on it, the narrative places this incident on the margins while it takes a detour to explore the habits and attitudes of the three youngsters themselves, Cece Ferns, Bud Salter, and Jimmy Box. The third-person narrator refers to the fact that there were "notable differences as to how [the young boys] lived at home and what was expected of them in life" (Love 11). Munro suggests these notable differences by describing the behaviour of these three boys as they meander along the river and walk into town. She also describes the tones and rituals of the dinner time meal at each boy's home. Not one boy reports to his family during dinner the important news that he found a dead body earlier in the day. The narrator explains that "It was just that their houses seemed too full. Too much was going on already" (21-22). And indeed in a Munro story, so much is going on already within these households: her depiction of the three boys' family dynamics offers a glimpse into the social, economic, class, cultural, and gender issues that define their homes, their lives, and that reflect the overarching attitudes of life in southwestern Ontario in the 1950s.

Later in the evening, Bud Salter finally tells his mother about his discovery and she immediately phones the police. After investigating the scene, the police conclude that Mr. Willens' death was either an act of suicide or an accident. But this assumption is radically questioned in the second section of the narrative, "Heart Failure." Here, the reader is introduced to a young, unmarried woman, Enid, and her latest nursing case, Mrs. Quinn, a young woman, married with two children, who is dying of complications from kidney

failure. In the last stages of her life, Mrs. Quinn experiences a resurgence of her strength "in that unnatural and deceptive way that Enid had seen once or twice in others" (56). In this state, Mrs. Quinn suggests to Enid that "'I could tell you something you wouldn't believe'" (56). The narrator mediates her story, telling how Mrs. Quinn's husband, Rupert, acidentally killed Mr. Willens and then contrived to cover it up by putting all evidence of the crime, the body and the optometrist's car, into the river. The narrator explains that Rupert came in from the fields to find Mr. Willens in the front room examining his wife's eyes, and with his hand on her leg to keep his balance, which Rupert interpreted as a sexual advance, even a sign of a sexual affair. In a fit of instant rage, Rupert toppled Mr. Willens and "banged his head up and down on the floor . . . banged the life out of him" (57). Mrs. Quinn insists that there was nothing to the scene Rupert witnessed between herself and the optometrist. Yet she contradicts this sense of innocence and benignity when she goes on to imply that Mr. Willens expected sexual favours for his services, and made overt gestures in that direction: "It was like the same game every time . . . him the dirty old cuss puffing away getting his fingers slicked in and puffing away" (62). Mrs. Quinn's story not only challenges the official version of Mr. Willens' death, but it also shatters Enid's assessment of this well-respected man's character during his life: "Dingey on him like a blowtorch. How'd you've liked that?" (62).

Enid is stunned by Mrs. Quinn's disclosure. Acting as a surrogate for the reader, she goes through a process of evaluating and assessing Mrs. Quinn's story: "She had to sort through [her thoughts] again and set them on two sides. What had happened—or what she had been told had happened-on one side. What to do about it on the other" (63). Enid

believes that "a dying person's mind, could fill up with all kinds of trash and organize that trash in a most convincing way" (74). Yet she eventually comes to the realization that she must confront Rupert with her knowledge of the story and ask him if it is true. Thinking that it might be, she reasons that "You cannot live in the world with such a burden. You will not be able to stand your life" (72).

Enid's thoughts on how to live in the world and whether one can stand one's life point to another level of meaning that the narrative encompasses. While much of "Heart Failure" details Mrs. Quinn's failing health and the possible murder of Mr. Willens, it also sketches in the background of Enid's life--her father's premature death, her training as a nurse, her social successes and popularity among friends--as well as her own "heart failure" in her romantic life. Good-looking, well-liked, and terribly competent, Enid, strangely, does not attract a husband. Because Enid's father worried that nursing would make her "coarse" and thus "spoil her good chances" in marriage (40), before his death he asks Enid to promise him that she will quit her training and never nurse in a hospital again. Enid obliges, and she goes on to lead a comfortable life with her mother. But while her friends either work or have children, Enid becomes the active social organizer, a favorite godmother, and an honorary daughter to her mother's friends. Thus "quickly and easily, still in her youth, she was slipping into this essential, central, yet isolated role" (41). But the narrator notes that, in fact, this had been her role "all along" (41); in high school, Enid never had a boyfriend: "She did not seem to have made a choice this way, but she was not worried about it, either. She had been preoccupied with her ambition--...to be a nurse. She had never thought of nursing as just something to do until she got married. Her hope was to be good, and do

good, and not necessarily in the orderly, customary, wifely way" (41-42).

Sixteen years later, Enid is neither a registered nurse working in a hospital, nor married. The nursing she does is inside people's homes as a practical nurse, often under difficult circumstances and for little money. Enid considers that she had "ended up doing exactly what she must have wanted to do" (48) and she is recognized by doctors, patients, and her mother, as being "an angel of mercy" (52). But a quiet note of disappointment about her life is sounded in the reflection that for both Rupert and her, who went to high school together, there were still misgivings: "You couldn't say that they had chosen the wrong lives or chosen against their will or not understood their choices. Just that they had not understood how time would pass and leave them not more but maybe a little less than what they used to be" (48).

Two days after Mrs. Quinn's death, while preparing to speak candidly to Rupert at his farmhouse, Enid experiences an epiphany. She realizes that as long as she maintains that Mr. Willens died on purpose or by accident,

> this room [in Rupert's house] and this house and her life held a different possibility, an entirely different possibility from the one she had been living with. . . . The different possibility was coming closer to her, and all she needed to do was to keep quiet and let it come. Through her silence, her collaboration in a silence, what benefits could bloom. For others, and for herself. (76)

The narrator then states that "This was what most people knew. A simple thing that it had taken her so long to understand. This was how to keep the world habitable" (76).

Ambiguity reigns as Munro uses a vague pronoun reference, "this," to signal the meaning of the critical point that Enid now grasps. But there are clues hinting at the substance of Enid's epiphany. The narrator implies that instead of envisioning Rupert confessing to a crime and going to jail, Enid is able to see herself concealing a crime as Rupert's helpmate, and taking on the role of his wife. Her nursing skills, her competence at managing her patients and their homes, would then be transferred to her own domestic sphere. Assessing the disorderliness of Rupert's house, the narrator thus indicates that "[Enid] would make this house into a place that had no secrets from her and where all order was as she had decreed" (77).

Enid's mother had long ago asked Enid to promise her that she would never marry a farmer. At the time, Enid replied, "'Of all the crazy ideas'" (43). By the end of the story, it appears as though Enid will marry Rupert, who is just that--a farmer. What makes the idea less crazy to Enid now? The narrator indicates that Enid weeps before Rupert, not with grief, but with "an onslaught of relief that she had not known she was looking for" (76). The implication is that Enid did not even know how badly she wanted her life to hold a "different possibility," or how badly she wanted to be married (76). When Enid once reflected that she might be thought of as a fool by other people, she focused on the fact that she pretended life was good, even when all lives "end in disaster," that "pain and disintegration lie in wait" for everyone (52). She grasps something different now, and it has to do with putting self-interest ahead of doing what is right and what is expected of you, and it also has to do with discovering that you can live with compromise, and silence, and secrets. In her case, she realizes that because of her silence, her life may not end in disaster,

but with a wedding. As a testament to Munro's complex depiction of women's lives, it is worth pointing out that Enid's choice is opposite to the one made by Almeda. It is also significant that Enid's choice seems unexpected precisely because she decides to conform to the societal conventions of getting married, becoming a wife, and keeping house.

Despite her independent nature, her success and competence at her work, and her busy social life, Enid comes to the recognition that she still wants to be married. The first part of the story provides insight into the kind of social culture that exists in Walley, Ontario. Some of the details point to the convention that women are supposed to stay home and take care of the domestic sphere, that for them to travel outside of the home into the public world was too "strange" (26), and that for them to neglect their duties inside the home was sad, even deplorable. While Enid does not actually appear as a character in the first section of the story, her feelings about marriage clearly connect her to the very same values and beliefs that are expressed by, and revealed through, her fellow townspeople. Enid does not actually say so, but it is as if she realizes that she will have a "real" life, meaning a life sanctioned by the customs and conventions of her society, if she marries Rupert.

In the "Introduction" to her Selected Stories, Munro comments on what she hopes to create through and in her stories. She says that a story is not like a road to follow, but like a house:

> You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these

> windows. And you, the visitor, the reader, are altered as well by being in this enclosed space, whether it is ample and easy or full of crooked turns, or sparsely or opulently furnished. You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time. It has also a sturdy sense of itself, of being built out of its own necessity, not just to shelter or beguile you. (xvi-xvii)

The idea that a Munro story is "built out of its own necessity" is central to my thesis, and central to my thinking about Munro's working out of the relationship between the form and content in her writing. Munro's insistence that the reader is altered by entering into her story world is also a critical point. I argue that her stories play with indeterminacy and thereby generate different layers and different levels of meaning within her stories. I also argue that the openness and complexity that characterize her stories correspond to her fictional realms. Munro's characters are firmly rooted in a particular reality, one with defined customs, values, and beliefs. But the story makes the reader aware, even if the characters are not, of the existence of other lives, situations, and places that are shaped differently by other customs, values, and beliefs. In so doing, Munro also makes the reader aware of the limitless interpretative possibilities of her stories, and also of the short story form itself.

Chapter Seven: Mavis Gallant

Over the span of her literary career, Mavis Gallant has garnered high praise as an author. In her study Reading Mavis Gallant, Janice Kulyk Keefer indicates that the "vast majority of our current critics acknowledge Gallant's mastery of language and the forms of narrative, the authoritative elegance of her style, the shrewdness of her authorial eye" (36). However, along with attracting such general commendations about her writing, Gallant has also been identified as problematic in terms of her status as a Canadian writer. More specifically, as someone who was born in Montreal in 1922 and who has lived abroad in Europe since 1950, Gallant has proven to be an intriguing subject for those readers intent on classifying her, as well as her writing, as being typically Canadian. Neil Besner, in the "Preface" to his book-length study on the author, quickly acknowledges that two issues, "both peripheral to her fiction itself, have troubled our encounters with Gallant's work" (ix). Besner notes that Gallant's status as an expatriate writer, as a Canadian living in exile, as well as her thirty-five-year association with the American magazine The New Yorker, can be stumbling blocks for readers intent on trying to understand the geographic and nationalistic centre of Gallant's art (ix). Besner happily dismisses any preoccupations with the circumstances of Gallant's writing by observing that "these generally unproductive questions have gradually given way to a more appropriate focus on the art of Gallant's stories themselves" (ix).

Heather Murray, however, suggests that the very fact that Gallant functions as an ambiguous Canadian literary figure because she writes and publishes outside of Canada

tells us something about the way Canadian literature is evaluated, assessed, and received. Of Gallant she comments that,

> There is perhaps no other English-Canadian author whose reputation in Canada is so mixed, and whose reputation so challenges the notion of a Canadian writing and the criteria by which it is established and judged. Gallant is placed both within and without the mainstream, liminally situated by gender, genre, and geography, seen as the foreign writer of "home truths," holding the mirror to a Canadian cultural identity. (102)

Murray explains that often a "geographical determinism is pressed into service" as critics address themselves to the question of Gallant's status as an author, and that her "double cultural ground" can present category difficulties (104).

Home Truths (1981) offers a collection of stories filled with Canadian characters who variously live in Canada or Europe. The book is divided into three sections; the first section is entitled "At Home," and features stories set in Canada. The second section, "Canadians Abroad," features Canadian characters as they travel in Europe. And the third and final section, entitled "Linnet Muir," consists of a group of six related stories about the title-character's return from the United States to her birth city of Montreal. The section headings indicate that this is a very consciously constructed volume. Indeed, in the "Introduction" to Home Truths, Gallant assuredly states that "I take it for granted that `Canadian stories' has a specific meaning" (xiii). Given the questions that commonly surround Gallant's status as a writer--Is she a Canadian writer? Are her stories typically Canadian?--I am interested in this collection because it offers Gallant's reflections, albeit in

the form of fictionalized "truths," about her country of origin and its citizens. And the portrait that she draws of Canadians through these stories is striking. The children in this collection are either orphans, missing one parent, or emotionally isolated from both of them. The adult characters are for the most part in some state of exile or displacement, whether it be geographical, linguistic, or emotional. They are almost uniformly isolated, marginalized, or alienated for holding values and beliefs different from those of a foreign, dominant culture. Moreover, the narrators often reveal ambivalence towards the claims characters make for what it means to be Canadian, or the images symbolizing Canadianness that we are shown. In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Gallant concedes that exile may well be the "world condition in [her] stories" (105). Given Frank O'Connor's precedent for forging a correspondence between "submerged population groups," which Gallant's characters must surely be counted as, and the short story, I seek to explore the way Gallant inscribes the issues surrounding exile and alienation, identity, and place into the structure of the stories themselves.

Gallant for her part complains about the loss of meaning surrounding the idea of a Canadian identity. In the "Introduction" to Home Truths she writes:

> I am constantly assured that Canadians no longer know what they are, or what to be Canadian should mean; for want of a satisfactory definition, a national identity has been mislaid. The most polite thing I can say about this is that I don't believe it. A Canadian who did not know what it was to be Canadian would not know anything else: he would have to be told his own name. It is as if a reassuring interpretation, a list of characteristics—the

> more rigid and confining the better-needed to be drawn up and offered for ratification. (xiii)

Flannery O'Connor, notably, answers the suggestion that there is something as distinct as a Southern identity in similar terms. She suggests that, "An identity is not to be found on the surface; it is not accessible to the poll-taker; it is not something that can become a cliché" (58). Gallant responds to the debate concerning the status of her own citizenship as well the nature of her own sense of national allegiance by arguing that "a Canadian is someone who has a logical reason to think he is one. My logical reason is that I have never been anything else, nor has it occurred to me that I might be" (Home Truths xiii). Gallant concedes that "I have sometimes felt more at odds in Canada than anywhere else, but I never supposed I was any less Canadian. Feeling at odds is to be expected; no writer calls a truce. If he did, he would probably stop writing" (Home Truths xiv).

Significantly, Gallant differentiates between possessing a "national sense of self" and subscribing to a pre-ordained "nationalism"; whereas she credits the idea of an individual consciousness, she absolutely distrusts and rejects the idea of an organized and conscious nationalism (Home Truths xv). In this regard, she makes the point that the "accident of birth does not give rise to a national consciousness, but I think the first years of schooling are indelible. They provide our center of gravity, our initial view of the world, the seed of our sense of culture. A deeper culture is contained in memory" (Home Truths xv). Speaking of the obligations of a citizen to his country, Gallant indicates that "In a democracy most of his obligations are moral and voluntary, and all the more to be observed on that account" (Home Truths xiii). But the artist, she clarifies, should not feel pressured

by nationalist sentiments or ties: "where his work is concerned, the writer, like any other artist, owes no more and no less to his compatriots than to people at large" (Home Truths xiii).

If, as Murray suggests, Mavis Gallant becomes a site for the formation of questions of Canadian cultural and literary identity, she also becomes the focus of questions concerning genre. Gallant is the author of three novellas, two novels, a play, and many journalistic essays and reviews. But with the publication of ten collections of short stories, including The Selected Stories of Mavis Gallant (1996), Gallant shows an especially sustained commitment to the short story genre. In The Canadian Short Story, Michelle Gadpaille asserts that Mavis Gallant is, along with Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood, one of the "recognized masters of the genre" (118). In Mavis Gallant: Narrative Patterns and Devices, Grazia Merler privileges Gallant's work in the short story field over that in other genres when she makes the assertion that "the author clearly prefers the short story to the novel: more concentration is possible as well as a more subtle tension" (56). Merler adds that "Action is virtually non-existent and the psychology of the characters is not detailed . . . the main concern is with the reaction mechanisms of human behaviour, not with deeds" (56).

Merler's distinction between reaction mechanisms and deeds relates to the common view that the short story can dispense with a preoccupation with plot and focus instead on detailing human behavior, a liberty that the novel, which must sustain a reader's interest over a longer period of time, does not indulge in as readily. But Merler's comment also implies something central about Gallant's aesthetic, which is that a Gallant short story does

not attempt to contain everything. Indeed, there are some things one finds in a Gallant story--an emphasis on the narrator's point of view, for example--and other things that are not present--such as background information about characters, or detailed and intricate plotting. Gallant is highly selective about how much information she provides in any story. Her representation of a character's life or of a situation always emphasizes the partiality, the brevity, and the limitations of the representation itself.

In The Light of the Imagination: Mavis Gallant's Fiction, Besner suggests that there are several reasons why the short story "has proven itself to be Gallant's major form" (48). Among them is the very nature of Gallant's characters. Besner writes that they "are often figures on the verge of perceptions they cannot quite accommodate, or stranded beyond the end of one era, before the beginning of another," and, according to Besner, they "are rendered most effectively in sharp glimpses, not in the fuller, more rounded portraits traditionally associated with the narrative and temporal amplitudes of the novel" (48). Besner also indicates that Gallant's conceptions of time, which he suggests are such an important formal element of her writing, "also gain in intensity and effect in the more concentrated field of the short story form, where the play of Gallant's narration can reverberate more closely amidst its own echoes" (48). Besner claims that the short story, noted for its foregrounding of style, rhythm, and pattern, is thus well suited to Gallant's stylistic predilection for playing with the rhythms of language, and for alternating between different kinds of assertions--spare and direct phrasing, for example, contrasted by expanding and reflective structures (48-49). And beyond individual phrasing, Besner insists that Gallant's descriptions, the quality of which are sharp and full of significance, "function

most effectively within the highly wrought frameworks of Gallant's stories, in which details can signify so quickly and yet so much, and less effectively in her novels" (49).

Besner's analysis of Gallant's use of the short story posits certain assumptions about the implications of the genre's very brevity. Indeed, because the short story is literally shorter than longer prose forms, the genre achieves greater intensity, density, and a greater concentration of its effects through attention to language, the rhythm of individual sentences, and the arrangement of the entire composition. Moreover, the reverberation, echoing, ricochet, and repetition of single words and whole ideas becomes more pronounced within a concentrated, tight narrative structure that draws attention to the system of the sentence, the system of the phrase, and the overarching architecture of the narrative. These concepts about short story form are central to Gallant's aesthetic and are the animating principles behind much of her work in the genre. These concepts also help explain where much of the tension and interest in Gallant's writing comes from: the blend of attention to the smaller elements in her writing in the language and tone of an individual phrase, and her confrontation of the larger stereotypes and generalizations that circulate around the idea of a Canadian identity. In my analysis of Munro's writing, I stress the way in which she builds so many layers and so much texture into her stories. Gallant, on the other hand, moves the reader between two distinct levels in her reliance on individual words, images, and symbols to signify meaning, and her play with large questions of Canadianness.

In Mavis Gallant, Danielle Schaub also suggests that Gallant prefers to eliminate from her writing "descriptions, a superfluous and often tedious addition pertaining to the

novel. She prefers to evoke places and landscapes rather than describing them at length; her pictures convey an atmosphere by mere hints" (5). Schaub finds support for this assessment in the words of Gallant herself who comments that the genre

> satisfies me fully; the more I write stories, the more I develop a taste for them and acquire technical mastery. Why bother about the unnecessary? The novel requires weaving ties between events, and only Stendhal, or, better still, Flaubert, succeed in turning every passage into an interesting one. In contrast, with the short story, the whole connective tissue, that is, what binds the muscle to the bones, is done away with. (qtd. in Schaub 4)

Gallant reiterates her perception of the short story as an autonomous form in her "Preface" to The Selected Stories of Mavis Gallant. She writes that "[t]here is something I keep wanting to say about reading short stories. . . . Stories are not chapters of novels. They should not be read one after another, as if they were meant to follow along. Read one. Shut the book. Read something else. Come back later. Stories can wait" (xix). This statement makes a case for the power, intensity, and density of short stories. It also invites the reader to indulge in a close, attentive reading of a demanding narrative form.

Any supposed correspondence between the matter and manner of Gallant's writing generates a variety of questions that frame my exploration of her work. Why does Gallant use the short story to tell these Canadian stories of exile, alienation, and loneliness when she could write these tales in a different genre, like the novel? Given her conscious choice, what effects, then, does the form achieve in the process of telling these stories? Are the kind of fleeting glimpses and momentary insights into a culture that "home truths" provide

best expressed in a genre like the short story which, because of its brevity, easily accommodates brief, partial, abrupt representations? Are stories that revolve around the difficult questions of identity, place, and culture best conceptualized in a generic structure which implies openness, ambiguity, and uncertainty? Does the concentration and intensity of the short story, which places attention at the level of the very structure of the sentence, somehow suitably convey the issues at stake in stories intent on exploring the terms of a cultural identity, and thereby resistant to linear, teleological, hermetically sealed narrative structures? In this chapter, I explore the relationship between the short story form and the kind of society and people Gallant reveals as being specifically Canadian based on a reading of a selection of stories from Home Truths.

Patrick O'Neill, in Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory, insists that genre constraints set up certain expectations on the part of the readers (55). According to this logic, the short story, by its nature, will generate certain practical and actual effects owing to its brevity. And as I have discussed in the Introduction, the genre typically carries the inherent suggestion of incompleteness, of partiality, and of uncertainty in ways that are not found in a longer, seemingly exhaustive narrative form like the novel. Gallant maximizes the connotations surrounding the genre's shortness by relating the structural length of her stories to her handling of her main themes and issues. Merler, Besner, and Schaub all comment on how well suited Gallant's style of writing is to the short story form. I suggest more specifically that her exploration of themes related to identity, place, and culture gain great resonance in this genre which highlights the partiality and limitation of representation, and, from that, the irresolution and ambiguity surrounding its core issues.

It is a simple concept to suggest that there is a correspondence between the form and the content. Yet it is as a result of that correspondence that the story becomes more complex and dynamic. Gallant does not define a Canadian identity. Rather, she simply exposes different characters' responses to various situations at home and abroad. The interpretative gaps that exist create the energy and the dynamism of the story. Writing about style in fiction, Gallant suggests that fiction is about the author saying

> that something is taking place and that nothing lasts. Against the sustained tick of a watch, fiction takes the measure of a life, a season, a look exchanged, the turning point, desire as brief as a dream, the grief and terror that after childhood we cease to express. The life, the look, the grief are without permanence. The watch continues to tick where the story stops. ("What is Style?" 73)

The sense that time continues past the end of the story is registered acutely in a genre which accommodates brief, sharp, and highly selective exposure of the details of any character's life.

"Virus X," the first story to be considered from Home Truths, appears under the section heading "Canadians Abroad." In this story it is 1952 and Lottie Benz has travelled from her home of Winnipeg, Manitoba to Paris, France on a Royal Society scholarship. The purpose of her trip is to conduct field research on her sociology thesis, the topic of which deals with "the integration of minority groups without a loss of ethnic characteristics" (178). The third-person narrator explains that Lottie "intended to profit from this winter of opportunities, and was grateful to her country for having provided it, but in no sense did she

desire to change or begin a new life" (175). Her attitude, and specifically her unwillingness to adapt or to respond to her European environment, becomes a focus of the story.

Another focus of the story presents itself in the form of Vera Rodna. Vera attended high school with Lottie in Winnipeg until such time as Vera "flunked out . . . and, on suspicion of pregnancy, [was] shipped abroad to an exile without glamour" in Paris (176). Vera had a baby girl whom she immediately gave up for adoption; she now continues to live in Paris, supported by her family's hard-earned money and their hopes that she will eventually settle down to marry. Vera has heard from her parents that Lottie is in Paris and she takes it upon herself to contact her at her hotel. As the narrator reveals, Lottie is mystified to think that she and Vera would have any reason for seeing each other, distanced as they are from each other in her mind by differences in education and social circumstances: "Lottie accepted Vera's invitation, though there was no real reason for them to meet. Having been raised in the same city did not give them a common past. Attempting to impose a past, beginning with a meal in a restaurant, Vera would not establish herself as a friend from home, if that was what she was trying to do" (176).

Despite her insistence that she and Vera have no connection between them, Lottie underestimates her own loneliness and neediness in a foreign environment and this dependency causes her to rely upon Vera while she is in Europe. While Vera is more exuberant and more comfortable in her exile and with her peripatetic life than Lottie, she nonetheless prefers not to be alone and she therefore makes herself available to Lottie as a travel companion. At Vera's urging, she and Lottie travel to Katherine Mansfield's grave at Fontainebleau, they take an excursion to Colmar at Christmas time, and they ultimately

travel together to Strasbourg where Lottie is to conduct the bulk of her research.

The reference within "Virus X" to Katherine Mansfield is intriguing in view of the fact that both Mansfield and Gallant have been seen, sometimes critically, as voluntary exiles. Mansfield's status as a New Zealand author seems in jeopardy to those who see her decision to live abroad in Europe as part of an effort to disown or disavow her New Zealand heritage. Interestingly, Gallant uses Mansfield in her fiction to deftly evoke the expatriate literary tradition. As mentioned, Lottie and Vera travel to Mansfield's grave at Fontainebleau to pay their respects to the author they studied in school and greatly admired. However, Lottie reveals that Mansfield "was my favorite author until I specialized... Then, I'm sorry to say, I had to restrict my reading" (180). Vera confesses that her commitment to Mansfield was really rather superficial since it was the result of a crush on her English teacher, Miss Pink: "It had led Vera to read this one writer when she never read anything else, or wanted to" (182). Such statements suggest that Gallant is all too familiar with the capricious tastes of readers with respect to various literary figures and traditions.

I find it interesting that Alice Munro also makes references to Katherine Mansfield in her writing, most recently in "Jakarta" from The Love of a Good Woman. In this context, the protagonists Kath and Sonje discuss the dynamic amongst the characters in Mansfield's "Prelude." For both Canadian authors, Mansfield clearly represents a standard of short story excellence. But she also stands as someone working within a settler-society literary tradition, and someone who had to respond to the expectations such a role places upon her artistic endeavours. For her part, Gallant indicates that her precarious position as an expatriate author, perched as she is between Canadian and European culture, stimulates

her creativity. Speaking of her early upbringing as having a double quality to it since she was born into a Quebec, English household, but was placed within a French and Catholic school system, she suggests that she had "two systems of behavior," "two environments to consider," and "two codes of social behavior" to contemplate (Selected xv). She speculates that, "Somewhere in this duality may be the exact point of the beginning of writing" (Selected xv). Her decision to live away from her birth country as an adult creates another duality that, one might speculate, sustains her writing. Notably, "Virus X" exposes not only dual, but multiple systems of behavior, various environments, and a plurality of codes of social behavior that Lottie and Vera must consider in their travels from Winnipeg to Europe.

While Lottie feels weak and vulnerable throughout her stay in Europe, it is in Strasbourg that she contracts "Virus X," an epidemic of grippe that is sweeping through the continent. The virus resembles pneumonia with symptoms including coughing, the possession of a white pallor, and low blood pressure. In such a sickly state, Lottie's body becomes a physical index of her inability to cope in Europe. She herself makes plain the relationship between her poor health and her diminished ability to live in a foreign place on her own: "I am frail, and I have to do this thesis on my own. I have to choose my own books and work with people I've never met before. I've never used a strange library . . . I've got this very low blood pressure" (198). Well into her stay, Lottie has done no work and her "thesis [is] a mess" (207). Thus when Lottie's Canadian boyfriend, Kevin, travels unexpectedly from Zurich to Strasbourg on a press flight, she accepts his presence at her hotel as an invitation to return home with him to Winnipeg.

Besner reads this story "as an ironic or failed initiation" on Lottie's part in trying to set her North American innocence against a European backdrop of experience (128). Besner interprets her return to Canada as being "in retreat from education, in retreat from an initiation into history" (130). Strasbourg, which lies on the border between Germany and France, is a suitable place for exploring one's identity, one's relation to one's country, and one's relation to history because the place itself is so geographically and politically unfixed and unstable. But Strasbourg becomes the site where Lottie eschews uncertainty and change and decides to conform to the safe conventions of home, and the possibility of marrying Kevin.

Lottie's return to Canada also means that her simple, conventional views about the world around her, and her uncritical use of stereotypes, remain unchallenged. Lottie's naivete is highlighted especially in those instances when she generalizes about Canadians as if they constitute a homogenous entity. Drawing upon the distinction Gallant makes in the "Introduction" to the collection, one might say that Lottie possesses an abiding faith in nationalism without possessing a national sense of self. She is hopeful, for example, that in a place like Paris where "Americans were said to be hated because of the Korean War" she can "put up a show for her own country, which was Canada" (174). Her idealism and patriotism are intermingled in statements like, "I love my country, Vera, and even if I didn't I wouldn't run it down" (184) and "You can't be sort of Canadian" (190). Simplicity is also reflected in her uncomplicated modelling of the behaviour of minority groups in her research project. As part of her effort to explain her thesis to Vera, Lottie suggests that it is "'Like at home. . . . That's the strength of Canada, that it hasn't been a melting pot.

Everybody knows that. The point is, I'm taking it as a good thing. . . . I'll give you a simple example. Take the Poles.' Delicacy with regard to Vera's possible feelings prevented her saying Ukrainians. 'The Poles paint traditional Easter eggs. Right? They stop doing it in the States after one generation, two at most. In Canada they never stop. Now do you see?'" (178).

What the reader sees most clearly is the way Lottie's innocence is contrasted against Vera's experience, experience which is suggested by Vera's ability to cope with her unwanted pregnancy and to survive in Paris on her own, and by her decidedly non-academic and non-romantic view of Europe and Canada. After telling Vera about her thesis, Lottie "felt she had sounded stupid, yet the idea, a favorite of Dr. Keller's, was not stupid at all. She knew it was a theory, but she was taking it for granted that it could be applied. If it could not, let Vera prove it" (178). And this is an invitation which Vera implicitly takes up throughout the story, challenging and undermining Lottie's tendency to construct formulaic ways of characterizing whole groups of people. Vera begins by asking Lottie if she even knows what a minority is, commenting that "It was always right to be what you are" (178). When Lottie comes across evidence in a Strasbourg coffee shop that works against her thesis, Vera offers the most lucid way of interpreting it. The problematic item is a tract, written in German, indicating that "a Separatist movement that seemed to have died had only been sleeping. Recent injustices had warmed it to life" (194). Ever the conscientious student, Lottie acknowledges that "if there are people here who don't want to belong to France, then my proposition doesn't hold water. The idea is, these people are supposed to be loyal but still keep their national characteristics" (195). Vera insightfully

counters that "It's your own fault for inventing something and then trying to stick people to it" (195). A little later Vera asks Lottie if Dr. Keller is responsible for the way she thinks: "Why do you think one piece is all of everything?" she asks (197). Vera overtly challenges Lottie's theories and she consequently shows up the limitations of Lottie's simplistic ideas about a Canadian national identity, as well as her assumptions about Ukrainians, girls who get pregnant, and other minority groups.

Lottie's thesis and her own thinking are monolithic in their lack of an expansive and open view about what might constitute an identity. She shows a failure of insight into the immense possibilities that an individual identity, a cultural one, a Canadian one, and a foreign one, can take on. But if Lottie's ideas seem reductive, the structural irony of the story refuses such simplicity and invites the knowing reader to contemplate a plurality of issues which move beyond the easy categorization of the social behaviour of individuals based on culture, ethnicity, or nationality. Championing individuality and diversity, the story thus examines the specific circumstances that conditioned both Lottie's and Vera's childhoods. In the "Introduction" to the collection, Gallant writes that the years of early schooling can "provide our center of gravity, our initial view of the world, the seed of our sense of culture" (Home Truths xv). In this story, the city of Winnipeg is the locus of such influence, the place where Lottie's and Vera's ideas about themselves were formed. Winnipeg, as a single signifier, means something different to each girl, and the narrative reflects the different attitudes, and the different values and beliefs they see embedded in the place they call home.

The narrator recounts some of the Winnipeg social history that Vera, the daughter of

Ukrainian immigrants, is keenly interested in. In the area where Vera's mother grew up, wooden planks replaced sidewalks. As the narrator notes, there were no sidewalks either in the good part of town, on Wellington Crescent, "but for a different reason" (196). The explanation follows that

> When Ukrainian children were taken across the city on digestive airings, after Sunday lunch, to look at Wellington Crescent houses-when their parents had at last lost the Old Country habit of congregating in public parks and learned the New World custom of admiring the houses of people more fortunate than they were-the children, wondering at the absence of sidewalks, were told that people here had always had carriages and then motorcars and had never needed to walk. (196)

Having grown up with a sense of difference, and of being less privileged, Vera lets Lottie know that "I always felt I had less right to be Canadian than you, even though we've been there longer . . . I've never understood that coldness. I know you aren't English, but it's all the same" (210). As Lottie prepares to return to Winnipeg with Kevin, she wonders whether Vera will come with them. But her sensitivity is acute enough to register that "if [Vera] had considered going home because Lottie was leaving, the voice from home saying 'Ukarainian' had reminded her of what the return would be. That was Vera's labyrinth. Lottie was on her way out" (214).

But in fact Lottie has her own labyrinth and she has not escaped or found her way out of its tortuous arrangements. While Vera's memory of Winnipeg includes remembering its class-consciousness, its hierarchical arrangement of ethnic groups, and its intolerance

and alienation of young girls who get pregnant, Lottie's experience of Winnipeg also includes the pangs of discrimination. Lottie's father taught at the high school Lottie and Vera attended. Vera remembers him somewhat fondly, telling Lottie that her father "was a fine man" (179). The narrator adds that "Mr. Benz had been called Captain Hook by his pupils, but there was a further matter, which Vera did not mention-Captain von Hook. That was an old wartime joke. You would have thought the mean backwash of war could never have reached them there, in the middle of another country" (179). Indeed a backwash of the war does reach Mr. Benz in that we are told that, as a German, he is prevented from being promoted to principal of his school: "after 1939 his career was blocked" (191). When Lottie first sees German landscape while walking about Kayserberg on one of her excursions with Vera, she contemplates that "this was the place she loathed and craved, and never mentioned. It was the place where her mother and father had been born, and which they seemed unable to imagine, forgive, or describe" (195).

Lottie's confused attraction and repulsion towards her German heritage provides a context in which to understand her patriotism and her whole-hearted belief in a singular Canadian identity. She sublimates her German heritage, and thereby suppresses her inherent sense of shame and insecurity about being German, by stressing that she is in every sense Canadian. The letters Lottie composes in her head reveal that she is capable of self-reflection, thoughtfulness, and even creativity. But just as she never commits her musings to paper, she wilfully limits her mind from exploring certain subjects and as a result she mostly avoids confronting the question of who she is, how she conceives her own identity, and how she connects to others. Her initial refusal to even set foot on German soil creates

the expectation that when she does finally cross the German border at a little town called Appenweier, it should be a momentous occasion, even an epiphanic one. But it is neither. As the narrator explains, despite the potential symbolism of the act, Lottie does not pass a threshold so much as reach another impasse: "If that was Germany, there was nothing to wait for, expect, or return to. She had not crossed a frontier but come up to another limit" (215). This description of Germany as a vacuous space hints at the malaise that Germany suffered from after WWII. But it also comments upon the frailty of Lottie's identity and her propensity to put up protective barriers between herself and foreign places, people, and things. When Lottie judges Vera's life to be "sad" because of her effectual exile to Europe, Vera makes it clear that it is not appropriate for Lottie to condescend to her in this way: "`You feeling sorry for me?'" Vera asks incredulously (194).

The themes of isolation and exile pervade this story. Vera lives in exile in Europe, and even when she lived in Winnipeg, she was ostracized and alienated at her high school because of her social circumstances. Moreover, as the daughter of Ukrainian parents, she occupies a precarious space between being Canadian and European, and she is keenly aware of a social hierarchy that exists within the Winnipeg immigrant community: to be English is to have a privileged status, and to be German is to be better off than it is to be Ukrainian. As a result of these dynamics, Vera feels marginalized everywhere she goes. Lottie also feels conspicuous in Winnipeg because of her German background, yet because she insists on her rightful Canadian identity, she ironically feels totally foreign on French and German soil as well. Lottie returns to Canada not so much by choice but in default of her inability to thrive in Europe, and Vera remains in Europe seemingly as orphaned as the child she

herself gave up for adoption. The narrative stresses the idea that there is not a single national, cultural, or social movement or environment that can accommodate the vagaries of individual identity. Equally important, "Virus X" also suggests that the Canadian identity is embryonic. That something akin to a Canadian consciousness is at a very rudimentary stage of development is suggested by the fact that Vera and Lottie, as Canadians, represent the crossover of cultures from Europe, and a co-mingling of identities. Indeed, the story highlights the reality of a fairly recent wave of immigration from Europe to Winnipeg. In her intimation of the differences between a New World (Canadian) and an Old World (European) sensibility, Gallant thus occupies thematic ground similar to that explored by David Malouf.

John Moss sees patterns of isolation in English Canadian fiction as one of its "distinguishing characteristics" (7). Speaking of the novel specifically, Moss considers that many "exhibit a profound fascination with the implications of exile. This might be expected in a country whose population, with the exception of its native peoples, has come from abroad within the last few generations" (8). He suggests that patterns of exile originate "in the experience of two societies being held simultaneously, in conflict, within a single consciousness. One will be actual and the other maintained with the distortions of memory" (12). Moss finds that patterns of isolation in literature ultimately "reflect the progress of the Canadian imagination towards a positive identity" (7). It is significant that, in this regard, Gallant's story does not fit within Moss' formalist designs. That is, in "Virus X," the thematic focus on Lottie and Vera's forms of exile does not reflect a clear, linear progression towards a "positive identity." In fact, the story ends on an open note with a

passage that resonates with uncertainty and ambiguity about the direction Lottie will take from this point forward.

After composing a sketch in her mind of the street scene below her hotel window, Lottie considers that "This could not be a letter to Kevin. . . . It was not a letter to anyone. There was no sense to what she was doing. She would never do it again. That was the first of many changes" (216). Despite the clarity and conviction of the language, the reader is not sure what exactly Lottie will never do again (compose? create? travel abroad?) or what changes she will make in her life once she returns to Winnipeg. In fact, it is surprising that the narrator refers to changes at all given that Lottie returns to Winnipeg in part to assume both a traditional and a predictable life. What movement she was making towards something different for her life has now been stalled.

The story raises questions about identity and place, including inquiring whether there is such a thing as a rigid Canadian identity, whether Lottie can confidently theorize about the patterns and behavior of groups of people, Canadians or others, whether Canadians suffer from a kind of uncertainty about their identity as Lottie and Vera do, and whether this anxiety is truly exacerbated when they travel to places like Europe with a long and established history. The title, "Virus X," suggests that Lottie's anxiety about her identity may be considered a generic trait, a kind of Canadian malaise. Notably, the narrator is non-committal in terms of answering the very questions that the story raises. Moreover, the narrator is frequently ironic and this creates additional instability and uncertainty within the narrative. How are we to interpret the tone? Lottie seems foolish when she speaks about Canadians as some collective group. Does this mean that the reader

would be foolish to think that the story makes some kind of statement about Canadians abroad? About Canadians' uncertainty surrounding their sense of who they are? The story certainly invites speculation on such subjects, but its inherent irony creates distrust about investing too much meaning into any kind of generalization.

"In the Tunnel," another story from the "Canadians Abroad" section of the collection, provides a brief and partial glimpse of the main character at a particular time in her life. There is very little information given about the edges of Sarah Holmes' life, either from her past or about her future, and because of this, the story focuses on the immediate, present moment. Sarah Holmes is characterized much like Lottie Benz in that she is a sociology student who travels to Europe, and Grenoble specifically, as part of her studies. If Lottie has Dr. Keller as her thesis advisor, Sarah has an equivalent in Professor Downcast, with whom she pursues "Urban and Regional Studies of the Less Privileged in British Columbia." The notably negative connotations that come from the names of both professors--Downcast and Keller--is a clue to Gallant's dismissal of their brands of sociology as credible pursuits. Moreover, Professor Downcast's professionalism in general seems to be in question given that Sarah has been sent to Europe by her father to get her away from him. Sarah, for her part, does not stay long in Grenoble. She finds the Alps "shabby, the cultural atmosphere in France was morbid and stifling," so she disobeys her father, abandons her studies, catches a bus and relocates to the Mediterranean (73).

Sarah's mother has died and her relations with her father are strained. She sends her father a letter from the Mediterranean--"a letter of reproach, of abuse, of cold reason, and also of apology--the postmark was bound to be a shock. She then began waiting round

American Express for an answer. She was hoping it would be a cable saying `Come on home'" (73). But in the letter Sarah's father eventually does write, he tries to impart some reasonable advice to her about staying clear of undesirable men. Naturally Sarah immediately takes up with someone her father would not approve of: Roy Cooper is a retired prison inspector who spent his career in an Asian colony and now resides near Nice, largely occupied with the business of securing the company of younger women. Roy is about twice Sarah's age and within days of their meeting, he asks her to come spend the rest of her holiday with him in the place he rents up behind the city. The narrator reflects that, "Until now this was her most important decision, for it supposed a way of living, a style. She reflected on how no girl she knew had ever done quite this; and on what her father would say. He might not hear of it; at least not right away" (77).

Roy rents his cottage from an expatriate English couple named the Reeves and Sarah has to learn to get along with them as well as with Roy. Things go well in the relationship until the day Sarah sprains her ankle while hanging Roy's washing on the clothes line. Roy is entirely unsympathetic and he eventually reveals that he strongly dislikes it when people suffer from afflictions, including illnesses and sprained ankles. His intolerance, the story implies, comes from his training to keep order and discipline within the Empire. Sarah's disability creates tension between them and in time she recognizes that she should leave Roy and the whole situation.

Narrated in the past tense by the third-person narrator, this is a kind of coming of age story. Sarah's stay with Roy "in the tunnel" begins as an act of rebellion against her father, but it develops into an opportunity for her to learn how to cope with and adapt to

other people, and finally ends with a realization about herself. The Reeves are not subtle about how they assess outsiders and as a result Sarah quickly becomes aware of their attitude towards her: "Who was she? Sarah Holmes, a little transatlantic pickup, a student slumming round for the summer? What had she studied?" (82). But just as the Reeves try to place Sarah, Sarah tries to place the Reeves. Relying on her background in sociology, she transforms the Reeves into a real-life case study of the behaviour of expatriates: "She decided to record the trivia first-how visitors of any sort were a catastrophe, how a message from old friends staying at Nice brought [Mr. Reeve] back from the telephone wearing the look of someone whose deepest feelings have been raked over" (85).

"In the Tunnel" offers a glimpse of Sarah's odd experience on the Mediterranean with these bizarre British expatriates. Amidst details of their strange activities and habits, the one clear thing that emerges is the sense that Sarah does not belong with the group: she is an outsider. It is suggested to her by Mrs. Reeve's niece that she is out of her depth with Roy, and that she is too young for him. But another strain of the narrative implies that she does not fit in simply because she is Canadian. The narrator notes that "She was not Sarah now but a prisoner impaled on a foreign language, seeing bright, light, foreign eyes offering something nobody wanted-death" (98). The narrator does not amplify or elaborate on this idea, but the multiple references to the Reeves and Roy's British background heightens the awareness that cultural identity does matter. Indeed, the narrator presents a harsh view of the English expatriates: being English means being totally immersed in a tunnel of British habits, tendencies, and customs. The Reeves dote on their two dogs, and make a huge fuss over a "good old fry up" in their black pan brought from England. Their proclivities,

including criticizing the Mediterranean because it has no tides, and reviewing their obsession with Labour government, seem decidedly British, and decidedly myopic. They are unable to adapt to or embrace their present, European, surroundings. But the story begs another question, which is whether being Canadian means being tunnel-like as well. How are we to judge Sarah, who, for all her animosity towards the Reeves, is as intolerant of them as they are of her, and wants nothing more than to go home to Canada and to her father? Are we to understand her desire to return home as a sign of Canadians' intolerance, inflexibility, and closed-mindedness?

Gallant provides a brief sketch of Sarah's life at this juncture. In this instance, as in so many cases with the other short story writers considered in this thesis, the qualities associated with the short story genre help to reiterate and reinforce the thematic strains of the narrative. Sarah's isolation and loneliness during her stay in the south of France are intensified by the fact that the reader only has access to her for such a short time, and that the exposure of her during this time is only partial. Sarah remains distant and aloof and she therefore seems all the more alone. Moreover, the narrator does not issue any authoritative statement about Sarah. The reader may wonder whether this story about a young Canadian girl's stay with British expatriates is as much a comment upon Canadians in exile as it seems to be upon the British in exile, upon the dynamics between the sexes, or upon the relationship between fathers and daughters. The ambiguity surrounding the main theme of "In the Tunnel" corresponds to, and thus heightens, the awareness of Sarah's confusion about her experience with Roy, her stay in Europe, her relationship with her father, and her relations with men. Sarah does not know to whom and to what she connects and her

uncertainty is reflected by the narrative's refusal to attach itself to a single, dominant theme.

A trademark of this and other stories in the collection lies in Gallant's willingness to put forward ideas about identity, place, and alienation without thorough discussion or resolution of them. The result is that the reader remains uncertain and perplexed about the very status of the narrative. Kulyk Keefer writes about Gallant's use of evasive or indifferent narrators and she confirms my sense that readers will find it difficult to form "easy, conventional responses" to the fictional situations they encounter precisely because the narrator can be so ambivalent, and so non-committal, in his or her own response (42). Kulyk Keefer rightly differentiates between Gallant's indifferent narrators and those of Alice Munro, pointing out that in "Alice Munro's fiction we have the consoling sense that the narrators somehow implicate themselves in the judgements they make of those characteristic human traits, smallness and ignorance, and in the common experience of failure, betrayal, loss" (42).

Like "Virus X" and "In the Tunnel," "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street" is one of the "Canadian Abroad" stories. Here again, Gallant places responsibility upon the reader to consider what kind of people her characters are, and what kind of story this is. The Canadian in question is Peter Frazier, joined by his British wife Sheilah. They are a couple who seek a more glamorous and prestigious life than the one they can cultivate in Canada. Consequently, they move to Paris and then to Geneva so Peter can look for international work. But what Peter and Sheilah really specialize in is a wilful denial of reality. They like to think of themselves as members of an elite, leisure class, except that they have neither the pedigree nor the money to support their desired lifestyle. Peter's

Scottish father spent his money freely such that "Peter and his sister and his cousins lived on the remains. They were left the rinds of income, of notions, and the memories of ideas rather than ideas intact" (114). Sheilah's childhood in Liverpool was even less noteworthy: she describes it as being "rat poor" (113). Peter's refusal to take his poor job or his mounting debt too seriously is part of a credo he inherited from his father: "He remembers his father saying, `Nothing can touch us,' and Peter believed it and still does" (114). Thus "he [Peter] had a manner of strolling to work as if his office were a pastime, and his real life a secret so splendid he could share it with no one except himself" (115).

Peter is annoyed to arrive at work one morning and find that he has a new office-mate, someone who will supervise his low productivity. His pride is piqued when he realizes that this woman has been assigned to the larger of the two desks. He sums her up quickly:

> She was a Norwegian from a small town in Saskatchewan. He supposed they had been put together because they were Canadians; but they were as strange to each other as if `Canadian' meant any number of things, or had no real meaning. Soon after Agnes Brusen came to the office she hung her framed university degree on the wall. It was one of the gritty, prideful gestures that stand for push, toil, and family sacrifice. He thought, then, that she must be one of a family of immigrants for whom education is everything. (115)

Agnes is quiet, serious, unobtrusive, and hard-working. The defining traits of her personality come in the facts that she owns two plain outfits, does not drink or smoke,

brings a Bible to work, and seems completely uninterested in gaining acceptance into any social group. Peter thinks of her as a small brown mole (116). But the narrator reports that Peter's "social compass was out of order because the others couldn't tell Agnes and Peter apart. There was a world of difference between them . . ." (116). And Peter's social compass, as well as Sheilah's, becomes completely disoriented when Agnes reveals that she is on the Burleighs' guest list.

In Peter and Sheilah's world, one which focuses on social A lists, the Burleighs represent the pinnacle of success. Mike Burleigh, an old acquaintance of Peter's, married an heiress; moreover, the Burleighs entertain frequently and the subject of who makes it on their guest lists is one of supreme importance to Peter and Sheilah: "The Burleighs had two guest lists. The first was composed of stuffy people they felt obliged to entertain, while the second was made up of their real friends" (112). Whereas the Fraziers initially get included in the first guest list, in time they fall out of favour with the Burleighs and cease to be invited to their weekend functions at all. Peter figures out that the friendship soured after Sheilah charged a skirt at a dressmaker's to Madge Burleighs' account. Madge had told her to do so, then changed her mind. The narrator notes, "Poor Sheilah! She was new to this part of it—to the changing humors of independent friends" (123). Given the Burleighs' status, Peter and Sheilah are mystified as to their acquaintance with Agnes. They wonder how they came to meet her, and what they see in her. Despite their mystification, the reader sees that Peter, Sheilah, and Agnes are all outsiders, and that they are all three in some ways unable to abide by the social rules demanding money, pedigree, knowledge of social protocol and customs, demanded by their circumstances.

At Mardi Gras, the Burleighs give their annual party and they invite everybody including "the damned and the dropped" (123). The Fraziers are ecstatic to be included in the gathering. As the narrator notes, "Like many of the guests they expected to meet at the party, they had been disgraced, forgotten, and rehabilitated" (123). While Sheilah circulates and works the crowd like a master, intent on trying to secure Peter his next job, Peter feels less at ease with the false pretenses. Just when he realizes that he has no one to talk to, he spots Agnes. She is "gasping for life." Unaccustomed to drinking alcohol, Agnes has unwittingly become drunk; the host, Madge Burleigh, asks Peter to take Agnes home.

Agnes is not her usually controlled self. She is sick outside from the alcohol, and when Peter and she arrive at her flat, she is uncharacteristically talkative and notably reflective of her childhood in Saskatchewan. She tells Peter that, "In our house we didn't smoke or drink. My mother was ambitious for me, more than for Harry and the others" (128). She also admits that "I've never been alone before. When I was a kid I would get up in the summer before the others, and I'd see the ice wagon going down the street. I'm alone now" (128). Back at work the following Monday, Agnes still feels embarrassed about her conduct and especially about having to rely on Peter. But she is also much more open and so she bluntly reveals to Peter her disgust about the way the people she strove to emulate, like those at the party, actually behave: "All my life I heard, Educated people don't do this, educated people don't do that. And now I'm here, and you're all educated people, and you're nothing but pigs" (132). That day, she and Peter have an engaging and meaningful conversation about a broad range of topics--death, ambition, religion, love: "They were both Canadian, so they had this much together—the knowledge of the little you

dare admit" (133).

Shortly thereafter, Peter and Sheilah relocate to Ceylon. And from there they continually move around. They are never settled or satisfied, but always waiting for something better, more glamorous, and more exciting to come into their lives. The narrator tells us that while Sheilah would not remember Agnes at this point in her life, Peter thinks of her often and that he wonders what she went on to do. He also thinks of her childhood memory of watching the ice wagon going down the street. This image is central to the story. We are initially invited to read it as a symbol of Agnes' childhood innocence, her connection with the world, and as an expression of her hopes, and of her dreams. But Peter's attachment to the image suggests his ability to recognize himself in it as well. Peter never tells his wife about his memories of Agnes and their conversation that one day, but the reader understands that the nature and depth of their discussion inform the way we are to interpret Peter's character. Indeed, in a concentrated narrative, the repetition of any single image signifies its importance. In this case, the single image provides a standard of innocence, purity, honesty, and isolation from which to judge Peter and Sheilah's contrived and tired life. Peter feels as alone as an adult as Agnes did that morning as a child. Peter's sensitive response to the image also indicates that he is well aware that the life he and Sheilah cultivate for themselves is a long way from anything meaningful, real, or humble. He recognizes that he is a long way from his roots and it is understood that Sheilah does not possess this kind of self-awareness.

There is a second image that recurs throughout the story and this is the reference to a dress Sheilah owns: "We have the Balenciaga," Peter and Sheilah repeatedly say to each

other, referring to a European designed dress (134). The narrator explains that Peter and Sheilah are back where they started: Peter is once again looking for a job, and Sheilah is once again contemplating which climate she would prefer to live in, and all the while they are staying with their two children at Peter's sister's apartment. Despite the obvious desperation and instability of their lives, the narrator suggests that

> It is wrong to say they have nothing to show for time. Sheilah has the Balenciaga. It is a black afternoon dress, stiff and boned at the waist; long for the fashions of now, but neither Sheilah nor Peter would change a thread. The Balenciaga is their talisman, their treasure; and after they remember it they touch hands and think that the years are not behind them but hazy and marvelous and still to be lived. (108-109)

What kind of talisman is a dress? How can a dress be sustaining in difficult times? In this story there is little narrative description about Peter and Sheilah. Instead, two images--the dress and Agnes' vision of the ice wagon going down the street--frame the story and suggest the values, beliefs, and morals of the three main characters.

The ending issues an invitation to re-read the story with the importance of these symbols in mind. Peter ruminates: "Sheilah is here, it is a true Sunday morning, with its dimness and headache and remorse and regrets, and this is life" (134). He then considers, "Let Agnes have the start of the day. Let Agnes think it was invented for her. Who wants to be alone in the universe? No, begin at the beginning: Peter lost Agnes. Agnes says to herself somewhere, Peter is lost" (134). In this story, the image of the ice wagon provides the key to interpreting Peter's attitude towards his own life, and his attitude towards Agnes.

The story's concentrated and close narrative structure makes way for the additional image of the dress to resonate throughout the story, and to comment on the connection between Peter and Sheilah. People with whom they work think Peter and Agnes are alike because they are Canadian. The story implies that the real connections between them come in the form of smaller, more personal statements of belief, of memories, and of vision. And yet the story also equivocates on this point because it also implies that this connection, although based upon something intimate, is also undeniably linked to their shared Canadian sensibility, a sensibility that also makes Peter attracted to the glamour, the mystique, and the promise that the Balenciaga symbolizes. Gallant's spare use of two images upon which to hinge so much of the meaning of the story means that there is a lot of ambiguity surrounding the question of who Peter is, and who Agnes and Sheilah are.

Before moving to Paris where she committed herself to her creative writing, Gallant worked as a journalist in Montreal. The stories in Home Truths suggest a journalists' sensibility and orientation towards depicting a particular moment in time, documenting a scene, and chronicling a cultural moment. And the content of the stories is equally like some journalism in that it is oriented towards detailing how a country and its citizens' preoccupations develop, change, and grow throughout the decades. One critic has observed that Gallant used decades as an ordering principle in her Selected Stories and that her decision to do so implies that she sees herself as an observer of societies in evolution (Tausky). In "An Introduction" to Home Truths, Gallant instructs that one story, "Saturday," "[l]ike every story in this collection . . . needs to be read against its own time" (xviii), a statement which supports the sense that grasping the settings of her stories--the

time, and place in which they occur--is critical to understanding them. In the story "With a Capital T," the character Linnet describes her job as a journalist working for the Montreal paper, The Lantern. As a twenty-one year old apprentice, she is to write the text that accompanies the paper's photographs. Her approach is simple--"You just repeat what the picture has told you . . ." (Home 318). But the story makes clear that there is in fact a great deal of choice, subjectivity, and latitude involved in the task. The implicit dilemma is one of finding the words to encapsulate, or to evoke, a particular scene. In this way Linnet's job offers a metaphor for the author's task of crafting the narrative to connote a picture of Canadian society at a particular moment. In each story, Gallant provides a snapshot of issues, themes, and incidents that relate to a particular time in Canada's cultural development.

In "Thank You for the Lovely Tea," from the "At Home" section of the collection, Gallant examines the rules and values that govern the culture of a girls' private boarding school. This story focuses on a young girl, Ruth, and the visit paid to her at her school by her father's soon-to-be-second-wife, Mrs. Holland. Feeling vindictive and sensing she has the upper hand in the situation, Ruth musters all of her powers to make the event of tea with Mrs. Holland an uncomfortable and stressful occasion for the prospective step-mother. She succeeds. But the story is not simply about a young girl and her future step-mother. The narrative is overlaid with references to Canada's status as a colony, and the references accumulate to suggest the difficulties for someone like Mrs. Holland of entering an atmosphere as closed, as stifled, and as limited as the provincial society that Ruth's whole private school world represents.

The story begins with a reference to the fact that it is the twenty-fourth of May, some thirty years after the death of Queen Victoria, and to the fact that the day is still dedicated to the late Queen's birthday. In addition, the third person narrator points out that a photograph of the late King hangs over the blackboard in Ruth's school: "He had died that year, and so had Kipling (although far less fuss was made about him), and the girls had to get used to calling Kipling `our late beloved poet' and the Prince of Wales `King Edward'" (Home 3). The pervasiveness of all things British in this story--references to British kings, queens, poets, and the British architecture of the school--fits within the context of Canada's close ties to Britain around 1936. But the references also sharpen the focus on those elements that are foreign, both literally and metaphorically so. Mrs. Holland, for instance, not only lacks the authority that being properly married to Ruth's father would confer, but she also lacks a certain decorum in her manner and dress that is expected of her. Seeing her come up the walk to the school, Ruth harshly assesses that, "She was emotional.... Emotion meant `being American'; it meant placing yourself unarmed in the hands of the enemy. Emotion meant not getting one's lipstick on straight, a marcel wave coming apart in wild strands. It accounted for Mrs. Holland's anxious blue eyes, for the button missing on a blouse, the odds and ends forever falling out of purse or pocket" (3). Even the headmistress treats Mrs. Holland according to a procedure reserved for friends of students, instead of parents. She is afforded, in other words, a different status, and a lesser one at that. But Mrs. Holland is not the only figure who finds it difficult to fit in to this culture. Ruth's school friend, Helen, also suffers from feeling isolated; in her case, she feels different from the other girls at school because she comes from neither a

wealthy home, nor an intellectual one. Indeed, Helen knows that with seven people in her household, she is marked as being part of an inferior underclass to the likes of Ruth, who is an only child to a divorced, yet wealthy, father. Helen's wish, that she "was to wear this [school] uniform as long as she could, to stay on at the school forever" expresses her desire to blend in with others, to avoid notice, and to avoid change (12).

Change, or the lack thereof, is a key theme in this story. The new headmistress of the school, fresh from England, is eager to make certain alterations to school procedure and to the curriculum. She claims only to be "progress-minded" (4), but the girls fear her. The narrator indicates that they were "shocked" (4) when King George V's picture was replaced by a picture of the Prince of Wales. Furthermore, they are terribly disturbed that an adjustment to the length of their tunics is to be implemented. As the narrator observes, "Modernism met with mulish and unaccountable resistance. Who would have believed that young girls, children of a New World, would so obstinately defend tradition? Modernism, broadmindedness foundered" (6).

But the story exposes the fact that this New World that the girls inhabit in Canada is sterile in terms of its culture. Ruth's callous treatment of Mrs. Holland and Helen comes from the satisfaction and the confidence that she derives from the size of her father's home, his economic status, and the rather privileged place she assumes within the culture of the private school precisely because of her father's wealth. Her outlook is provincial and limited, but so too are the rules and values enshrined by the other girls at the school. In this way, Gallant depicts the intolerance and rigidity that the insular nature of Canadian culture can engender. Mrs. Holland and Helen can be aligned with Vera and Lottie in that none of

them fit within the narrow definition of culture, nor the narrow scope of acceptable behaviour that is presented to them by this provincial society in the New World.

If "Thank you for the Lovely Tea" highlights Gallant's ability to present a carefully observed social world, "Up North," from the "At Home" section of Home Truths, also reflects the attitudes and circumstances of a particular time in Canadian history, though with a very different level of society as its subject. This story is set in Canada a year and a half after the end of W.W. II, and focuses on a "Limey" war bride who has recently arrived in Canada with her son to reunite with her Canadian husband, the father of her child. As a soldier, the husband returned to Canada right after the war, but the wife had to wait her turn to make her voyage, finally coming to Canada by ship with "over a thousand war brides" on it (Home 52). The husband is thus described by the narrator as "this mythical, towering, half-remembered figure" (50); the young son, Dennis, "hardly knows him" (52).

As the woman and child travel by train north of Montreal for this family reunion, they meet Roy McLaughlin. McLaughlin is an engineer who works in the northland, and as such he is all too familiar with the kind of lifestyle that the young bride will have to adapt to. He understands immediately that her husband "fell into the vast pool of casual labor, drifters," and that his skill, that of driving bulldozers for the various companies which operate around the northern parts, places him at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the Canadian north land (52). McLaughlin also thinks he knows something about the father's identity. Noting the young boy's black hair and blue eyes, he considers: "The hair was coarse, straight, rather dull; Indian hair" (52). Hearing that the father's name is Donald Cameron, McLaughlin reasons that "That meant nothing, still; McLaughlin had worked in a

place on James Bay where the Indians were named McDonald and Ogilvie and had an unconquered strain of blue eyes" (52). When McLaughlin tries to get some reaction out of the mother by mentioning Indians, she concedes nothing. She does, however, admit that the landscape she takes in from the train window, in its bareness, is not proper country. Her son flatly admits that he does not like Canada and that he wishes to go home.

McLaughlin helps the mother and son get down from the train at their stop, and as he does he tells the young boy not to worry his mother by talking nonsense and by making up stories. He tells him, "You'll be seeing plenty of everything now" (55). What this story allows the reader to see is a glimpse of a time in Canada when war brides were coming over from England to face an unknown future with husbands they barely knew. McLaughlin knows much more about the woman's husband, and about the kind of harsh and peripatetic life she is going to have, than she does. And he knows much more about the kind of hardships and difficulties the young boy will face than he himself can imagine. The story is a short one at seven pages, and yet the story manages to elucidate the same themes and issues that recur in Gallant's longer stories. The narrator does not say so, but McLaughlin's reaction to the English bride's plight signifies that there is no place for her in the uncultivated, raw, and male-dominated landscape of Canada's north. From his perspective, it is clear that she is setting out for a life which has no room for her because of gender, social, and economic considerations. Like so many of Gallant's characters, the woman and her son will be unable to integrate themselves in their new culture.

With an implicit focus on the Canadian consciousness as opposed to a focus on the consciousness of any one character, Gallant's writing provides an interesting contrast to

Alice Munro's work. In my estimation, Munro pursues the question of what constitutes a life, and she applies this question to the lives of individual characters, focusing on the small elements, rituals, and habits that become part of the fabric of her characters' existence. The lives she examines are undeniably Canadian ones, yet her stories complicate such an assessment because Munro builds layers, texture, and multiple structures into her stories, such that she writes around and through the lives she depicts. Her writing creates the impression that there is no single, defintive life, Canadian or otherwise, but rather a multiplicity of diverse lives, conditioned by different circumstances. Moreover, as she emphasizes the openness and ambiguity surrounding narrative questions concerning identifying a real life, she also highlights the open qualities associated with the short story form itself.

Gallant continually asks the reader to judge whether her characters function solely as individuals, or whether they stand, in some way, as representative Canadians. Similarly, she asks readers to determine whether certain scenes are simply neutral, or typically Canadian. Tone is critical in a Gallant story and in this regard many of her narratives place greater interest in the narrator's point of view and tone of voice than with any individual character. Gallant's stories, like Munro's, emphasize openness and ambiguity, but they do so because they typically offer such brief and sharp descriptions of a scene, and the reader is constantly confronted with the task of sorting out the meaning and significance of the material presented. O'Neill quotes Wolfgang Iser to make the point that "No tale can be told in its entirety. Indeed it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected

directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in gaps left by the text itself" (qtd. in O'Neill 19).

The final section of Home Truths chronicles the life and recollections of Linnet Muir in a sequence of six related stories; some critics consider the Linnet Muir stories to be Gallant's "finest creation" (Kulyk Keefer 75; see Besner 131). The first story, entitled "In Youth is Pleasure," establishes the style and tone of the main character. Speaking in the first person, Linnet is direct and frank in recalling memories of her childhood with her parents in Montreal. Linnet explains that she was born in Montreal and lived there until the age of ten when she moved first to an Ontario city, and then to New York City, where she went to school. Her father's death during her early childhood and her subsequently strained relations with her mother turned her life into a "helpless migration" (Home 219). Linnet returns to Montreal at some point during the time frame of the Second World War at the age of eighteen, and the story chronicles her impressions, thoughts, and recollected memories of the city, the differences between Americans and Canadians, and the general climate of the time.

Linnet points out that "In those days there was almost no such thing as a 'Canadian.' You were Canadian-born, and a British subject, too, and you had a third label with no consular reality. . . . In Canada you were also whatever your father happened to be, which in my case was English" (220). Having lived in New York City, Linnet makes comparisons between Canada and America. As her train crosses the border, she notes that she "expected to sense at once an air of calm and grit and dedication, but the only changes were from prosperous to shabby, from painted to unpainted, from smiling to dour" (222). There are

differences between the people as well; Americans, Linnet observes, are more open and more emotionally available than Canadians. The first time she had ever heard people laughing out loud in a cinema was in New York; she was fourteen and until then, she had never heard "people expressing their feelings in a public place" (227). Considering the Americans, she wonders, "What were these new people? Were they soft, too easily got at? . . . . Were they, as Canadian opinion had it, vulgar? Perhaps the notion of vulgarity came out of some incapacity on the part of the refined" (227). Linnet establishes that her exposure to Americans has given her a greater understanding of the different modes of behavior that people can fall into, and the different cultures that can develop from that: "When I came back to Canada that June, at least one thing had been settled: I knew that it was all right for people to laugh and cry and even to make asses of themselves. I had actually known people like that, had lived with them, and they were fine, mostly - not crazy at all" (228). At one point Linnet says, "I had neither the wealth nor the influence a provincial society requires . . ." (232) to be placed in "some sensible context" (232) and the statement establishes that small-mindedness and snobbery are part of so-called civilized society in Canada.

While reflecting on these issues of cultural differences, Linnet simultaneously ruminates on her childhood, and specifically on the fate of her father. She was never told of his death, and did not know its exact circumstances or even the date when he passed away. Thus in a belated effort to determine some of the particulars surrounding his passing, she contacts three of her father's friends. From their separate accounts, Linnet is able to piece together "something about tuberculosis of the spine and a butchery of an operation" (234).

There is also the suggestion that her father owned a gun and may have thought about, or even committed, suicide. But Linnet dismisses these three accounts and instead creates her own version of his death, concluding that he died of homesickness: "sickness for England was the consumption, the gun, the everything. 'Everything' had to take it all in" (235). Everything, in its broad meaning, suggests the general yet inclusive nature of the story itself. Linnet tells a story of her return to Montreal and in so doing she touches upon a number of issues that relate to the personal, the political, the social and cultural, as well as the historical circumstances of the 1940s.

The second Linnet Muir story, "Between Zero and One," provides an equally strong impression of the work situation in Montreal for a young, unmarried woman during the Second World War. Speaking in the first person once more, Linnet describes her work for the federal government in the office of "Review and Development, Research and Expansion, of Wartime Industry." Despite the dullness of the office name, Linnet suggests that this time in her life was one of "inexplicable grace when every day is a new parcel one unwraps, layer on layer of tissue paper covering bits of crystal, scraps of words in a foreign language, pure white stones" (248). The story too unfolds to reveal the different layers of the office situation, with each layer containing a distinct insight about the gender politics of the time, and reflecting a variety of perspectives on the work atmosphere and the relations between men and women. In this job, Linnet experiences the prejudice of men against a young woman like herself, as well as the prejudice of an older woman, Mrs. Ireland, who despises the promise and potential that a younger woman represents. She also senses the insecurity that the men are capable of harboring, and the vulnerability concealed behind

Mrs. Ireland's harsh exterior.

Linnet recalls that in the office, "there were about a dozen other men—older, old. I can see every face, hear every syllable, which evoked, for me, a street, a suburb, a kind of schooling . . . born here, born in Glasgow; immigrated early, late; raised in Montreal, no, farther west" (239). She acknowledges that "Most of [the men] lived thinly, paying for a bungalow, a duplex flat, a son's education . . ." (239). Linnet is the first woman permitted to actually work with the men, as opposed to simply being in the women's secretarial pool. As she describes it, her hiring was an event of monumental proportion: "in an ambience of doubt, apprehension, foreboding, incipient danger, and plain hostility, for the first time in the history of the office a girl was allowed to sit with the men" (243). She recalls that the occasion brought about a kind of epiphany because it was the first time she felt that "almost palpable atmosphere of sexual curiosity, sexual resentment, and sexual fear that the presence of a woman can create where she is not wanted" (244). Even once the men get to know Linnet and to treat her with fondness, "the feeling that women were `trouble' never disappeared" (244).

From her desk, Linnet is able to observe the habits and customs of her co-workers. With a more mature perspective, she now realizes that the office was "dull" and that the men were simply "rotting quietly until pension time" (244). But at the time of her working there, she admits that she observed the scene with great wonder and interest. She does note that her male colleagues conduct themselves in a restricted, limited, kind of way. She asks why "didn't they move, walk, stretch, run? Each of them seemed to inhabit an invisible square; the square was shared with my desk, my graph paper, my elastic bands" (246). And

the "contents of the square were tested each morning" as the men checked whether anything had been tampered with during the night (246). The limitations of the men's attitude to work are symbolized by their preoccupation with the maintenance of their individual hand towels, which are distributed only to certain men each week. The men who are given the towels take meticulous care of them, carrying them to the washroom, airing them, drying them on the back of their chairs, keeping them folded in a special drawer. The corollary to this attentiveness is that "any mistake or oversight on towel day was a source of outrage" (247).

There is a correspondence between the sterility and the poverty of the office climate and that of Montreal. Linnet complains that the intellectual life of the city at this time was conservative, limited, and parochial. She laments that there was no theatre, no music, only a feeble museum of art, and not even a free public lending library. When she chooses to read a play from New York as part of an audition for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, she is asked "'what is this rubbish?'" (250). She recalls that "'A play in New York' evoked a look Canada was making me familiar with: amusement, fastidious withdrawal, gentle disdain. What a strange city to have a play in . . . " (251). Still, there are moments that offer her insight into the repressed desires of the people around her. Linnet sometimes catches a glimpse of what she calls "another world, like an extra room" (246) while at work, and this glimpse comes in the form of an expressed "wish outdistanced, reduced, shrunken, trailing somewhere in the mind" by one of the men with whom she works. Statements like, "'I often thought I wanted . . .' 'Something I wouldn't have minded having . . .'" (247) give expression to a whole range of unrealized, unfulfilled, and

unspoken dreams. Such statements, with their very ellipsis, imply that the perspective Linnet obtains of the men can only ever be partial and incomplete.

Her story of her work during the war contains a "play within the play, a subplot" (251) that emerges when a second woman is brought into the office: Mrs. Ireland "had an advanced degree in accountancy and she was preparing a doctorate in some branch of mathematics none of the men were familiar with" (251). Thus with her higher education and her haughtiness, Mrs. Ireland is threatening to everyone, including Linnet. She immediately tries to boss Linnet around and to get her to do some of her work, and it is only when Mr. Tracy, a superior who is well disposed towards Linnet, steps in to sort out the power relations that Linnet regains her ground in the fragile office hierarchy. Mrs. Ireland declares that working girls in offices make her "sick, sore, and weary" (255). It is owing to this remark that Linnet experiences her second epiphany, this time about women's potential attitudes towards other women. Linnet notes that, "I had believed it was only because of the men that girls were parked like third-class immigrants at the far end of the room. . . .But there, up on the life raft, stepping on girls' fingers, was Mrs. Ireland" (255). Linnet insightfully asks, "If that was so, why didn't Mrs. Ireland get along with the men, and why did they positively and openly hate her . . ." (255).

The story develops yet another layer when the men do some research on Mrs. Ireland's husband, only to discover that he is an uneducated Polish immigrant: the word in the office is that "Old `ski' was a lush who drank [Mrs. Ireland's] paycheck and sometimes beat her up; the scarves she wound around her neck were meant to cover bruises" (258). This information provides a broader context for interpreting Mrs. Ireland's resentment of

the younger Linnet, and of women whom she feels do not acknowledge, in their innocence and naivete, when they are "well off" (260). Moreover, the exposure of Mrs. Ireland's marital woes sharpens Linnet's focus on the men's attitudes towards matrimony and on the dissatisfaction they clearly experience in their married lives. When Linnet announces that she is engaged, they plead with her to not follow through with the ceremony. The clear warning they convey is that "marriage was a watershed that transformed sweet, cheerful, affectionate girls into, well, their own mothers" (259). According to her male colleagues, it follows that once a girl "had caught (their word) a husband she became a whiner, a snooper, a killjoy, a wet blanket, a grouch, and a bully" (259). Such an attitude suggests some of the gender stereotypes that circulated in the forties, but it also, sadly, implies the inequality, as well as the real unhappiness and sense of compromise in the men's home lives.

In the closing paragraph of the story, Linnet suggests that what she learned from this work experience had to do "with the men, with squares and walls and limits and numbers" (Home 260). She asks: "How do you stand if you stand upon Zero? What will the passage be like between Zero and One? And what will happen at One?" (Home 260). The questions are a bit cryptic, and yet the story clearly identifies the struggles the men and a woman like Mrs. Ireland face in making a place for themselves, not just in the work place, but in life more generally. Linnet is always an outsider to, and an observer and a chronicler of, this scene. Yet she shares some of the fellow characters' concerns in her similar endeavour of claiming her independence, of declaring her identity, and of striking out on her own life. She says of Mrs. Ireland that they were different—"different ages, different women, two lines of a graph that could never cross" (260). This is true in that Mrs. Ireland,

and the men, seem stuck in the very stratum of life that Linnet hopes to escape. However, the complexity of the story develops from the way lines do cross, layers do unfold, perspectives shift, and limits expand every so slightly.

The stories by Mavis Gallant have a provisional quality to them precisely because they insist, in their brevity and in their episodic style, upon the partiality of the representations themselves. What kind of truths are embedded in these narrative structures? And what kind of truths about home, about Canada, about life during a particular decade do they offer? In part, Gallant's narrative style suggests that the issues surrounding identity, a sense of place, and feelings of exile and alienation, exceed and evade description (O'Neill 38). And in part, Gallant's unwillingness to give certainty to her stories means that the reader is left to contemplate, in the most open and irresolute way, a vast array of narrative possibilities.

Conclusion

The critic Martha Nussbaum suggests that when an author is seeking to express a truth about human life, "form and style are not incidental features" (5). She contends that "[T]he telling itself—the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary . . . all of this expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of . . . life's relations and connections" (5). The choice made by these six writers to write short stories, as well as their cultivation of the genre's ability to generate irresolute, ambiguous, textured, and dynamic narrative structures, comment on the people, the cultures, and the places they explore. The lives and situations they depict take shape and acquire meaning through the short story form. Their interpretation of the genre places a stress on the openness, the uncertainty, the plurality, and the complexity that can exist not just within the genre, but also within settler society cultures.

Lecturing on the "Making of Literature," David Malouf comments that the power of reading lies in our capacity to enter into the world of the narrative and become

> a mover in it, to make that world our own. It's the active capacity to live, for a time, in some other life than our own daily one, and in that way to add to our experience, to make new discoveries in the world of the senses, to see new connections between things, to make leaps of moral awareness that give us a more complete hold of our world. (279)

My thesis argues that when the depiction of "life" is enclosed within the formal capacities of the short story genre, that "life" can seem dynamic, changing, complex, partial, and open, rather than simply complete, contained, and resolved. For authors exploring the difficult questions surrounding identity, culture, and place, the short story offers an appropriate structure to house these often difficult and unresolved themes. Iris Murdoch suggests that through literature, "we can re-discover the density of our lives" (21). I offer this modification, that through the short story genre, these six authors help readers discover the density of their settler society worlds.

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